

# SERMONS,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

HIGH WYCOMBE.

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BY

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# SERMON XVIII.

CHRIST THE HEALER OF THE BROKEN-HEARTED.

ST. LUKE iv. 18.

*“He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted.”*

THESE gracious words proceeded out of the mouth of Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth. He declares in them the errand on which he came down to the earth, and points out to us the work which, as Mediator of his church, he still delights to perform. Never was any messenger sent forth from heaven on so merciful an errand as this. Never was the eternal Son employed in a more blessed and honourable work.

In meditating on the words which the Saviour has here applied to himself, we may consider, first, the distressed condition of the persons spoken of in them; secondly, the reasons why they are brought into this condition; and, thirdly, the encouragement which the declaration before us is calculated to afford them. And may that Holy Spirit who has caused this gracious saying to be written for our learning, so bless our meditations on it, that all the mourning and contrite amongst us may be enabled to bear this testimony concerning it, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in our ears!”

I. *The condition of the persons spoken of in the text* is one of extreme distress and misery. They are broken-hearted. All their happiness is gone. All their hopes are blasted. Nothing is left to them but wretchedness and despair.

The world has many such sufferers in it. The calamities of life are daily breaking a thousand hearts, and bringing down multitudes of the children of men with sorrow to the grave. Now all these sons of affliction Christ is ready to heal; but the greater part of them are either ignorant of him, or refuse to avail themselves of his aid, choosing despair and death rather than the healing balm provided for them in his gospel. It is however the spiritually broken-hearted who are the special objects of the Saviour’s compassion; they who are brought by spiritual trials into the same state of despondency, as that into which others are brought by worldly calamities. These are the sufferers to whom the text principally refers. It seems to speak of them as labouring under a painful disease, as fainting and sinking beneath the power of sin, that spiritual malady which has polluted, racked, and destroyed, so many immortal souls.

1. It implies that *they have a sorrowful consciousness of the existence of*

*this evil within them.* They feel sin to be deeply lodged in their hearts, and they are filled with shame and grief at the thought of having so loathsome a disease raging there. But it was not always thus with them. They were once light-hearted. They had the same cause for spiritual sorrow, which they have now, but they were not sensible of its existence. They thought but little of their iniquities, and when they did think of them, it was without feeling or seriousness. "Dead in trespasses and sins," they were strangers to spiritual sorrows and joys. But now the Holy Spirit has quickened them, and awakened them to a sense of their wretched condition. They find that there is no health in them. They feel themselves to be miserable sinners. They are pricked to the heart by a consciousness of their transgressions, and are weary and heavy laden with the burden of their sins.

2. *They are also dissatisfied with their condition,* and earnestly desire deliverance from it. Like men oppressed with sickness, they are not in a state in which they can be at ease. They want health, and nothing but health will satisfy or relieve them. In other troubles, earthly comforts may be of some avail, but in this they are of none. They have lost all their power to delight. In the midst of them all, the heart still throbs and aches, and is dead to everything but a sense of its misery and sin, its sorrow and its shame. Deliverance from sin is the mercy they sigh for, and as long as this grievous burden presses them down, they must still, like the contrite publican, smite upon their breasts; they must still, like the psalmist, go mourning all the day long.

3. *They are sensible likewise of the deadly nature of the disease under which they are suffering.* They know that it is a mortal disease; not merely debasing and loathsome, but dangerous and fatal; a disease which has already brought spiritual death upon their souls, and is hourly bringing them nearer to everlasting destruction. The dread of final perdition is not indeed the only reason why they look on iniquity with hatred. Were death to be no longer its wages, it would still be the object of their abhorrence. But they know that sin has a curse connected with it, which they are not able to endure; and they never look forward into eternity without shrinking with terror from it.

