

PRAYING AND PLEADING NO. 1661

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do you it for your name’s sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against you. O the hope of Israel, the savior thereof in time of trouble, why should you be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should you be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name; leave us not.”
Jeremiah 14:7-9.*

THIS passionate appeal for mercy was forced from the people by extreme misery. There was a famine in the land until men fell in the streets of the city exhausted with hunger. Drought had long prevailed, and dearth of water was terribly felt. Meanwhile invasion kept them in perpetual fear, so that the prophet lamented, “If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword! and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine!” Such judgment had God inflicted on a guilty nation for her sin. No springs were bubbling up from the earth, and no rain dropped down from heaven. This dire privation had produced universal distress. “Judah mourns, and the gates thereof languish, they are black unto the ground, and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up.”

As the calamity, like a river of lava, burned its dreadful way, an eyewitness, in his heart’s anguish, describes a few common scenes which forcefully tell the tale of utter desolation. Princes and peasants are seized with the same consternation, the prophet paints them both with their heads covered in token of a common grief. Here in the city the children are coming back from the place of pools and fountains with empty pitchers, for they find not a drop of water in the pits. Out yonder in the fields the ground is chapped and cleft by the scorching sun in the absence of dew or rain. The plow is of no use in that parched soil. Husbandmen are sitting down ashamed, confounded, utterly dejected, it is vain for them to lift the hand of labor.

Down in the valleys the dumb cattle express their feeling with throes of anguish—the hind calves and forsakes her young, and up on the mountain heights the wild asses prove their share in the universal distress. Those creatures which are most apt to scent water from afar, and to hasten to it to drink, are unable to discover a cooling brook, though they snuff up the wind like dragons. What a dreadful thing for a country to be placed as it were at the oven’s mouth, and to become so completely burned up, that even the wild beasts can discover no pasture, and their eyes fail because there is no grass.

Nothing could help the people. Grim death stared them in the face. None of their idol gods could cause rain, and without it they must all perish. Under such circumstances prayer to God was the last and only resource. Driven to their wits’ end, they now began to be wise. The prophet has expressed in admirable words the penitent confessions and the earnest supplications of those who were ready to perish. Our text is a most appropriate model of humble petitioning. I can easily imagine that all the Jews of the land were willing enough to adopt this form of prayer at such an extremity, and to follow it with a fervent, “Amen.”

But alas for them, the feet which had loved to wander were not willing to return, and the hearts which had cast off their allegiance to the Lord were not reconciled to His law of righteousness. The Lord felt compelled to say of them, “I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways.” Theirs was prayer in terror, not prayer in penitence. How many there are who pray after a fashion in times of dire distress! When the plague was raging, the cross was marked on many a door which else had never

known that token. When the cholera rages they go to church. When poverty invades their homes, and they are sorely pinched, they cry, “Lord, have mercy upon us.” When they are brought to death’s door, they entreat, “Send for some minister to come and pray at our side.”

What a wretched business is this—that we should only be disposed to think of God when we are in our utmost need! Dare we treat the Lord as if He were only to be called upon in our emergencies? How can we expect that God will accept prayers that are only forced out of us by selfish fears? It is not uncharitable to suspect that too often such prayers are either hypocritical or superstitious, and far different from the contrite cries which are music in the ears of the Most High.

What a mercy it is that God does hear real prayer, even if it is presented to Him only because we are in distress. “Call upon me,” says the Lord, “in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” When the prodigal went home to his father, his father did not say, “You have only come home because you have a hungry belly. You seek a meal among my hired servants because you could not fill yourself with the husks wherewith the swine are fed.” No, not so. Every word was welcome, every look was love. He “gives liberally, and upbraids not.” He does not fling into the teeth of a sincere penitent any reproach concerning the past. There is no scowl on the heavenly Father’s face, no scolding words are uttered by His lips. Nay, but He opens wide His arms of love, and clasps His lost one to His heart. The Lord of mercy bids the poor and needy come to Him and welcome, though he may have been a rake and a profligate.

What a dreadful state then, must those men be in to whose prayers the God of all grace has resolved to shut His ears. Thank God, my dear hearers, that you are still on praying ground and pleading terms with Him. How terrible is the case of any who have passed the frontier of hope. The case described in this chapter did not admit of pity or pardon. No chastisement could condone crimes which had been so repeated and gloried in. The Lord Himself bade Jeremiah not to pray for these people.

