

THE LORD—THE LIBERATOR

NO. 484

A SERMON
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“The LORD looseth the prisoners.”
Psalm 146:7

WHEN preaching last Tuesday in Dover, the mayor of the town very courteously lent the ancient town hall for the service, and in passing along to reach a private entrance, I noticed a large number of grated windows upon a lower level than the great hall. These belonged to the prison cells where persons committed for offenses within the jurisdiction of the borough were confined.

It at once struck me as a singular combination, that we should be preaching the Gospel of liberty in the upper chamber, while there were prisoners of the law beneath us. Perhaps when we sang praises to God, the prisoners, like those who were in the same jail with Paul and Silas, heard us, but the free word above did not give them liberty, nor did the voice of song loose their bonds.

Alas! what a picture is this of many in our congregations. We preach liberty to the captives, we proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, but how many remain year after year, in the bondage of Satan, slaves to sin. We send up our notes of praise right joyously to our Father who is in heaven, but our praises cannot give them joy, for alas! their hearts are unused to gratitude.

Some of them are mourning on account of unpardoned sin, and others of them are deploring their blighted hopes, for they have looked for comfort where it is never to be found. Let us breathe a prayer at the commencement of the sermon this morning, “Lord, break the fetters, and set free the captives. Glorify Thyself this morning by proving Thyself to be JEHOVAH, who looseth the prisoners.”

The little circumstance which I have mentioned, fixed itself in my mind, and in my private meditations it thrust itself upon me. My thoughts ran somewhat in an allegory, until I gave imagination its full rein and bid her bear me at her will. In my daydream I thought that some angelic warder was leading me along the corridors of this great world-prison, and bidding me look into the various cells where the prisoners were confined, reminding me ever and anon as I looked sorrowful, that “JEHOVAH looseth the prisoners.”

What I thought of, I will now tell out to you. The dress of the sermon may be metaphorical, but my only aim is to utter comforting, substantial truth, and may the Master grant that some of you who have been in these prisons, as I have been, may this day come out of them, and rejoice that the Lord has loosed you.

I. The first cell to which I went, and to which I shall conduct you, is called the *common prison*.

In this common prison, innumerable souls are shut up. It were useless to attempt to count them, they are legion, their number is ten thousand times ten thousand. This is the ward of SIN. All the human race have been prisoners here, and those who this day are perfectly at liberty, once wore the heavy chain, and were immured within the black walls of this enormous prison.

I stepped into it, and to my surprise, instead of hearing, as I had expected, notes of mourning and lament, I heard loud and repeated bursts of laughter. The mirth was boisterous and obstreperous. The profane were cursing and blaspheming, others were shouting as though they had found great spoil.

I looked into the faces of some of the criminals, and saw sparkling gaiety, their aspect was rather that of wedding guests than prisoners. Walking to and fro, I noticed captives who boasted that they were free, and when I spoke to them of their prison house, and urged them to escape, they resented my advice, saying, “We were born free, and were never in bondage unto any man.” They bade me prove my words,

and when I pointed to the irons on their wrists, they laughed at me, and said that these were ornaments which gave forth music as they moved, it was only my dull and somber mind, they said, which made me talk of clanking fetters and jingling chains.

There were men fettered hard and fast to foul and evil vices, and these called themselves free-livers, while others whose very thoughts were bound, for the iron had entered into their soul, with braggart looks, cried out to me that they were free-thinkers.

Truly, I had never seen such bond-slaves in my life before, nor any so fast manacled as these. But ever did I mark as I walked this prison through and through, that the most fettered thought themselves the most free, and those who were in the darkest part of the dungeon, thought they had the most light, and those whom I considered to be the most wretched, and the most to be pitied, were the very ones who laughed the most, and raved most madly and boisterously in their mirth.

I looked with sorrow, but as I looked, I saw a bright spirit touch a prisoner on the shoulder, who thereon withdrew with the shining one. He went out, and I knew, for I had read the text—"The LORD looseth the prisoners," I knew that the prisoner had been loosed from the house of bondage. But I noted that as he went forth his late bond-fellows laughed and pointed with the finger, and called him sniveler, hypocrite, mean pretender, and all ill names, until the prison walls rang and rang again with their mirthful contempt!

I watched, and saw the mysterious visitant touch another, and then another, and another, and they disappeared. The common conversation of the prison said that they had gone mad, that they had become slaves, or miserable fanatics, whereas I knew that they were gone to be free forever, emancipated from every bond.

