

A TROUBLED PRAYER

NO. 741

A SERMON
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“Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins.”
Psalm 25:18

IF this Psalm were indeed written by David at the time when his son Absalom had raised the rebellion against him, we can readily understand the distinction which he draws between his “affliction,” and his “pain.” It is a great “affliction” to have a son become a rebel, and that subjects who owed so much to their monarch should become traitors against his gentle government.

“Pain” was the acute sensation which David’s own heart experienced as the result of such calamity. He knew,

*“How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is
 To have a thankless child.”*

None of us can guess the “pain” which David must have felt from the “affliction” of having such a son as Absalom, and the “pain” of mind again which he felt in being betrayed by his familiar counselor, Ahithophel, and in being forsaken by his subjects, who in former days had honored him and rejoiced in him. He asked the Lord, therefore, to look, not only upon the trouble, but also upon the misery which the trouble caused him.

“If needs be,” says the apostle, “we are in heaviness through manifold temptations,” as if not only the temptations were to be observed, but also the heaviness consequent thereof. So here we may bring before God’s notice, not only our trial, but the inward anguish which the trial occasions us.

I can understand also why David should add, “And forgive all my sins,” because he knew that the revolt of Absalom was mysteriously connected with the divine purpose as a chastisement, for his sin with Bathsheba. He recollected how Nathan had told him that he should have war all the days of his life, and now he remembered it all.

The bitterness of gall sickened his soul as he remembered that sin which had once been so sweet to his taste. He went back to the fatal day, and the tears stood in his eyes as he thought of all the filthiness and guiltiness of his conduct—what a traitor he had been to Uriah—how he had dishonored the name of God in the midst of the whole land.

Well might he have said, “Lord, when You look upon this well-deserved affliction, and when You see the pain with which it wrings my soul, then, though it will bring my sin to Your mind as it does to my mind, yet let forgiveness blot it out. Yea, not for that sin only, but for all others that have preceded or followed it, grant me a gracious pardon—forgive, I pray You, all my sins.”

I. It is well for us, dear friends, WHEN OUR PRAYERS ABOUT OUR SORROWS ARE LINKED WITH PRAYERS ABOUT OUR SINS—WHEN, BEING UNDER GOD’S HAND, OUR SOUL IS NOT WHOLLY TAKEN UP WITH OUR PAIN, BUT WE ALSO REMEMBER OUR OFFENSES AGAINST GOD.

I do not think it would have been worth one’s while to have preached from the text if it had only said, “Remember my affliction and my pain,” but when it is, “Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins,” the two things put together are very instructive. Let us seek to get some edifying counsel from them.

Our sorrows are profitable when they bring our sins to our minds. Some sorrows may do this by *giving us time for thought*. A sickbed has often been a place of repentance. While the man was occupied

with his daily work, and the active labor of his hands, or could be from morning till night at business, sin escaped his notice. He was too busy to care about his soul. He had too much to do with earth to remember heaven.

But now he cannot think of business, or if he does, he can get no profit or satisfaction from all his thoughts. Now he cannot go to his work, but must lie upon his bed until his health be recovered. And oftentimes the quiet of the night, or the stillness of the day which once was given up to toil and moil of drudgery, has been blessed of God to work a solemn stillness in the soul in which the voice of God has been heard, saying, “Turn unto Me! Turn unto Me! Why will you die?”

Some of you do not often hear God’s voice. You are in the midst of the clitter-clatter of this great city, and the roar and din of it are so perpetually ringing in your ears, that the still small voice of your heavenly Father you do not hear, and it may, perhaps, be a great mercy to you if, in your own house, or in the ward of an hospital, you may be compelled to hear Him say, “Turn unto Me! Turn unto Me! For I will have mercy upon you!”

Other afflictions remind us of our sins *because they are the direct result of transgression*. The profligate man, if God should bless those scourges of the body which have even sprung from his own vices, may find the disease to be a cure for the misdemeanors which produced it. We ought to thank God that He will not let us sin without chastisement.