If you read the sequel you will find that God declared that though Moses and Samuel stood before Him, though the mightiest of intercessors and the best and most honored of saints were to join in supplication, yet He would not hear them, for His mind was made up to ease Him of His adversaries. Their hour of doom was come, the scaffold was ready, and the executioner was at hand. Take heed, you that trifle with mercy, lest God should put by the silver scepter and draw the sword out of its sheath. Take heed, you that scorn the mercy seat, lest it turn into a burning throne of wrath, and you “perish from the way while his wrath is kindled but a little.”

That is not the condition of things with us at this time, blessed be His name, and so I may invite you to notice the text as a model prayer, an *excellent example to God’s own people who are in a wandering state*, and afterwards I shall use it as an *instructive example for sinners conscious of their sin, who would fain come to God and find mercy*.

I. First, then, I speak to the church of God at large wherever it has backslidden, and to each believer in particular WHO MAY HAVE DEPARTED FROM THE LIVING GOD IN ANY MEASURE OR DEGREE.

Would you take with you words and turn unto the Lord? You cannot have better words than those now before you. I will read them again. “O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do you it for your name’s sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against you. O the hope of Israel, the savior thereof in time of trouble, why should you be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should you be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name; leave us not.”

Begin by pleading guilty. It is hard to bring men to this, yet there is no forgiveness apart from it. “O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do you it for your name’s sake: for our backslidings are many. We have sinned against you.” The sin-stricken soul has no defense, nor even an excuse, to offer on its own behalf. The penitent cries—Guilty, ay, guilty, for there is no denying it. Our iniquities testify against us. If there were no witnesses of our sin, our sins themselves bear witness against us. Oh that every child of God felt this if he has in the least gone aside from the paths of holiness!

It is not only that you see us, O our God, or that our brother Christians may have seen our faults, or even that some scoffers in the world have spied them out, and may be all too ready to bear witness against us, but our sins themselves have gone before us to the judgment seat and testify against us. When the facts are in clear evidence what plea can avail? No witnesses can more effectually secure condemnation. Look at the lives of many professors.

Yea, let us look at our own lives. Is there not enough of fault, enough of folly, enough of failure, for our own lives themselves, without any accusation from without, to witness against us? If I had to stand before God tonight to plead upon the matter of my own righteousness, I could do nothing but lie in the dust and hide my face for very shame, and it must be more or less the same with every believer who knows his own heart and life, and sees it in the light of God's countenance. There is no denying the charge, we are prone to wander. Therefore, O my brother, come with me, take the sinner's place, be abashed as an erring child, and come before the great Father and say, "Our iniquities testify against us."

While there is no denying it, let us *admit that there is no excusing it*, "for our backslidings are many." If we could have excused ourselves for our first faults by offering a degree of extenuation for the fickleness of our youth, yet what are we to say of the transgressions of our riper years? If you, my brethren, could say, "Lord, when we began to be believers we were ignorant and feeble, and we were readily carried away by temptation," you cannot make that apology now when years have given you stability, experience has brought you knowledge, and the favor and protection of God have ripened your character, or should have done so. "Our backslidings are many."

I feel as if I could not preach about this, for it touches my heart, and makes me feel ready to weep. Much rather would I like everyone to say to himself, "What have I done? What have I left undone? How far have I declined from the ways of the Lord?" Turn over the records of your life, brother Christian. What have you done for Christ? What have you done for the truth, for the souls of men, for the spread of your Redeemer's kingdom? Alas, may you not so have lived as even to have disparaged the truth, and done injury to the cause which is so dear to you? "Our backslidings are many."

We cannot count them, their number is as great as their guilt. It is well for us to feel that extenuation and apology and excuse are out of the question. There is no use in our making any pretense to self-justification. We are compelled to plead—Guilty. Guilty with gross aggravations. Guilty again and again. "Our backslidings are many." Guilty, though we were under bonds to have lived in a very different fashion.

Ay, and not only is it past denying and past excusing, but also *it is past computing*. We cannot measure how great have been our transgressions, as that next sentence may well imply, "We have sinned *against you*." It looks, at first sight, as if that were the smaller sentence of the three, but let me read it again, and throw the emphasis where it ought to be, and then you will see that it is the heaviest clause in the indictment. "We have sinned *against you*." That is what David always lays the emphasis upon when he makes his confession, "Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight." This is the prodigal's confession, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you."