4. To this sorrowful consciousness of their depravity, this dissatisfaction with their condition, and this dread of futurity, is added *a despair of healing their spiritual diseases by means of their own ability or strength.*

There was a time when they imagined that their case was not altogether hopeless. They felt themselves to be sinners, and they knew that the wrath to come was the just desert of their transgressions; but they still hoped that by their prayers and contrition this wrath might be averted. They accordingly wept and prayed. Day by day they cried for deliverance, and night after night they watered their couch with their tears. But still they were sorrowful. They

still seemed as far from pardon and heaven, as they were before, and condemnation and hell appeared as dreadful and as near. They had recourse to other expedients, but these were found to be equally ineffectual. Driven from refuge to refuge, from one ground of hope to another, they are at length forced to abandon them all; and find themselves to be not only guilty, but helpless and hopeless. It is this feeling of despair which breaks the heart, and which, if not counteracted by a rising hope of deliverance through the gospel of peace, would end in the anguish of Cain and the horror of Judas.

Such is the afflicted condition of the persons spoken of here, and all who are Christians indeed, have tasted of its wormwood and its gall; they have been broken-hearted with spiritual sorrows. Not that they have all suffered in the same degree, but they have all suffered from the same cause. They have all felt that there is no health in their souls, and have mourned over the deadly disease which they have found themselves unable to heal. Yea, many of them are still at seasons mourners in Zion. The workings of faith, even in the mind of the renewed Christian, are not always mingled with the feelings of penitence. A hope in infinite mercy does not always brighten the eye which is wet with the tears of contrition. The grace of the Saviour is sometimes forgotten, and the repentant believer thinks only of his own depravity and guilt. Sometimes too he suffers himself to be overcome by the power of temptation, and he yields at other times to the influence of spiritual sloth. Watchfulness and prayer are remitted, and worldly-mindedness and unconcern take possession of his heart. These seasons of declension he must expect to be succeeded by bitter convictions. He must look for a partial return of that painful remorse which once harrowed up his soul, and must deem himself peculiarly favoured when peace is again restored to him.

Temporal afflictions are often made the means of renewing this work of repentance, and sometimes materially increase the penitent's despondency. In days that are past, he has rejoiced in tribulation, and viewed it as the chastisement of a Father who loved him; but now he regards it as a token of wrath, and infers from it, that the divine mercy towards him is "clean gone for ever," and that his God will "be favourable no more."

The believing Christian then, as well as the returning sinner, may often be numbered among the broken-hearted. The spiritual sorrow of both is of the same nature, and flows from the same source. It is a godly sorrow, divine in its origin, and the immediate work of the Spirit of God. The calamities of life cannot produce it. In one sense, they may break the heart. They may put into it that "sorrow of the world," which "worketh death," but they cannot soften it; they cannot fill it with spiritual mourning. They may lead us to madness or suicide, but they cannot draw from our eyes the tears of Peter,

nor lodge in our souls the contrition of David. Neither have sermons or ordinances any power in themselves to accomplish this work. Thousands who habitually hear and attend them, remain altogether unaffected by them, and can even scoff at the penitence which they seem calculated to produce. The outward means of grace are as unable to discover to the sinner his malady, as they are to heal it when it is discovered. The work of conviction is as much the work of the Spirit, as the work of consolation. It is God, who teaches the heart to feel and the eye to weep. It is he, who makes the hard-hearted trifler a thoughtful, serious, and contrite mourner.

II. But why does the Physician of souls thus deal with the sinful children of men? Why cannot he apply his healing balm to their wounds, without first afflicting them with so much wretchedness? *Why must they be brought into so disconsolate a state, before they are made acquainted with pardon and peace?*

1. In answer to these enquiries we may observe, that God thus afflicts his penitent children, in order that *sin may be embittered to them*; that they may have a heartfelt knowledge of the misery and shame which it is able to implant in the mind, and thus learn to regard it with hatred and fear.

By nature we love sin; we think it calculated to make us happy; and all the representations of scripture, and all the sufferings under which the world is groaning, though strengthened by our own experience and the testimony of the wisest and best of mankind, cannot change our opinion concerning it, or cause us to regard it in any other view, than as a source of happiness. It is the will of God, therefore, that we should be taught the real nature of sin by feeling something of its spiritual consequences. Hence he fixes within us the arrows of conviction, and makes us taste of the bitterness of iniquity. He causes us to feel the smart of our wounds, that we may no longer love and caress the hand which inflicted them. He lays upon us spiritual troubles, and in the midst of them, he causes the voice of conscience to address us in these words of his prophet, “Thy ways and thy doings have procured these things unto thee. This is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart.”