If any of you are sinning, and find pleasure without penalty in the self-indulgence, do not congratulate yourself upon the apparent immunity with which you violate the laws of virtue, for *that* is the badge of the reprobate. To sin and never smart, is the mark of those who will be damned. Their smart, like their doom, being in reserve and stored up for sorer judgment.

But if any man among you here is now smarting for the sin he has committed, I will not say, let him be hopeful, but I will say, let him be thankful. Let him remember that evidently God has not quite given him up—He has touched him with the rod, but He has not thrown the reins upon his neck. He has put a curb in his mouth and He is pulling him up sharply. God grant that it may be blessed to turn him from his wild career.

The extravagant man who has spent his money, and finds himself in rags, ought to look upon his sins through his rags. His present poverty may well remind him of his previous prodigality. The man who has lost a friend, through ingratitude, and now needs a friend, but cannot find one, may thank himself for it, and be reminded of his baseness by his bankruptcy.

There are many other sins, though we have not time to mention them, which are evidently the fathers of sorrows. And when you get the sorrowful offspring, you should think of the guilty parentage—and if you would be rid of the child, go to God and ask Him to deliver you from the sin, and divorce you from the transgression that produced it.

Other sorrows likewise remind us of our sins because they bear their likeness. It has been well-remarked that oftentimes when God would punish us, He just leaves us to eat the fruit of our own ways. He has nothing more to do than to let the seed which we have sown ripen and then allow us to eat it.

How often in reading the Holy Scriptures may you observe the quality of men’s sins in the nature of their punishment! Jacob deceived his father, and what then? Why, he was always being deceived all his life long. He was a great bargain-maker, so everybody cheated him, of course. He would use his wily artifice. As he would be clever and supplant, he had to become a dupe and be supplanted—that was the misery of his life, because it was the besetting sin of his character.

Now, when a man loses money, loses it continually, notwithstanding all the skill and efforts he can employ, I would have him ask himself whether there may not have been some sin in connection with his money which has brought the punishment on him. He may have loved it too much. He may have obtained it in an ill way. He may not have used it when he had it in a proper spirit. It may have been dangerous for it to remain with him lest it should have corroded his heart by its own cankering.

The losses a man suffers in business, I doubt not in many cases, and I am sure of it in some cases, ought to make him look earnestly at the way in which they came upon him. When we have heard of

some who have gained wealth by one speculation, and have lost it again by another speculation, I think it ought to be made the subject of inquiry with them how far their dealings were lawful, if indeed it were lawful for them to have entered upon such traffic in any way or shape, and whether God may not have had a controversy with them in their counting-house.

Is this an obligation with money? Surely it often is so with the rearing of your family. If your affliction should come through your children turning out ill in life, or through what is a far lighter affliction—though perhaps you may not think it so—through your children dying in infancy, you may say to yourselves, “How have I behaved towards those children?”

Is my child willful and disobedient? Then how about the training and the management that I have observed? Is my child perverse, vicious, frivolous, worldly? How about my example as it was seen at the family hearth? May not my boy’s sins be only a reproduction of my own?—the fledglings that I have hatched, roost in my family, disturb my peace, and bring me sorrow? May not my daughter’s stubbornness of heart be only my own obduracy that breaks out in the girl?

Might I not hear the voice of God saying to me, “See how you treated me, and is it not meet you should eat the fruit of your own ways? You are a father, and how do you like to be thus treated—to be slighted in your discipline and your affections set at nought?”

So I might continue, passing from our households to our respective positions in society. We sometimes find ourselves unable to maintain our station. With chagrin and mortification we have to take a lower place, and may we not then ask, Did we acquit ourselves before God in all that we might have done in our former standing? Did the rank we held elevate us and puff us up with vanity? At any rate, we may bring ourselves to great searchings of heart. When sorrow takes any particular shape, it suggests its own particular questions. The problem must be studied to get at the solution.

