



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 11: 1865

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 11: 1865* by Charles Spurgeon

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Table of Contents

<i>About This Book</i>	p. ii
Sermon 623. Satan Considering the Saints.	p. 1
Sermon 635. Are You Prepared to Die?.	p. 11
Sermon 641. Confession Of Sin Illustrated by the Cases of Dr. Pritchard and Constance Kent.	p. 21
Indexes.	p. 31
Index of Scripture References.	p. 31

Satan Considering the Saints

A Sermon

(No. 623)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, April 9th, 1865, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job.”—Job 1:8.

HOW VERY UNCERTAIN are all terrestrial things! How foolish would that believer be who should lay up his treasure anywhere, except in heaven! Job's prosperity promised as much stability as anything can do beneath the moon. The man had round about him a large household of, doubtless, devoted and attached servants. He had accumulated wealth of a kind which does not suddenly depreciate in value. He had oxen, and asses, and cattle. He had not to go to markets, and fairs, and trade with his goods to procure food and clothing, for he carried on the processes of agriculture on a very large scale round about his own homestead, and probably grew within his own territory everything that his establishment required. His children were numerous enough to promise a long line of descendants. His prosperity wanted nothing for its consolidation. It had come to its flood-tide: where was the cause which could make it ebb?

Up there, beyond the clouds, where no human eye could see, there was a scene enacted which augured no good to Job's prosperity. The spirit of evil stood face to face with the infinite Spirit of all good. An extraordinary conversation took place between these two beings. When called to account for his doings, the evil one boasted that he had gone to and fro throughout the earth, insinuating that he had met with no hindrance to his will, and found no one to oppose his freely moving and acting at his own pleasure. He had marched everywhere like a king in his own dominions, unhindered and unchallenged. When the great God reminded him that there was at least one place among men where he had no foothold, and where his power was unrecognized, namely, in the heart of Job; that there was one man who stood like an impregnable castle, garrisoned by integrity, and held with perfect loyalty as the possession of the King of Heaven; the evil one defied Jehovah to try the faithfulness of Job, told him that the patriarch's integrity was due to his prosperity, that he served God and eschewed evil from sinister motives, because he found his conduct profitable to himself. The God of heaven took up the challenge of the evil one, and gave him permission to take away all the mercies which he affirmed to be the props of Job's integrity, and to pull down all the outworks and buttresses and see whether the tower would not stand in its own inherent strength without them. In consequence of this, all Job's wealth went in one black day, and not even a child was left to whisper comfort. A second interview between the Lord and his fallen angel took place. Job was again the subject of conversation; and the Great One defied by Satan, permitted him even to touch him in his bone and in his flesh, till the prince became worse than a pauper, and he who was rich and happy was poor and wretched, filled with disease from head to foot, and fain to scrape himself with a miserable potsherd, to gain a poor relief from his pain.

Let us see in this the mutability of all terrestrial things. He hath founded it upon the floods,” is David's description of this world; and, if it be founded on the floods, can you wonder that it changes off? Put not your trust in anything beneath the stars: remember that “Change” is written on the

fore-front of nature. Say not therefore, "My mountain standeth firm: it shall never be moved;" the glance of Jehovah's eye can shake thy mountain into dust, the touch of his foot can make it like Sinai, to melt like wax, and to be altogether on a smoke. "Set your affection on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," and let your heart and your treasure be where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal." The words of Bernard may here instruct us: "That is the true and chief joy which is not conceived from the creature, but received from the Creator, which (being once possessed thereof) none can take from thee: compared with which all other pleasure is torment, all joy is grief, sweet things are bitter, all glory is baseness, and all delectable things are despicable."

This is not, however, our subject this morning. Accept thus much as merely an introduction to our main discourse. The Lord said to Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" Let us deliberate, first, *in what sense the evil spirit may be said to consider the people of God*; secondly, *let us notice what it is that he considers about them*; and then, thirdly, *let us comfort ourselves by the reflection that one who is far above Satan considers us in a higher sense*.

I. First, then, IN WHAT SENSE MAY SATAN BE SAID TO CONSIDER THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

Certainly not in the usual Biblical meaning of the term "consider." "O Lord consider my trouble." "Consider my meditation." "Blessed is he that considereth the poor." Such consideration implies good-will and a careful inspection of the object of benevolence with regard to a wise distribution of favour. In that sense Satan never considers any. If he has any benevolence, it must be towards himself; but all his considerations of other creatures are of the most malevolent kind. No meteoric flash of good flits across the black midnight of his soul. Nor does he consider us as we are told to consider the works of God, that is, in order to derive instruction as to God's wisdom and love and kindness. He does not honour God by what he sees in his works, or in his people. It is not with him, "Go to the ant; consider her ways and be wise;" but he goes to the Christian and considers his ways and becomes more foolishly God's enemy than he was before. The consideration which Satan pays to God's saints is upon this wise. *He regards them with wonder, when he considers the difference between them and himself*. A traitor, when he knows the thorough villainy and the blackness of his own heart, cannot help being astounded, when he is forced to believe another man to be faithful. The first resort of a treacherous heart is to believe that all men would be just as treacherous, and are really so at bottom. The traitor thinks that all men are traitors like himself, or would be, if it paid them better than fidelity. When Satan looks at the Christian, and finds him faithful to God and to his truth, he considers him as we should consider a phenomenon—Perhaps despising him for his folly, but yet marveling at him, and wondering how he can act thus. "I," he seems to say, "a prince, a peer of God's parliament, would not submit my will to Jehovah. I thought it better to reign in hell than serve in heaven: I kept not my first estate, but fell from my throne. How is it that these stand? What grace is it which keeps these? I was a vessel of gold, and yet I was broken; these are earthen vessels, but I cannot break them! I could not stand in my glory—what can be the matchless grace which upholds them in their poverty, in their obscurity, in their persecution, still faithful to the God who doth not bless and exalt them as he did me!" It may be that he also wonders at their happiness. He feels within himself a seething sea of misery. There is an unfathomable gulf of anguish within his soul, and when he looks at believers, he sees them quiet in their souls, full of peace and happiness, and often without any outward means by which they should be comforted, yet rejoicing and full of glory. *He goes up and down through the world and possesses great power,*

and there be many myrmidons to serve him, yet he hath not the happiness of spirit possessed by yonder humble cottager, obscure, unknown, having no servants to wait upon her, but stretched upon the bed of weakness. He admires and hates the peace which reigns in the believer's soul.

His consideration may go farther than this. Do you not think that *he considers them to detect, if possible, any flaw and fault in them, by way of solace to himself?* "They are not pure," saith he—"these blood-bought ones—these elect from before the foundations of the world,—they still sin! These adopted children of God, for whom the glorious Son bowed his head and gave up the ghost!—even they offend!" How must he chuckle, with such delight as he is capable of, over the secret sins of God's people, and if he can see anything in them inconsistent with their profession, anything which appears to be deceitful, and therein like himself, he rejoices. Each sin born in the believer's heart, cries to him, "My father! my Father!" and he feels something like the joy of fatherhood as he sees his foul offspring. He looks at the "old man" in the Christian, and admires the tenacity with which it maintains its hold, the force and vehemence with which it struggles for the mastery, the craft and cunning with which every now and then, at set intervals, at convenient opportunities, it putteth forth all its force. He considers our sinful flesh, and makes it one of the books in which he diligently reads. One of the fairest prospects, I doubt not, which the devil's eye ever rests upon, is the inconsistency and the impurity which he can discover in the true child of God. In this respect he had very little to consider in God's true servant, Job.