2. The sinner is made broken-hearted, that *he may be willing to be healed by Christ in his own way and on his own terms.*

Before a sick man can be prevailed on to apply to a physician for his aid, he must feel the sickness which has seized on him, and know that he stands in need of a physician. If the remedy which is prescribed to him, be a painful remedy, or repulsive to his prejudices or feelings, he must undergo much suffering before he will consent to submit to and apply it. Thus no sinner will ever accept the salvation of Christ, till he understands something of his sinful and perishing condition. It is not a way of salvation suited to our taste. It is

opposed to our fancied goodness, and it pours contempt on our imaginary greatness. It wounds every proud and self-righteous feeling of our hearts. Nothing but a deep conviction that our state is desperate, will bring us as suppliants to the cross of such a Saviour as Jesus Christ. Like seamen in a storm, who see that they must sink if they do not cast everything out of their ship, we give up our beloved merits only when we see that we must give them up, or perish with them.

Christ therefore, before he heals us, shows us our lost condition, and thus makes us willing to submit to whatever method of restoration he may prescribe. The soul becomes humble and obedient, and is ready to welcome whatever may save it from hell and lead it to heaven. Thus was it with the Jews to whom Saint Peter preached on the day of pentecost. Before they were “pricked to the heart,” they mocked; but when their guilt and danger were laid open before them, they said with one voice unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Thus was it with Saul of Tarsus. He was no sooner convinced of the enormity of his conduct in opposing the gospel of Christ, than he also asked, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” It was the same with the gaoler at Philippi. As soon as he was made to tremble under a sense of his sins, he fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, “What must I do to be saved?”

3. A further reason why the returning sinner is thus torn and smitten, may be this—that *the deliverance vouchsafed to him may be more highly valued.*

We consider the removal of a disease which has brought us to the gate of death, a greater instance of mercy, than restoration to health from a slighter attack. So likewise the more a sinner sees of the danger and horror of the state into which sin has brought him, the more will he value the grace which has rescued him from it. We do not know how to estimate the worth of salvation, till we have seen ourselves standing on the verge of perdition, and find ourselves snatched as “brands from the burning.” Never is the news of a pardon heard with so fervent a joy, as when the sentence of death has been passed, and the prisoner has arrived at the place of execution.

4. It may also be the will of God to give the penitent a deep sense of his wretchedness, that *the great Physician of his soul may be more warmly loved.*

The man who has been made the means of raising from the bed of sickness a sufferer who thought his condition desperate, and who had applied in vain to other physicians, will be thanked with greater ardour of gratitude, than one who has rendered assistance in a less dangerous case. It is the same with the spiritual sufferer. He who has felt “the plague of his heart” the most keenly, will value most highly the heavenly Friend who has healed him. His love will be proportioned to the depth of his penitence, and the sense which he experiences of the greatness of his guilt. Hence it is generally found that

they whose convictions of sin have been the deepest and most abiding, have manifested the greatest zeal in the service of Christ, and become his most eminent servants. They love much because they feel more than others have felt, how much has been forgiven them. They have seen more of “the unsearchable riches of Christ,” more of his suitableness to their necessities, more of the tenderness of his heart, more of his power and his goodness, more of the greatness of his salvation. Thus was it with Paul. He deemed himself the chief of sinners, and the consequence was, that he, became the very chief of saints. It was the same with the woman who had been a sinner. Simon received the Redeemer into his house, but he gave him no water for his feet and no oil for his head. This woman, on the contrary, “stood behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with ointment.”

These then are some of the reasons why the feelings of repentance and sorrow are wrought in the soul, before it pleases the heavenly Physician to heal its diseases.