With regard to sickness, I am not certain whether the chastening hand of God for sin ought not to be more immediately recognized than is now for the most part common among us. In one sense, God never punishes His people for sin. There is nothing vindictive in the rod He uses, and nothing expiatory in the sufferings they endure. For God’s redeemed people were punished in Christ, and it cannot be therefore that the penalty of the law is exacted of them a second time. Yet there is a sense in which the church of God, under paternal discipline, is continually exercised with chastisement.

Do you remember the apostle’s words about the Corinthian church? They had fallen into a very lax method of receiving the Lord’s Supper. They brought every one his own bread and wine, some of them were full and others were hungry. Beside which, other breaches of church order were rife among them, and the apostle says, “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” Hence I gather that sickness at any rate in the early church was wont to be sent by God upon the members for ecclesiastical offenses.

I am not sure whether in like manner sacred corrections, though in a way not so easily discoverable, may not still be in exercise among the members of the Christian church. I see that in ordinary providence, God visits men. And as there is a special providence for His people, surely there is nothing harsh or unwarrantable in attributing a strong flood of adversity, as well as a refreshing stream of prosperity, to the hand of the Lord!

When a Christian, therefore, finds himself chastened in his body, he should go to God with this question, “Show me wherefore thou contendest with me? Why do You lay Your rod upon me, my Father? You do not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. It is not from the heart, as though You had ceased to love. It must be from Your unerring judgment whereby in measure You do rebuke. Tell me, therefore, my Father, what is the cause? If You see a need-be, tell me what that need-be is.

*“The dearest idol I have known,
Whate’er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.”*

Our sins, then, may sometimes be discovered by the very image of our sorrows.

What a great blessing it is to us when our sorrows remind us of our sins by *driving us out of an atmosphere of worldliness!* There is our nest, and a very pretty, round, snug nest it is, and we have been very busy picking up all the softest feathers that we could find, and all the prettiest bits of moss that earth could yield, and we have been engaged night and day making that nest soft and warm. There we intended to remain. We meant for ourselves a long indulgence, sheltered from inclement winds, never to put our feet among the cold dewdrops, nor to weary our pinions by mounting up into the clouds.

But suddenly a thorn came into our breast. We tried to remove it, but the more we struggled, the more it chafed and the more deeply the thorn fixed itself into us. Then we just began to spread our wings, and as we mounted it would seem as though the atmosphere had changed, and our souls had changed too with the mounting, and we began to sing the old forgotten song—which in the nest we never should have sung—the song of those who mount from earth and have communion with the skies.

Yes, when God is pleased to take away our health, our comfort, our children, our friends, it very frequently happens that then we think of Him. We turn from the creature with disgust. We leave the broken cisterns, because they hold no water, and begin to look out for the overflowing fountain. And so our sorrows, driving us to God, make us, in the light of His countenance, to behold and to grieve over our sins. This is a great blessing to us.

Sometimes, again, our sorrows *remind us of our ingratitude.* You are unwell, now you recollect how ungrateful you were for your health. You are poor, “Ah!” you think to yourselves, “I used to grumble once over a good meal that I should be glad to have now.” “Ah!” say you, “those garments that I used to think so shabby, how much I should prize their warmth now!” It is said that we never know the value of mercies till we lose them. It is a great shame that such a proverb should be true. We ought to be grateful to God without needing the bitter teaching of adversity.

Our sorrow thus administers a rebuke, and kindles in us a remembrance of the goodness that we had never welcomed with our praise till the shadows fell upon us, and the night hid it from our view. No crime among men is accounted more base than ingratitude, but few sins we less bewail before God. Bunyan has well-said that he who forgets his friend is ungrateful to him, but he who forgets his Savior is unmerciful to himself.

And I remember some other author who says, that we are never surprised at the sunrise of our joys, as we are at their sunset. On the contrary, when storms of sorrow burst upon us, we are sore amazed, but when they pass away, we take it as a matter of course. You all know how sad a blemish it was upon the character of Hezekiah that he rendered not again unto the Lord according to the benefit done unto him, for his heart was lifted up. The provocation of a thankless heart to a merciful God is no light matter. As the guilt is heavy, let our repentance be sincere.

