

SERMONS,

PREACHED IN

THE PARISH CHURCH OF GLASBURY,

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AND

ST. JAMES'S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM,

SURREY.

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SERMON XV.

THE AFFLICTED DAVID A PARDONED SINNER.

2 SAMUEL xii. 13.

Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin.

THE closing years of the life of David are deeply, but most painfully interesting. His dreadful crimes, and the miseries which followed them, are such as we can never forget, and yet never think of without a shudder.

But there is some light amidst all this darkness. We learn from the text the readiness of Jehovah to blot out the most heinous offences; and who can look on the contrition of this pardoned sinner, without instruction and pleasure? Some of us may derive consolation even from his sufferings. They show us that many things which we are prone to regard as the sure marks of an unpardoned condition, are yet sometimes found in the redeemed soul; are, in fact, no proofs, no indications whatsoever of a condemned state. To this single point then, let us confine our attention; and may the Holy Spirit bless our consideration of it to the comfort of every sorrowful heart!

I. *Heavy afflictions* are no signs of an unpardoned condition. If they were, who was ever more lost than David? “The Lord hath put away thy sin,” said the prophet to him; but from that hour judgments followed him to the grave. You remember the history of his woes. They were such as make a father’s ear tingle as he hears of them. They almost broke that poor monarch’s heart. But in the lowest depths to which he sunk, the words of Nathan concerning him were as true, as though he had been happy on his throne. The iniquities of David were forgiven.

There are times when we find it hard to believe this truth. A light and short affliction seldom much depresses us, for we can easily reconcile it with a Father’s faithfulness; but when blow succeeds to blow, when our troubles are peculiar, and long continued, and harrowing, our hearts begin to fail us. We think that a gracious God never can love the creatures whom he so severely wounds. We could not so afflict our children; we are ready to conclude therefore, that were we the children of a heavenly Father, he would not so afflict us: our once peaceful assurance of his pardoning mercy gives way, and is succeeded by perplexity and doubt.

But where all this time are the declarations of our Bible gone? We have only to bring our afflictions to the standard of that holy book, and their character is in a moment changed. The Holy Spirit foresaw all our fears, as well as our sufferings; and what is his language to us under them? “Ye have

forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children; My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” “But not as we are scourged,” you answer. Then turn again to that faithful word of testimony. Read in it the history of the church which was bought with blood. Is it not a record of afflictions, such as you never witnessed? And whose afflictions, whose trials were all these? They were the portion of men, “of whom the world was not worthy;” of men who, while on earth, were the most beloved of God, and who in heaven are nearest to his throne.

When your troubles, brethren, are more bitter than those of David, more numerous than Paul’s, and more hard to be borne than the desolate Job’s, then regard them as witnesses against you. Till then, look on them rather as manifestations of kindness. They will not prove you forgiven, but they will prove that you are not abandoned. They are no more the marks of condemnation, than the pruning knife is a sign that the tree must fall. Does the refiner often heat his furnace for the metal which he knows to be worthless? Do you watch over and correct year after year a stranger’s child?

II. To all this perhaps you have an answer ready. “We know,” you say, “that if we tire Christ’s, afflictions are a part of our inheritance. They alone could never excite one fear in our souls. This is the cause of our misgivings—we have no consolations under them. All without us is trouble, and all within us is darkness. Were we among the pardoned, would it, could it be thus?” Turn again to the experience of David. It tells us, as plainly as the most comfortless affliction can tell us, that *a want of spiritual consolation* under calamities is no evidence of an unpardoned state.

It is true that the Lord Jesus Christ has taught his people to expect special consolations in special sufferings. It is true also, that their most afflicted hours have sometimes been their happiest. But is it not as true that they have often walked in darkness and had no light? Their feelings under afflictions have been as various as their afflictions themselves. What different feelings, for instance, have they manifested at the death of children! “Blessed be the name of the Lord,” was the exclamation of Job, when the tidings were brought to him of the loss of all his offspring. “Aaron held his peace,” when his two sons were consumed. The end of Hophni and Phineas could not move old Eli. It was not till he heard that the ark of God was taken, that he fell from his seat. But turn to David. His infant sickens and dies. This was his first affliction after his fall. A ray of comfort seems to have cheered him under it. But where was David’s spiritual joy, when he “tare his garments” at the news of Amnon’s death, and “lay on the earth,” and “wept very sore?” Did his consolations abound, when his chamber rung

with the sounds, "O my son Absalom! my son, my son, Absalom,! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