III. Let us proceed to consider, thirdly, *the encouragement which the declaration before us is calculated to afford to every broken-hearted mourner.*

1. It plainly implies, first, that *it is the will of God that the broken-hearted should be healed.* He has sent a Messenger from heaven to bring peace to them, and parted for a season with the delight of his soul, that his sorrowful children may be healed and cheered.

When the mind is filled with despondency under a sense of its guilt, we are apt to look upon God as taking pleasure in our anguish, and rejoicing as an enemy in the bitterness of our grief. We hear of his mercy to the sinful and of his compassion for the wretched, but we cannot be persuaded of our interest in either. We see in him a God of inexorable justice only, incensed against us by our manifold provocations, and treasuring up for us wrath and fiery indignation. And yet this dreadful Sovereign is a God of unbounded benevolence and love. “His tender mercies are over all his works and there is not a creature in his universe, whom he does not wish to see holy and happy. His indignation against iniquity springs from his love, and even his justice may be regarded as a modification of his benevolence. He hates and discourages sin, because sin is calculated to destroy the happiness of his creatures, and to involve them in wretchedness. He willeth not the death of the most rebellious sinner, neither does he delight in the misery of the vilest.

When therefore the transgressor is anxious to be saved from his sin, from its guilt, its power, and its bitterness, he may think of the general benevolence of God, and learn to hope in his mercy. He may think of the text, and be taught that the Lord is waiting to be gracious to his soul; that he wishes its

wounds to be healed, and its grief to be changed into joy. Yea, he may even take encouragement from his present sorrow, and draw hope out of his misery. Why has the Holy Spirit vouchsafed to him a discovery of his wretchedness? Why has he broken his heart? That he may fill it with fear in this world, and rack it with pain in the next? No. It is a work of compassion, and not of vengeance; the forerunner of mercy, and not an intimation of wrath. He has shown the man his disease, that he may seek a remedy against it; he has opened his eyes to his danger, that he may escape it. He has torn him, that he may be healed; and smitten him, that he may bind him up.

The assurances of God in his word fully warrant the most exalted ideas of his compassion and mercy, which a returning sinner can form. He claims the work of consolation as his own peculiar work; and represents himself as delighting as much in comforting the mourner, as a mother delights in chasing away the fears and the sorrows of a beloved child. This is his language to all his broken-hearted children, “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted.” He is indeed a wise, as well as a tender Parent; and he will not sacrifice the future and permanent happiness of his children, for the gratification and ease of the present hour. He will send them, for a moment, any “light affliction” which is likely to work out for them “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” He will sow in their hearts any seeds of sorrow, which are likely to produce for them a harvest of joy.

2. The declaration in the text teaches us also, that *God has given to Christ authority and power to heal all the broken-hearted.*

He has given him *authority*. Long before he was born, he was set apart for this work, and when he was sent into the world, these were the words with which he opened his commission, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek. He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted;” “to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion; to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

Christ has received also *power* to comfort. His Father has not only sent him on this gracious errand, but furnished him with all the qualifications which are necessary for the faithful discharge of it. “It hath pleased the Father,” says the apostle, “that in him should all fulness dwell;” a fulness of pardon for the guilty, a fulness of comfort for the sorrowful, a fulness of strength for the weak, a fulness of life for the dead. The persons to whom he is sent, are lying under a sentence of condemnation; and before they can be happy, this sentence must be repealed, and the criminals pardoned. God therefore has “given his Son power over all flesh, that he should give eternal

life to as many as he has given him.” He has promised that “whosoever believeth in him shall be saved;” shall have the curse of the law removed from him, and all his multiplied transgressions freely and completely remitted. He has given to the blood which flowed from his cross, such infinite virtue, that it can cure the deepest and deadliest wounds, and “save to the uttermost” all who are sprinkled by it.

He has given also to his Son the ministration of the Spirit, and empowered him to bestow on mankind his enlightening, quickening, sanctifying, and comforting influence. By this sovereign remedy, the great Physician breaks the power of sin, and implants within the soul a principle of holiness. By this he communicates faith and gives birth to hope. By this he enables us to rejoice in the exceeding great promises of his gospel, and shows us our interest in his special love. By this he makes his word and ordinances effectual to solace us, and causes even the afflictive dispensations of his providence, our troubles, and difficulties, and temptations, to be “helpers of our joy.”