Sometimes, again, sorrow reminds us of the sin of *want of sympathy with those in like sorrow.* “Ah!” says one, “I used to laugh at Mrs. So-and-So for being nervous. Now that I feel the torture myself, I am sorry that I was ever hard upon her.” “Ah!” says another, “I used to think of such and such a person that he must be a fool to be always in so gloomy a state of mind. But now I cannot help sinking into the same desponding frames, and oh! I would to God that I had been more kind to him!”

Yes, we should feel more for the prisoner if we knew more about the prison. We should feel more for the poor if we understood more of the pangs of want. Our sorrows may often help to remind us of our harshness towards some of the best of God’s afflicted ones.

And I think also that affliction may be sent to admonish us *of our neglect of divine teaching.* “Why that rod?” “Why that whip and that bridle?” Because I have been like the horse and the mule, which have no understanding. Had I listened to the voice of God that I heard from the pulpit, or had I listened to the counsels given to me in the pages of Scripture, or if I had even noticed the dictates of my own conscience, yea, had I been more jealous of the motions of the Holy Spirit in my soul, I might never have had all this trouble upon me.

You know the old fable we used to read in our school books about the boy in the apple tree who would not come down when the good man with soft words admonished him. Then the man took to throwing turfs at him, but still he would not heed, and at length the man betook himself to throwing stones, and compelled the boy to come down.

Oh! when God betakes Himself to stones, and we get cut with them, we might well say to ourselves, “Ah! light afflictions, you would not do. We laughed at the kind words, and even the turfs, which struck our conscience without wounding our flesh, would not do, and now He has come to blows with us. God is always loath to use the rod. He is an unwise father who never chastens, but a much worse father he who chastens for nothing.

God will chasten His people, but it takes Him a long time to bring Himself to use the rod. He does not wish to smite His children. He delights in their happiness, and not in their sorrow. And when at last He does come to it, it is—if I may use such an expression in reference to Him—because our ill manners force Him to it. O Christian, in these your sorrows, be you humble before the Lord your God, but still use Job’s inquiry, “Show me wherefore thou contendest with me?”

I wish that some here, who have not the fear of God before their eyes, would look at it in this light. If you are inclined to pray about your troubles, do take your sins into consideration too. If you feel that you must go to God under the particular trial which is vexing you at present, do go to Him about your besetting sins as well. Make the two into one bundle, and go to Him, and say, “Look upon my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins.” This, then, is our first remark. It is fit that our sorrows should bring our sins to remembrance.

II. Secondly, IT IS WELL WHEN WE ARE AS EARNEST ABOUT OUR SINS AS WE ARE ABOUT OUR SORROWS.

This is the mark of a genuine penitent. I think you will have noticed in the late “Report” of the chaplain of Newgate, the remark that many of the prisoners will pretend very great repentance when the chaplain is talking to them about spiritual things. But the chaplain can very readily discover those who are not truly penitent, by their constantly trying to bring him round to tell them something about their punishment.

Before the trial they frequently ask for information as to what term of imprisonment—how many months or years—they are likely to get. Then, when they are undergoing punishment, they frequently try to get some trifling favor through the means of the chaplain, showing that they think more of the punishment than of the theft. Like the unhappy wretch in the condemned cell, who often repents of the gallows that is to end his career, but does not repent of the murder that cut short his victim’s life. There are many such.

So, if I go to God and only ask to have my sorrows taken from me, what is that? I am no true penitent. I am like the child who cries bitterly because he smarts, but when the smart is over, he goes back to the offense again. If we were true children of God and had a truly repentant spirit, we should feel the rod to be less than nothing compared with the sin. We should say, “Lord, strike me, if You have but forgiven me, I can bear the strokes. Strike, Lord, strike as hard as You will, for my sin is forgiven.”

