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SERMON XIII.

SINS BLOTTED OUT BY GOD.

ISAIAH XLIII. 25.—“I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

THE world, brethren, was once a paradise: it is now a prison; and we who live and move in it, are criminals in the hands of justice, and liable every hour to be called to our trial and execution. It is clear then, that of all the blessings we ever heard of, pardon is that which we most need. In comparison with it, none other is worthy of a single thought. But where shall we look for it? Here in this text comes one proclaiming a pardon, and almost laying it at our feet.

Who then is he? Let this be our first enquiry. What is the nature of the pardon he brings? Let this be our second. What is the motive which leads him to offer it to us? We must take this as our third. How shall we act with respect to it? Let that be our last.

I. No tidings can be more welcome than those which are here published, none more joyful; but *who is he that brings us this offer of forgiveness?* On this point depends all the value of his news. He himself seems aware of its importance, for he evidently wishes to turn on himself our notice and enquiry. He speaks too as though he could quiet our most anxious suspicions, as though he were sure that a pardon coming from him, would leave us nothing to fear or desire.

He can be no fellow-mortal then, who speaks thus; no prophet or angel. All the strength of men and angels could no more blot out such sins as ours, than it could drive the midnight shades from the sky. It is the great God himself, who undertakes this work. It is the Holy One of eternity, who comes among us and says, “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions.”

There is more in this assurance than a mere glance can discover.

1. He who thus offers us pardon, is *the Being whom our sins have most displeased.*

We know how offensive iniquity sometimes is even to our own minds. It has often caused us to shudder as we have witnessed it. But our abhorrence of sin is as nothing. Would you pull down a house, because a sinner had entered it? Would you lay waste a garden or a field, because it had been the scene of a crime? But mark the conduct of God. He built the world. When he had made it, he called it good. It is an immense world, a lovely world, a glorious monument of power and goodness. But sinners

have trodden on it;—that is enough—it is accursed in the sight of God; he will soon sweep it from the heavens.

None but God can tell how God loathes iniquity. It is “that abominable thing which he hates.” It is the only thing which he hates; the only thing on earth or in hell, which can excite in him one moment’s displeasure. Yet with the objects of his abhorrence full before him, with all our sins blazoned before his face, he says, “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions.”

2. *He is also the Being whom our sins have most injured.* I speak after the manner of men; or rather after the manner of God, for he himself speaks of sin as an injury done to him. “Will a man rob God?” he says; “yet ye have robbed me.” And well may he say so. None of us have given God his due. Of that debt which, as creatures and sinners, we owe him, we have not paid him one mite. On the contrary, we have been employed, every moment of our existence, in returning him evil for good. No man ever injured man, as we have injured God. He who brings us these tidings, is the most outraged Being in the universe; one whose name we have profaned, whose authority we have trampled on, whose glory we have stained, whose displeasure at our foul offences we have mocked at, and, worst of all, that which robs him more than all other wrongs—whose amazing mercy we have despised.

Here then are two great points gained. The sinner however must have more. If I enter my neighbour’s house and rob him of his property, he may forgive me the wrong; and when I return home, my family and connections whom my conduct has grieved, may pardon me; but I am not yet safe. The officers of justice are in pursuit of me; the laws of my country must be satisfied; nothing short of my sovereign’s pardon can save me.

Thus the dying Stephen reasoned. The savage Jews were stoning him. He was the party injured by their violence, and he forgave them. But what was his pardon worth? They had a King reigning above; they had broken his laws. “With a loud voice” therefore the martyred saint cries to him for mercy for them; “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

3. He then who is here represented as blotting out our sins, is our King, *the very Being whose laws we have broken.*

We must not consider God, when we sin against him, merely as an injured or offended Father. He is the Monarch of the world, its Lawgiver and Sovereign. There is none above him, none equal to him. It follows therefore, that if he pardons, none can condemn. He made the law; I have broken it, and it condemns me; but he sets me free, and I am safe.

4. But our final trial is not yet past. And what if it is not? He who brings us these tidings of mercy, is none other than *the Being who will be our Judge.*

This is not an unimportant point. A king may determine to pardon a criminal, and may promise him a pardon; but the judge appears; the prisoners are summoned before him; the guilty man is condemned. He pleads his sovereign's promise; but what does this avail him? The judge knows nothing of it; he leaves him to suffer, and he dies. Not so however the man whom the King of heaven pardons. He is called on to meet his Judge; and such a Judge! so awful, so terrible in his greatness, that the earth and the heavens flee away before his face. The astonished man lifts up his enquiring eyes to the throne before him; and whom does he see on it? No enemy, no stranger, no minister of vengeance. He sees, with unutterable joy, his own gracious King, the Son of man, the very Being who said to him in the days of his flesh, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions." How then can he fear? The tribunal of justice is changed to a throne of grace. The Judge who sits on that throne, is the Saviour of his soul, the very Jesus who once hung on a cross to atone for his crimes.