3. The declaration before us assures us, lastly, that *Christ is willing to heal all the broken-hearted who apply for his aid*; that he is ready to exercise the authority and power which he has received. The Father has sent him from heaven to execute this gracious work, and he will not be unfaithful to the trust committed to him.

As Mediator of the church, Christ became the servant of Jehovah. In this character he is spoken of by the prophet, and called “a righteous servant.” “Though he were a son,” says the apostle, “yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” In the councils of eternity he voluntarily took on him the office of “Messenger of the covenant,” and fulfils all the duties of it with faithfulness and delight. “Sacrifice and offering,” says he, “thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart. I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation. I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation.”

But the readiness of Christ to heal all the broken-hearted, must be traced to a source still more encouraging than obedience to his commission. His heart is as full of love for the sorrowful sinner, as of reverence for the commands of his Father. The work which has been given him to do, is consequently a work in which he delights. The errand on which he came down from heaven, is an errand which brings to him more happiness, than all the services and worship of his angels. He voluntarily left the praises of eternity to be employed in it. He came down to the earth, and “bore our griefs, and

carried our sorrow;” he was stricken and afflicted, wounded and bruised; and yet he is satisfied. His infinite mind is filled with unspeakable satisfaction as he contemplates the fruit of his labours, and through eternity he will never look back without joy on “the travail of his soul.” And whence does this satisfaction arise? From the mercifulness of his nature; from the delight which he takes in the happiness of his creatures; from his great love to his people.

Here then is a rich source of encouragement to every desponding mourner. The God against whom he has sinned, has sent a Messenger from heaven to heal him; and he whom he has sent, rejoices to bind up the broken-hearted. He has infinite compassion to pity, as well as infinite power to relieve. He has assumed our nature and partaken of our sorrows, that he may know by experience how to discover and feel for our miseries; and he has had his soul pierced with unutterable anguish, that he might procure a balm for our wounds. This balm he freely communicated to all who came to him for it when he was on earth, and the Bible tells us that he has lost none of his compassion and tenderness by going to heaven. He has commanded his apostle to assure us, that he is still “a merciful and faithful High Priest,” and thousands of his people are daily experiencing his sympathy and aid. They are all ready to testify that “he delighteth in mercy,” and knows how to pour consolation into their sorrowful souls.

A review of the subject on which we have been meditating, points out to us, first, *the persons to whom the ministers of the gospel are to administer comfort.*

Some of their brethren would have them speak peace indiscriminately to all, and are sometimes ready to censure them, because the careless, the worldly, and the proud, derive no comfort from hearing them. But where, brethren, can we find in our Bibles any consolation for characters like these? Where is our warrant to speak peace to them? Our commission is in substance the same as our Master’s. We are sent on the same errand of mercy, and to the very same description of persons. We have a message of consolation entrusted to us, but then it is to be delivered only to the poor in spirit, the broken in heart, the bruised. In proportion as we are faithful and skilful ministers of the word, and as God blesses our labours, these humble sinners will be comforted and others disquieted; the poor and the hungry will be filled with good things, and the rich will be sent empty away. Indeed there is no greater proof of the faithfulness of a minister of Christ, than his being made a son of consolation to some of his brethren, and the means of disturbing the false peace of others. He who has a message of comfort for all, may be caressed by men, but he will not be commended by God. He may quiet the conscience of the worldly and lukewarm professor of the gospel, but he

will not be the instrument of saving his soul. He will not advance the glory of the Redeemer, or the spiritual prosperity and salvation of his fellow-sinners.