A good child will say, “My Father, you have forgiven me the offense. Ah! well, if I must be chastened, I will cheerfully bear it, for my sorrow is not that I smart, but that my sin should have caused you to be angry and to make me smart.”

This, then, is the mark of a genuine penitent, that he is as earnest about his sins as he is about his sorrows. Your trials have never wrought in you what they were meant for until it is so. God sends your trial to make you see yourself—your weakness, your folly, your sinfulness, your distance from Him. And when those sins, those sweet sins of yours, become bitter, when your soul nauseates and loathes them—then, probably, your affliction will be taken from you.

But if you still yield to your sins with your left hand and would fain lay hold of God’s mercy with your right, there is need that the rod be laid on your back again, and again, and again, for you have not yet feared the rod, nor Him who has appointed it.

Let any of you who are in trouble here, mend your prayer tonight. If you have been saying, “Lord, take away the sickness from my dear child,” you should say, “Lord if it be Your will, heal my child, but forgive my sin.”

Or, if any of you are very poor tonight, or if you are not well, and you have a sense of sin, I pray you, I adjure you, as you kneel by your bedside—which I trust you all will—while you ask God to restore your health or to remove your poverty, be quite as earnest about the forgiveness of your sins, or else it will betoken two things—that you are not a genuine penitent, and that, therefore, the affliction has not wrought in you its great design.

III. But thirdly, IT IS WELL TO TAKE BOTH SORROW AND SIN TO THE SAME PLACE.

It was to God that David took his sorrow. It was to God that David took his sin. Observe then, *we must take our sorrows to God*. Ah! my dear sister over yonder, where do you take your sorrows? Why, to your next door neighbor, to Mrs. This and to Mrs. That! We are very, very fond of pouring out our tale of woe into the ear of some earthly friend.

That may be a slight relief if discreetly done, but I think the verses of the hymn are not wrong which say,

*“Have you no words? Ah! think again;
Words flow apace when you complain,
And fill your fellow-creature’s ear
With the sad tale of all your care.*

*“Were half the breath thus vainly spent
To heaven in supplication sent,
Our cheerful song would more oftener be
‘Hear what the Lord hath done for me.’”*

Some children run and tell their mother or tell their father. Do you the same. Go and tell your Father. You can tell your brethren afterwards if you will, but you had better let your Father know first. I think we should often hesitate to mention our troubles lest we should depress our fellow creatures. I am sure we would hesitate to mention them to men, if we made it a rule first to bring them before our God.

Your little sorrows you may take to God, for He counts the hairs of your head. Your great sorrows you may take to God, for He holds the world in the hollow of His hand. Go to Him, whatever your present trouble may be, and you shall find Him able and willing to relieve you.

But we must *take our sins to God too*. Possibly this is a more difficult point. The sinner thinks that he must fight this battle for himself, wrestle with his own evil temper himself, and he himself must enter into conflict with his lusts and his besetting sins. But when he comes into the fight, he soon meets with defeat, and then he is ready to give it all up.

Take your sins to God, my brethren. Take them to the cross that the blood may fall upon them to purge away their guilt and take away their power. Your sins must all be slain. There is only one place where they can be slaughtered—the altar where your Savior died.

If you would flog your sins, flog them with the whip that tore your Savior’s shoulders. If you would nail your sins fast, drive the same nails through them which fastened your Lord to the cross. I mean let your faith in the great Surety, and your love to Him who suffered so much for you, be the power with which you do conflict with evil. It is said of the saints in heaven, “They overcame through the blood of the Lamb.” That is how you must overcome.

Go to Jesus with your sins, no one else can help you. You are powerless without Him. You may confess all your sins to Him, with a view of leaving them all with Him. He receives sinners, He receives their sins too, when they are brought to Him in penitence. For God has made to meet upon Him the iniquity of all His people. And you may take your sins and leave them in the hands of Jesus, who will counter-plead them with His merits, and put them away in His mercy, so shall you come away rejoicing.

