

A SINGULAR PLEA IN PRAYER NO. 2535

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 1897.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, APRIL 27, 1884.

*“I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against You.”
Psalm 41:4.*

THIS was one of David's sayings—“I said.” It was a saying that was worth saying, and it is worth re-saying—“I said, Lord, be merciful unto me.” How often he said it, we do not know. The more often, the better. There is no day too bright for saying it, and there is no night too dark for saying it. “I said, Lord, be merciful unto me.” Every one of David's sayings was not worth repeating, for he said some things that he had to retract. “I said in my haste,” he said, on one occasion, and possibly what he said in his haste he repented of at his leisure. But this saying in our text needs no retracting! It only needs repeating, and until we enter heaven, we may keep on saying it—“I said, Lord, be merciful unto me.” I have never heard of Christ rebuking anybody for speaking thus. He who said, “God, I thank You that I am not as other men are,” received no commendation from the Lord Jesus Christ. But he who said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner,” went down to his house justified rather than the other! This is a good saying, a true saying, a humble saying, and a gracious saying. And I say again, the more often it is repeated, the better. “I said, Lord, be merciful unto me.”

Observe that this is a saying to the Lord—“I said, LORD, be merciful unto me.” You hear people say, when they are talking and gossiping, “I said to her, and she said to me,” or, “He said to me, and I said to him”—so-and-so, and so-and-so. Well, what does it matter what you said or what they said? Very likely it is not worth repeating, nor the answer that was made to it! Much of what is said may be summed up in the Dunottar Castle motto—

***“THEY SAY.
WHAT DO THEY SAY?
LET THEM SAY.”***

It all comes to nothing! It is only breath vainly spent, which would be far more wisely expended if it were, as the poet Cowper said—

“To heaven in supplication sent.”

How much better it would be if each one of the parties concerned said, “*Lord, be merciful unto me!*” If we would speak twice to God, and only once to men, or if we even reached as happy a proportion as at least to say *as much* to God as we say to our fellow men, how much healthier, happier, stronger, more heavenly, and more holy would we become! You need not try to remember all that you have said to your fellow men—probably much of that is best forgotten—but it is good to remember what you have said to your God, if it is anything like this saying of the sweet psalmist of Israel, “I said, Lord, be merciful unto me.”

Let this be one of our sayings as well as David's. As he said, “Lord, be merciful unto me,” I am sure I ought to say it, and I think, dear friends, you ought to say it, too. If there is anybody here who thinks that he has grown so good that he does not need to pray, “Lord, be merciful unto me,” I am very thankful, for once, that I am not as that man is, for he must be eaten up with pride! He cannot be right in his heart who will not pray for mercy, and surely he has received no mercy who does not feel his need of more mercy! God can scarcely have begun to work in that man who thinks that he needs no longer make confession of sin, or seek mercy from God. David tells us, “I said, Lord, be merciful unto me,” and I advise you to make this one of your sayings also. People sometimes say, “It is an old saying,” and that is supposed to be its commendation. Well, this, also is an old saying. A young man says, “My father used to say so-and-so,” and I have no doubt that if you had a godly father, he used to say much that was worth

remembering, and worth repeating—and you cannot do better than use your father’s words, especially if they were like David’s on this occasion! Let it be reported of you in your biography, if it is ever written, “This was one of his sayings. He often said, ‘Lord, be merciful unto me.’”

Notice, also, that this was the saying of a sick man, and of a sick saint. “I said, Lord, Be merciful unto me.” It is not written, “I said, Lord, You are unmerciful to me in chastening me; you deal too severely with me in placing me upon this sickbed, and causing me to lie here till the bed grows hard as a rock beneath me.” No, there is no complaining, here, though there is petitioning! There is no murmuring, though there is supplication! “I said, Lord, be merciful unto me.” When you get well again after an illness, it will be a great comfort if you can look back, and feel, “I did not complain, but the chief cry from my sickbed was, ‘Lord, be merciful unto me.’”

I have thus briefly introduced to you one of the sayings of a sick saint—a sick king—and that king was David, the man after God’s own heart. And I believe that this saying of his was after God’s own heart, and that this prayer was pleasing in the ears of the Most High. “I said, Lord, be merciful unto me.” So now I will try to show you that our text contains, first, *a prayer*—“Lord, be merciful unto me.” Next, *a confession*—“I have sinned against You.” And then, thirdly, *a plea*, and a very singular plea it is—“I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against You.”