Oh, brothers and sisters, to have sinned against our Father and His infinite love, against our Savior and His precious blood, against the Holy Ghost and all His gentle striving and His sweet comfortings and blessed teachings—this is to have sinned with a vengeance. What shall we say of ourselves? Do not such sins strike us dumb? Sins against the law and against the Gospel, sins against light and sins against knowledge, sins in our holy things, sins on our knees, sins in our hearts, sins—where are they not? Sins high as the clouds, broad as the earth, immense as the sea. Who shall fathom the great ocean of our iniquity? It is wise for us, therefore, to stand at the bar of God and humbly confess that "Our iniquities testify against us, our backslidings are many, for we have sinned against you."

Next to this plea of guilty, we find that the culprits do *most vehemently appeal to God for mercy*. Please observe carefully how they order their cause before Him, and with what arguments, as Job has it, they fill their mouths.

No reasons whatever could they fetch from themselves. They dare not plead before God that if He will have mercy upon them they will do better, for their many backslidings render such a promise hopeless. Brothers, are you not sick of promising that you will from this time forward amend your lives? I hardly think that we are convinced of our sinfulness if we flatter ourselves that we shall do better in the future. Can you again trust that broken bone which has let you fall so many times? Can you again trust that tongue of yours when already you have been unable to rule it? Can you trust that flaming member which has been ready to set on fire the course of nature? What, trust your heart again? Go, confide in the wind or the treacherous sea, but trust not your treacherous resolution.

“If I could only have my life over again,” says one, “I should do better.” My brother, I should not like to have my life over again for fear I should do worse, and worse I should do, unless I had more grace. Ah, brothers, it never does to say to God, “Lord, forgive the backslidings of the past, for I shall do better by and by.” Suppose you do. There is no merit in that, but it is a wild supposition, for you will do nothing of the kind. “Ay, but” you say, “I am now more resolved than I was. I am older and wiser now, and I feel quite safe because my resolution is so strong.”

This is fine talk for one who is no better than a reed shaken by the wind. How preposterous is such boasting! Your strong resolution! How strong is the wax before the fire? How strong is the tow in the midst of the flame? Your resolution, however, seems to yourself to be firm as adamant, alas, it is only seeming. Peter’s resolution was strong when he said, “Though I should die with you, yet will I not deny you,” yet the look and laugh of a silly maid at the palace door opened his mouth with floods of blasphemy—that mouth which Peter thought would overflow with brave confessions of his Master.

We know not what spirit we are of. We are worse than we think we are. When young folks tell me how terribly wicked they are, and therefore they are afraid that they cannot be saved, I sometimes reply, “Yes, but you are much worse than you think you are.” They look so astonished, for they hoped to be comforted, and lo, they are plunged into a deeper ditch. Probably they cry out that they feel themselves to be more weak and foolish than any other people alive. I tell them that most likely they are near the truth, but that they are much worse than they fancy they are, for in fact, they are utterly undone, and there is no good thing in them.

They look bewildered, and then I tell them that the Lord Jesus came to save the weak and worthless, and that He looks after the lost and ruined ones. We lay the axe to the tree of self that men may fly to the tree of life. There must be no reliance upon arguments based upon our own excellence, we must beg for grace and plead for mercy, for upon no other terms but those of grace can the Lord treat us with.

Child of God, it is well for you in prayer before the Lord to get rid of every sort of excuse, apology, or palliation. Let your self-impeachment stand in the forefront of your petition—“O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do you it for your name’s sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against you.”

But still there is a plea, for *they make a plea out of God’s name*. From the badness of the rebellious subjects to the goodness of the righteous Sovereign is a rapid but reasonable transition. A weighty motive is suggested that may dispose God to be merciful, but that motive is drawn exclusively from Himself—“Though our iniquities testify against us, do it for your name’s sake.” Oh the majesty of the name of the Lord! The fame thereof is wonderful throughout all generations. You have a name, O God, for pardoning iniquity. So David said, “For your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity, for it is great.”

Come, then, desponding brothers. Here is a prayer which will avail for us when the night is darkest and not a star is to be seen. “Do you it for your name’s sake”—because it will glorify Your name to save us, because there is something about Your name which encourages our soul to hope. “Do you it for your name’s sake.” The distracted nation is drawn into closer fellowship as the story of the past suggests a plea for her present distress.