Nor is this all, but rather just the starting point of his consideration. We doubt not that *he views the Lord's people, and especially the more eminent and excellent among them, as the great barriers to the progress of his kingdom;* and just as the engineer, endeavouring to make a railway, keeps his eye very much fixed upon the hills and rivers, and especially upon the great mountain through which it will take years laboriously to bore a tunnel, so Satan, in looking upon his various plans to carry on his dominion in the world, considers most such men as Job. Satan must have thought much of Martin Luther. "I could ride the world over," says he, "if it were not for that monk. He stands in my way. That strong-headed man hates and mauls my firstborn son, the pope. If I could get rid of him I would not mind though fifty thousand smaller saints stood in my way." He is sure to consider God's servant, if there be "none like him," if he stand out distinct and separate from his fellows. Those of us who are called to the work of the ministry must expect from our position to be the special objects of his consideration. When the glass is at the eye of that dreadful warrior, he is sure to look out for those who by their regimentals are discovered to be the officers, and he bids his sharpshooters be very careful to aim at these, "For," saith he, "if the standard-bearer fall, then shall the victory be more readily gained to our side, and our opponents shall be readily put to rout." If you are more generous than other saints, if you live nearer to God than others, as the birds peck most at the ripest fruit, so may you expect Satan to be most busy against you. Who cares to contend for a province covered with stones and barren rocks, and ice-bound by frozen seas? But in all times there is sure to be contention after the fat valleys where the wheat-sheaves are plenteous, and where the husbandman's toil is well requited, and thus, for you who honour God most, Satan will struggle very sternly. He wants to pluck God's jewels from his crown, if he can, and take the Redeemer's precious stones even from the breastplate itself. He considers, then, God's people; viewing them as hindrances to his reign, he contrives methods by which he may remove them out of his way, or turn them to his own account. Darkness would cover the earth if he could blow out the lights; there would be no fruit to shake like Lebanon, if he could destroy that handful of corn upon the top of the mountains; hence his perpetual consideration is to make the faithful fail from among men.

It needs not much wisdom to discern that *the great object of Satan in considering God's people is to do them injury*. I scarcely think he hopes to destroy the really chosen and blood-bought heirs of life. My notion is that he is too good a divine for that. He has been foiled too often when he has attacked God's people, that he can hardly think he shall be able to destroy the elect, for you remember the soothsayers who are very nearly related to him, spoke to Haman on this wise; "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him." He knows right well that there is a seed royal in the land against whom he fights in vain; and it strikes me if he could be absolutely certain that any one soul was chosen of God, he would scarcely waste his time in attempting to destroy it, although he might seek to worry and to dishonour it. It is however most likely that Satan no more knows who God's elect are than we do, for he can only judge as we do by outward actions, though he can form a more accurate judgment than we can through longer experience, and being able to see persons in private where we cannot intrude; yet into God's book of secret decrees his black eye can never peer. By their fruits he knows them, and we know them in the same manner. Since, however, *we* are often mistaken in our judgment, *he* too may be so; and it seems to me that he therefore makes it his policy to endeavour to destroy them all—not knowing in which case he may succeed. He goeth about seeking whom he *may* devour, and, as he knows not whom he may be permitted to swallow up, he attacks all the people of God with vehemence. Some one may say, "How can one devil do this?" He does not do it by himself alone. I do not know that many of us have ever been tempted directly by Satan: we may not be notable enough among men to be worth *his* trouble; but he has a whole host of inferior spirits under his supremacy and control, and as the centurion said of himself, so he might have said of Satan—"he saith to this spirit, 'Do this,' and he doeth it, and to his servant, 'Go,' and he goeth." Thus all the servants of God will more or less come under the direct or indirect assaults of the great enemy of souls, and that with a view of destroying them; for he would, if it were possible, deceive the very elect. Where he cannot destroy, there is no doubt that Satan's object is to worry. He does not like to see God's people happy. I believe the devil greatly delights in some ministers, whose tendency in their preaching is to multiply and foster doubts and fears, and grief, and despondency, as the evidences of God's people. "Ah," saith the devil, "preach on; you are doing my work well, for I like to see God's people mournful. If I can make them hang their harps on the willows, and go about with miserable faces, I reckon I have done my work very completely." My dear friends, let us watch against those specious temptations which pretend to make us humble, but which really aim at making us unbelieving. Our God takes no delight in our suspicions and mistrusts. See how he proves his love in the gift of his dear Son Jesus. Banish then all your ill surmisings, and rejoice in unmoved confidence. God delights to be worshipped with Joy. Oh come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms." "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous, and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart." "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say, rejoice." Satan does not like this. Martin Luther used to say, "Let us sing psalms and spite the devil," and I have no doubt Martin Luther was pretty nearly right; for that lover of discord hates harmonious, joyous praise. Beloved brother, the arch-enemy wants to make you wretched here, if he cannot have you hereafter; and in this, no doubt, he is aiming a blow at the honour of God. He is well aware that mournful Christians often dishonour the faithfulness of God by mistrusting it, and he thinks if he can worry us until we no more believe in the constancy and

goodness of the Lord, he shall have robbed God of his praise. "He that offereth praise, glorifieth me," says God; and so Satan lays the axe at the root of our praise, that God may cease to be glorified.

Moreover, if Satan cannot destroy a Christian, how often has he *spoilt his usefulness*? Many a believer has fallen, not to break his neck—that is impossible,—but he has broken some important bone, and he has gone limping to his grave! We can recall with grief some men once eminent in the ranks of the Church, who did run well, but on a sudden, through stress of temptation, they fell into sin, and their names were never mentioned in the Church again, except with bated breath. Everybody thought and hoped they were saved so as by fire, but certainly their former usefulness never could return. It is very easy to go back in the heavenly pilgrimage, but it is very hard to retrieve your steps. You may soon turn aside and put out your candle, but you cannot light it quite so speedily. Friend, beloved in the Lord, watch against the attacks of Satan and stand fast, because you, as a pillar in the house or God are very dear to us, and we cannot spare you. As a father, or as a matron in our midst, we do you honour, and oh—we would not be made to mourn and lament—we do not wish to be grieved by hearing the shouts of our adversaries while they cry "Aha! Aha! so would we have it," for alas! there have been many things done in our Zion which we would not have told in Gath, nor published in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised should rejoice, and the sons of the Philistines should triumph. Oh may God grant us grace, as a Church, to stand against the wiles of Satan and his attacks, that having done his worst he may gain no advantage over us, and after having considered, and considered again, and counted well our towers and bulwarks, he may be compelled to retire because his battering rams cannot jar so much as a stone from our ramparts, and his slings cannot slay one single soldier on the walls.

Before I leave this point, I should like to say, that perhaps it may be suggested, "How is it that God permits this constant and malevolent consideration of his people by the evil one?" One answer, doubtless, is, that God knows what is for his own glory, and that he giveth no account of his matters; that having permitted free agency, and having allowed, for some mysterious reason, the existence of evil, it does not seem agreeable with his having done so to destroy Satan; but he gives him power that it may be a fair hand-to-hand fight between sin and holiness, between grace and craftiness. Besides, be it remembered, that incidentally the temptations of Satan are of service to the people of God; Fenelon says they are the file which rubs off much of the rust of self-confidence, and I may add, they are the horrible sound in the sentinel's ear, which is sure to keep him awake. An experimental divine remarks, that there is no temptation in the world which is so bad as not being tempted at all; for to be tempted will tend to keep us awake: whereas, being without temptation, flesh and blood are weak—and though the spirit may be willing, yet we may be found falling into slumber. Children do not run away from their father's side when big dogs bark at them. The howlings of the devil may tend to drive us nearer to Christ, may teach us our own weakness, may keep us upon our own watch-tower, and be made the means of preservation from other ills. Let us "be sober, be vigilant, because our adversary the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour;" and let us who are in a prominent position be permitted affectionately to press upon you one earnest request, namely, "Brethren, pray for us." that, exposed as we are peculiarly to the consideration of Satan, we may be guarded by divine power. Let us be made rich by your faithful prayers that we may be kept even to the end.