I. First, here is, A PRAYER—“Lord, me merciful unto me.” It may mean—and I daresay it *did* mean, at least in part—“*Mitigate my pains.*” O Beloved, when you feel your heart throbbing and palpitating, or when the swollen limb seems as if it were laid upon an anvil, and beaten with red-hot hammers, when the pain goes through you again and again, till even the strong man is ready to cry out in his agony, and the tears start unwillingly to the eyes, this is a good prayer to present to God, “Lord, be merciful unto me.” I have sometimes found that where medicine has failed, and sleep has been chased away, and pain has become unbearable, it has been good to appeal directly to God, and to say, “O Lord, I am Your child! Will You allow Your child to be thus tortured with pain? Is it not written, ‘Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him’? Lord, be merciful unto me!” I can solemnly assert that I have found immediate respite from convulsions of extreme pain in answer to a simple appeal to the Fatherhood of God, and a casting myself upon His mercy. And I do not doubt that I am also describing the experience of many others of God’s afflicted children. When grieved with sore physical pain, you will find, dear friends, that the quiet resignation, the holy patience, and the childlike submissiveness which enable you to just pray, “Lord, be merciful unto me,” will often bring a better relief to you than anything that the most skilled physician can prescribe for you. You are permitted and encouraged to act thus—when the rod falls heavily upon you, look up into your Father’s face, and say, “Lord, be merciful unto me.”

But that is not all that David meant, I am quite sure, for, next, he must have meant, “*Forgive my sins.*” You can see by his prayer that his sins were the heaviest affliction from which he was suffering—“Be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against You.” And, believe me, there is no pain in the world that at all approximates to a sense of sin! I said to a dear friend who is greatly depressed at this time, “I should like you to have a little rheumatic gout, just to take your thoughts off your mental anxiety.” “Oh,” she said, “it would be a great pleasure to me to have that form of suffering rather than my present depression of spirit!” And I am sure that it is so—and if that depression of spirit is mingled with the thought of sinfulness, and you are afraid—although, perhaps, in your case there may be no ground for fear because you really are God’s child—but if you get afraid that you are not pardoned and forgiven, that fear will cut into you worse than a wound from a sword! It will make your blood boil more than would the poison of a cobra in your veins, for there is nothing as venomous as sin! So David meant, “I said, when I felt my sin—I said, when my spirit sank within me—Lord, be merciful unto me. Be merciful unto me.”

Sinners’ prayers suit depressed saints. The prayer of the publican is, after all, my everyday prayer. I have what I may call a Sunday prayer, a prayer for high days and holiday, but my everyday prayer, the one that I can use all through the week, the one that I can pick up when I cannot pick up anything else, is the publican’s prayer, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” That prayer is “the baby’s prayer,” such as you would teach a child to pray. It is the prayer of the poor harlot, the prayer of the dying thief, “O God, be merciful to me!” It is a blessed, blessed prayer, and I charge you never to cease from using it in the sense that our Lord taught it to His disciples, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.”

But that is not all that there is in this prayer. I think that David, when he said, “Lord, be merciful unto me,” also meant, “*Fulfill Your promises.*” “You have said of the man who considers the poor, ‘The

Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.’ Lord, be merciful unto me, and deliver me in the time of my trouble. You have said, ‘The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive.’ Lord, be merciful unto me, preserve me, and keep me alive. You have said that you will not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. Lord, be merciful unto me, and guard me from my foes. You will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing. Lord, be merciful unto me, and strengthen me. You will make all his bed in his sickness. Lord, make my bed.” It is a very difficult thing to make a sick man’s bed easy, and I should think that it was still harder to make the kind of bed that David was accustomed to lie upon. We often have a soft bed with plenty of feathers in it, yet, after we have been lying upon it for a month, it gets very hard. No matter if it is a bed of down, it seems as if it were made of stones, and one is apt to think that it is made very badly when it is really made exceedingly well. But I should think that the mattresses they used in the East must have been so hard that it needed God, Himself, to make soft beds for sick people, so the Lord comes in with this gracious promise, “I will make all his bed”—bolster, pillow, covering and all—“I will make all his bed in his sickness. I will help him. I will comfort him. I will make him patient. I will enable him to bear all My will.”