Nor is this all, the covenant of grace promises a glorious future, and this *promise is pleaded* as the Lord is called, “*the hope of Israel*.” It is well to draw upon the bank of hope as well as upon the bank of

experience. When your cup is full of sorrow, and your face is covered with shame, and not a ray of light falls on your dreary path, remember that there is a history full of grace behind us, and a prophecy full of glory before us, and it is all wrapped up in the name of Him who is the hope of every contrite heart. But take good heed that your hope is not a vague hope. See to it that you believe in God firmly, and that you lay hold upon an actual promise of His Word or some statute of His kingdom very tightly, for then you may hope to your heart's content.

Though you cannot see the way of deliverance, you can feel that the Lord holds you by the hand. Now plead with Him, "Lord, You are my only hope. You know that I have no hope anywhere else. I am clean driven to despair except You look upon me in Your grace." This is good pleading. Everyone has a hope somewhere. To the miserable there remains no other medicine. Deprived of this the sufferer would grow desperate, and his melancholy would drive him to the verge of madness. But there is a hope of some kind in every man's bosom.

Now, if you can truly say, "One thing I know, my hope is alone in You, my God," you may plead that. You may argue thus—"Lord, do save me for your name's sake, that I may never be ashamed of my hope. You have never left a poor soul to use You as its anchor, and then to find that anchor drag and leave the vessel to drift upon a lee-shore. Be true, then, to this Your name, and rescue me, and blot out my transgressions, seeing I put my trust in You." Beloved, a hope so grounded shall never fail you.

The church of God pleads the name of God under another title, "*The Savior thereof in time of trouble.*" God has saved His people. In the roll of fame His name is written as a great Deliverer. The annals of Israel were full of anniversaries. By feasts and fasts they were taught to remember dire emergencies and delightful escapes. The mighty deeds of the Lord whereof their fathers had told them are celebrated in psalms and songs, and their charm is this, that His mercy endures forever.

Here again is a lesson in the art of prayer. He has been a Savior, therefore plead with Him, "Lord, I have no right to salvation, but still, You are a Savior. You have been accustomed to save Your people in time of trouble, save me. Fulfill Your gracious office. Lord, save, or I perish. It will glorify You to save me. Why is Your name thus revealed but to guarantee the grace that is wrapped up in it? Savior is an empty name if You do not save." Is not this fine pleading? O Laodicea, you that are neither cold nor hot, do you mourn your lukewarmness? Then awake to some such a plea as this—"O hope of Israel, O Savior thereof in time of trouble, for your name's sake deal graciously and restoringly with me."

Then, next, she does not mention the name, but it is implied in the words. She says, "Why should you be as a stranger in the land?"—one who is merely traveling through the country and takes little interest in its trouble because he is not a citizen—one who merely puts up for a night in the house, and therefore does not enter into the cares and trials of the family. She does as good as call Him *master*, lord of the house, and *His ownership is pleaded in the suit*.

Jesus, You are head of the family. You are the Lord, the husband. Will You act as if You were a mere lodger or a stranger? Tell Him that your house is His—that the church is His—that He is the head of it, and plead with Him that He will not lay aside His position, or neglect that condescending responsibility which He voluntarily took upon Himself when He became the head of His church, and undertook on her behalf to be her Redeemer. Plead with Him that way, for His name's sake, and you will win a gracious reply.

Then the argument ventures a little farther, and the plea is this, "You, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name." God's presence with His church and *His connection with it becomes a plea*. Have I not thus pleaded sometimes for this church when I have thought over its sins and its wanderings? I have said—"And yet, Lord, You are in the midst of us. We do have Your presence at Your table and in the prayer meeting. You are with this people right blessedly, and we are called by your name, and if You shall leave us, the ungodly world will say, 'In that edifice was once assembled a church of God, but it has become deserted. There in former times a Gospel ministry flourished, but it has failed.' If ever it should be so said, Your name will be dishonored."

See how Israel pleads in the text—“Why should you be as a man astonished?” That is, like a man confounded, who does not know what to do—who is distracted and amazed. She says, “Lord, if You do not help us now, the men of the world will say, their God could not help them. They were brought into such a condition at last that their faith was of no use to them, and their God could not deliver them. Why should you be as a mighty man that cannot save? a champion defeated in all his efforts? Nay, but You have given us a banner, a sacred standard that must not suffer defeat, let it be displayed because of the truth, and give us victory.”