What struck me most was that the prisoners who were touched with the finger of delivering love were frequently the worst of the whole crew. I marked one who had blasphemed, but the Divine hand touched him, and he went weeping out of the gate.

I saw another who had often scoffed the loudest when he had seen others led away, but he went out as quietly as a lamb. I observed some, whom I thought to be the least depraved of them all, but they were left, and oftentimes the blackest sinners of the whole company were first taken, and I remembered that I had somewhere in an old book read these words—"The publicans and the harlots enter into the kingdom of God before you."

As I gazed intently, I saw some of those men who had once been prisoners come back again into the prison—not in the same dress which they had worn before, but arrayed in white robes, looking like new creatures. They began to talk with their fellow prisoners, and oh! how sweetly did they speak! They told them there was liberty to be had, that yonder door would open, and that they might escape. They pleaded with their fellow men, even unto tears. I saw them sit down and talk with them till they wept upon their necks, urging them to escape, pleading as though it were their own life that was at stake.

At first I hoped within myself that all the company of prisoners would rise and cry, "Let us be free." But no, the more these men pleaded the harder the others seemed to grow, and indeed, I found it so when I sought myself to be an ambassador to these slaves of sin.

Wherever the finger of the shining one was felt our pleadings easily prevailed, but save and except in those who were thus touched by the heavenly messenger all our exhortations fell upon deaf ears, and we left that den of iniquity crying, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?"

Then I was cast into a muse, as I considered what a marvel of mercy it was that I myself should be free, for well do I remember when I spurned every invitation of love, when I hugged my chains, dreamed my prison garb to be a royal robe, and took the meals of the prison, called the pleasures of sin, and relished them as sweet, yea, dainty morsels, fit for princes.

How it came to pass that sovereign grace should have set me free I cannot tell, only this I know, I will sing forever, while I live and when I die, that "The LORD looseth the prisoners." Our gracious God knows how to bring us up out from among the captives of sin, set our feet in the way of righteousness

and liberty, make us His people, and keep us so forever. Alas! how many have I now before me who are prisoners in this common prison?

***“Oh! sovereign grace, their hearts subdue;
May they be freed from bondage too;
As willing followers of the Lord,
Brought forth to freedom by His Word.”***

II. I asked the guide where those were led who were released from the common ward. He told me that they were taken away to be free, perfectly free, but that before their complete jail deliverance it was necessary that they should visit a house of detention which he would show me. He led me thither. It was called *the solitary cell*.

I had heard much of the solitary system, and I wished to look inside this cell, supposing that it would be a dreadful place. Over the door was written this word—“PENITENCE,” and when I opened it I found it so clean and white, and withal so sweet and full of light, that I said this place was fitter to be a house of prayer than a prison, and my guide told me that indeed so it was originally intended, and that nothing but that iron door of unbelief which the prisoners would persist in shutting fast made it a prison at all.

When once that door was open the place became so dear an oratory that those who were once prisoners therein were wont to come back to the cell of their own accord, and begged leave to use it, not as a prison, but as a closet for prayer all their lives long. He even told me that one was heard to say when he was dying, that his only regret in dying was that in heaven there would be no cell of penitence.

Here David wrote seven of his sweetest Psalms, Peter also wept bitterly here, and the woman who was a sinner here washed the feet of her Lord. But this time I was regarding it as a prison, and I perceived that the person in the cell did so consider it.

I found that every prisoner in this cell must be there alone. He had been accustomed to mix with the crowd, and find his comfort in the belief that he was a Christian because born in a Christian nation, but he learned that he must be saved alone if saved at all. He had been accustomed aforetime to go up to the house of God in company, and thought that going there was enough, but now every sermon seemed to be aimed at him, and every threatening smote his conscience.

I remembered to have read a passage in the same old book I quoted just now—“I will pour out upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. And the land shall mourn, every family *apart*; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.”

I noticed that the penitent, while thus alone and apart in his cell, sighed and groaned full oft, and now and then mingled with his penitential utterances some words of unbelief. Alas! were it not for these, that heavy door would long ago have been taken from its hinges. ’Twas unbelief that shut the prisoners in, and if unbelief had been removed from this cell I say it had been an oratory for heaven, and not a place for disconsolate mourning and lamentation.