The text affords us, secondly, *a test by which we may try our spiritual comfort*. Whence did it spring? Did your light arise out of darkness? Had your spiritual joy its origin in godly sorrow? Did your heart bleed before it was healed? Then be thankful to that gracious Saviour who has given rest to your soul. But if your religious consolations were not preceded by the deep workings of contrition, if your conscience was quieted before sin was embittered to you, you have no cause to rejoice. Your peace is not the peace of God; your joy is not the joy of the Holy Ghost. It is the joy of the man who eats, drinks, and is merry, while his habitation is on fire over his head. It is the peace of the mariner who slumbers while his vessel is sinking in the storm.

Not that every Christian can retrace all the various steps of spiritual sorrow, through which he has passed; nor that all who have been brought to the great Physician of souls, were led to him by precisely the same degree of apprehension and misery. In some cases, it has pleased God to carry on his work of grace in the heart by such gentle and insensible degrees, and so to modify the feelings of repentance almost from the first by a hope in his mercy, that the mind has been saved from that acuteness of suffering, which has generally been the portion of sinners when returning to the Lord. But in every case there has been some sense of guilt, and some deep and humbling apprehensions of the danger and wretchedness in which it has involved us. In every case the heart has effectually been broken. There has been a mourning for sin, and a consciousness that without the interposition of Christ, fear and despair must be the everlasting portion of the transgressor.

We may infer also from the text, that *true contrition of heart is one of the greatest blessings which God can bestow on man*. Not that it is in itself a blessing, for “no affliction for the present is joyous but it will eventually terminate in all the blessedness which the God of heaven can give or his creatures receive. It brings the sinner within the reach of the commission of a gracious and powerful Saviour. It opens his mind to receive all the healing and cheering influences of the Spirit of grace. It is the first step by which a God who loves him, is guiding him to heaven, and preparing him to share in its joys.

We have no reason therefore to mourn over those of our friends, whom the Lord has taught to weep over their manifold sins. Their sorrow, we are told, sends up a new ray of joy into the kingdom of the blessed; and if we were holy and wise like the angels, we too should rejoice “over the sinner that repenteth,” and his complaining and sighs would be as music in our ears.

And yet, brethren, it is painful to think how many of us would rather see our children and friends trifling in the most humiliating scenes of folly, than see them retiring from the crowd, as the stricken deer retires from the herd, to mourn and to bleed alone. In the one case, we applaud them; in the other, we harass and deride them, as though they had no hearts to be wounded, and we no pity to bestow. Cruel as this conduct is to our friends, it is still more cruel to ourselves. They can find in their closets something which can bear them up against all the revilings of men; but we shall soon have nothing to bear up our souls under the aggravated displeasure of God. They can go and read in their Bibles, that though “their father and mother forsake them” for righteousness’ sake, “the Lord taketh them up;” while we are forced to read and understand these prophetic words of the psalmist, “Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate, and let none dwell in their tents; for they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they have talked to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded.”

But here it may be asked, “Is all spiritual sorrow to be accounted a blessing? Is there no spiritual sufferer, over whom they who love him, may be allowed to grieve? We saw our friend retire, in the midst of gaiety and youth, from a world which courted his friendship. We saw him burst asunder bands which we once thought too strong to be broken. We beheld him meekly and resolutely devoting himself to the service of the God who had redeemed him. With mingled feelings of anxiety and hope, we watched his conduct after he had openly taken the side of the Lord, and we witnessed in it an ardour of love, which is seldom surpassed. Many of his former associates thought him wretched, but he opened his heart to us, and we found it to be as full of peace and of blessedness, as heart could hold. Such was year after year his enviable state; but now all his happiness is gone. His harp has been long hung upon the willows, and his mind overwhelmed with anguish and despondency. We see in him the same holy fear that we saw in him in his happiest days; the same deep humility, the same hatred of sin, the same love for his Saviour, the same benevolence to man; but we no longer hear from him the song of trembling joy, nor see his countenance brighten with the same sacred delight. His soul is afflicted, tossed with tempests, and not comforted. May we not then be allowed to mourn over such a sufferer as this? Can such spiritual sorrow be esteemed a token of mercy, a blessing of grace? We dare not arraign the dispensations of the Holy One, but we are constrained to say, “Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.”