Some of you who are trying to serve God have floated into shallow waters lately, and you are in great trouble. Now, if you can somehow implicate God in what you are doing you will greatly strengthen your cause. Are you His servant, acting in His name, and entangled with difficulties that arise out of conscientiously following His command and trusting in His promise? Then you may say to Him, “Lord, what will the Egyptians say? What will the Philistines say? Will they not say that at last it is proved that faith is a delusion, that the promise is a snare, and that there is either no God, or else that He is a God who cannot aid, or will not hear prayer and help His servants?”

I delight to get upon this track. It refreshes me to feel that I have no help but in God, but that His promise binds Him to succor me. When I am quite out of my own depth I feel that I must swim, for if the Lord’s power does not buoy me up, I shall sink to destruction. How can He suffer one to be destroyed whose trust is in Him? If this faith is a lie, it will be exposed by my failure, and if this God is not the living God, and does not hear prayer, the adversaries of the Lord will laugh.

Ah, then you may plead with Him, “Do it for your name’s sake.” Though our iniquities have been many—though we have not served You as we ought to do—though we have backslidden often, yet, Lord, do not punish Yourself on account of us. Do not put Your name to dishonor because of our folly. Do not put Your Gospel to the rout because we are so unbelieving, but do, for Your own honor’s sake, now interpose and deliver Your servants in this their time of need.

II. Having thus tried to put before you, though very feebly, the good ground on which your feet may stand while you are wrestling with God, I want for a very few minutes to speak with THOSE POOR TROUBLED HEARTS THAT DO NOT YET KNOW THE LORD, or fear that they do not.

To my text as a whole they have no title, but from the matter of it we may draw some valuable suggestions for their use. Are there not among us many, who though strangers to the fellowship of the saints, are distressed in soul and desirous to find peace with God? Are there not many who would fain obtain salvation from the God of grace? You say, “I want peace.” Then, I pray you, take heed that you do not put up with a false peace, or calm your conscience with anything less than true reconciliation with God. Better be always restless than find rest in a delusion. Begin and continue in the way of truth, for this will endure to the end, while all that is false will burst like a bubble.

Begin first by *confessing your guilt*. Come, my dear hearer, there can be no benefit in trying to conceal anything, therefore acknowledge your transgression. God can see it all, but there will be great benefit in your seeing it and confessing it before Him. Do not try to patch up a righteousness of your own. Jesus Christ is never sweet to any but to sinners. You have to prove that you are a sinner, not a saint, for Jesus gave Himself for our sins, not for our merits.

Remember, when Christ comes to fill us, the first thing we need to know is our own emptiness. Do not, therefore, go upon the tack of trying to make any kind of defense, but acknowledge your sins and say, “My iniquities testify against me.” Some of you could not make out a plea of righteousness if you were to try, your life-long actions would confound you if you attempted it. When people come in here who have never heard the Gospel before, they are often brought speedily to receive Christ because, when God blesses the word to such, it is not difficult to convince them of sin. They are so plainly guilty that they do not dream of disguising it. They never attempt to mend their old clothes, for they are too far gone, and only fit for the dunghill. They would only make greater rents by patching up such old and rotten materials.

Come, oh you poor ragged sinners, in all your rended garments, in all your loathsomeness and sin, and say each one, "Lord, I own that my transgressions testify against me. It is not the first time that I have been anxious, or the first time that I have promised better things, but I have been a deceiver until now. My backslidings are many. I am an old sinner, and a hardened sinner. I have sinned against convictions, sinned against a tender conscience, sinned against the restraints of Your Spirit. If I did seem to leave my evil ways the dog has returned to its vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

Ah, my hearer, you are a bad fellow, and I want you to own that you are. I want you to stand in the dock like a felon and plead, "Guilty," but be sure you do not add, "Only there are extenuating circumstances." There are no such circumstances in your case. You are thoroughly unworthy and deserve to be sent to hell. If you had died in your sins twenty years ago, and had been condemned without mercy, your wickedness would have abundantly vindicated the sentence of the Judge. Do you kick against that? I hope not, it will be your wisdom to admit your terrible desert of punishment. I beseech you, put your confession into words, and state truthfully what you have done. The sense of your wickedness will grow more keen when you recall your follies.