As the prisoner wept for the past, he prophesied for the future, and groaned that he should never come out of this confinement, because sin had ruined him utterly, and destroyed his soul eternally. How foolish his fears were all men might see, for as I looked round upon this clean and white cell, I saw that the door had a knocker inside, and that if the man had but the courage to lift it there was a shining one standing ready outside who would open the door at once. Yea, more, I perceived that there was a secret spring called *faith*, and if the man could but touch it, though it were but with a trembling finger, it would make the door fly open.

Then I noticed that this door had on the lintel and on the two side posts thereof the marks of blood, and any man who looked on that blood, or lifted that knocker, or touched that spring, found the door of unbelief fly open, and he came out from the cell of his solitary penitence to rejoice in the Lord who had put away his sin, and cleansed him forever from all iniquity.

So I spoke to this penitent and bade him trust in the blood, and it may be that through my words the Lord afterwards loosed the prisoner, but this I learned, that no words of mine alone could do it, for in this case, even where repentance was mingled with but a little unbelief, 'tis the Lord, the Lord alone, who can loose the prisoners.

III. I passed away from that cell, though I would have been content to linger there, and I halted at another, this also had an iron gate of unbelief, as heavy and as ponderous as the former. I heard the warder coming, and when he opened the door for me it grated horribly upon its hinges, and disturbed the silence, for this time I was come into *the silent cell*.

The wretch confined here was one who said he *could not pray*. If he could pray he would be free. He was groaning, crying, sighing, weeping, because he could not pray. All he could tell me, as his eyeballs rolled in agony, was this—"I would, but cannot, pray. I would plead with God, but I cannot find a word, my guilt has smitten me dumb." Back he went, and refused to speak again, but he kept up a melancholy roaring all the day long.

In this place no sound was heard but that of wailing, all was hushed except the dropping of his tears upon the cold stone, and his miserere of sighs and groans. Verily thought I this is a sad and singular case, yet I remember when I was in that cell myself I did not think it strange. I thought that the heavens were brass above me, and that if I cried never so earnestly the Lord would shut out my prayer.

I dared not pray, I was too guilty, and when I did dare to pray, 'twas hardly prayer, for I had no hope of being heard. "No," I said, "it is presumption, I must not plead with Him," and when at times I would have prayed, I could not. Something choked all utterance, and my spirit could only lament, and long, and pant, and sigh to be able to pray.

I know that some of you have been in this prison, and while I am talking to you this morning you will remember it, and bless God for deliverance. Perhaps some of you are in it now, and though I say I think your case is very strange, it will not seem so to you. But do you know, there was a little table in this cell, and on the table lay a key of promise, inscribed with choice words. I am sure the key would unlock the prison door, and if the prisoner had possessed skill to use it, he might have made his escape at once.

This was the key, and these were the words thereon—"The LORD looked down from the height of his sanctuary: from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death."

Now, thought I, if this man cannot speak, yet God hears his groans, if he cannot plead, God listens to his sighs, and beholds him all the way from heaven, with this purpose, that He may catch even the faintest whisper of this poor man's broken heart and set him free, for though the soul feels it can neither plead nor pray, yet it has prayed, and it shall prevail.

I tried to catch the ear of my poor friend a little while, and I talked to him, though he would not speak with me. I reminded him that the book in his cell contained instances of dumb men whom Jesus had taught to speak, and I told him that Christ was able to make him speak plainly too. I turned to the book of Jonah, and read him these words—"Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest me." I quoted the words of Elias, "Go again seven times." I told him that the Lord needed no fine language, for misery is the best argument for mercy, and our wounds the best mouths to speak to God's ear.

Besides, I told him, we have an Advocate with the Father who opens His mouth for the dumb, so that those who cannot speak for themselves have one to speak for them. I told the man that whether he could pray or not he was bidden to look at the blood marks over his door, that the publican was justified by the blood, though he could only cry, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

I pleaded with him to receive the Lord's own testimony, that the Lord Jesus is "able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him," that He waited to be gracious, and was a God ready to pardon, but after all, I felt that the Lord alone must loose His prisoners. O, gracious God, loose them now!

IV. We had not time to stay long at any one place, so we hastened to a fourth door. The door opened and shut behind me and I stood alone. What did I see? I saw nothing! 'Twas dark, dark as Egypt in her plague! This was the black hole called *the cell of ignorance*.

