

SERMONS,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

HIGH WYCOMBE.

BY

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SERMON X.

THE REPENTANCE OF JUDAS.

ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 3, 4, 5.

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

Among the various characters exhibited to our view in the holy scriptures, the character of Judas is perhaps the most awful and alarming. We behold in this wretched man one who forsook all he possessed to follow the despised Jesus of Nazareth, exposing himself year after year to persecution for his sake, preaching his gospel and working miracles in his name, unsuspected by his fellow-disciples and not disowned by his Lord; and yet we are warranted to say that "it would have been good for this man, if he had never been born;" that he was all his life long a "son of perdition," and is now in the land of darkness.

The history of this extraordinary person is full of instruction and warning. Indeed every part of it is calculated to make the most light-hearted serious, and the most hardened fearful. But confining our attention to the closing scene of his life, let us examine the nature of that repentance which he then manifested, and which, it is evident, bore a very strong resemblance to genuine contrition, though at the same time it came materially short of it. We may be enabled to form a correct estimate of it by enquiring, first, wherein it resembled true repentance; and, secondly, wherein it differed from it.

I. 1. It is plain that the repentance of Judas was similar to true repentance in *that conviction of sin from which it sprung*. He knew that he had transgressed, grievously and daringly transgressed; so that while the priests and pharisees around him were trusting in themselves that they were righteous, he, like the contrite sinner in the temple, saw and felt himself guilty.

2. This resemblance may be traced also in *the open acknowledgment of guilt, to which his convictions led him*. There was no attempt to conceal his crime or to disguise its atrocity. He went promptly and uncalled for to the chief priests and elders, and openly acknowledged before them his own guilt

and the innocence of his Lord. And thus did a righteous God provide for the honour of his persecuted Son. He had before forced unclean spirits to declare his dignity, and he now constrained him who had been employed in their service and was soon to be numbered with them, to bear a public testimony to him, to bear it too at a time when its sincerity could not possibly be questioned nor its force gainsaid.

But it may be said, "Although Judas was thus convinced of his guilt and thus openly avowed it, he was not perhaps much affected by his consciousness of it, and felt little or no regret on account of it." It appears however that the sin which he had committed, wrung his heart with anguish so acute, that his existence became an intolerable burden.

3. Hence we may observe another point of similarity between him and the real penitent, in *the deep sorrow with which his repentance was accompanied*.

The language of the sacred historian appears to warrant the supposition, that when he consented to betray his Master, he had persuaded himself that this act of treachery would not prove fatal to him. He thought perhaps that, as on former occasions, Christ would deliver himself from the hands of his enemies by an exertion of his miraculous power; and thus while his crime served to enrich himself, it would really promote the interest of his Lord, by giving him a signal opportunity of manifesting his greatness. When therefore he saw that he was really condemned; when he saw him, instead of passing through the surrounding multitude, or striking down by the word of his mouth the guards who thronged him, quietly submitting to be led to prison and to judgment; when he saw his Friend, his Guide, his Benefactor, going "as a lamb to the slaughter;" a multitude of distracting thoughts crowded into his mind, his obdurate heart relented, and his former unconcern gave way to a sorrow as sincere and pungent, as ever wrung a guilty breast.

4. But a still more remarkable accordance with spiritual contrition may be discovered in *the self-condemnation with which the repentance of Judas was attended*.

We are all willing to confess that we have sinned, and there are seasons perhaps in which most of us feel some degree of sorrow at the remembrance of our transgressions; but then we are not willing to condemn ourselves on account of them. We are continually attempting to palliate and excuse our conduct, pleading in our defence the power of temptation, the force of example, the peculiar circumstances in which we have been placed, the frailty of our nature. Like our first parents in the hour of their shame, we throw the blame of our sins on Satan, on each other, on God, or, in short, anywhere, rather than take it to ourselves. Now this is not the case with the sincere penitent; neither was it the case with Judas. When he confessed his guilt, he made no effort to represent it as less aggravated than it really was. On the

contrary, he appeared anxious, like David, to welcome the shame of it, and seemed ready to take up the words of the abased Job, "Behold I am vile; what shall I answer? If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me."