Now, then, you dear saints of God who are in trouble, here is a prayer that is suitable for every one of you, “Lord, be merciful unto me.” Should you get very badly off, then plead the promise, “You have said, ‘Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure.’ Lord, be merciful unto me.” Are you going down in the world? Remember that it is written, “No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly,” and cry, “Lord, be merciful unto me.” This prayer comes in appropriately at the back of every promise!

I know that I am addressing some who are not yet saved, but I wish that this prayer might get into each one of their hearts—“Lord, be merciful unto me.” Keep on praying it until you obtain the mercy! Every five minutes in the day, wherever you are, let your heart go beating—beat, beat, beat, beat—to this tune, “Lord, be merciful unto me. Be merciful unto me. Be merciful unto me.” You cannot have a prayer that will better fit your lips!

So far I have spoken of only half the psalmist’s prayer. The other half of it is, “Heal my soul.” David does not pray, “Heal my eyes; heal my feet; heal my heart; heal me, whatever my disease may be,” but he goes at once to the root of the whole matter, and prays, “Heal my soul.” O you sick ones, be more anxious to have your soul healed than to have your body cured! What does David mean by this portion of his prayer?

He means, I think, first, “*Heal me, Lord, of the distress of my soul!* My soul is afflicted with an appalling disease, and is brought very low—‘Lord, heal my soul.’ I am so sad, so sorely frightened, and such terrors pass before my eyes, my soul is morbid, melancholic, and despondent—‘Lord, heal my soul.’” The Lord is the great Soul-healer, therefore go to Him with this prayer, “Lord, heal me of the distress of my soul.”

But also add this meaning to the petition—“*Lord, heal my soul of the effect of sin.*” Every sin brings on another sin. And the continuance in sin makes the tendency to sin, stronger. “‘Heal my soul, Lord.’ If I was once a drunk, and I have given up the evil thing, yet the thirst will come—heal my soul of it. If I have been a man of the world, and have made unrighteous gains, the tendency to do so again will be strong upon me when the opportunity occurs—‘heal my soul, Lord,’ that I may forget the wanton songs I used to sing, the wanton sights I once delighted in, the wanton lusts that once ate up my life, ‘heal my soul, Lord.’” It is one thing to be forgiven, it is another thing to be delivered from the result of a long life of sin! Yet God can do even that, so pray, “Lord, be merciful unto me and pardon me. Heal my soul, and sanctify me.”

I think that David also meant by this prayer, “*Heal me of my tendency to sin.*” He seemed to say, “Lord, I shall sin again if I am not healed. I have an evil tendency in me, and an old nature which is inclined to sin. If You do not heal me of this disease, there will be another eruption upon the skin of my life, and I shall sin again.” When a man sins outwardly, it is because he has sin inwardly. If there were no sin *in* us, no sin would come *out* of us! But there it lies, sometimes concealed. I do not think it is ever a good thing to sin—that cannot be—but I have known a man to be tempted, and to fall into sin who has discovered by his fall how much of sin there always was in him. It is something like the breaking out of a disease in the skin—it would not have broken out if it had not been there before. And the outbreak, however grievous it is, may be useful by driving the sufferer to seek a cure, and so he becomes thoroughly healed. This is the meaning of David’s prayer, “Heal my soul, for I have sinned. Heal me, that I may not sin again.”

II. The second part of our subject is A CONFESSION. “I have sinned against You.” I do not want to simply have these words in my mouth, to tell them to you. I wish that I could put them into your mouths, O you unconverted ones, that you might say them to God! Let us briefly consider what is meant by this confession, “I have sinned against You.”

First, it is a confession *without an excuse*. David does not say, “I have sinned against You, but I could not help it,” or, “I was sorely tempted,” or, “I was in trying circumstances.” No, as long as a man can make an excuse for his sin, he will be a lost man; but when he dares not, and cannot frame an excuse, there is hope for him! “I have sinned against You,” is a confession without an excuse.

Further, it is a confession *without any qualification*. He does not say, “Lord, I have sinned to a certain extent, but, still, I have partly balanced my sins by my virtues, and I hope to wipe out my faults with my tears.” No. He says, “I have sinned against You,” as if that were a full description of his whole life. He bows his knees, and just confesses unto God, “Lord, I give up everything in the way of self-defense or self-justification. ‘I have sinned against You.’”