II. Secondly, WHAT IS IT THAT SATAN CONSIDERS WITH A VIEW TO THE INJURY OF GOD'S PEOPLE?

It cannot be said of him as of God, that he knoweth us altogether; but since he has been now nearly six thousand years dealing with poor fallen humanity, he must have acquired a very vast experience in that time, and having been all over the earth, and having tempted the highest and the lowest, he must know exceeding well what the springs of human action are, and how to play upon them. Satan watches and considers first of all *our peculiar infirmities*. He looks us up and down, just as I have seen a horse-dealer do with a horse; and soon finds out wherein we are faulty. I, a common observer, might think the horse an exceedingly good one, as I see it running up and down the road, but the dealer sees what I cannot see, and he knows how to handle the creature just in such quarters and at such points that he soon discovers any hidden mischief. Satan knows how to look at us and reckon us up from heel to head, so that he will say of this man, "His infirmity is lust," or of that other, "He hath a quick tempter," or of this other, "He is proud," or of that other, "He is slothful." The eye of malice is very quick to perceive a weakness, and the hand of enmity soon takes advantage of it. When the arch-spy finds a weak place in the wall of our castle, he takes care to plant his battering-ram, and begin his siege. You may conceal, even from your dearest friend, your infirmity, but you will not conceal it from your worst enemy. He has lynx eyes, and detects in a moment the joint in your harness. He goes about with a match, and though you may think you have covered all the gunpowder of your heart, yet he knows how to find a crack to put his match through, and much mischief will he do, unless eternal mercy shall prevent.

He takes care also to consider *our frames and states of mind*. If the devil would attack us when our mind is in certain moods, we should be more than a match for him: he knows this, and shuns the encounter. Some men are more ready for temptation when they are distressed and desponding; the fiend will then assail them. Others will be more liable to take fire when they are jubilant and full of joy; then will he strike his spark into the tinder. Certain persons, when they are much vexed and tossed to and fro, can be made to say almost anything; and others, when their souls are like perfectly placid waters, are just then in a condition to be navigated by the devil's vessel. As the worker in metals knows that one metal is to be worked at such a heat, and another at a different temperature; as those who have to deal with chemicals know that at a certain heat one fluid will boil, while another reaches the boiling-point much earlier, so Satan knows exactly the temperature at which to work us to his purpose. Small pots boil directly they are put on the fire, and so little men of quick temper are soon in a passion; larger vessels require more time and coal before they will boil, but when they do boil, it is a boil indeed, not soon forgotten or abated. The enemy, like a fisherman, watches his fish, adapts his bait to his prey; and knows in what seasons and times the fish are most likely to bite. This hunter of so souls comes upon us unawares, and often we are overtaken in a fault and or caught in a trap through an unwatchful frame of mind. That rare collector of choice sayings, Thomas Spencer, has the following which is to the much to the point—"The chameleon, when he lies on the grass to catch flies and grasshoppers, taketh upon him the colour of the grass, as the polypus doth the colour of the rock under which he lurketh, that the fish may boldly come near him without any suspicion of danger. In like manner, Satan turneth himself into that shape which we least fear, and sets before us such objects of temptation as are most agreeable to our natures, that so he may the sooner draw us into his net; he sails with every wind, and blows us that way which we incline ourselves through the weakness of nature. Is our knowledge in matter of faith deficient? He tempts us to error. Is our conscience tender? He tempts us to scrupulosity, and too much preciseness. Hath our conscience, like the ecliptic line, some latitude? He tempts us to carnal liberty. Are we bold spirited? He tempts us to presumption. Are we timorous and distrustful?

He tempteth us to desperation. Are we of a flexible disposition? He tempteth us to inconstancy. Are we stiff? He labours to make obstinate heretics, schismatics, or rebels of us. Are we of an austere tempter? He tempteth us to cruelty. Are we soft and mild? He tempteth us to indulgence and foolish pity. Are we hot in matters of religion? He tempteth us to blind zeal and superstition. Are we cold? He tempteth us to Laodicean lukewarmness. Thus doth he lay his traps, that one way or other, he may ensnare us."

He also takes care to consider *our position among men*. There are a few persons who are most easily tempted when they are alone; they are the subjects then of great heaviness of mind, and they may be driven to most awful crimes: perhaps the most of us are more liable to sin when we are in company. In some company I never should be led into sin; into another society I could scarcely venture. Many are so full of levity, that those of us who are inclined the same way can scarcely look them in the face without feeling our besetting sin set a-going; and others are so somber, that if they meet a brother of like mould, they are pretty sure between them to invent an evil report of the goodly land. Satan knows where to overtake you in a place where you lie open to his attacks; he will pounce upon you, swoop like a bird of prey from the sky, where he has been watching for the time to make his descent with a prospect of success.

How too, will he consider *our condition in the world!* He looks at one man, and says, "That man has property: it is of no use my trying such-and-such arts with him; but here is another man who is very poor, I will catch him in that net." Then, again, he looks at the poor man, and says, "Now, I cannot tempt him to this folly, but I will lead the rich man into it." As the sportsman has a gun for wild fowl, and another for deer and game, so has Satan a different temptation for various orders of men. I do not suppose that the Queen's temptation ever will annoy Mary the kitchen-maid. I do not suppose, on the other hand, that Mary's temptation will ever be very serious to me. Probably you could escape from mine—I do not think you could; and I sometimes fancy I could bear yours—though I question if I could. Satan knows, however, just where to smite us, and our position, our capabilities, our education, our standing in society, our calling, may all be doors through which he may attack us. You who have no calling at all, are in peculiar peril—I wonder the devil does not swallow you outright. The most likely man to go to hell is the man who has nothing to do on earth. I say that seriously. I believe that there cannot happen a much worse evil to a person than to be placed where he has no work; and if I should ever be in such a state, I would get employment at once, for fear I should be carried off, body and soul, by the evil one. Idle people tempt the devil to tempt them. Let us have something to do, let us keep our minds occupied, for, if not, we make room for the devil. Industry will not make us gracious, but the want of industry may make us vicious. Have always something on the anvil or in the fire.

"In books, or work, or healthful play,
I would be busy too,
For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do."

So Watts taught us in our childhood; and so let us believe in our manhood. Books, or works, or such recreations as are necessary for health, should occupy our time; for if I throw myself down in indolence, like an old piece of iron, I must not wonder that I grow rusty with sin.

Nor have I done yet. Satan, when he makes his investigations, notices all *the objects of our affection*. I doubt not when he went round Job's house, he observed it as carefully as thieves do a jeweller's premises when they mean to break into them. They very cunningly take account of every

door, window, and fastening: they fail not to look at the next-door house; for they may have to reach the treasure through the building which adjoins it. So, when the devil went round, jotting down in his mind all Job's position, he thought to himself, "There are the camels and the oxen, the asses, and the servants—yes, I can use all these very admirably." "Then," he thought, "there are the three daughters! There are the ten sons, and they go feasting—I shall know where to catch them, and if I can just blow the house down when they are feasting, that will afflict the father's mind the more severely, for he will say 'O that they had died when they had been praying, rather than when they had been feasting and drinking wine.' I will put down too in the inventory," says the devil I shall want her," and accordingly it came to that. Nobody could have done what Job's wife did—none of the servants could have said that sad sentence so stingingly—or, if she meant it very kindly, none could have said it with such a fascinating air as Job's own wife, "Bless God and die," as it may be read, or "Curse God and die." Ah, Satan, thou hast ploughed with Job's heifer, but thou hast not succeeded; Job's strength lies in his God, not in his hair, or else thou mightest have shorn him as Samson was shorn! Perhaps the evil one had even inspected Job's personal sensibilities, and so selected that form of bodily affliction which he knew to be most dreaded by his victim. He brought upon him a disease which Job may have seen and shuddered at in poor men outside the city gates. Brethren, Satan knows quite as much in regard to you. You have a child, and Satan knows that you idolize it. "Ah," says he, "there is a place for my wounding him." Even the partner of your bosom may be made a quiver in which hell's arrows shall be stored till the time may come, and then she may prove the bow from which Satan will shoot them. Watch even your neighbour and her that lieth in your bosom, for you know not how Satan may get an advantage over you. Our habits, our joys, our sorrows, our retirements, our public positions, all may be made weapons of attack by this desperate foe of the Lord's people. We have snares everywhere; in our bed and at our table, in our house and in the street. There are gins and trap-falls in company; there are pits when we are alone. We may find temptations in the house of God as well as in the world; traps in our high estate, and deadly poisons in our abasement. We must not expect to be rid of temptations till we have crossed the Jordan, and then, thank God, we are beyond gunshot of the enemy. The last howling of the dog of hell will be heard as we descend into the chill waters of the black stream, but when we hear the hallelujah of the glorified, we shall have done with the black prince for ever and ever.