Remember, too, the forms in which you have sinned against God. You have violated the laws which regulate your life. You have set at naught those counsels which make for your physical health and your moral welfare. It is bad enough to have sinned against a mother's tears and a father's prayers. It is bad enough to have sinned against your own body, and to have disregarded your wife and your children. That is sad enough and horrible enough. Many have gone deep enough in that direction to crimson their cheeks with shame.

But you have despised the God that made you, you have dishonored your Creator. You have lived to gratify your own lusts, you have delighted in defying His laws. "The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib," alas, dumb driven cattle have been more dutiful than you. The Lord raised you up from fever, He sheltered you in storm, He rescued you from shipwreck, He has delivered you many times from going down into the pit by sudden death, yet you have been unmindful of Him and unthankful to Him. You have doted on the idols that provoked Him.

Feel this! Own this! Mourn this! Come before the Lord in penitent contrition. But make sure you are sincere. Think not that the language of a litany will avail you if you falsely say, "Lord, have mercy upon us miserable sinners," when you are not miserable, and do not believe that you are sinners at all. Rather may God the Holy Ghost work such deep conviction in your spirit that the language of my text may seem too feeble for you, may you be compelled to cry out, "O God, no speech can tell the depth of my guilt. Forgive me, for Your mercy's sake."

Shall I leave you there sitting down in abject despair? Doubtless in such depths we learn that salvation is of the Lord. Be sure of this—no excuse can exonerate you. Apologies drawn from your constitution or your circumstances will only aggravate your crimes. Your only ground for hope must be based on His grace. Call now upon His name, "For your name's sake." You big sinner say, "Lord, if you will save me, it will be a great instance of *Your power*."

"Well," said one the other day, "it is of no use your trying to convert me. If I ever shall be converted it will need God Himself to do it, for I am such a tough fellow." Yes, yes, and the Lord delights to let men see what He can do, He proves that He is omnipotent in the moral world as well as in the physical world, and as able to subdue free will as to stay the raging of the wild winds that sweep the sea. He is Lord, and besides Him there is none else, when He speaks the word of power, He can turn the lion into a lamb, the raven into a dove.

Oh, plead with Him to glorify His power, say, "Lord, it will show Your power if You will save one like me. If You will cast a legion of devils out of me, I shall be a standing wonder wherever I go. To men and angels I shall be a convincing proof of the regenerating power of the Almighty, therefore save me for your name's sake." If the Lord were to forgive a dozen ordinary sinners it would not so much display His *mercy* among men as in saving one unusually vile transgressor. Plead this.

There may be somebody listening to this discourse whom this word exactly suits. I feel as if the Holy Spirit were prompting me to utter these words for your use—"Lord, all the sin in the world seems to have run into me as into a common cesspool, but O Lord, if You can cleanse my heart, it will be a wonder of mercy indeed, and Your name shall be glorified. I am the man who ought to be damned above all men, I deserve to be the center of the target, at which all Your arrows ought to be leveled, but oh, if You will forgive me, it will make all hell quiver with astonishment. That God should save such a one as I will make heaven ring with joy, that such a one should be delivered from going down into the pit because God has found a ransom."

Here you may remember that all God's name is comprehended in Jesus Christ. This master-key unlocks every door. If you will cry, "Lord, save me for Jesus' sake, that men may see what Jesus can do by the cleansing power of His blood, by the strength of His hand, and by the love of His heart," you will have pleaded the name of the Lord. This argument has matchless force.

The dying thief!—look what glory He has brought to Christ all through the centuries. The apostle Paul, changed, renewed!—what honor he has brought to Christ ever since he was saved! Be this then your prayer, "O Lord, honor Yourself, honor Your Son, honor Your Spirit by saving me. Bless me for your name's sake." Cannot you join me in this prayer? O Holy Spirit, enlighten men as to their lost condition till they feel that there is no other way of pleading, and no other name to plead. Is it not the desire of the Father that Jesus should see of the travail of His soul in the salvation of the chief of sinners?

The Lord give you a grip of that plea. It is sure to prevail, "For your name's sake." You may thus plead the name of the Father, "My Father, glorify Your fatherly heart by welcoming Your prodigal child with a kiss of reconciliation, and saying, 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.'" You may next use it with the Holy Ghost and say—"O divine Spirit, glorify Your power over human hearts, by cleansing and regenerating even me, that men may see Your new creation, and wonder at it as You do work it in me."

