

# SERMONS,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

HIGH WYCOMBE.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES BRADLEY,

VICAR OF GLASBURY, BRECKNOCKSHIRE; AND MINISTER OF

ST. JAMES'S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM, SURREY.

THE SIXTH EDITION.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.

PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1833.

## SERMON XII.

### THE CONFESSION OF PHARAOH.

EXODUS ix. 27, 28.

*And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time. The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked. Entreat the Lord, for it is enough, that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail, and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer.*

OUR apostasy from God, though we have lost by it all disposition to perform any of the duties we owe him, has materially increased their number. All the obligations which were originally laid on us as creatures, still remain in their full force, while, as sinners, we have brought on ourselves new and more arduous duties. Among these is the confession of our guilt, a duty so frequently and so solemnly inculcated in the scriptures, that no man who has any regard for their authority, has ever denied its necessity or doubted its importance. But this, as well as every other fruit of the Spirit, has its counterfeit. There is a spurious confession of sin, as well as a spurious repentance; not merely a formal and hypocritical, but a sincere and heartfelt confession, which is not acceptable to God, and brings down no forgiveness from his throne.

This assertion may perhaps appear to some of us harsh and unfounded, but the text confirms its truth. It contains as sincere an acknowledgment of sin as ever proceeded from any one of ourselves, while we know that he who made it, lived the daring enemy of God, and died impenitent and unpardoned. Mindful then of our liability to self-deception, and supplicating the aid of that Spirit who only can make the subject on which we are entering, effectual to save us from it, let us consider, first, the resemblance which the confession of Pharaoh bears to true confession of sin; secondly, its difference from it; and, thirdly, the lessons which it is calculated to teach us.

I. *The resemblance* of the confession before us to the language of true contrition, is close.

1. It was *open*, made not to a partisan or friend in the secrecy of retirement, but to Moses and Aaron in public; to the very men whose presence was likely to fill the sinner with the greatest shame, and to require of him the most mortifying concessions.

2. It was accompanied also with *a sense of guilt*, and that not confined to one transgression only, but extending to the general conduct of himself and his subjects. Like Judas, he says, "I have sinned this time," but he does not,

like Judas, end there. In language similar to that of the penitent David, he adds, "I and my people are wicked."

3. It is remarkable too that, like David, *he considered his guilt as an offence against God*. In the sixteenth verse of the following chapter, we find him declaring that he had sinned against the Lord, as well as against his servants, and again beseeching Moses and Aaron to entreat the Lord their God for him, and to supplicate the removal of his judgments.

4. But this was not all. The confession of Pharaoh included in it *an acknowledgment of the justice of God in inflicting these judgments*. They were great and heavy, but he does not complain of their severity. He complains only of his own sins, which had so justly drawn them on his head. "The Lord," he says, "is righteous, and I and my people are wicked."

And herein also he closely resembled the real penitent. Such a man is not only conscious that he has incurred the wrath of God, but he feels that this fearful wrath is only the just desert of his offences; that were he this moment to be cast into hell, his trembling lips must even there join in the song of Moses and the Lamb, and say in the midst of his miseries, "True and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord God almighty. Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." He not only pleads guilty before God, but he passes on himself the sentence of everlasting death, and counts every thing less than this death, goodness and mercy. Thus David felt. "Against thee, thee only," he says, "have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest." Thus too the prophet Daniel spake. When he prayed unto the Lord his God and made his confession, he was not satisfied with saying, "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and done wickedly but he goes on to say, "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces as at this day, because we have sinned against thee." And then, though he and his countrymen were captives in the land of their enemies, he adds, "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him."

To these feelings, mankind in general are utter strangers. When we are in shame and in trouble, our chief concern generally is to clear ourselves, not to vindicate a chastising God. So far from regarding our wickedness as great and our iniquities as infinite, so far from considering everlasting destruction as our merited portion, we think that a few tears and prayers can wash out all our guilt, and that God would be both unmerciful and unjust were he to consign us to vengeance. We profess to have more liberal ideas of the Deity, and are even shocked at the denunciations which are sometimes repeated in our hearing from his word. Offenders against every command of our Sovereign, criminals condemned to die by every law to which we can appeal, creatures suffering day by day under the present effects of sin, and often trembling at

the prospect of its future consequences, surrounded with the dying and the dead, and carrying about within ourselves the seeds of corruption, we yet think, and speak, and act, as though sin had no curse attached to it, and the terrors of hell no more reality than the illusions of a dream.

5. There were also *some good resolutions* connected with the confession of Pharaoh. He determined, and the determination appears to have been sincere, that he would no longer oppose the departure of the Israelites, nor repeat the sin which had provoked the God of Israel to wrath. "Entreat the Lord," he says, "that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail, and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer."