III. Satan considered, but THERE WAS A HIGHER CONSIDERATION WHICH OVERRODE HIS CONSIDERATION.

In times of war, the sappers and miners of one party will make a mine, and it is a very common counteractive for the sappers and miners of the other party to countermine by undermining the first mine. This is just what God does with Satan. Satan is mining, and he thinks to light the fuse and to blow up God's building, but all the while God is undermining him, and he blows up Satan's mine before he can do any mischief. The devil is the greatest of all fools. He has more knowledge but less wisdom than any other creature, he is more subtle than all the beasts of the field, but it is well called *subtlety*, not wisdom. It is not true wisdom; it is only another shape of folly. All the while that Satan was tempting Job, he little knew that he was answering God's purpose, for God was looking on and considering the whole of it, and holding the enemy as a man holds a horse by its bridle. *The Lord had considered exactly how far he would let Satan go.* He did not the first time permit him to touch his flesh—perhaps that was more than Job at that time could have borne. Have you never noticed that if you are in good strong bodily health you can bear losses and crosses, and

even bereavements with something like equanimity? Now that was the case with Job. Perhaps if the disease had come first and the rest had followed, it might have been a temptation too heavy for him, but God who knows just how far to let the enemy go, will say to him, "Thus far, and no farther." By degrees he became accustomed to his poverty; in fact, the trial had lost all its sting the moment Job said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." That enemy was slain—nay it was buried and this was the funeral oration, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." When the second trial came, the first trial had qualified Job to bear the second. It may be a more severe trial for a man in the possession of great worldly wealth suddenly to be deprived of the bodily power of enjoying it, than to lose all first, and then lose the health necessary to its enjoyment. Having already lost all, he might almost say, "I thank God that now I have nothing to enjoy, and therefore the loss of the power to enjoy it is not so wearisome. I have not to say, "How I wish I could go out in my fields, and see to my servants, for they are all dead. I do not wish to see my children—they are all dead and gone—I am thankful that they are; better so, than that they should see their poor father sit on a dunghill like this." He might have been almost glad if his wife had gone too, for certainly she was not a very particular mercy when she was spared; and possibly, if he had all his children about him, it might have been a harder trial than it was. The Lord who weighs mountains in scales, had meted out his servant's woe.

Did not the Lord also consider *how he should sustain his servant under his trial*? Beloved, you do not know how blessedly our God poured the secret oil upon Job's fire of grace while the devil was throwing buckets of water on it. He saith to himself, "If Satan shall do much, I will do more; if he takes away much, I will give more; if he tempts the man to curse, I will fill him so full of love to me that he shall bless me. I will help him; I will strengthen him; yea, I will uphold him with the right hand of my righteousness." Christian, take those two thoughts and put them under your tongue as a wafer made with honey—you will never be tempted without express license from the throne where Jesus pleads, and, on the other hand, when he permits it, he will with the temptation make a way of escape, or give you grace to stand under it.

In the next place, the Lord considered *how to sanctify Job by this trial*. Job was a much better man at the end of the story than he was at the beginning. He was "an incredible disgrace upon Satan. If you want perfect and an upright man" at first, but there was a little pride about him. We are poor creatures to criticize such a man as Job—but still there was in him just a sprinkling of self-righteousness. I think, and his friends brought it out, Eliphaz and Zophar said such irritating things that poor Job could not help replying in strong terms about himself that were rather too strong, one thinks; there was a little too much self-justification. He was not proud as some of us are, of a very little—he had much to be proud of, as the world would allow—but yet there was the tendency to be exalted with it; and though the devil did not know it, perhaps if he had left Job alone, that pride might have run to seed, and Job might have sinned; but he was in such a hurry, that he would not let the ill seed ripen, but hastened to cut it up, and so was the Lord's tool to bring Job into a more humble, and consequently a more safe and blessed state of mind. Moreover, observe how Satan was a lacquey to the Almighty! Job all this while was being *enabled to earn a greater reward*. All his prosperity is not enough; God loves Job so much, that he intends to give him twice the property; he intends to give him his children again; he means to make him a more famous man than ever; a man whose name shall ring down the ages; a man who shall be talked of through all generations. He is not to be the man of Uz, but of the whole world. He is not to be heard of by a handful in one neighbourhood, but all men are to hear of Job's patience in the hour of trial. Who

is to do this? Who is to fashion the trump of fame through which Job's name is to be blown? The devil goes to the forge, and works away with all his might, to make Job illustrious! Foolish devil! he is piling up a pedestal on which God will set his servant Job, that he may be looked upon with wonder by all ages.

To conclude, *Job's afflictions and Job's patience have been a lasting blessing to the Church of God, and they have inflicted incredible disgrace upon Satan.* If you want to make the devil angry, throw the story of Job in his teeth. If you desire to have your own confidence sustained, may God the Holy Ghost lead you into the patience of Job. Oh! how many saints have been comforted in their distress by this history of patience! How many have been saved out of the jaw of the lion, and from the paw of the bear by the dark experiences of the patriarch of Uz. Oh arch fiend, how art thou taken in thine own net! Thou hast thrown a stone which has fallen on thine own head. Thou madest a pit for Job, and hast fallen into it thyself; thou art taken in thine own craftiness. Jehovah has made fools of the wise and driven the diviners mad. Brethren, let us commit ourselves in faith to the care and keeping of God—come poverty, come sickness, come death, we will in all things through Jesus Christ's blood be conquerors, and by the power of his Spirit we shall overcome at the last. I would God we were all trusting in Jesus. May those who have not trusted him be led to begin this very morning, and God shall have all the praise in us all, evermore. Amen.

NOTE.—At the request of several subscribers, we intend in future to mention the passage of Scripture read at the service, or some other more suitable to be read with the sermon.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Job 1 & 2:1-10.

Are You Prepared To Die?

A Sermon

(No. 635)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”—Jeremiah 12:5.

CANAAN MAY BE CONSIDERED as a type of two states or conditions in the Christian's life. It was the land of rest to the children of Israel after a weary pilgrimage in the wilderness. Now it is written that “we who believe do enter into rest.” A true Christian possessed of strong faith will not have a wilderness state on earth so much as a land flowing with milk and honey, because his faith will give him the substance of things hoped for, and be the evidence of things not seen. Many disciples live a life of depression, wretchedness, and discomfort, which would be completely changed if they had faith in God, and lived a higher life of devotedness and love. Canaan may be fairly considered as a type of that better state of Christianity which some enjoy. It is not altogether free from ills; the Canaanite dwells in the land, and there are wars and fightings still; but there is rest, and there is the spirit of service developing itself in the cultivation of the promised land. But Canaan is generally used to shadow forth “the rest which remaineth for the people of God” beyond the skies. Heaven is thus frequently described as corresponding to the earthly inheritance of the Jews. It is our hope, the end of our pilgrimage. It contains our Jerusalem, and the temple, “not made with hands.” When this is the view taken of the type, then Jordan is not unnaturally likened unto death. Its dark waters are made to picture forth to our minds the chill stream through which we wade in the dying hour. It is a beautiful emblem, and we have all doubtless sung Dr. Watt's hymn with much feeling—

“There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.”
There everlasting spring abides,
And never-withering flowers;
Death, like a narrow sea, divides
This heavenly land from ours.”