A great point is to be able to lay hold upon a promise, a promise in the Book. I recollect when seeking the Lord the sweetness of that saying to my heart—"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." I found liberty when I could plead that. I said, "Lord, as far as I know what it means, I do call upon Your name. I have no other name to call upon, and You have said that whosoever does call upon Your name shall be saved. Now, for Your word's sake, do not draw back. I know You cannot lie. Fulfill Your promise even to me."

Brethren, we cannot say to a man when we have made him a promise, "I promised to do this for you, but you are such a bad fellow." That would be no excuse for our breaking our promise. You must honor your promise even if you feel ashamed of the person to whom it was made. The Lord in mercy having made a promise never quotes our character as a reason why He should break it. He knew all about you when He made the promise, and so He is not surprised. He knows more about you now than you know about yourself. He knows that you are a thousand times worse than you think you are. He has a much deeper sense of your guilt than you have. Still, for all that, He is ready to pardon. Plead His promise with Him and He will stand to His word.

Do any of you doubt the possibility of your obtaining mercy of the Lord, because of the depths of your iniquity, or the ruinous consequences it has already wrought? Believe me, you are victims of a delusion of Satan. The Lord God merciful and gracious passes by iniquity, transgression, and sin. There are some parts of the book of Jeremiah that I should not like to read to you. I can hardly think that they were meant to be read in public, they are intended rather, for our private meditations.

There is, however, one picture of infamy which I will merely hint at, though it has often excited my profound astonishment. It runs something like this, "They say if a man puts away his wife, and she goes from him and is another man's and plays the harlot, shall he take her to himself again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? Yet return unto me, says the Lord." Do you see the drift of this striking illustration? Here is a woman kindly treated in every way, who willfully leaves her husband. She has not

been led astray by a profligate, but she has wantonly left her husband of her own wicked self. She has defiled her name and her honor, and to crown her infamy then she has even left her paramour, and she has gone on the streets and become utterly vile.

Shall her first husband take her back again after her multiplied and manifest impurities? Would it not pollute the land? Everybody will say, “Why, this is an offense against morality. She has dishonored herself, she has dishonored her husband, and she has dishonored her country.” “Yet,” says God, “return unto me.” Is not this beyond the manner of man?

So does the mercy of the Lord transcend even the statutes of the law which He gave to Israel. You will see the force of this more clearly if you compare the third chapter of Jeremiah with the twenty-fourth chapter of Deuteronomy. The parable is startling. God is represented as dealing with an idolatrous nation as it would be an abomination before His own eyes for any man to deal with an unchaste wife. Such delight has JEHOVAH in mercy that He dispenses it at the risk of public odium. He knew that the self-righteous would cavil, and that even elder brothers would be angry, but He dared all that.

Henceforth let there be no demur on your part. “*Yet return again unto me, says the LORD.*” If there be any obloquy it must rest on His name whose holiness cannot be sullied. The elders in our Savior’s day who sat in Moses’ seat thought it an open scandal that He received publicans and harlots. I am not surprised that when He gave welcome to such fallen ones they were glad to come, but I am beyond measure astonished at those of you who put aside the only Gospel that can do you good. Why argue against your own interests instead of accepting the Lord’s open invitation?

Every evangelist who preaches pardon and peace by the blood of the Lamb braves the ethics of the age, the new teaching is that people must reap the consequences of their actions, there is no hope of ever undoing anything that a man does, and therefore there can be no Gospel to the guilty. Yes, I know that this is what the reign of law seems to demand, but for all that, the Lord would sooner that men should accuse Him of weakening the principles of morality than refuse a poor sinner who comes to Him for mercy in Christ Jesus.

I know that if we receive certain persons into the church, the mere moralists cry out, “How can they associate with such people?” Yet, come along, come along, you chief of sinners. The vilest are welcome to Christ. You that are worse than the worst—you who have leaped over the hedge, and have got upon the wild commons of outrageous sin, may come to Jesus. Do you sing—

*“Depths of mercy, can there be
Mercy still reserved for me”?*

It is reserved for you. You are the person for whom it is reserved. This deep consciousness of sin, this guilt of yours which you feel and own, points you out as the one to whom I am to say, “Return unto the Lord, for He will have mercy upon you, He will blot out your transgressions, He will change your nature, and He will turn you from a sinner to a saint, and glorify His name in you.” God grant that you may each and all prove the exceeding riches of His grace, for His dear name’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 43

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK—63 (SONG 3), 202, 201

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