5. "But of what avail," it may be said, "are convictions and confessions, anguish of spirit and self-condemnation, if sin be not forsaken, and the fruits of it renounced, and the injury it has done repaired?" They are undoubtedly worthless, so worthless, that where these things are wanting, the most open humiliation and the most heart-rending sorrow are no more acceptable to God, than the self-reproach of the condemned or the groans of the lost. But these things were not wanting in the repentance of Judas; for mark, further, *his extreme anxiety to counteract the evil consequences of his crime, and his entire renunciation of its fruits.* "He brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders." The money from which he had expected so much gratification, had become now a source of misery. Regarding it as the price of his Master's blood and the wages of his own unrighteousness, he could not look upon it without horror, nor keep it without torment. Impatient to put it far away from him, he carried it back to those from whom he had received it; and when they refused to accept it, he cast it down with abhorrence in the temple, and departed. And not this only, he endeavoured at the hazard of his life to prevent the execution of Christ. While one of his disciples was denying and the others deserting him, Judas openly declared his innocence before the assembled Sanhedrim; and thus boldly condemned their proceedings, and showed that he was ready to encounter any danger, to bear the utmost violence of their malice, so that he might vindicate and save his injured Lord.

These, brethren, are the signs by which this unhappy man evinced the sincerity of his repentance. Who, as he thinks of them, can resist the conviction that there are very few among ourselves, whose repentance would bear to be compared for one moment with his? We all indeed acknowledge ourselves to be sinners, but no abiding consciousness of guilt disturbs our peace, and our confessions of it are little more than mere words of course, or idle, unmeaning compliments to our God. We call ourselves miserable offenders, but as for the misery of sin, we have never felt it. It is on the contrary our delight, and all our ideas of happiness are more or less connected with it. How backward also are we to condemn ourselves! And how do our proud spirits rise, when we are condemned or censured by others! Instead of forsaking the iniquities we confess, we hold them fast, and are prepared to repeat tomorrow, without compunction or shame, the sins which we have professed to lament today. This striking difference between us and the betrayer of our Lord, may well excite our fears, and the more so, when we remember that even his sincere and heart-felt remorse fell far short of real contrition, and left him to perish.

II. That this salutary impression may be strengthened, let us proceed to enquire, secondly, wherein the specious repentance we have been considering, differed from that godly sorrow with which pardon and salvation are connected.

1. It differed from it, first, in *its origin*. It was the work of natural conscience roused out of its slumber by the power of God, sitting as a judge and avenger in the traitor's heart, and filling it with self-accusation, horror, and fear.

In true repentance indeed there is an awakening of the conscience, an alarm in the soul, a conviction of guilt, and an apprehension of danger; but then, though preceded and accompanied by these feelings, it is not occasioned by them. It springs from the special grace of God. It is the operation of that Spirit who has access to every mind, and can bend and soften every heart at his will. It is the gift of that ascended Jesus who purchased it with his blood, and is exalted to bestow it on his church. It is blended with fear, but the instrument employed in producing it is faith, a stedfast and lively belief in the promises of the gospel, a close and overpowering view of the love of God in redemption, an estimating of our guilt by the price that was paid for its remission. "The goodness of God," says the apostle, "leadeth to repentance;" and the prophet Zechariah speaks the same language. He compares the grief of the penitent to the deep and bitter anguish of a parent who mourns for his first-born; and he ascribes it to the agency of that gracious Spirit, who directs the eye of the sinner to a pierced Saviour, and assures him that he was pierced and wounded for him.

2. The difference between the remorse of conscience which Judas manifested, and the contrition of the truly repentant sinner, may be discovered also in *the object of his sorrow*.

Of what did Judas repent? Not of his crime, but of its consequences. As soon as he was awakened, to a sense of his transgression, the prophetic declarations of his Master concerning his latter end, rushed into his mind, and his soul was dismayed at the prospect before him. Could he have been assured that this vengeance was averted, he would probably have enjoyed the reward of his perfidy without remorse, and after shedding a tear or two over the grave of his Lord, would have thought of his iniquity no more.