Taking “the swelling of Jordan” to represent the precise time of death, the question really is, what shall we do when we come to die? “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?”

I. We notice, in the first place, that this is an EXCEEDINGLY PRACTICAL QUESTION.

How wilt thou *do*? Is the enquiry. There are some subjects which are more or less matters of pure faith and personal feeling; and though all Christian doctrines bear more or less directly upon the Christian life, yet they are not what is commonly meant by practical subjects. Our text, however, brings us face to face with a matter which is essentially a matter of doing and of acting; it asks how we mean to conduct ourselves in the hour of death. We sometimes hear the remark made by those who object to doctrinal preaching, that we are too speculative, and utter our own opinions, which

feed men's fancies, but do not regulate life. Now we believe that every promise leads to a precept, and every doctrine has its duty; so we will not admit the justice of the insinuation even if we did preach doctrine entirely to the exclusion of the commandments, which we emphatically deny; but here we have at any rate a topic practical enough, I am only afraid it will be a little too much so for some; thy will turn it into a sentiment and a feeling, and not act upon it so as to put it into practice, and exemplify its power in after days. Christians may differ from men on some points, but I am sure that here we are united in belief—we must die, and ought not to die unprepared. There is a divergence of opinion as to what we ought to do at the commencement of Christian life; I maintain that we ought to follow Christ, and be immersed in water, “for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness;” others oppose that as being unnecessary, inexpedient, or what not; we differ at the beginning of lie, but we agree in the end; we must die; and we all want to die the death of the righteous, and to have our last end like his.

II. We notice, in the second place, that is UNDOUBTEDLY A PERSONAL QUESTION.

How wilt *thou* do? It individualizes us, and makes us each one to come face to face with a dying hour. Now we all *need* this, and it will be well for each one of us to look for a minute into the grave. We are too apt to regard all men as mortal but ourselves. Somehow we can see frailty of life, as well as all the other frailties which we possess in common, much more clearly in other people than we can ourselves. We are blind to our own weakness far too much, and shall do well to ask ourselves, each of us, “My soul, how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” The ancient warrior who wept because before a hundred years were passed, he knew his immense army would be gone, and not a man remains behind to tell the tale, would have been wiser, if he had wept also for himself, and left alone his bloody wars, and lived as a man who must be one day die, and find after death a day of judgment. Each one of you must die. If I were addressing an assembly of the sages of the world, I should say, “All your combined wisdom cannot lengthen out the days of one of you even a single minute. You may reckon the distance of the stars, and weigh worlds, but you cannot tell me when one of you will die, nor how many grains of sand are left behind in the hourglass of time, which shows the exit of each spirit from the world.” I say now to you the wisest of you must die; and you know not but that you may die ere long. So with the mightiest, and the richest of men. Samson was mastered by a stronger than man, and the wealthiest of man cannot bribe death to stay his dart for a single hour. We all come into the world one by one, and will go out of it also alone. Loved ones come to the brink of the dark stream, but there they shake hands and say “farewell,” and we go on alone. The prophet's companion and successor followed his master until the fiery chariot came to take his leader away; but when the messengers of God came, they left the servant behind, vainly crying, “My father, My father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.” We had better therefore take the question up as individuals, seeing that it is one in which we shall be dealt with singly, and be unable then to claim or use the help of an earthly friend. I put to the young, to the old; to the rich, to the poor; to each one of this vast assembly—I put it, as if we were alone before God—“How wilt *thou* do in the swelling of Jordan?”

III. As a third thought, we call attention to the fact that it is one of the MOST SOLEMN questions.

Death and life are stern and awful realities. To say that anything “is a matter of life and death” is to bring one of the most emphatic and solemn subjects under our notice. Now, the question we are considering this morning is of this character, and we must deal with it as it becomes us, when we investigate a subject involving the everlasting interest of souls. The question is of infinite

importance to all, but there are some whose case is manifestly such, that they need to gird up the loins of their minds and address themselves to its consideration, with intensest thought and care. Let me call attention to one or two cases, for while I wish to stir up all, I am bidden to have especial compassion on some, making a difference, so that I may pluck them as brands out of the fire. I have been curious enough to think that I should like to ask that question of a Jew, of one who rejects Christ as the Messiah. "How wilt *thou* do in the swelling of Jordan?" According to the law, and it is that under which every Jew is born, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." Now there never was, and never will be any man who did, or could "continue in all things written in the book of the law to do them," and consequently every man becomes accursed; and it must be a dreadful thing for a man to think of dying under the curse and ban of his own religious faith; and yet every Jew is so, cursed by his own book of law, accursed for ever. What comfort will that yield him when he comes to the swelling of Jordan. I have thought too, that I should like to ask the atheist, the unbeliever, this question, "How wilt *thou* do in the swelling of Jordan?" He tells me, perhaps. That he believes in annihilation: he will want comfort when he is lying upon that weary bed; will he get it out of that well? The dreary blank of total destruction, of ceasing to be; is there anything to help a spirit when it lies where it most wants consolation, tossing to and fro in pain and weakness? I think not. I should like also to put the question to a Roman Catholic; for how will *he* do "in the swelling of Jordan?" Some time ago you will remember a Prince of the Catholic Church departed: where did he go? I am not versed in such matters, and should not like to judge anybody's soul, but on the coffin of the Cardinal we find a request that we would pray for his soul, and there have been masses said for its repose. It is evident, therefore, that the Cardinal's soul went somewhere, where it wants praying for, and to some place where it is not in repose. Now if this is to be the lot of a Cardinal Archbishop, there is but a poor lookout for an ordinary professor of the same faith; if a *prince* in the Church dies, and goes not to heaven as we have been hoping, not to eternal rest, but to a place where he needs our intercession, and where he has no repose for his soul, why then it must be dreadful work to die with such a creed as that. I would sooner have beneath my head the most prickly thornbush, than have that for my dying pillow. Oh, we want something better than this, a hope more rapturous, more divine, more full of immortality than the certainty of going to a place where there is no repose, and where our souls need the prayers of sinful men on earth. But I do not know that we have very much to do with any of these, they must "gang their own gait", they must go their own way; and if they be found wrong at the last, we are so sorry that it should be so, but *our own* business is certainly the first matter in hand. Therefore, forgetting them, let the question come to each of us, "How wilt *thou* do in the swelling of Jordan?"

IV. Remember, in the fourth place, that his question was put by way of REBUKE to the prophet Jeremiah.

He seems to have been a little afraid of the people among whom he dwelt. They had evidently persecuted him very much, mocked at him, and laughed him to scorn; but God tells him to make his face like flint, and not to care for them, for, says he, "If thou art afraid of them," How wilt thou do in the swelling of the Jordan?" This ought to be a rebuke to every Christian who is subject to the fear of man. I do not believe that any preacher will be long in his pulpit without having the temptation to be afraid of some man or another, and if he doth not stand very firmly upon his integrity he will find some of the best of his friends getting the upper hand with him. And this will never do with God's minister. He must deal out God's Word impartially to rich or poor, to good