And as we have remarked that we are not to take up the battle with our sorrows alone, nor with our sins alone, we may further say that *the most sorrowful and the most sinful are welcome to the Lord Jesus*. The most sorrowful may come. I mean those in despair, those who are at their wits' ends, those poor souls who, through superabundant difficulty are ready to do the most unreasonable things—ready, it may even be, to give way to that wicked, Satanic temptation of rushing from this present life into a world unknown by their own hand.

Go, sorrowful one, go now to Jesus, whose tender heart will feel for you. Has your friend forsaken you? Have your lover and your acquaintance become your enemies? Seek no human sympathy just now, but first and foremost, in a flood of tears, reveal your case to the great invisible helper. Kneel down and tell Him all that racks your spirit and fills your tortured mind, and plead the promise that He will be with you, and you shall find Him true though all else be false.

And as the most sorrowful, so the *most sinful* are welcome to Christ—the sinful certainly, but the *most sinful* especially. If your sin has become so outrageous that it were wrong for me to mention it here, if it has become so tremendous in its power, that like the chain and ball at the convict's foot, you cannot escape from it, yet still come with all your sins to Jesus.

You blackest sinner out of hell, you who are nearest to the gates of perdition, you who have had fellowship with devils till you have become almost a devil yourself, you who have lain steeped in the scarlet of sin till it has ingrained and entered into the very warp and woof of your being, you who are all over black within and without, go you to the Savior, and take these words in your mouth, "Look upon mine affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins."

And suppose the two conditions should have met in your heart, that you are at the same time the most sorrowful and the most sinful, still go, for the gates of mercy are very wide. When Christ opened the holy of holies, He did not make a little slit therein, but the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, so that the biggest sinner that ever lived might come through it to the blood-besprinkled mercy seat.

Oh, the amazing mercy of God! "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts." Sin is, after all, a thing of the creature, but mercy is an attribute of the Creator, and the Creator's attribute swallows up the creature's fault. Thus says the Lord, "I will take away their iniquities and cast them into the depths of the sea." The most sorrowful and the most sinful may go.

And let us add that *God can with equal ease remove our sorrows and our sins*. It is a wonder how difficulties fly when Omnipotence encounters them! The sick man who has been given up by the physician has often recovered. And it has been, perhaps, his mercy that the physician gave him up, for where man has come to an ending, God has come to a beginning.

The old proverb says that, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," and most certainly that is true. God has but to will it and fevers fly and diseases disappear. As the soldier goes at the captain's bidding, so does God say to Death, "Go," and he goes, or "Come," and he comes. Thus is it in our circumstances.

How very often a day which opened as black as gathering clouds could make it, has ended with a bright sunset! How frequently the beggar has found himself lifted up from the dunghill and made to sit among princes! I should not wonder but what some of you, in looking back and remembering the circumstances you are now in, are quite surprised to find yourselves where you are.

This very morning I was talking with a gentleman who said to me, "I cannot bear waste in my household, and one reason is this, if ever there was a poor wretch who could live on hard fare once, and envy the very dogs a piece of bread, I am just that one. But God has been pleased to prosper me, and I often look back upon that season of poverty and of want, and thank Him for having helped me through it."

Well, you see, dear friends, that God can turn the wheel, and make the bottom spoke to be the uppermost one, and He can do it all in a few days. Come then, though sin and sorrow rest like a double

burden upon our body and soul, let us go to Him and say, “Look upon mine affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins.”

IV. Perhaps our last observation is more strictly to the text than anything else. It is that WE ARE TO GO TO GOD WITH SORROWS AND WITH SINS IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT.

You notice that all that David asks about his sorrow is, “*Look upon mine afflictions and my pain.*” But the next petition is more express, definite, decided, plain, “*Forgive all my sins.*” Some people would have put it, “Remove my affliction and my pain, and look at my sins.” But David does not say so. He says, “Lord, as for my affliction and my pain, I do not say much about that—Lord look at it. I will leave that to You. I should be glad to have it removed. Do as You will. Look at it. Consider it, but as for my sins, Lord, I know what I want there. I must have them forgiven. I cannot bear them.”