On this head then the most fearful may be satisfied. If he offers us pardon, whom we have most displeased and most injured, who is our Monarch and will be our Judge, let the whole world condemn, it cannot harm us. Every hair of our head is safe.

II. But what kind of pardon does he offer? Just such a pardon as our lost situation requires; just such a pardon as becomes the Lord of the universe to give. Consider *its nature*.

It is expressed in the text by the "blotting out of transgressions," and the "not remembering of sins." Now one of the first thoughts that enter the mind, is a suspicion of some contradiction between this language and that which God sometimes employs when speaking of sin, even of the sin he has pardoned. We read here of his ceasing to remember it. He describes it, in other places, as being ever before him, fixed in the light of his countenance; he swears that he will never forget it. And we know that his words are true. A God of infinite knowledge must see all things and remember all things—every leaf of the woods that has withered and dropped; much more the transgressions of the children of men. How then can these declarations be reconciled? Only in one way.

When God speaks of remembering sin, the sin of his people, he alludes to the moral guilt, the turpitude or demerit, of it. This is, in its own nature, as eternal as himself. When he speaks of blotting out sin and forgetting sin, he speaks of its legal guilt, its sentence, its curse, the woe denounced against it. This is done away with when the soul turns itself to Christ. It ceases to exist. It is remembered no more.

Peter denied his Master. The baseness of his conduct, his oaths and curses, are remembered on earth and in heaven. But where is the punish-

ment of his sin? Where is the vengeance it merited? It is out of existence. For seventeen hundred years, the man has not shed a tear nor felt a pang.

The sum of the whole is this—pardon leaves the desert of condemnation where it finds it, on the head of the transgressor, while it frees him from condemnation itself.

1. The pardon then which is here proclaimed, is a remission of punishment, and it is a *full*, complete remission.

Here many a guilty conscience hesitates. “O were it not for a few heinous sins,” says one transgressor, “I would sue for a pardon. Were my iniquities the common frailties of my brethren, numerous as they might be, I would plead and hope for forgiveness. But the crimes of that one dark hour, the transgressions of that dreadful year!—they are too black to be covered.” “The multitude of my sins dismays me,” says another. But look at this proclamation. It shows us God blotting out transgressions and sins. He means all transgressions, all sins; sins as great as Manasseh’s, and as numerous as David’s; most certainly as numerous and great, as those of the guiltiest of the people to whom he is speaking. His words were otherwise a mockery of them. He pardons them by blotting them out; and what is that? It supposes them written and recorded in the book of his remembrance: and cannot the hand which can touch that awful record, cross out a thousand debts as well as one? Cannot the debt for a thousand talents be erased as easily as though it were for ten?

Turn to another declaration. Look at two clouds as they rise in the heavens. One is a blot on the sky, dark and huge; the other is scarcely visible, a light fleecy thing. We can remove neither; God can remove both. But which the most easily? We are ready to say, the lightest. That cloud then shall not be first mentioned as an emblem of Israel’s sins. Look at the other. A breath which you neither hear nor feel, takes it. Though heavy and threatening, it passes over the mountains and is gone. And its light companion follows it; the sky is clear. Now hear the voice of Israel’s God; now learn the extent of his pardoning mercy; “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins.”

The fact is, brethren, that the grace of God can as easily triumph over many and great sins, as over few and comparatively light iniquities. Ample provision is made in the everlasting covenant for the greatest possible enormities of every humbled sinner. Hence no partial forgiveness is ever offered us. If we are justified at all, it is “from all things.” God has no other pardon to bestow. No other would save us. One uncanceled sin would prove our ruin.

2. There may be lingering in some mind yet another fear. “I believe,” says the stricken penitent, “the fulness and extent of Jehovah’s mercy. Vile as my past transgressions have been, the blood of Christ, I trust, has

cleansed me from them. But am I not a transgressor still? And may not this rebellious heart of mine provoke the Lord, before I die, to withdraw the pardon he has given me?" Never. The forgiveness which God bestows, is an *eternal*, as well as a complete pardon; "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions;" "blotteth them out," as a creditor blots out from his book an enormous debt. He does not let the debt stand over for a time; he makes it void, he looks on it as paid.