or bad; and he must determine to have no master except his Master who is in heaven; no bit nor bridle for his mouth, except that of prudence and discretion, which God himself shall put there. For if we are afraid of a man that shall die, and the son of man is crushed before the moth, how fearful shall we be when we have to talk with the grim king of terrors! If we are afraid of puny man, how shall we be able to face it out before the dread ordeal of the day of judgment? Yet I know some Christians that are very much abashed by the world's opinion, by the opinion of their family circle, or of the workshop. Now what does it matter after all? There is an old proverb, that "he is a great fool that is laughed out of his coat;" and there was an improvement on it, that "he was a greater fool who was laughed out of his skin;" and there is another, that "he is the greatest fool of all who is laughed out of his sou." He will be content to be damned in order to be fashionable, pays dear indeed for what he gets. Oh, to dare to be singular, if to be singular is to be right; but if you are afraid of man, what will you do in the swelling of Jordan? The same rebuke might be applied to us when we get fretful under the little troubles of life. You have losses in business, vexations in the family—you have all crosses to carry—but my text comes to you, and it says, "If you cannot bear this, how will you do in the swelling of Jordan? If your religion is not equal to the ordinary emergencies of common days, what will you do when you get to that extraordinary day, which will be to you the most important day of your being?" Come friends, be not bowed down with these things, bear them cheerfully, since there is much sterner work to do than any that you have met with in the battle of life. And the same reproof might come to us when we get petulant under pains of body, for there are some of us, who as soon as ever we get a little unwell, become so fretful, that those like us best who are farthest from us; we can scarcely have a little depression of spirit, but straightway we are ready to give up all for lost, and like Jonah say, "We do well to be angry even unto death." Now this ought not to be. We should quit ourselves like men, and not be perturbed with these little rivulets; for if these sweep us away, what shall we do when Jordan is swollen to the brim, and we have to pass through that? When one of the martyrs, whose name is the somewhat singular one of Pommily, was confined previous to his burning, his wife was also taken up upon the charge of heresy. She, good woman, has revolved to die with her husband, and she appeared, as far as most people could judge, to be very firm in her faith. But the jailer's wife, though she had no religion, took a merciful view of the case as far as she could do so, and thought, "I am afraid this woman will never stand the test, she will never burn with her husband, she has neither faith nor strength enough to endure the trial;" and therefore, one day calling her out from her cell, she said to her, "Lass, run to the garden and fetch me the key that lies there." The poor woman ran willingly enough; she took the key up and it burned her fingers, for the jailer's wife had made it red hot; she came running back crying with pain. "Ay, wench," said she, "if you cannot bear a little burn in your hand, how will you bear to be burned in your whole body;" and this, I am sorry to add, was the means of bringing her to recant the faith which she professed, but which never had been in her heart. I apply the story thus: If we cannot bear the little trifling pangs which come upon us in our ordinary circumstances, which are but as it were the burning of your hands, what shall we do when every pulse beats pain, and every throb is an agony, and the whole tenement begins to crumble about the spirit that is so soon to be disturbed? Come, let us pluck up courage! We have to fight the giant yet! Let us not be afraid of these dwarfs! Let the ordinary trials of every day be laughed to scorn! In the strength of divine grace, let us sing with our poet,

"Weak as I am, yet through thy strength,

I all things can perform."

For it we cannot bear these, how will we do in the swelling of Jordan? This is what the text was ordinarily meant to teach. We will now use it for a further purpose.

V. The question may be put as A MATTER OF CAUTION.

In this assembly, there are some who have no hope, no faith in Christ. Now I think, if they will look within at their own experience, they will find that already they are by no means completely at ease. The pleasure of this world are very sweet; but how soon they cloy, if they do not sicken the appetite. After the night of merriment there is often the morning of regret. "Who hath woe? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine." It is an almost universal confession that the joys of earth promise more than they perform, and that in looking back upon them, the wisest must confess with Solomon, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Now if these things seem to be vanity while you are in good bodily health, how will they look when you are in sickness? If vanity while you can enjoy them, what will they appear when you must say farewell to them all? If it was vanity to the rich man while he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, what greater vanity it must have been when it was said, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" How wilt thou do in Jordan when these joys shall vanish, and there shall be a dreary blank before thee? Moreover, you feel already that conscience pricks you. You cannot live without God and be perfectly easy, unless you are one of those few who are given up to judicial blindness and hardness of heart. You could not take an hour quietly to think about yourself and your state, and yet go to your bed easily. You know right well that the only way some of you can keep up peace of mind at all, is by going from one gay assembly to another, and from one party of frolic to another, or else from business to business, and from care to care. Your poor soul, like the infant which is to be cast into Moloch's arms, cries, and you do not hear its cries, because you drown it with the noisy drums of this world's pleasures and cares; but still you are not at rest; there is a worm in your fair fruit, there are dregs at the bottom of your sweetest cups, and you know it. Now, if even now you are not perfectly at peace; if in this land of peace wherein you have trusted you are getting weary of these things, then "how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Moreover, you sometimes have, if I mistake not, very strange apprehensions. I have known some of the most reckless sinners who have had fearful times, when nobody could cheer them; when a certain fearful looking for of judgment has haunted them. The most superstitious people in the world are those who are the most profane. It is a strange thing that there is always that weak point about those who seem to be most hardened. But you that are not thus hardened, you know that you dare not look forward to death with any pleasure—you cannot; to go to the grave is never ver joyous work with you. Ay, and if you were certain that there could be no more death, it would be the best news that you have ever heard; whereas to some of us it would be the worst that could ever come. Ah, well! if the very thought of death is bitter, what will the reality be? And if to gaze at it from a distance is too hard a thing for your mind, what will it be to know that the poison is rankling in your veins? What will you do? "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Well, I shall not describe what you will do, though I have seen it, and you must have been dosed with the laudanum of self-confidence. At other times the man is awaked, and see the dreadful doom to which death is driving him, and starts back and shrinks from the wrath to come, and cries and shrieks, and perhaps swears that he will not die; and yet die he must, dragged down to that place where he must lift up his eyes to see nothing that can give him hope—nothing that can take away the sharpness of his anguish. I leave that point. God make it a caution to many now present. Some of you men and women here may be nearer

death than you dream of. I would you would answer the question, "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

VI. But now I intend to use the question as EXCITING MEDITATION in the breasts of those who have given their hearts to Christ, and who consequently are prepared to die whenever the summons may come. Well, what do we mean to do, how shall we behave ourselves when we come to die? I sat down to try and think this matter over, but I cannot, in the short time allotted to me, even give you a brief view of the thoughts that passed through my mind. I began thus, "how shall I do in the swelling of Jordan?" Well, as a believer in Christ, perhaps, I may never come there at all, for there are some that will be alive and remain at the coming of the Son of Man, and these will never die. For so says the Apostle: "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and the last trump." This thought we wish to keep ever before us. My real hope is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I would far rather see the Master return than see the messenger Death. I regulate my life as one who is looking for and hastening unto the coming of The Son of Man. I will not pay more attention to the servant than to the Lord of all. "Come, Lord Jesus! yea, come quickly," is the prayer of our hearts continually; and as the bride of Christ, we ought to have our hearts filled with rapture at the thought of his return to claim us as his own. If he send for us, "It is well;" but best of a if he come himself again the second time without sin unto salvation. A sweet truth, which we place first in our meditation, I may not sleep, but I must and shall be changed. Then I thought again, "How shall I do in the swelling of Jordan?" I may go through it in the twinkling of an eye. Remember that good man, who some time ago was getting ready to preach as usual, but the sermon was never delivered on earth, I mean the President of the Wesleyan Conference; how speedily was he taken to his rest; and how happy it is just to close one's eyes on earth, and open them in heaven. Such also was the death of one of God's aged servants, Mr. Alleine, who had battled well for the truth. He was suddenly taken ill, and was advised to retire to bed. "No," said he, "but I will die in my chair, and I am not afraid to die." He sat down, and only had time to say, "My life is hid with Christ in God," and he closed his eyes with his own hands and fell on sleep. When Ananias, a martyr knelt to lay his white head upon the block, it was said to him as he closed his eyes to receive the stroke, "Shut thine eyes a little, old man, and immediately thou shalt see the light of God." I could envy such a clam departing. Sudden death, sudden glory; taken away in Elijah's chariot of fire, with the horses driven at the rate of lightning, so that the spirit scarcely knows that it has left the clay, before it sees the brightness of the beatific vision. Well, that may take away some of the alarm of death, the thought that we may not be even a moment in the swelling of Jordan. Then again, I thought, if I must pass through the swelling of Jordan, yet the real act of death takes no time. We hear of suffering on a dying bed; the suffering is all connected with life, it is not death. The actual thing called death, as far as we know of, does not cost a pang; it is the life that is in us, that makes us suffer, but death gives one kind pin's-prick, and it is all over. Moreover, if I pass through the swelling of Jordan, I may do so without suffering any pain. A dying bed is sometimes very painful; with certain diseases, and especially with strong men, it is often hard for the body and soul to part asunder. But it has been my happy lot to see some deaths so extremely pleasing, that I could not help remarking, that it were worth while living, only for the sake of dying as some have died. We have seen consumption for instance; how gently it takes down the frame very often; how quietly the soul departs; and in old age, and debility, how easily the spirit seems to get away from the cage that was broken, which only needed one blow, and the imprisoned bird flies straight away to its eternal resting-place.