But the sorrow of the true penitent is of an altogether different kind. He dreads the consequences of sin, but it is over sin itself that he mourns. This is the evil which causes him to repent himself; makes him weep bitterly in secret, like Peter; and smite on his breast, like the publican; and humble himself in dust and ashes, like Job. Taught to perceive its baseness and pollution, he regards it with an abhorrence equal to his former love of it, with a loathing which no length of time, no hope of pardon, can remove. His sorrow is a

“godly sorrow;” a sorrow which not only proceeds from God, but which has a direct reference to him. He regards sin as an offence against the Sovereign of heaven, against his infinite majesty, his incomprehensible purity, his unsearchable grace. He enters into the feelings and adopts the language of David, and losing sight of all other considerations, he says, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned; against thee, my Friend and my Father, my Redeemer and my Saviour, my Lord and my God.”

3. The repentance of this traitorous disciple was defective also in *its extent*. It was of a very partial nature. When he confessed that he had sinned, he did not, like the publican, style himself “a sinner,” nor did he say, with Simon, that he was “a sinful man.” Expressing no concern for his covetousness and theft, and probably not thinking of them, he merely refers to a solitary act of transgression. “I have sinned,” he says, “in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” The real penitent however “is convinced of all, he is judged of all.” It is true that those offences which have been attended with peculiar aggravations, occur to his mind more frequently than others of a less heinous nature, and excite there a more piercing sorrow; but his attention and thoughts are not confined to them. He takes an extensive view of his transgressions, and mourns over them all. He deplures his omissions of duty, as well as his positive commissions of evil; his short-comings, as well as his crimes; his once loved and defended follies, as well as his flagrant enormities. Nor is this all. He looks within. The impurity of the stream leads him to examine the fountain from which it flows; and within that heart which he once thought good and untainted, he finds abominations which distress his soul, a host of foolish imaginations, proud suggestions, debasing impurities, and corrupt desires. Turn again to the broken-hearted David, and enquire into the origin of his sorrow. He tells us of the blood-guiltiness of his life, but the desperate wickedness of his heart appears to be the chief cause of his anguish, and the removal of this evil his chief prayer. “Behold,” says he, “I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”

4. The remorse of Judas differed from true repentance also in *its result*. And what is the result of genuine sorrow? We cannot fully answer the question, till we have gone with the weeping penitent into the eternal world, and tasted the peace and blessedness which are reserved for him there. As far however as regards the present life, real contrition is invariably followed by prayer, by an earnest application for pardon, and a greater or less degree of hope in the divine mercy. Thus we find David blending together confessions of guilt and cries for deliverance. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.” “Cast me not away from thy presence, and take

not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit.” “Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”

But the remorse of the ungodly is succeeded by very different effects. It produces despair, and despair silences the voice of supplication, turns away from mercy, and works death. Such was its issue in Judas. We behold him departing from the temple, and it might have been hoped after the contrition he had manifested there, that he went away to cast himself at the feet of the Saviour whom he had betrayed, or at least to implore in secret the mercy of that God whom he had offended. But no. Stung with remorse and abandoned to despair, he precipitated himself into the very misery which he dreaded, and hurried to the tribunal of that Judge at whose vengeance he trembled. “He cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.”

And now, brethren, let us ask what are the practical lessons which this solemn subject is calculated to teach us.

It shows us, first, that *we may bear a very close resemblance to the disciples of Christ, and yet remain still in the number of his enemies, and share their condemnation.* It reminds us that we may seem to have proceeded far in the way to heaven, and yet never reach it; be almost saved, but altogether lost. It calls upon every one of us not to take his sincerity and safety for granted, but to examine the foundation on which his hope rests, and to enquire, with the most earnest anxiety, whether he be indeed and in truth under the converting and saving influence of the gospel of Christ.