And if this be not enough, the Lord speaks yet again. And O what sounds of mercy come from his lips! He whose memory retains every sin we have committed, more surely and firmly than a sculptured rock or leaves of brass, the great, the infinite God, declares to his guilty Israel, "I will not remember thy sins." What can this language mean? It means, brethren, that the sins which Jehovah pardons, are no more to him when he sits in judgment, than as though he had never seen them. It means that the guiltiest of you, if washed in the Saviour's blood, are as safe, as secure from condemnation, as though you had never been stained by one transgression. It is not a respite of which the Lord here tells you; it is an acquittal, a full and eternal discharge. It is more. It is an act of oblivion. It is the casting of your sins into "the depths of the sea." It is like the passing of the ocean over a record on sand—the writing is gone, it can never be recalled.

Is this language too bold? Then let God himself explain his mercy. "In those days and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found;"—and why? "for I will pardon them."

3. But when is this great pardon given? Now; the very moment when grace brings the sinner to himself, and mercy finds him at the Redeemer's feet. It is an *immediate* pardon. We read here, not "I will forgive;" but "I forgive." "I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions." "Even now while I am speaking, my hand is passing over the black and crowded page. I have spoken; the work is done; thou art free. Thou must wait indeed awhile before thy pardon is publicly proclaimed; my angels must be summoned, and all the sleeping dead must be awaked; thou mayest wait for a few short days before thy own unbelieving heart rejoices in its blessedness, or even knows it; but the deed of acquittal is written; I have set my seal to it; the blood of the covenant is on it. Since I can swear by no greater, I swear by myself that it shall never be recalled. Thou wilt find it in my word. Place it in thy bosom. Rejoice in it when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And when thy lips are opened after the silence of the grave, when thou seest me on my throne, and hast pleaded ' Guilty, guilty,' at my bar, then bring it forth. I will acknowledge it. The heavens shall hear it and rejoice."

Such then is the pardon which God bestows. And is it not a most gracious pardon?—so full, that of all the multiplied millions of Israel's sins,

there is not one left on the record;—so lasting, that it runs on with eternity;—so immediate and prompt, that the guiltiest here might have it in an hour. Looking at the Being it comes from, we say with one pardoned sinner, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” Looking at the pardon itself, we exclaim with another, “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?”

III. But why is all this? *Where shall we find the motives of this act of mercy?* This is our third enquiry. The answer to it is short; it is humbling, but yet of all answers the most encouraging and the noblest. These four words, “for mine own sake,” are the sum and substance of the gospel; the hope of a lost world; the theme, the praise, the security, of a saved one.

A good king never pardons without a reason for his conduct. This, in most cases, must be looked for either in the criminal or in himself. Seek it in these criminals. They are men who have been “making God to serve,” oppressing him “with their sins,” and “wearying him with their iniquities.” “Put me in remembrance,” he says to them; “let us plead together; declare thou, that thou mayest be justified.” They are silent; their own proud lips dare not talk of justice, no, nor even plead for mercy. And what can our lips say? They have said much. They have spoken of goodness and merit, of tears, and charities, and prayers, of good hearts and harmless lives; but what has God answered? “Ye are all as an unclean thing, and all your righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” Misery, pollution, guilt; a darkened mind, a desperately wicked heart; vile affections, contending passions, and triumphant lusts; a soul as earthly as a worm’s, as proud as Satan’s;—these are the things among which man must search for all his goodness, for all the recommendations he can plead to heaven’s favour. O what a fool is man, when man dreams of righteousness and worth!

The springs of mercy then must be in God; but what are they? Turn again to an earthly king.

1. He sometimes pardons *from a love of mercy*; to gratify the feelings of a kind and compassionate heart. So also does God. “He pardoneth iniquity,” says Micah; “he passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage; he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.” No one loves mercy as God loves it. And of all the mercy he delights in, pardoning mercy he values the most. He is more ready to offer, than the perishing to accept it; more willing to speak peace to the offending, than they are to hear it. He deems his grace his wealth. He calls it his “riches,” “the riches of his glory,” his glorious riches.