But notice, also, that this confession is *without affectation*. When some people say, “We have sinned,” you can tell by their manner that they think they are, by their confession, complimenting God. You talk with them, and they say, “Oh, yes, sir, we are all sinners!” Yes, they are all sinners like the monk who said that he had broken all the commandments, and was the most wicked man in the world. So one of his companions asked him if he had broken the first commandment. Another asked about the second, then the third, the fourth, the fifth, and all the rest. And to each one he kept saying, “No, I never broke that in my life.” They inquired about the whole ten, and he declared that he had never broken one of them—yet this was the man who had confessed that he had broken all ten! And there are men who say that they are sinners, yet they do not mean it. And a sham sinner will only have a sham savior—that is to say, a man who only pretends to be a sinner, and does not realize his guilt in the sight of God, *will not have a Savior!* But Christ died for nobody but real sinners, those who feel that their sin is truly sin—

*“A sinner is a sacred thing,
The Holy Spirit has made him so”*

and if I am happy enough to meet with a man who puts himself down with real sinners, I bid him believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and expect that, by so doing, he will find a real Savior who will cleanse him from sin by His precious blood!

I wanted you to notice that there was no affectation about David’s confession of sin, for, in the next verse he says, “My enemies speak evil of me.” He was not going to confess sin which he had not committed—and when men spoke against him, he said, “They speak evil of me.” Well, but, David, how can they speak evil of you when you confess that you are so bad? “Yes,” he says, “but I have not done that with which they charge me. I confess that I have sinned against God, but I have not sinned against Him in the way they say I have. So far as their charges are concerned, I am innocent and pure. What I confess is that I have sinned against God.” I like a man, when he makes a confession of sin, not to be carried away into the use of proud expressions without meaning, but to speak with judgment, and to acknowledge and confess only what is true. This is the excellence of David’s confession, that he acknowledges to what no sinner will ever admit till the grace of God makes him do it—“I have sinned *against You*.” Hear him again in the 51st Psalm—“Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight.” Hear the prodigal—“Father, I have sinned *against heaven*, and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son.” The essence of sin is that it is sin against *God*. It is wrong to do any harm to your neighbor, but, after all, you and he are only two subjects of the great King and Lord of All. It is high treason to sin against God and often that sin, of which men think the least, God thinks the most. That spiritual sin of which some say, “Oh, that is a mere trifle!”—that forgetting of the Creator, that ignoring of the only Redeemer—this is the sin of sins, the damning sin which kindles the flames of Hell! And it is a good thing and a right thing, when a man’s confession of sin has David’s confession as the very core of it, “Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against You.”

III. Now I close by noticing A PLEA, and a very singular plea it is. The psalmist’s prayer is followed by a confession, and, strangely enough, the confession is the argument of the prayer. Listen to the text again—“I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul.” Why? “*For I have sinned against You.*”

That is a very startling and remarkable way of pleading, but it is the only right one. It is *such a plea as no self-righteous man would urge!* The Pharisee keeps to this strain, “Lord, be merciful unto me, for I have been obedient, I have kept Your law.” O foolish, self-righteous man! Do you not see that you are shutting the door in your own face? You say, in effect, “Be merciful unto me, for I do not need any mercy.” That is what it practically comes to, and therefore you are contradicting your own prayer! If you

have kept the law from your youth up, and you have been so good, and so obedient, you do not need any mercy from God! Why, therefore, do you ask for it? No man who thinks himself better than his neighbors, strictly upright, honorable, and worthy of reward, will ever bow his knees, and cry to God, "Have mercy upon me, for I have sinned against You." He pleads, on the contrary, "Have mercy upon me, for I am a most respectable man; I pay everybody twenty shillings in the pound; I have brought up my family most admirably! Have mercy upon me." I say again, he asks for charity, and then says, "I do not need it. Give me of Your charity, O God, but I am not one of the poor beggars that crawl about the street—I am as well-to-do as anybody." None but the poor will value the charity of men, and none but the guilty will value the charity of God! If you are not a sinner, Christ as a Savior has nothing to do with you. He came into the world to save sinners—and as for you who count yourselves righteous, this is what He says about you, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." As Mary sang, "He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent empty away." Let them feed themselves if they have such an abundance as they say. This, then, is the sort of plea that a self-righteous man would not urge.