I groped as a blind man gropes for the wall. I was guided by my ear by sobs and moans to a spot where knelt a creature in an earnest agony of prayer. I asked him what made his cell so dark. I knew the door was made of unbelief, which surely shuts out all light, but I marveled why this place should be darker than the rest, only I recollected to have read of some that sat "in darkness, and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron."

I asked him if there were no windows to the cell. Yes, there were windows, many windows, so people told him, but they had been stopped up years ago, and he did not know the way to open them. He was fully convinced that they never could afford light *to him*.

I felt for one of the ancient light holes, but it seemed as if, instead of giving light, it emitted darkness. I touched it with my hand and it felt to me to have once been a window such as I had gazed through with delight. He told me it was one of the doctrines of grace which had greatly perplexed him, it was called *Election*. He said he should have had a little light had it not been for that doctrine, but since God had chosen His people, and he felt persuaded that He had not chosen him, he was lost forever, since if he were not chosen, it was hopeless for him to seek for mercy.

I went up to that window and pulled out some handfuls of rags, filthy rotten rags which some enemies of the doctrine had stuffed into the opening, caricatures and misrepresentations of the doctrine maliciously used to injure the glorious truth of divine sovereignty.

As I pulled out these rags, light streamed in, and the man smiled as I told him, "It is a mercy for you that there is such a doctrine as election, for if there were no such doctrine, there would be no hope for you, salvation must either be by God's will or by man's merit. If it were by man's merit, you would never be saved, but since it is by God's will, and He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, there is no reason why He should not have mercy on you, even though you may be the chief of sinners. Meanwhile He bids you believe in His Son Jesus, and gives you His divine word for it, that "Him that cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out."

The little light thus shed upon the poor man led him to seek for more, so he pointed to another darkened window which was called—*The Fall*—or *Human Depravity*. The man said, "Oh, there is no hope for me for I am totally depraved, and my nature is exceedingly vile, there is no hope for me."

I pulled the rags out of this window too, and I said to him, "Do you not see that your ruin fits you for the remedy? It is because you are lost that Christ came to save you. Physicians are for the sick, robes for the naked, cleansing for the filthy, and forgiveness for the guilty."

He said but little, but he pointed to another window, which was one I had long looked through and seen my Master's glory by its means. It was the doctrine of *Particular Redemption*. "Ah!" said he, "suppose Christ has not redeemed me with His precious blood! Suppose He has never bought me with His death!" I knocked out some old bricks which had been put in by an unskillful hand, which yet blocked out the light, and I told him that Christ did not offer a mock redemption, but one which did really redeem, for "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth *us* from all sin."

"Ah!" he said, "but suppose I am not one of the 'us'!" I told him that he that believeth and trusteth Christ, is manifestly one of those whom Jesus came to save, for he is saved. I told him that inasmuch as universal redemption manifestly does not redeem all, it was unworthy of his confidence, but a ransom which did redeem all believers, who are the only persons for whom it was presented, was a sure ground to build upon.

There were other doctrines like these. I found the man did not understand one of them. That the truth had been misrepresented to him, and he had heard the doctrines of grace falsely stated and caricatured, or else had never heard them at all. He had been led by some blind guide who had led him into the ditch, and now when the windows were opened and the man could see, he saw written over the door, “Believe and live!” and in the new light which he had found he trusted his Lord and Savior, and walked out free, and marveled that he had been so long a slave.

I marveled not, but I thought in my heart how accursed are those teachers who hide the light from the eyes of men so that they understand not the way of life. Ignorant souls, who know not the plan of salvation, will have many sorrows, which they might escape by instruction. Study your Bibles well, be diligent in attending upon a free grace ministry, labor after a clear apprehension of the plan of salvation, and it will often please God that when you come to understand His truth your spirits will receive comfort, for it is by the truth that “the LORD looseth the prisoners.”

V. I passed on and came to another chamber. This room, marked number five, was large and had many persons in it who were trying to walk to and fro, but every man had a chain round his ankle, and a huge cannon ball fixed to it—a military punishment they said for deserters from the ranks of virtue. This *clog of habit* troubled the prisoners much.

I saw some of them trying to file their chains with rusty nails, and others were endeavoring to fret away the iron by dropping tears of penitence thereon, but these poor men made but little progress at their work. The warder told me that this was the chain of *Habit*, and that the ball which dragged behind was the old propensity to lust and sin.