Thus far then all is well. We have in this heathen king a sincere and open confession of sin, accompanied with a sense of guilt, with an open acknowledgment that this guilt was an offence against God, with a vindication of his righteous judgments, and a fixed resolution to provoke him to anger no more.

6. Nay, this confession seems to go still farther, and to include in it *a conviction of the divine mercy*. We see not in this awakened transgressor the wild fear of Cain, nor the despair of Judas. On the contrary, he remembers that there is mercy with God, and intimates his belief that he is ready to hear and to answer the prayer of his servants.

Now all these things are connected with true repentance; so closely and inseparably connected with it, that where one of them only is wanting, there every thing is wanting, which can render our confessions pleasing to the Lord. But these things do not necessarily prove that our repentance is genuine. Pharaoh was not a penitent, though he bore so strong a resemblance to one. His confession was sincere, but it was not godly. It resembled the language of true repentance, but at the same time it differed essentially from it.

II. 1. In attempting to trace this *difference*, we may observe that it was a *forced* confession, extorted from him by the sufferings he endured, and the fear of still heavier judgments. It was the confession of a criminal on the rack, not the free and voluntary acknowledgment of a returning rebel, casting himself at his monarch's feet.

Affliction, when it is severe, generally produces conviction, and sometimes a sincere and open confession. When the troubles of life press heavily on our heads, when lover and friend are put far from us and our acquaintance into darkness, when we are fainting on the bed of sickness and in expectation of immediate dissolution, when our "fear cometh as a desolation" and we think that our "destruction is coming as a whirlwind," then we feel that God is contending with us, and we are constrained to cry out with the alarmed Pharaoh, "I have sinned." But such convictions, though they may lead to repentance, are no proofs that we are already penitent. That grief which is spiritual, needs no judgments to call it into exercise. It is free and spontaneous,

flowing from the heart, through the power of the Holy Ghost, as naturally as streams flow from a fountain. Affliction may indeed be employed to revive and increase it, but it mourns and weeps in the hour of mercy, as well as in the day of tribulation. It mingles with our joy in the season of health, as well as waters our couch with tears in the time of sickness.

If we would know the real state of our hearts, we must lay very little stress on those emotions which are excited on particular occasions, and under any extraordinary circumstances, or indeed by any outward causes whatsoever. We must learn our true character from the feelings which arise from ourselves, from our inward principles and inclinations. The point to be ascertained is not what kind of men we are in affliction or in sickness, in the house of God or in the society of his servants; but what is the frame of our minds when these excitements are withdrawn, and we are left to ourselves. What are we in retirement? What are we on our beds? What are we in our families? What are we in our daily intercourse with the world?

2. The confession of Pharaoh differed from a true confession in this respect also—*it was unaccompanied with humiliation before God*. When Moses came to him at first with a message from Jehovah, he exclaimed, “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?” and the spirit which prompted this reply, was never subdued. It manifests itself in the text. He promises to let the Israelites go in obedience to the command of their God, but he, at the same time, wishes to treat with the Almighty as an equal, prescribing conditions, and even refusing his obedience unless those conditions were previously granted. He demands that his thunderings and lightnings should first cease, and then he consents to send the people away. This attitude of proud independence he maintained to the very last. He repeatedly besought Moses and Aaron to entreat for him, but he disdained to bend the knee himself. He trembled at the judgments of the Lord, but though they laid waste his country and cut off his first-born, he still refused to humble himself before him.

This spirit of independence is the bane and curse of our fallen nature. The very essence of our depravity consists in it. We will not have God to reign over us. We are rebels and traitors against him, and no threatenings, no convictions, no chastisements, can prevail on us to acknowledge his authority. They can terrify, but they cannot humble us. They can make us confess our guilt, but they cannot make us pray for the pardon of it. They can destroy, but they cannot bend us. Pharaoh perished rather than ask for mercy. Judas hung himself rather than supplicate forgiveness. Satan himself, though he has been torn for ages with remorse and has all the vengeance of the Almighty resting upon his head, still lifts up himself against the Holy One of Israel, and is not only the most wretched being in the universe, but the proudest.

Now true repentance begins with destroying this spirit. It forces the creature to acknowledge the authority of his Creator, to see his dependence on him and the service he owes him. It places a man where he was originally designed to be, and where the loftiest archangel rejoices to be, prostrate before the footstool of the Lord. Look at Paul. He was once a haughty persecutor; he is now brought to repentance, and “behold, he prayeth falling to the earth, he says to that very Jesus against whom he had exalted himself, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Look at Manasseh. Who more hardened than he? But when omnipotence and grace caused his affliction to bring his sin to remembrance, “he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed.”