In reply to such enquiries as these, it must be admitted that the dealings of God with his saints are often dark and mysterious, and that the mind which

attempts to penetrate them, will often ache in the effort. It must be acknowledged also, that the servant of God may sometimes be left for a season a prey to despondency, even when his despondency has not been preceded by any visible or known relapse into sin. But let us not blindly impeach the loving-kindness and truth of Jehovah, nor rashly suspect the healing efficacy of his gospel of peace. Are we sure that the sorrow we deplore has its origin in spiritual causes? On the contrary, have we not abundant reason to suppose that it must be traced principally or solely to natural causes? In almost every instance, it will be found to have been preceded by bodily indisposition, long continued affliction, or excessive mental exertion; and to be uniformly attended with a greater or less degree of mental debility. The bewildered and throbbing head, the pallid countenance, the failing voice, the shivering frame, plainly tell us that the anguish of the spirit must be ascribed to the weakness and wretchedness of the habitation in which it is lodged; and that the efforts of the bodily physician must be blessed in restoring strength to the frame, before the spiritual Physician can bind up and heal the soul. The gospel of Christ was never designed to remove natural diseases, or the apparently spiritual diseases which are connected with them, and which are in reality occasioned by them. It can do little more in some cases to keep off the pressure of melancholy, than it can to enable a man to resist the attack of a fever.

While therefore we weep with our disconsolate friend, and endeavour to lessen the burden of his wretchedness, let us not harbour any suspicion against the mercy and faithfulness of the great Physician of souls. He has not deserted the sufferer, though he may seem to have forsaken him. Even the bitterness which has been poured into his cup, may prove a salutary medicine. It may be the means of saving him from many dangers and sins, into which he would otherwise have fallen; or of raising him to a degree of holiness, usefulness, and happiness, to which he would not otherwise have attained. It may make him patient and gentle, tender-hearted and pitiful; the soother of the sorrowful, and the skilful comforter of the distressed. The same work may be going on now, which we once saw going on in the day of his blessedness. Yea, he may be growing still more rapidly in grace than he ever was before, and may soon come forth out of the furnace rejoicing and purified. The rising sun is not impeded in its course, when its glory is obscured by clouds. We see not its progress, but while concealed from our view, it climbs higher and higher, and at length bursts forth from the mists which concealed it, shining in meridian splendour. And what, if the friend whom we love, should never again rejoice in the hope of salvation? What, if he should go down to the grave bowed down with sorrow? One moment of heaven will recompense him for all the bitterness of his life; and one smile from the throne of Jehovah raise him to the summit of joy.

The text reminds us, lastly, of *the sin and folly of despair*.

If God has sent his Son from heaven to heal the broken-hearted, and if the Son whom he has sent, is a faithful Servant and a merciful and skilful Physician, where is the broken-hearted sinner who has not a ground for hope? Where is the dejected penitent who will look on the compassionate Jesus, and dare to pronounce his case hopeless? Your condition may be pitiable. No heart but your own may know half the depth of your iniquity, nor half the greatness of your fear. But do not make your guilt and your wretchedness greater, by adding the sin of unbelief to all your multiplied transgressions. Christ has again and again invited all the weary and heavy laden to come unto him for rest. He has promised that he who cometh unto him, "shall in no wise be cast out." He has said that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Now you cannot treat these invitations and promises as insincere or unmeaning, without impeaching the veracity of him who is more faithful than any of his creatures, and who, in all the ages of his existence, has never once altered the thing that has gone out of his mouth. Why then should this faithful God single you out to mock and deceive you? He has healed many sinners as great as you, and comforted many as sorrowful; and he is as ready to heal and comfort your hearts whenever you apply for his aid, as he was to put away the iniquity of David, or to pardon the transgression of Peter. The greatness of your guilt is no obstacle in the way of his bestowing a pardon upon you; neither is your unfitness to receive it any disqualification for asking it. Do you need it? Do you desire it? Do you find that you can never be happy without it? Are you ready to sacrifice all your sins to obtain it? Then this is the language which a God of infinite mercy addresses to you from heaven, "Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."