We are more especially warned to guard against self-deception as to our repentance. We are told how far an accusing conscience may carry us, and yet leave us at as great a distance as ever from true conversion of heart. We are called on to look at Judas becoming his own accuser, openly acknowledging his guilt, vindicating his Master, and condemning himself; and while we are ready to commiserate his sufferings and are almost admiring his boldness, we are reminded that, at this very moment, he was as much a son of perdition, as when with a treacherous kiss he betrayed his Lord. Not that his confession was hypocritical, or his repentance superficial or assumed. No confession could be more sincere, no sorrow more genuine, no fear more agitating. And yet he perished, perished not because his sin was too great for the blood of Christ to cleanse and the mercy of God to pardon it, but because he wanted those things without which the most harrowing compunction, and the liveliest feelings, and the most splendid gifts, are nothing worth. And what are those things? A heart-felt abhorrence of sin, a conviction of the deeply seated and desperate wickedness of the soul, a spirit of grace and

supplication, an earnest wrestling with God for his pardoning mercy. These are “the things which accompany salvation,” and he who is destitute of these, is yet far from the kingdom of God, is utterly alienated from him, a stranger to his covenant of promise, and an heir of his wrath.

We are taught also that *a profession of attachment to Christ aggravates the guilt of sin, and renders an indulgence in it peculiarly dangerous.*

The holy Jesus will not be wounded in the house of those who call themselves his friends, without manifesting his indignation against them, and vindicating before a blaspheming world, the holiness and majesty of his own great name. His open enemies he can bear with, convert and pardon; while the pretended friend is exposed to scorn, blasted and destroyed. Judas had suffered much perhaps for his sake, and had given him many proofs of his love; but there was one sin which Judas loved better than he loved Christ, and that one sin, though it was a secret and a decent one, blighted all his graces and withered all his prospects. He was covetous, and covetousness led him to apostasy, despair, and death.

Take heed therefore, brethren, that you hold not the truth in unrighteousness. Beware of secret sin, and more especially of that sin, which, while it subjects men to little or no reproach, hardens the heart, deadens the conscience, surrounds them with temptations and snares, “pierces them through with many sorrows,” and at length “drowns them in destruction and perdition.” “Take heed and beware of covetousness.” “Be content with such things as ye have.” “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” Dread nothing more than a profession of religion without principle, the form of godliness without its transforming power, a Christian creed with a heathen heart.

The repentance and end of this fallen apostle may remind us, lastly, that *no man can be a gainer by sin.*

When he first received the thirty pieces of silver from the chief priests, Judas undoubtedly felt a momentary gratification, and pleased himself with the thought of increasing and permanently enjoying his ill-gotten treasure; but he had scarcely obtained possession of it, when he became anxious to part with it, and cursed the hour in which he had sold his peace of conscience for so mean a price. And thus is it with sin of every kind, and under all possible circumstances. It is treacherous and destructive. It offers us pleasure, but it is a pleasure which ends in the bitterness of death. The losses we sustain by it are real, great, and many; its gains a mere show, an empty delusion, the sweetness of the cup which is charged with poison, the beauty of the serpent whose bite is death.

And yet Judas is not the only professor of the gospel, whom sin has deceived and ruined. Thousands who once seemed fair as he, have been overcome by it, and perished. For the sake of averting some threatening difficulty

or attaining some fancied good, they have consented to betray their Lord. Professing themselves his friends, they have taken counsel with his enemies, deserted his cause, and been ashamed of his name. And what have they gained? “They have sold themselves for nought.” But what have they lost? All that once enriched, and dignified, and cheered them; yea, they have lost their soul; and all that they have gained by the sacrifice, is a wounded spirit, an accusing conscience, a foretaste of wrath. Let their fall be a warning to us. It may well make all of us tremble, but it need not lead one of us to despair; for their guilt may be avoided, and if not, their end may be escaped. The same scriptures that show us a Judas rushing to his own dreadful place in eternity, tell us of a once faithless Peter now rejoicing in glory, a dying thief entering into paradise, a persecuting Saul sitting at the right hand of that Jesus whom he once injured, and triumphing in that cross he so scornfully despised. There is but one sin, from the guilt of which the blood of Christ will not cleanse us, and that sin is despair, a rejection of his mercy, an unbelief of his word. “He that believeth,” though he were once a betrayer and a persecutor, “shall be saved;” but “he that believeth not,” though he understand all the mysteries of the gospel, and speak with the tongue of men and of angels in its praise; though he have “tasted of the heavenly gift,” and been agitated and warmed by the word of God and “the powers of the world to come;” though he have gloried in the reproach of Christ, and given his body to be burned for his sake—that man shall be condemned, accursed, lost.