3. The confession of Pharaoh was defective also in another respect—*it was not succeeded by an entire renunciation of sin*. Refusing to humble himself before God, he paid no more attention to his commands, than fear extorted from him. Under the smart of his rod he promised obedience; but no sooner was each succeeding plague removed, than he sinned yet the more. And when at length he yielded for a season, it was solely from the influence of fear. He gave up what he was afraid to keep, and what he was absolutely compelled to renounce.

And it is thus with many in the present day, who imagine themselves penitent. They love sin as much as ever they loved it; it has still the throne in their hearts, living and reigning within them; but they dare not indulge it as they once did. They know that death and judgment are near, and the thought of the one and the fear of the other, constrain them to consent to a partial surrender of what they would still deem it their highest happiness to retain.

But this is not the case where repentance is genuine. It causes a man to hate the sin which he renounces, yea, to hate all sin with a detestation equal to his former love of it. He consequently strives to mortify and subdue it. His spirit wars against it in whatever manner it assails him, or whatsoever shape it assumes. It still besets him, grieves him, and sometimes overcomes him; but there is no wish to retain or spare it; there is no effort to compromise matters with God. He does not ask, “How far may I indulge my lusts, and yet be safe? How much love may I have for the world, and yet escape condemnation?” but, “What right hand have I yet to cut off? What right eye have I yet to pluck out? What lurking sin still remains to be discovered and overcome?. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do I delight. Order my steps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.”

4. But even if the confession of Pharaoh had not been defective in these things, had it been ever so voluntary and free, accompanied with the deepest humiliation and the most entire renunciation of every known sin, there was

yet another point of difference between it and a genuine confession, and that a most important and ruinous difference—*it was not habitual and lasting*. The convictions from which it sprung, were as temporary as the judgments which gave rise to them, so that he who feared and trembled one hour, hardened his heart the next.

But the repentance from which true confession proceeds, is as lasting as our existence; and it is its permanent, its abiding nature, which proves it to be the repentance which God has blessed. That sorrow for sin which is the effect of heated passions only, will surely die away, and that which proceeds from remorse of conscience, is seldom lasting; but that contrition which is lodged in the soul by the Spirit of God, nothing can destroy; no length of time can efface it, no sense of pardon can weaken it. It is indeed modified by time, and the blood of Christ, when applied to the conscience, by taking from it much of its bitterness, causes it to assume a new character, but it does not diminish its activity or strength; on the contrary, it increases both, rendering the humiliation of the believer more habitual, and his contrition more deep and tender. His penitence grows in the exact degree in which his faith and consolation abound, and never ceases growing till it is lost in the joys of heaven. And who can say that these joys will destroy it? Who can say that the Christian does not take with him into the presence of God a remembrance of his former guilt, and add to the fervour of his love and the ardour of his praise, by confessing it before his throne?

Repentance then is not an act, it is a habit: not a duty to be performed once in a man's life, and then to be thought of no more; it is to be our daily work, our hourly employment. Thus, as history tells us, Peter repented, and thus David mourned. It is thus too that we ourselves shall mourn, if the arrows of the Lord have really stricken us. Through all the scenes of our life, our sins will be ever before us; and when death is sent to us, we shall be sorrowing still. The scene of our greatest penitence will be the chamber in which we breathe our last. There may be confidence, there may be peace, there may even be triumph, in our dying moments, but they will be marked with a sorrow for sin more lively than we have ever before experienced, with a lowliness of spirit inferior only to the humility of angels.

III. Such was the confession of Pharaoh. *The lessons it teaches* are as important as they are obvious.

It shows us, first, *the great need of self-examination*. And let us not despise the lesson. A mistake here is fatal, and the least reflection is sufficient to convince us how easy it is to mistake in this matter, yea, how difficult it is to avoid deceiving ourselves. We have seen how far the confession of Pharaoh went. It was sincere. He really meant what he said. When he spake of his wickedness, he felt it, and feared the judgments of the Lord on account of it.

Has your repentance been of this kind? Have the confessions you have uttered this day, proceeded from a feeling and fearful heart? When you said that you were miserable sinners, were you honest in the declaration? Alas, brethren, to how many of us might it be said, “Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God!”

But even were it otherwise, even if our consciences bore witness to the sincerity of our acknowledgments, this is not the only point to be ascertained. We may have confessed our sins from our heart; but has that heart been humble, lowly, obedient? Instead of going about to establish our own righteousness, are we submitting ourselves to the righteousness of God? Are we praying, as well as trembling? Is our contrition habitual? Are its sighs breathed in our chambers and its tears shed in our closets, as well as its language heard in this church and among our Christian friends? Is it sanctifying? Have we given up every known sin? and though still burdened with iniquity, are we striving to throw off the burden, and to “perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord?”

This subject shows us also *the extreme depravity of the human heart.*

We see here a man persevering in disobedience in the face of the most awful judgments. Sign follows sign, plague is succeeded by plague, wonders of wrath dismay all around him; and yet the haughty Pharaoh still lifts up himself against the Lord God almighty, and on the wreck of his property, his country, and his family, he maintains to the very last his proud rebellion.