2. A king may pardon from another motive. Perhaps he has just ascended his throne. He desires to be loved by his subjects; he wishes his reign to

be glorious. He begins it therefore with an act of grace, a proclamation of pardon. And God pardons *to display his glory*; “for his own sake to make his perfections known, to put honour on his eternal Son, to fill a universe with his praise. And how does he attain this end? Not by at once restoring sinners to his forfeited love. No. He saves his Israel; one after another, he takes his redeemed to heaven; and we wonder at his grace as we think of beings so unworthy rejoicing in so holy a place; but it is not their salvation simply, which we admire. It is not that which raises the new and loudest hosannahs of his temple. It is the way in which he has saved them; it is the display he has made of his glory in the cross of his Son. The redeemed would have been happy, had he pardoned them without any satisfaction, but neither his love nor his justice would have been so highly exalted. Mercy would have shone forth, but not in her brightness, not in that glorious attire in which she now triumphs and reigns.

IV. We have now examined the forgiveness proclaimed to us. The most important matter however yet remains behind— *How ought we to treat this offer of pardon? How ought we to act with respect to it?*

Place yourselves within a prison. A sovereign enters it, and declares aloud that he has mercy, many free and full acquittals, to bestow. How would the inhabitant of every cell and dungeon act? Would he not hasten to throw himself at his monarch’s feet, and eagerly exclaim, “Pardon me! O save me!” Imitate these men.

1. Make this your first concern, *to seek the pardon* offered you in the gospel. Labour to secure it for yourselves.

You answer perhaps, “We have done so.” Then tell me, or rather tell your own consciences, the hour, the day, in which you have sought this mercy. Name the chamber, the field, the church, where you have smitten on the breast, and, with the earnestness of a dying man supplicating life, cried for forgiveness. Is there such a place on the earth? Is there such an hour in your history? Some of you must answer, “No.” Then how came this wonderful pardon yours? Brethren, it is not yours. None has ever found, who has not sought it. It is as free as the air you breathe; but they die unpardoned, who despise it. O that you knew your need of it! O that you knew its value! O that you knew the consequences of setting it at nought! You may do without it in some poor way, as long as you are within these prison-walls, but you must soon leave them. “The Judge is at the door.” Death is ready to call you away. Ere a few more years are gone, your body will be a lump of clay, and your soul will stand trembling before its God. O pity yourselves! To be going to such a place as the bar of heaven, and to be going there with the tidings of pardon sounding in your ears, and yet to care about any thing or every thing rather than pardon—none but the Spirit of

God can cure such folly as this. At once implore him to work effectually in your hearts. Fall down this night before him, and on your bended knees make this your prayer, “Lord, help me.” “Lord, save me.” “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”

2. Are any of you already seeking this forgiveness? seeking it with a feeling, broken, imploring heart? Then stretch forth the hand of faith;—*take this pardon*. You have heard that it is full; God tells you it is free. He offers it to you, not because you have deserved it, or because you are fit to receive it; but simply “for his own sake”—to indulge his mercy, to magnify his grace.

Cease then from all unbelieving reasonings and proud objections. If you are conscious of your need of pardon, if above all things you desire pardon, if you despair of doing any thing whatsoever to deserve it, if you are really willing to receive it as guilty, condemned, helpless, dying men; then you are as much warranted as sinners can be, to go, in Christ’s name, to the mercy-seat, and to take this complete and eternal pardon as your own. To you, as well as to the proud in heart, God says, “Put me in remembrance. Let us plead together.” “Tell me not for ever of thine unfitness for my kingdom, thy rebellion and thy crimes. Tell me of my invitations to the guilty, and my promises to the lost. Tell me of the blood that was shed to save thee. Tell me of the tears, and prayers, and righteousness, the cross and passion, of my Son. Show me that thou canst trust my word. Only believe, and though thou wert as sinful as the cursing Peter, or as unworthy as the persecuting Saul, I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

3. Are any among you really in possession of this mercy? Then go once again for instruction to the prisoner’s cell.

He has sought and obtained his monarch’s pardon. The deed confirming it is in his hands. After a few months or years have past, he hears the same voice again proclaiming the same free mercy. How would such a man act? Would he hear that voice now with indifference? O no. It would remind him anew of his former danger. He would press the warrant of his safety closely to his heart and rejoice in it afresh. And how would he treat the author of his security? Would he despise him because he was merciful? make light of his displeasure, because he had been set free by his grace? Would he turn traitor against him, because he was good? He could not do this. He would make the prison ring with his praises. He would be found amongst the very first at his feet; he would be the last to depart from his sight. One minute, he would be calling on some thoughtless criminal to apply for his mercy; the next, he would be shouting with praise for some new pardon bestowed. Were he in his right mind, such a man would be the humblest and happiest within those prison-walls.

What shall I say more? Be like that man. “Go, and do thou likewise.”