This is, further, *such a plea as a carnal reasoner could not urge*, for he could not spy out any reason or argument in it. "Am I to appeal to my God for mercy, and for soul-healing on the ground that I have sinned? Why," he says, "there is no plea in *that*." But he who has been to Christ's school, and learned the logic of the cross, will know that there is no argument equal in force to this—"Lord, I have sinned, I need mercy. Give it to me, Lord. I have sinned, and therefore I have no right whatever to expect anything of You—therefore glorify Yourself by the freeness and spontaneity of Your abounding grace! Lord, I have sinned, and this sinning has destroyed me! Have pity upon me. This sinning is like a deadly disease within my soul. Therefore, great Physician, come and heal me! This sinning has killed me. Make me alive. This sinning has damned me. Come and save me!"

That is the best pleading in all the world, and, after all, it is the common pleading that men make use of with their fellow men. When one comes begging of me, what does he say? In nine cases out of ten, he tells me what is not true! That I can vouch for, but I always notice that he never pleads thus—"Now, sir, I want you to give me help because I do not need it very much. I am not at all badly off—I already have about as much as I need—but I thought that I would take to begging because it is a genteel kind of occupation." You never hear him talk like that! I remember giving a man who came begging of me with bare feet, a pair of patent leather boots. They were nearly done with, but I thought that he might make some use of them. He put them on, but he was not as foolish as to go begging in them! At the first gateway he came to, he pulled them off, and I met him, ten minutes afterwards, without the boots, except that he had them slung over his back, ready to sell to the first likely customer! He knew that rags are the best clothes for a beggar—if he would succeed in his calling, the fouler, and the more ragged he looked, the better for him—for so he appeals to our sense of pity! At any rate, that is the way to beg of God. Do not go and smarten yourself up, and say, "Lord, I am pretty decent as I am. Be merciful unto me." No, but go in your rags—go just as you are, in all your sin, filthiness, weakness, poverty, and insignificance—and so appeal to the pity and the mercy of God! This is sound common sense that I am talking. Suppose there had been a battle, and I were a soldier who had been wounded, and lay upon the plain? And suppose the surgeon, and the men with the ambulance were going round to see who needed their help? If they came to me, I do not think I should say, "Well, doctor, I have got a bullet in here somewhere, but it has not gone in very far. I daresay it will be all right—you can leave me here." Oh, no! I would say, "I am afraid, doctor, that this bullet is very near my heart. You had better let your men pick me up and attend to me quickly, or I may be very soon dead." I certainly would not try to make myself out to be better than I was! And I would be glad to be attended to at once.

And what folly it is when a man tries to comfort himself, as a sinner, by looking up all his filthy rags of self-righteousness, and saying, "Lord, I do not think there is very much the matter with me." O soul, if you did but know it, your whole head is sick, and your whole heart is faint—from the crown of your head to the soles of your feet you are covered with wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores! There is but a step between you and death—between you and hell—if you have never been washed in the precious blood of Jesus Christ! Therefore, do not set up your lying pretenses! Do not paint yourself up, like Jezebel, for you cannot, in that way, make yourself beautiful in the sight of God! You must go to Him with all your wrinkles, all your foulness, and everything else that is hideous, and say, "Lord, I have no beauty, I have no merit, nothing to plead, nothing to urge, but my guilt. 'Heal my soul; for I have sinned against You.'" Then you shall be saved! When a man cannot pay to God a penny in the pound of all his debts, then he will be frankly forgiven all. But as long as he promises that he will make a composition, and do his best to pay what he owes to divine justice in the hope that Jesus Christ will make up the rest,