And such would be the conduct of each of us, if the mighty hand of God did not restrain and bridle us. The dispositions which this man manifested, were not peculiar to him. They are the common fruits of our corrupt nature; they are visible in all the human race; they are working in our own breasts. We ourselves have manifested them. We have withstood many of the judgments of God, abused many of his mercies, refused to abandon many of our sins. There is not one of us, who, if left to himself, would not become as hardened as Pharaoh, as guilty as Judas. Remove the barrier which infinite mercy has placed before our lusts, and the stream will rush on with dreadful impetuosity and bear us to our ruin. A mortal poison is raging within us; let but the great Physician cease to counteract it, and we are lost. What inference then are we to draw from this mournful fact? The same that our church has already drawn for us—“We cannot turn and prepare ourselves, by our own natural strength, to faith and calling upon God.” We need the transforming power, the effectual working, of the Holy Ghost. We must seek repentance as a gift of mercy at the throne of God.

We may see, further, *the folly of trusting in convictions.* The history of Pharaoh proves that a sense of guilt and a fear of punishment are no evidences of a converted heart.

And yet how many professors of the gospel are grounding all their hopes of salvation on their remorse and fears! They are at seasons deeply impressed by sermons and greatly alarmed by afflictions. Or if these things have now lost their effect on them, they remember the time when they made them fearful and wretched. On these grounds alone, while they manifest no love to God in their conduct and are altogether averse to his laws, they conclude that their condition is safe, that their hearts have been renewed, and their sins forgiven. But this, brethren, is an awful delusion. Pharaoh could produce such evidences of piety as these; and not Pharaoh only, but Felix, and Judas, and Cain, and ten thousand others who are groaning in misery; yea, Satan himself has been trembling and repenting for ages, and will repent constantly and bitterly for ever. Remorse is not penitence. Conviction is not conversion. Fear is not grace.

But while we are reminded of the folly of trusting in convictions, we are at the same time taught *the guilt and danger of stifling them*. They cannot save the soul, but they are designed to make us feel our need of salvation, and to lead us for it to him who is the great Saviour of the lost. They are in fact messengers of mercy; but many of us treat them as though we deemed them our enemies. We love the sin which they condemn. We are determined to persevere in our pursuit of worldly vanities, and we are therefore impatient of the checks of conscience, and use a variety of expedients to silence its remonstrances. And our efforts are sometimes cursed with a dreadful success. An external religion, a partial reformation, or something equally delusive and unprofitable, quiets the conscience, while sin reigns over the soul with absolute and unresisted sway. But in what a storm of fiery indignation will this strange calm end! Judgments despised and convictions stifled are the forerunners of approaching wrath. They are signs that the sinner has not a moment to lose, that he must this very instant turn and repent, or be abandoned for ever and sealed for destruction. A jealous God will not be trifled with. They who have despised his warnings, shall feel his vengeance. He will first give them up to a hardened heart, and then, when the measure of their iniquities is full, he will suddenly destroy them and that without remedy. He will give them the quietness of a seared conscience for a season, and afterwards the torment of the never dying worm for ever. Trifle no longer then with his judgments; despise his chastenings no more. Cherish the convictions which still remain, and which perhaps are ready to die. Welcome the bitterest afflictions, poverty and sickness, shame and contempt; ask the prisoner for his chains and the tortured criminal for his rack, rather than provoke a wearied God to say concerning you, "He is joined to idols; let him alone."

There is yet another lesson to be learned from the subject before us. It seems indeed on the first view to speak to us only of the depravity of man

and the awful justice of God, but to what subject of meditation can we turn, which does not remind us of *the divine mercy*?

Look at this rebellious Egyptian. Behold him setting the Almighty at defiance; and yet no sooner does he confess his iniquity, than the avenging thunders and lightnings cease. Again he refuses obedience, and again the judgments of the Lord are poured out; but he again seeks to avert them by repentance, and they are again withdrawn. If therefore such a confession from such a sinner thus availed with God, what may the really contrite transgressor expect at his hands? What mercy will be denied him? What blessing withheld? A hardened Pharaoh, as well as a weeping Peter, declares to us, that the guilty will never seek pardon in vain. "If we confess our sins," says the scripture, "God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins;" to forgive them, not because we confess them, not because our repentance can purchase forgiveness, but because the blood of his Son has purchased it, and because he has bound himself by the most solemn promises to pardon freely, fully, and for ever, all who come to him pleading the merit of his obedience and trusting in his blood. "He is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent;" and as long as he remains a God of truth, so long is every broken-hearted sinner warranted to cast the heavy burden of his sins on his crucified Lord, and to rejoice in that Saviour who bare them all "in his own body on the tree."