A Christian counts sorrow lighter in the scale than sin. He can bear that his troubles should continue, but he cannot endure the burden of his guilt or the weight of his transgressions. Here are two guests come to my door, both of them ask to have a lodging with me. The one is called *Affliction*. He has a very grave voice, and a very heavy hand, and he looks at me with fierce eyes. The other is called *Sin*, and he is very soft-spoken, and very fair, and his words are softer than butter.

Let me scan their faces, let me examine them as to their character, I must not be deceived by appearances. I will ask my two friends who would lodge with me to open their hands. When my friend Affliction, with some little difficulty, opens his hand, I find that, rough as it is, he carries a jewel inside it, and that he meant to leave that jewel at my house. But as for my soft-spoken friend Sin, when I force him to show me what that is which he hides in his sleeve, I find that it is a dagger with which he would have stabbed me.

What shall I do, then, if I am wise? Why, I should be very glad if they would both be good enough to go and stop somewhere else, but if I must entertain one of the two, I would shut my door in the face of smooth-spoken Sin, and say to the rougher and uglier visitor, Affliction, “Come and stay with me, for may be God has sent you as a messenger of mercy to my soul.”

“*Look upon mine affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sin.*” We must be more express and explicit about sin than we are about trouble. Take the two expressions together, use them, and whether you blend or contrast them, either or both will prove to be full of instruction.

Before I close my sermon and dismiss this assembly, it may be necessary to notice some among you who have no affliction or pain. In too many instances I am afraid you have sin, so the latter part of the text will well suit your case. But oh! and if you have not any affliction or pain, nor yet any cause of fear because your sins are forgiven, let me then suggest to you that you should be exceedingly happy. Your cup should overflow with joy.

I do not think, brethren, that you and I rejoice enough. When engaged this morning, seeing inquirers coming in one after another, I thought within myself, “I have known the time, when I first began to preach the Gospel, that one soul God had given me as a fruit of my ministry, made me so happy that I was ready to leap out of the body.

Truly it is a happy thing to be the means of bringing one soul to Christ.” The poet says that,

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever.”

But a thing of grace is much more truly so, for the things of beauty here on earth may be consumed, but a work of grace is everlasting. To be the means of saving one soul ought to set a silver bell ringing in your hearts that will never leave off. You will say, “I am very poor, and very sick, but I have not lived for nothing, there will be one gem in the Redeemer’s crown that came there through my instrumentality. There will be one voice in the orchestra of the skies, which, humanly speaking, would not have been there if the Lord had not enabled me by His grace to be the means of bringing that soul to Christ.” This ought to make us joyful.

But then I thought, here have I been seeing thirty today, and most of them owed their conversion to the preaching of the Gospel here, and I have seen, perhaps, in my little lifetime, several thousands of souls, and know of many others whom I never saw, who have been brought to Christ through our instrumentality.

What! and down-hearted, and sometimes wretched, and distracted with care after this? I thought to myself, what a fool I am!

And I suspect that if you and I, or any of us, were to consider the goodness of God to us, the fact that our names are written in heaven, that Christ is ours, that heaven is ours, that we are the children of God, and that we are justified by faith—we should say, “Why, what am I at to be moaning and groaning about these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, and which will work out for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?”

Come, my soul, take down the harp, and let your fingers roam among its strings. Say with old Herbert,

*“My God, my God,
My music should find Thee
And everything shall have its attribute to sing.”*

So, if we cannot go to God, asking Him to look on our affliction, let us ask Him to look upon our joy, and to help us to increase it, and to grow in it, and then to keep us from sin in the future, and to lead us in the paths of duty and of blessed service, to the honor of His name and the comfort of our own souls.

May the Lord give you, in parting, His own blessing.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 25

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