And think of the psalms which are every sabbath on our lips. Most of these are the compositions of this pardoned sinner. Is it possible for words to express more pure, unmixed, comfortless misery, than that which gives vent to its wretchedness there? "I am troubled," he says; "I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long." "I am weary with my groanings: all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears." "As for the light of mine eyes, it is gone from me." "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" And hear the piteous complaints of the disconsolate Heman. "My soul," says he, "is full of trouble." "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps." "Lord, why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me?" Job too bewails departed comforts, and Jeremiah groans in unbroken darkness.

And shall we forget the exceeding great sorrow of his soul, who "knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth? "The spotless Jesus himself, in the hour of his deepest misery, was comfortless. The most piercing cry that ever came from human lips, came from the holiest; "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

III. A want of consolation then is no proof of a condemned state: neither, thirdly, is *a troubled conscience*.

"We read in our Bibles," say some, "that they who are justified by faith, have peace with God. We are told also, that they have peace within; that the blood which cleanses, quiets them. Christ himself promises them rest; we see that some of them enjoy it. There was a time when we ourselves were easy; but now a prisoner on the rack might almost pity us. Sins committed months and years ago, sins which we thought blotted out of God's remembrance and our own for ever, are now as fresh in our memory as though they were not an hour old. They follow us wherever we go. We cannot forget them. They are a terror to us by night, and a burden by day. We could be content to be comfortless; we could welcome the sharpest tribulations; but this wounded spirit, this evil conscience, who can bear? It is the scourge of an angry God; it is a mark of his wrath." No, brethren; an accusing conscience is a mark of nothing but this, that you are sinners, and that sin is a more evil and bitter thing, than you once thought it. It cannot of itself prove you forgiven, for the guilty in hell are "tormented in this flame." Much less can it prove you condemned. Thousands have groaned under it, who are now peaceful in heaven; and thousands more, who will soon be in heaven, it often lays on the ground in anguish.

Your sense of guilt may be exceedingly painful; and what was David's? The agonies of his soul pass all description. Words fail him, as he attempts to express them. In the thirty-eighth psalm, he compares his recollections of sin to arrows darting into his flesh, to a wasting disease, to rankling wounds, to broken and aching bones.

The sufferings of your spirit may be frequent. His were constant. "Thine arrows," says he, "stick fast in me." "There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin." "My sorrow is continually before me."

"But David," you answer, "was supported. He had strength to bear his misery. Ours is sometimes overwhelming, intolerable." Was David's light? Did he think it easy to be borne? "Thy hand," he cries, "presseth me sore." "Mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me." "I am feeble and sore broken. I have roared by reason of the inquietness of my heart."

"But my sins," you reply again, "are so abominable, so loathsome: the remembrance of them fills me with self-abhorrence; it covers me with unutterable shame." Turn once again to this troubled king. "My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness." "My loins are filled with a loathsome disease." Hear too what the astonished Ezra says; "O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God." And hear the upright Job; "I abhor myself."

And pass from the prophets of old to the holy men who wrote our Prayer Book. Did they deem convictions of sin tokens of condemnation? Why then have they laboured so much to keep these convictions alive? Why have they taught us to call ourselves no fewer than six times every sabbath, "miserable offenders, miserable sinners?" And what is the language which they put into our lips at the table of the Lord? With the emblems of his blessed body and blood before us—the body which, they tell us, was given, and the blood which, they say, was shed for us—they call us not at once to a song of exultation or a burst of praise. They bid us bewail our manifold sins; they bid us say of them what you, and such as you, are the only persons who can say without a mockery of heaven, "The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable." And what perhaps is the feeling of some envied neighbour who is kneeling by your side, or of the minister whose voice is uttering this confession in your ears? He is wishing for a more heart-felt sense of its meaning: he is praying for a greater measure of the compunction it describes.