I asked him why they did not get the chains knocked off, and he said they had been trying a long time to be rid of them, but they never could do it in the way they went to work, since the proper way to get rid of the chain of habit was, first of all, to get out of prison. The door of unbelief must be opened, and they must trust in the one great deliverer the Lord Jesus, whose pierced hands could open all prison doors, after that, upon the anvil of grace with the hammer of love, their fetters could be broken off.

I stayed awhile, and I saw a drunkard led out of his prison, rejoicing in pardoning grace. He had aforesaid labored to escape from his drunkenness, but some three or four times he broke his pledge, and went back to his old sin. I saw that man trust in the precious blood and he became a Christian, and becoming a Christian he could no more love his cups, at one stroke of the hammer the ball was gone forever.

Another was a swearer, he knew it was wrong to blaspheme the Most High, but he did it still, till he gave his heart to Christ, and then he never blasphemed again, for that foul thing was abhorred. I noticed some, and I think I am one of them myself, although they had the ball taken away, yet on their hands there were the remains of old chains. Like Paul, in another case, when we rejoice in all things we have to say, “Except these bonds.” Once we were chained with both hands together, the divine hammer has smitten off the connecting links, but still some one or two are left hanging there.

Ah! often has that link made me cry out—“O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!” Though I am free, yet still the iron clings to its hold, and will hang there till I die. “When I would do good evil is present with me.” O that old Adam nature, the corrupt flesh, would God we were rid of it!

Blessed be the Lord, as the pulse begins to beat high with heaven’s glory, the band will burst, and we shall be perfect forever. There is no way of getting rid of the links of old habits but by leaving the prison of unbelief and coming to Christ, then the evil habits are renounced as a necessary consequence though the temptation will remain.

Though sometimes we have to feel a link of the chain, it is a subject of unbounded thankfulness that the link is not fastened to the staple. We may sometimes feel it dragging behind, enough to trip us up, so that we cannot run in the path of obedience as swiftly as we would, but it is not in the staple now. The bird can fly, though there be a remnant of its cord about its foot it mounts up to heaven, singing its song of praise.

The Lord must loose prisoners from their evil habits. He *can* do it, a drop of Jesu's blood can eat the iron all away, and the file of His agonies can cut through the chain of long-acquired sins, and make us free. "The LORD looseth the prisoners."

VI. I must take you to another cell. In almost all prisons where they do not want to make vagabonds worse than when they entered, they have hard labor for them. In the prison I went to see in my reverie there was a *hard-labor room*.

Those who entered it were mostly very proud people, they held their heads very high, and would not bend, they were birds with fine feathers, and thought themselves quite unfit to be confined, but being in durance vile, they resolved to work their own way out. They believed in the system of human merit, and hoped in due time to purchase their liberty. They had saved up a few old counterfeit farthings, with which they thought they could by and by set themselves free, though my bright attendant plainly declared their folly and mistake.

It was amusing, and yet sad, to see what different works these people were about. Some of them toiled at a tread wheel, they were going to the stars they said, and there they were, tread, tread, tread, with all their might, but though they had been laboring for years and were never an inch higher, yet still they were confident that they were mounting to the skies.

Others were trying to make garments out of cobwebs, they were turning wheels and spinning at a great rate, and though it came to nothing they wrought on. They believed they should be free as soon as they had made a perfect garment, and I believe they will.

In one place a company labored to build houses of sand, and when they had built up to some height the foundation always yielded, but they renewed their efforts, for they dreamed that if a substantial edifice were finished, they would then be allowed to go free.

I saw some of them, strangely enough, endeavoring to make wedding garments out of fig leaves, by sewing them together, but the fig leaves were of a sort that were shriveled every night, so that they had to begin the next morning their hopeless toil. Some,

I noticed, were trying to pump water out of a dry well, the veins stood out upon their brows like whipcords while they worked amain without result. As they labored, like Samson when he was grinding at the mill, I could hear the crack of whips upon their backs. I saw one ten-thronged whip called *the Law*, the terrible Law—each lash being a commandment, and this was laid upon the bare backs and consciences of the prisoners, yet still they kept on work, work, work, and would not turn to the door of grace to find escape.

I saw some of them fall down fainting, whereupon their friends strove to bring them water in leaking vessels, called ceremonies, and there were some men called priests, who ran about with cups which had no bottoms in them, which they held up to the lips of these poor fainting wretches to give them comfort.

As these men fainted, I thought they would die, but they struggled up again to work. At last they could do no more, and fell down under their burdens utterly broken in spirit. Then I saw that every prisoner who at last so fainted as to give up all hope of his own deliverance by merit, was taken up by a shining spirit, and carried out of the prison and made free forever.