there is no hope for him! The Lord Jesus Christ will not be a mere counterbalance for you! Do you think that you are to get into the scale with your beautiful righteousness, and that you are to be accounted somebody of great importance—and that Christ is to do the little that you cannot do—that it is to be “Christ & Co.,” or rather, “Self & Co.”? And that you are to be the head of the firm, and Christ to be a kind of silent partner? He will not do it! It would be a disgrace to Christ to yoke you with Him in such a fashion! You might as soon yoke a gnat with an archangel as think of your going in to help Christ to save you! To join a filthy rag from off a dunghill with the golden garments of a king or a queen cannot be permitted! Christ will be *everything*, or else He will be nothing—you must be saved wholly by mercy, or else not at all! There must not be even a trace of the fingers of self-righteousness upon the acts and documents of divine grace. It must be all of grace—“And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace.” There can be no more mingling of the two together as the ground of hope than oil will mix with water, or fire will burn beneath the sea. You cannot be saved by your own merits! Oh, then, I implore you, breathe this prayer to God, “Lord, be merciful unto me; pardon me, for You have mercy upon sinners, and here is one! You heal the sick, and here is one! Lord, by Your grace I trust You! I lay my sins on Jesus, I lay my soul-sickness at his dear feet. Lord, save me.” It is all done if you trust Jesus—you are saved!

Just before I came in to this service, I saw a young brother whom I mean to propose to the church, and who, last Sunday came to me, after the morning sermon, and said, “Sir, I am saved, and I know I am.” And as I spoke to him, I thought that I knew it, too. Why should there not be many others in the same blessed condition? What is the use of preaching—what is the use of this vast crowd coming together, and going away again—unless men and women believe in Christ? Look unto Jesus and be saved! If you look, you shall be saved *now*! The Lord lead you to look at this very moment, and unto Him be praise forever and ever! Amen.

EXPOSITION C. H. SPURGEON: *PSALMS 41, 42.*

You will see, dear friends, from these holy songs, that the saints of God in those olden days were not screened from trials and troubles, but were tempted in all points like as we are. If we happen to be in similar trying circumstances, let us take comfort from their experiences. The footsteps of the flock that has gone before should make the sheep feel that it is not lost.

Psalm 41 To the chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

Verse 1. *Blessed is he that considers the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.*

David delivered *others*, and God will deliver him. When he is poor and needy, God will think upon him, even as David considered the poor and the needy when they cried to him.

2, 3. *The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and You will not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: You will make all his bed in his sickness.*

God will be condescendingly gentle to such as are kind and gentle to the poor. If we love God, first, and then exhibit the result of that love in our care for the poor and the needy, we shall certainly be recompensed, for he that gives to the poor lends to the Lord, and the Lord will pay him back—sometimes in his own coin, but more often in a coin of heavenly currency. Let us take note of this and let us never harden our heart against the poor and the needy in the time of their extremity.

4. *I said, Lord, be merciful unto me.*

David had been very kind to the poor at all times, but when he gets into trouble, he does not plead that, he just mentions it. The main stress of his pleading is quite in another direction, namely, for mercy—“I said, Lord be merciful unto me.”

4, 5. *Heal my soul; for I have sinned against You. My enemies speak evil of me. When will he die, and his name perish?*

But good men do not die to please wicked men. But sometimes, when the good men have been dead, buried, and their memory has been insulted by the wicked, they have risen up, again, in their posthumous influence! Good men live too long for the wicked, but they live as long as God wills that they should—they are immortal till their work is done. The story of Wycliffe is but a typical case of what has often happened. When the monks gathered round his bed, and expected that their opponent would soon be gone, he said, “I shall not die, but live,” and so he did. And even after he had died, he continued to be

a living power in the land. Indeed, we know not how much of the blessings we enjoy is the result of the light that was shed upon England by “the morning star of the Reformation.”

6. *And if he comes to see me, he speaks vanity: his heart gathers iniquity to itself; when he goes abroad, he tells it.*

Those are bad visitors to the sick who, when they speak, talk only nonsense, or that which galls the sufferer. And then, when they go out, begin to tell an idle tale against him to his injury.

7-9. *All who hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt. An evil disease, say they, cleaves fast unto him: and now that he lies, he shall rise up no more. Yes, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.*

Many a child of God has had his character whispered down by slanderers. Many a man has had a hard time of it through the evil speaking of men of the world. Yes, even the Lord of saints and the King of pilgrims knew what it was to find a traitor in His most familiar friend, and to receive the basest ingratitude from one who had eaten of His bread. Do not be carried away with too much sorrow if you are slandered or betrayed—better men than you have suffered through this fearful evil! Take the trouble to your Lord, and bear it with such patience as He will give you.