Well, then, as I cannot tell in what physical state I may be when I come to die, I just tried to think again, how shall I do in the swelling of Jordan? I hope I shall do as others have done before me, who have built on the same rock, and had the same promises to be their succour. They cried, "Victory!" So shall I, and after that die quietly and in peace. If the same transporting scene may not be mine, I will at least lay my head upon my Saviour's bosom, and breathe my life out gently there. You have a right, Christian, to expect that as other Christians die so shall you. How will you die? Why, you will die as your sainted mother did; you will die as your father did; when the time came for the "silver cord to be loosed and the golden bowl to be broken, for the pitcher to be broken at the fountain and the wheel broken at the cistern," the pitcher was broken and the cord loosed, and their spirits went to God who gave them. How will you die? Why, as I mused on this I took down my little book of "Promises," for I thought, I shall certainly do as God says I shall. Well, how is that? "When thou passest through the rivers I will be with thee." And again, "Though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." And again, "He shall swallow up death in victory." And again, "he shall make all thy bed in they sickness;" and yet again, "Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God' I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." You know what a many dying pillows God has made for his dear people in the hour of their departure. "How shall I do in the swelling of Jordan?" Why, do manfully, do patiently, if God shall keep his promise as we know he will.

Now let me speak to you all again—I mean you that are in Christ. "How will you do in the swelling of Jordan?" Why, you will do as a man does who has had a long day's walk, and he can see his home. You will clap your hands. You will sit down upon the next milestone with the tears in your eyes, and wipe the sweat from your face and say, "It is well, it is over. Oh how happy it is to see my own roof-tree, and the place where my best friends, my kindred dwell. I shall soon be at home—at home forever with the Lord." How will you do? Why we will do as a soldier does when the battle is fought; he takes off his armor, stretches himself out at length to rest. The battle is all over. He forgets his wound, and reckons up the glory of the victory and the reward which follows. So will we do. We will begin to forget the wounds, and the garments rolled in blood, and we will think of the "crown of life that fadeth not away." How will we do in the swelling of Jordan? We will do as men do when they launch for a foreign country. They look back upon those they leave behind, and wave their handkerchiefs as long as they can get sight of them; but they are soon gone. And we will bid adieu to dear ones; they shall have the tears, but we shall have the joy, for we go to the islands of the blest, the land of the hereafter, the home of the sanctified, to dwell with God for ages. Who will weep when he starts on such a voyage, and launches on such a blessed sea! What will we do when we come into the swelling of the Jordan? Why me thinks, dear friends, we shall then begin to see through the veil, and to enjoy the paradise of the blessed which is our forever. We will make that dying bed a throne, and we will sit and reign there with Christ Jesus. We will think of that river Jordan as being one tributary of the river of life, which flows at the foot of the jasper throne of the Most High. We will live in the land of Beulah on the edge of the Jordan, with our feet in the cold stream, singing of the better land. We will hear the songs of angels, as celestial breezes bring them across the narrow stream. And sometimes we will have in our bosom some of the spices from the Mountains of Myrrh, which Christ shall give us across the river. And when we come to die, what will we do in the swelling of the Jordan? Why we will try and bear our dying testimony.

"My joyful soul on Jordan's shore,

Shall rise one Ebenezer more.”

Oh, that was a grand thing when Joshua said to the twelve men, “Take up twelve stones, and set them down in the midst of Jordan where the priest’s feet stood still, and take up twelve other stones and set them up on the other side of the Jordan, when the children of Israel first trod the promised shore.” You and I will do this, we will leave twelve stones in the midst of Jordan. They shall tell our friends and kindred here of the good works we said, the adieux we gave them, and the joyful hopes which cheered us, the song we sang when death began to stay our throat. And then we will raise another Ebenezer in heaven. There shall by twelve stones there that will tell the angels and the principalities, of the love which cleft the Jordan, and brought us through it as on dry land. This is how we will do in the swelling of the Jordan. We are not looking forward to death with any fear, with any dread. When we get home tonight, we shall begin to take off our garments one by one. We shall not shed a tear. Nor shall we when we come to die.

“Since Jesus is mine, I will not fear undressing,
But gladly put off these garments of clay;
To die in the Lord is a comfort and blessing,
Since Jesus to glory thro’ death led the way.”

This is how we shall do in the swelling of the Jordan. Take off our garments to put on celestial robes. As the bridegroom longeth for the marriage day, and as the bride waiteth until she is joined unto her husband in wedlock, even so our spirits wait for God. As the exile panteth to be delivered, and the galley-slave to be separated from his oar, so wait we to be set free for glory and immortality. As she that mourns her absent lord pines for his return, as the child longeth to reach his father’s house and to see his father’s face, so do we.

“My heart is with him on his throne,
And ill can brook delay,
Each moment listening for his voice,
'Make haste and come away.'”

I must finish, for time has gone. But I meant to have said a word or two by way of *warning*. I can only do so now briefly, abridging them and compressing the thoughts as tightly as I can. “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” may be well used by way of warning. I think, dear friends, you ought to ask yourselves one question. Some of you never think of dying, and yet you should. You say you may live long: you may, and you may not. If there were a great number of loaves upon this table, and you were to eat one every day; if you were told that one of those loaves had poison in it, I think you would begin every one with great caution; and knowing that one of them would be your death, you would take each up with silent dread. No you have so many days, and in one of those days there is the poison death. I do not know which one. It may be tomorrow; it may not be until many a day has gone. But I think you ought to handle all your days with holy jealousy. Is not that a fair parable? If it be, then let me ask you to think upon the question, “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” You grant that you will die, and you may die soon. Is not foolish to be living in this world without a thought of what you will do last? A man goes into an inn, and as soon as he sits down he begins to order his wine, his dinner, his bed; there is no delicacy in season which he forgets to bespeak, there is no luxury which he denies himself. He stops at the inn for some time. By-and-by there comes in a bill, and he says, “Oh, I never thought of that—I never thought of that!” “Why,” says the landlord, “here is a man who is either a born fool or else a knave. What! Never thought of the reckoning—never thought of settling-day!” And yet this how some of you live. You