O happy are you, if your only cause of fear is a troubled spirit! Wherever God bestows a pardon, he always first bestows this; and even when his pardon has been welcomed to the heart, sooner or later he generally bestows this gift again. And it is not a useless gift. Pardon teaches us the ex-

tent of Jehovah's mercy; this painful sense of guilt shows us the awfulness of his justice, the fearfulness of his wrath. By the one, he exalts himself; by the other, he abases and empties us. He pardons our sins, that we may be saved from them; he suffers us to taste their wormwood and their gall, that we may value salvation. He takes us to heaven, that we may magnify his grace; he shows us the bitterness of sin in our way to it, that we may not enter heaven with a cold heart and a silent tongue; that when we are there, we may praise the Lamb that was slain with a love proportioned to the greatness of the evil from which he has delivered us, and with a fervour suited to the weight of the curse which he has borne.

IV. It may be that even yet the cause of your disquietude has not been touched. It is not trouble, it is not darkness, it is not past guilt, that makes you deem yourselves accursed; it is present sin. You have great temptations from without, and strong corruptions within. Satan harasses you. Your wearied soul is a scene of perpetual conflict. You tell us that sin when remitted is not thus powerful; that where Christ is a Saviour, he is a Sanctifier also. You infer therefore that you have no interest in his salvation. We will go then a step farther, and say without fear of misleading you, that *a painful sense of inward corruptions* is not inconsistent with pardoning mercy.

But let us be cautious here. If there is any one lust which, day after day and year after year, leads you captive; any one ungodly practice, in which you habitually indulge; if the sin which is your fear, is at the same time your delight, ever committed with greediness, though sometimes repented of with anguish; let an angel from heaven declare you to be pardoned, we will appeal to the written testimony of God, and say that the truth is not in him; that you have no more reason to regard yourselves forgiven, than a dying man has to think himself in health. But if sin is opposed, as well as felt; if its strivings within you lead to prayer instead of iniquity; if, through the Spirit, the base passions of your nature are habitually overcome; if sin is your grief and abhorrence, as well as terror; then, brethren, we are as sure as the Bible can make us, that the warfare in your soul, though painful, and tumultuous, and unceasing, is no mark of the displeasure of heaven; is as plain a token as God can give you, that he has "blotted out as a thick cloud your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins."

It is true the holy Jesus sanctifies all he redeems. By these conflicts he is sanctifying you. They will end in the victor's shout, and the conqueror's crown. They will end in the purity, as well as the blessedness of glory. Where is David now? Among the holiest and happiest around the throne of his God. But what was his state when on earth?—his state, not in that awful year when an offended God gave him up to himself, but his state when sovereign mercy "renewed him again to repentance," and a messenger from

God had pronounced him forgiven? He himself shall describe it; “Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” And did none of this inbred pollution remain? His prayer will tell us; “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” “Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.”

“But David,” it may be said, “was just recovering from a polluting fall.” Turn then to the blameless Paul, to him of whom, after his conversion to God, the Holy Ghost has not left on record one sin or one folly. What says his experience? It goes farther than we have yet ventured to lead you. It tells you that there may be conflict in a pardoned heart; and it tells you more—that there may be in that very heart, amidst all its conflicts, a sense of forgiveness, a triumphant assurance of pardon. It tells you that a man may groan under a sense of sin, and yet look on himself as an heir of glory. “I delight,” says he, “in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” And what does he add? “I am unpardoned; I am lost?” No; “*I* thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” And for what does he thank God? For his corruptions? for the dreadful burden under which he groaned? In no wise;—for a deliverance which he foresaw and almost enjoyed; for a conquest which was so certain, that he already speaks of it as his own. “The sting of death,” says he in another place, “is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Here we must stop. The sum of all you have heard is briefly this—I am not to look on my guilty soul as pardoned because heavy afflictions are sent me, or spiritual consolation is denied; because a troubled conscience weighs me down, or my own evil heart torments me; but if the Holy Spirit has stamped on me those marks which the redeemed have ever borne, none of these things can weaken their testimony; no, nor all of them together prove me condemned. Troubled and comfortless, I am warranted to lift up my wretched eyes to heaven, and say, “Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin.”