Then I thought within myself, "Surely, surely, these are proud self-righteous persons who will not submit to be saved by grace, 'Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down and there was none to help; then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.'"

I rejoiced and blessed God that there was such a prison house to bring them to Jesus, yet I mourned that there were so many who still loved this house of bondage and would not escape, though there stood one with his finger always pointing to the words—"By the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified," and to these other words, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

I had seen enough of that prison house, for I recollect being there myself, and I have some of the scars upon my spirit now. I desire not to go back to it, but as I have received Christ Jesus the Lord so would I walk in Him, knowing that if the Son makes me free I shall be free indeed.

VII. We must not leave these corridors till we have peered into all the cells, for we may not come here again. As I passed along, there was another cell, called *The Low Dungeon of Despondency*.

I had read of this in the book of Jeremiah—a pit wherein there was no water, of which the prophet said, “He has led me and brought me into darkness and not into light.” I looked down. It was a deep, dark, doleful place, down in it I saw by the gloomy light of the warder’s lantern a poor soul in very deep distress, and I bade him speak to me, and tell me his case.

He said he had been a great offender, and he knew it. He had been convinced of sin, he had heard the Gospel preached, and sometimes he thought it was for him, but at other times he felt sure it was not. There were seasons when his spirit could lay hold of Christ, but there were times when he dared not hope. Now and then, he said, some gleams of light did come, once a week when he had his provision sent down, a little fresh bread and water, he did feel a little encouraged, but by the time the Monday came—for his provision was always sent down on Sunday—he felt himself as low and miserable as ever.

I called out to him that there was a ladder up the side of the prison and if he would but climb it, he might escape, but the poor soul could not feel the steps. I reminded him that he need not be where he was, for a divine hand had let down ropes to draw him up, with soft cushions for his armholes, but I seemed as one that mocked him, and I heard some that tormented him bid him call me “liar.” These were two villains called Mistrust and Timorous, who were bent upon keeping him here, even though they knew that he was an heir of heaven, and had a right to liberty.

Finding myself powerless, I thus learned the more fully that the Lord must loose these prisoners or else they must be prisoners for many a day, yet it was a great comfort to recollect that no soul ever died in that dungeon if it had really felt its need of Christ, and cried for mercy through His blood.

No soul ever utterly perished while it called upon the name of the Lord. It might lie in the hold till it seemed as if the moss would grow on its eyelids, and the worms eat its mildewed corpse, but it never did perish, for in due time it was brought by simple faith to believe that Christ is “able to save, even to the uttermost,” and then they come up, O how quickly, from their low dungeon, and they sing more sweetly than others—“He hath brought me up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay; he hath set my feet upon a rock, and put a new song in my mouth, and established my going.”

VIII. Shudder not at the clinging damp, for I must take you to another dungeon deeper than this last, it is called *the inner prison*.

Paul and Silas were cast into the inner prison, and their feet made fast in the stocks, yet they sang in their prison, but in this dungeon no singing was ever heard. It is *the hold of despair*. I need not enlarge much in my description. I hope you have never been there, and I pray you never may. Ah! when a spirit once gets into that inner prison, comforts are turned at once into miseries, and the very promises of God appear to be in league for the destruction of the soul.

John Bunyan describes old Giant Despair and his crab tree cudgel better than I can do it. Sorrowful is that ear which has heard the grating of the huge iron door, and full of terror is the heart which has felt the chilly damp of that horrible pit. Are any of you in that dungeon today? Do you say, “I have grieved the Spirit, and He is gone, my day of grace is over. I have sinned against light and knowledge, I am lost”?

O man, where are you? I must have you free. What a splendid trophy of grace you will make! My Master loves to find such great sinners as you are, that He may exhibit His power to save. Oh! what a platform for my Lord to raise the standard of His love upon, when He shall have fought with you and overcome you by His love.

What a victory this shall be. How will the angels sing unto Him that loved the vilest of the vile, and ransomed the despairing one out of the hand of cruel foes. I have more hope of you than I have of

others, for when the surgeon enters the hospital after an accident, he always goes to the worse case first. If there be a man who has broken his finger only, “Oh! let him be,” say they, “he can wait,” but if there be a poor fellow who is much mangled, “Ah!” says the surgeon, “I must see to this case at once.”