10, 11. *But You, O LORD, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them. By this I know that You favor me, because my enemy does not triumph over me.*

“He may think that he shall triumph over me. He may even begin, in his mind, to divide the spoil. But he shall never really get it—‘My enemy does not triumph over me.’”

12, 13. *And as for me, You uphold me in my integrity, and set me before Your face forever. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.*

That is the sick man’s praise—it is full of fervor, and full of life. Let us never rob God of the revenue of His praises! Let us not have such a cupboard love for Him that we only praise Him when He gives us good things. Let us bless His name just as much when He takes away, when He afflicts, when He chastises! That is true praise which comes from the bed of affliction, and from a heart that is sorely broken with sorrow.

Now in the next Psalm we find the good man in trouble again.

Psalm 42:1. *As the hart pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul after You, O God.*

“As the hart pants” or “brays.” And if such is your soul’s panting after God, you shall have what you pant for. Sooner or later God will manifest Himself in grace to the man who cries after Him in this fashion!

2. *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*

“My soul, my very soul, thirsts for God, the living God.”

2, 3. *When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is your God?*

That is another of the taunts of the ungodly. Just now, they said, “When shall he die, and his name perish?” Now they cry, “Where is your God? You said that He would help you. You were sure that He would comfort you. You were confident that He would draw near to you—and now you are crying and panting after Him, and have not got what you want—‘Where is your God?’”

4. *When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me.*

That is not a good thing to do. If you pour your soul out, do not pour it into *yourself*! There is little gain when you merely empty your grief *out* of yourself *into* yourself. I have known many a man lay his burden down, and then take it up, again, directly. That is poor economy! The way to get rid of the sorrow is to pour out your hearts before God! There is no wisdom in doing what the psalmist says he did—“I pour out my soul in me.”

4, 5. *For I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted in me?*

You see, the psalmist, here, talks to himself. Every man is two men—we are duplicates, if not triplicates—and it is well, sometimes, to hold a dialogue with one’s self. “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” I always notice that as long as I can argue with myself about my depressions, I can get out of them. But when both the men within me go down at once, it is a downfall, indeed! When there is one foot on the solid rock, the other comes up to it pretty soon.

5. *Hope you in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.*

“I know I shall. He will yet look at me. I shall not always be in the dark. Therefore, let me begin at once to praise Him.” It is well, sometimes, to snatch a light from the altars of the future, and with it to kindle the sacrifices of the present. “I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.”

6. *O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember You from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.*

From the little hill I will think of all Your former love—all the sacred spots where You have met with me, all the lonely places where You have been my comfort, and all the joyful regions where You have been my glory. I will think of these, and take comfort from them, for You are an unchanging God, and what You did for me before, You will do for me again and yet again.

7. *Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterspouts: all Your waves, and Your billows are gone over me.*

Here is a great storm. Here is a man, not merely on the sea, but in the sea with not only some waves beating upon him, but with all of them going over him. And those not common waves, but God’s waves. That is a Hebraism for the biggest waves, Atlantic billows—all these have gone right over him, yet see how he swims! Hope in God always crests the stormiest billow.

8, 9. *Yet the Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life will say unto God, my rock, Why have You forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?*

See what liberties saints take with God—how they reason with Him, how they argue with Him—and God loves them to do so. Are you not pleased with your child when he urges reasons why you should do this or that for him? You are glad to see that he has mind enough to think of these things, and confidence enough in you to expect you to be affected by his pleading. And the Lord loves His people to commune with Him. “Put Me in remembrance,” He says. “Let us plead together.” “Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord.” If we reasoned more with God, we should reason less with ourselves. There is a good reason for reasoning with God, but it is often unreasonable to reason with yourself.

10, 11. *As with a sword in my bones, my enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is your God? Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope you in God. for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

It is curious to see the duplicate man here. He talks to himself as, “you,” and yet he says, “I.” “Hope you in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance.” First, he said, “I shall yet praise Him, for the help of His countenance.” Now it is, “the *health of my countenance.*” When God helps us with His countenance, then our own countenance soon grows bright and healthy! “Who is the health of my countenance,” says the psalmist, and then he comes to the sweetest note of all, “and my God.”—

*“For yet I know I shall Him praise,
Who graciously to me,
The health is of my countenance,
Yes, my own God is He.”*

Oh, sweet word, that! May each of us be able to reach it! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—537, 594, 607.

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