But who, under such discouragements, can raise his confidence so high? We can listen to the Christian minister or friend who tells us that these things ought not to cast us down. It is easy to understand his reasoning, and impossible perhaps to gainsay one of his words; but what good has he done us? What hope has he kindled in our souls? None. Our sins are as heavy as though he had not uttered a word, our hearts as sinking, our mis-

givings as strong. Learn here then *the importance of a simple faith in the Redeemer's blood.*

There are times, brethren, when every effort to discover our interest in the divine mercy will fail us. Sin may cloud the evidences of our safety; or the Holy Spirit, for gracious purposes, may cease to shine on them; or infirmity of body or of mind may hide them from our sight. We may search our hearts till they ache in the work; we may compare ourselves with one pardoned transgressor after another, and the only fruit of our enquiries may be thicker darkness, more painful uncertainty. How then, in these straits, shall we act? How did David act? He applied to Jehovah for pardon. At first he examined, he reasoned, he “took counsel,” as he says, in his soul; but what could reasoning do for a sinner like him? What could self-examination do, but unveil to him more disheartening views of his crimes? He tells us that these things did nothing to comfort him, that he had “sorrow in his heart daily.” He flies at length as a poor, sunk, helpless transgressor, to his God, and throws himself on his mercy. He seeks peace through pardon. “Have mercy upon me, O God,” says he, “according to thy loving-kindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” And what followed? Years perhaps of sorrow; but before he died, his guilty lips spake yet again of pardoning grace; “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” And on his dying bed, we see him calmly reposing in the covenant and salvation of his God.

Let us follow his footsteps. Cease for a while, brethren, from your wearisome enquiries into your own state. If they have discovered to you how little you can do for yourselves, how utterly unable you are to obtain present peace, much less everlasting salvation, they have done their work. It is a blessed work. Amid conflicts and fears, they are not likely to do more. Nor need they. The great Saviour of sinners is both able and willing to accomplish all you desire. Look out of yourselves to him. And for what purpose? For the very same purpose that David, and Paul, and all who are in heaven, have looked to him; for the same purpose that you yourselves have looked to him in the days that are gone—for the remission of your sins. Instead of asking whether you are pardoned or lost, cast yourselves at the feet of him by whom all the lost may be pardoned, and in whom only the pardoned can be safe. Approach him as sinners; as sinners, embrace anew his promises; as sinners, hope in his mercy, and righteousness, and blood. This is the way to heaven, and there is no other way to hope or quietness on earth. In the very first moment in which the assurance will not prove a curse to you, he will send, not a prophet, but his Holy Spirit to say to you, in a voice which you cannot misunderstand, “The Lord hath put away thy sins.” “Thy sins are forgiven thee.”

There is a lesson also here for *the peaceful Christian*. Are you free from the fears which perplex many of your brethren? Do you live in the enjoyment of “a good hope through grace?” Then look on David, and behold *what havoc sin can occasion in the noblest mind*.

There was a time when this was the happiest of men. He had his troubles, but there was no sting in them; he did not heed them. His song from day to day was a song of joy, of thankfulness for mercies past, and of the liveliest hope of higher mercies yet to come. But turn your eyes on “the sweet psalmist of Israel” now. O what a mournful change! Not a single note of happiness comes from that once cheerful harp. All is complaint, distraction, and misery. And what has wrought this change? That accursed thing which can turn a paradise into a desert. The man has been feeding on ashes. He has forgotten on his throne the law which was so dear to him in the fields of Bethlehem, and on the mountains of Judaea. Sin has poisoned his happiness. It has made him a wreck. Look not at his wretched family in order to see what this tremendous evil can do. Look not at his dying babe, his injured daughter, his wicked sons, his murdered Amnon, his lost Absalom. Look not at the monarch driven by his own child from his throne, and followed with the curses of a rebel, as he flies, weeping and barefoot, to the wilderness. Look at the ravages of sin within that man. What has it done there? It has ruined a peace which God himself had given him from above; it has put an end to a joy which was almost divine; it has darkened the hopes which once soared to heaven. It has done more. It has made reflection a terror to him, conscience a scourge, life a burden, death dreadful. It has thrown down the once firm, spiritual, towering mind of David, and turned it into a ruin.

Where then is the mind which can open itself to sin, and not be overthrown by it? Not yours, brethren; not mine; no, nor an angel’s. It would be easier to bear the ravages of the plague, and not be weakened; easier to pass through the flames of a furnace, and escape unhurt. Sin never brings guilt on a Christian’s conscience, without bringing pollution into his mind; without, in the end, weakening its powers, debasing its affections, blasting its hopes, and withering its joys. Would you continue happy? Continue holy. “Remember David and all his troubles.” Keep your hearts “with all diligence.” “Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation,” “Walk in the Spirit.” “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.”