So is it with you, but *the Lord* must loose you, I cannot. Only this I know, if you would but believe me, there is a key which will fit the lock of your door of unbelief. Come, look over this bunch of keys, “He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him.” “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” “He that believeth on him is not condemned.” “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Brother, this inner dungeon can be opened by the Lord Jesus.

“The gates of brass before him burst, the iron fetters yield.”

IX. I am getting to the end of this dark story now, but tarry a moment at the grating of *The Devil’s Torture Chamber*, for I have been in it, yes, I have been tormented in it, and therefore I tell you no dream. I tarried in it till my soul melted because of agony, and therefore speak what I do know, and not what I have learned by report.

There is a chamber in the experience of some men where the temptations of the devil exceed all belief. Read John Bunyan’s “Grace Abounding,” if you would understand what I mean. The devil tempted him, he says, to doubt the existence of God, the truth of Scripture, the manhood of Christ, then His deity, and once, he says, he tempted him to say things which he will never write, lest he should pollute others.

Ah! I remember a dark hour with myself when I, who do not remember to have even heard a blasphemy in my youth, much less to have uttered one, heard rushing through my soul an infinite number of curses and blasphemies against the Most High God, till I put my hand to my mouth lest they should be uttered, and I was cast down, and cried to the merciful God that He would save me from them.

Oh! the foul things which the fiend will inject into the spirit, the awful, damnable things, the offspring of his own infernal den, which he will foist upon us as our own thoughts in such hosts, and so quickly the one after the other, that the spirit has hardly time to swallow down its spittle, and though it hates and loathes these things, still it cannot escape from them, for it is in prison.

Ah! well, thank God no soul ever perished through such profanities as those, for if we hate them they are none of ours, if we loathe them it is not our sin, but Satan’s, and God will in due time bring us to be free from these horrors.

Though the hosts of hell may have ridden over our heads, yet, let us cry “Rejoice not over me, O my enemy: though I fall yet shall I rise again.” Use your sword, poor prisoner! You have one. “*It is written*”—“the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.” Give your foe a deadly stab, tell him that “God is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him,” and you may yet see him spread his dragon wings and fly away. This too, is a prison in which unbelief has confined both saint and sinner, and the Lord Himself must loose these prisoners.

X. Last of all, there is one dungeon which those confined therein have called *the condemned cell*.

I was in it once. In that room the man writes bitter things against himself, he feels absolutely sure that the wrath of God abides on him, he wonders the stones beneath his feet do not open a grave to swallow him up, he is astonished that the walls of the prison do not compress and crush him into nothingness. He marvels that he has his breath, or that the blood in his veins does not turn into rivers of flame. His spirit is in a dreadful state, he not only feels he shall be lost, but he thinks it is going to happen now.

The condemned cell in Newgate, I am told, is just in such a corner that the condemned can hear the putting up of the scaffold. Well do I remember hearing my scaffold put up, and the sound of the hammer of the law as piece after piece was put together! It appeared as if I heard the noise of the crowd of men and devils who would witness my eternal execution, all of them howling and yelling out their accursed

things against my spirit. Then there was a big bell that tolled out the hours, and I thought that very soon the last moment would arrive, and I must mount the fatal scaffold to be cast away forever.

Oh! that condemned cell! Next to Tophet, there can be no state more wretched than that of a man who is brought here! And yet let me remind you that when a man is thoroughly condemned in his own conscience, he shall never be condemned. When he is once brought to see condemnation written on everything that he has done, though hell may flame in his face, he shall be led out, but not to execution, led out, but not to perish, “He shall be led forth with joy, and he shall go forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before him into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

As we read in history of one who was met with a pardon just when the rope was round his neck, just so does God deal with poor soul. When they feel the rope about their necks, acknowledge that God’s sentence is just, and confess that if they perish they cannot complain, it is then that sovereign mercy steps in and cries, “I have blotted out like a cloud thine iniquities, and like a thick cloud thy sins; thy sins which are many are all forgiven thee.”

And now, Thou glorious JEHOVAH, the Liberator, unto Thee be praises! All Thy redeemed bless Thee, and those who are today in their dungeons cry unto Thee! Stretch out Thy bare arm, Thou mighty Deliverer! Thou who didst send Thy Son Jesus to redeem by blood, send now Thy Spirit to set free by power, and this day, even this day, let multitudes rejoice in the liberty wherewith Thou make free, and unto Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Israel’s one Redeemer, be glory for ever and ever! Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.