have this, and that, and the other thing in the world's inn (for it is nothing but an inn), and you have soon to go your own way, and yet you have never thought of settling-day! "Well, says one, "I was casting up my accounts this morning." Yes, I remember a minister making this remark when he heard of one that cast up his accounts on Sunday. He said, "I hope that is not true sir." "Yes," he said, "I do cast up my accounts on Sunday." "Ah, well," he said, "the day of judgment will be spent in a similar manner—in casting up accounts, and it will go ill with those people who found no other time in which to serve themselves except the time which was given them that they serve God." You have either been a dishonest man, or else you must be supremely foolish, to be spending every day in this world's inn, and yet to be ignoring the thought of the great day of account. But remember, though you forget it, God forgets not. Every day is adding to the score. Photographed in heaven is every action that you perform. Your very thoughts are photographed upon the eternal mind; and in the day when the book shall be opened it will go ill with you. Perhaps you will say, as one did in the Book of Kings, "Well, I was busy here and there", "I was looking after my family and my property; I was looking after politics; I was seeing after such-and-such an investment; and my soul is gone." Yes but that would not bring it back again. And what shall it profit you, though you gain the whole world and lose your own soul. It is no business of mine what becomes of you, except this, that I do desire so to talk with you at all times, that if you perish it may be laid at my door. What would you say to that soldier who should be told by his commanding officer to fight with the foe on the field of battle, and the so-called soldier were to reply, "I don't know anything about battle or fighting; I never thought of the battle field, I can do anything but fight!" The general would be sorely amazed. He would want to know what the soldier lived for, if it were not to fight and defend his country in the hour of his country's need. What do we live for, if it is not to prepare for a hereafter life, and for the day for which all days were made? What, are we sent into this world and told that we are to "prepare to meet our God," and we do everything else but the one thing: this will not be wise; and when the Lord of the whole earth shall come out of his place to judge the sons of men, bitterly shall we rue our folly. Be wise now, remember this, and consider your latter end. What words shall I use to urge you to consider the subject and take my warning. Is heaven a place you would like to enter? Is hell a place you would like to avoid, or will you make your bed in it forever? Are you in love with eternal misery that you run to it so madly? Oh, stop; turn ye! Turn ye! Why will ye die? I do pray you stop and consider. Consideration does no man harm. Second thoughts here are for the best. Think and think, and think again, and oh, may God lead you, through thinking to feel you danger, and may you then accept that gracious remedy which is in Christ Jesus; for whosoever believeth in him is not condemned, whosoever trusts in Christ is saved. Sin is forgiven, the soul is accepted, the spirit is blessed the moment if trusts the Saviour.

Before I close the subject, I must guide your thoughts to what is the true preparation for death. Three things present themselves to my mind as being our duty in connection with the dying hour. First seek to be washed in the Red Sea of the dear Redeemer's blood, come in contact with the death of Christ, and by faith in it you will be prepared to meet your own. Without giving an opinion upon the merit of that system of medicine which professes to cure diseases by producing an effect upon the system akin to the original malady, or as they put it, "like curing like," we recommend it in spiritual things; come into union with Christ's death, and that will take away the evil and sting of your own. Be buried with him in baptism unto death, and have part with him in the reality symbolized in that blest ordinance, and you will not dread Jordan's swellings, if in the full tide of the Redeemer's blood has rolled over you, so that you are washed and clean. If guilt be on your

conscience, it will be as a millstone round your neck and you will sink to endless woe; but if the love of Jesus be in your heart, it will buoy up your head and keep you safe, so that although heart and flesh fail you, you will have God to be the strength of your heart and your portion for ever. Again, learn of the Apostle Paul to “die daily.” Practise the duty of self-denial and mortifying of the flesh till it shall become a habit with you, and when you have to lay down the flesh and part with everything, you will be only continuing the course of life you have pursued all alone. No wonder if dying should prove hard work if you are completely unused to it in thought and expectation. If death comes to me as a stranger, I may be startled, but if I have prepared myself to receive him, he may come and knock at my door and I shall say, “I am ready to go with you, for I have been expecting you all my life.” How beautiful this expression of the Apostle, “I am ready to be offered up and the time of my departure is at hand.” He was waiting for death as for a friend, and when it came, I am sure he was well pleased to go. He tells us he had “a desire to depart and to be with Christ which is far better.” Even so may we learn to look at the time when we shall hear the summons, “Come up higher,” as to a time to be longer for rather than dreaded. Learn to submit you will to God’s will daily. Learn to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross, so that when the last conflict comes it may find you able by the grace of God to bear the brunt of the final contest with unflinching courage. And as the last preparation of the end of life, I should advise a continual course of active service and obedience to the command of God. I have frequently thought that no happier place to die in could be found than one’s post of duty. If I were a soldier, I think I should like to die as Wolfe died, with victory shouting in my ear, or as Nelson died in the midst of his greatest success. Preparation for death does not mean going alone into the chamber and retiring from the world, but active service, “doing the duty of the day in the day.” The best preparation for sleep, the healthiest soporific, is hard work, and one of the best things to prepare us for sleeping in Jesus, is to live in him an active life of going about doing good. The attitude in which I wish death to find me is, with light trimmed, and loins girt, waiting and watching; at work, doing my allotted task, and multiplying my talent for the master’s glory. Idlers may not anticipate rest, but workers will not be unwilling to welcome the hour which shall hear the words, “It is finished.” Keep your eye upon the recompense of the reward. Lay up treasures in heaven, and thus will you be ready to cross the stream and enter the loved land, whither heart and treasure have gone beforehand, to prepare the way. Washed in the blood of Christ, accustomed to submit to whatever God wills, and to find our pleasure in doing his will on earth as we hope to do it in heaven, joined to a life of holy service, and I am persuaded that we shall be prepared with one of old to say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,” and with him, calmly and joyfully to anticipate the crown which fadeth not away. God bring you to this point, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Corinthians 5.

Confession Of Sin Illustrated by the Cases of Dr. Pritchard and Constance Kent

A Sermon

(No. 641)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, July 23rd, 1865, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”—Psalm 32:5.

DAVID’S grief for sin was long and terrible. Its effects were visible upon his outward frame; “his bones waxed old;” “his moisture was turned into the drought of summer.” No remedy could he find, until he made a full confession before the throne of the heavenly grace. He tells us, that for a time he kept silence, and then his heart became more and more filled with grief: like some mountain tarn whose outlet is blocked up, his soul was swollen with torrents of sorrow. He dreaded to confront his sin. He fashioned excuses; he endeavoured to divert his thoughts, by giving his mind to the cares of his kingdom or the pleasures of his court, but it was all to no purpose; the rankling arrow made the wound bleed anew, and made the gash more wide and deep every day. Like a festering sore his anguish gathered and increased, and as he would not use the lancet of confession, his spirits became more and more full of torment, and there was no rest in his bones because of sin. At last it came to this, that he must return unto his God in humble penitence, or he must die outright; so he hastened to the mercy-seat, and there unrolled the volume of his iniquities before the eye of the all-seeing One, acknowledging all the evil of his ways in language such as you read in the fifty-first and other penitential Psalms. Having done this, a work so simple and yet so difficult to pride, he received at once the token of divine forgiveness; the bones which had been broken were made to rejoice, and he came forth from his closet to sing the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.

See, dear friends, the value of a truthful grace-wrought confession of sin; it is to be prized above all price, for he that confesseth his sin and forsaketh it, shall find mercy. Now, it is a well known fact, that when God is pleased to bestow upon men any choice gift, Satan, who is the god of counterfeits, is sure very soon to produce a base imitation, true in appearance, but worthless in reality: his object is deception, and full often he succeeds. How many there are who have made a worthless confession, and yet are relying upon it as though it were a work of grace; they have come before God as a matter of form, and have said, “Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners;” and having so done, imagine that they have received the divine absolution, when alas! alas! it is easy to be deceived, and difficult to cultivate within one’s heart that genuine repentance, which is the work of God the Holy Ghost.

May God grant us his gracious assistance while we describe two widely different sorts of confession which have been very vividly brought before us during the past week; and then we will have a few words upon the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy which is vested in God, who gives forgiveness to those whose confession is sincere.

I. Let me set before you TWO SORTS OF CONFESSION.

At this present moment, unhappily, two persons are lying under sentence of death, for murders of the most atrocious character. Without wishing to say a single word with regard to the state of soul of either of these persons—for into that it is no business of mine to pry—it seems to me that the published reports of their cases, may very properly furnish us with types of two sorts of persons. It is remarkable that two such cases as those of Dr. Pritchard and Constance Kent should be before the public eye at the same moment and that the points of contrast in their confession should be so exceedingly clear. I cannot but hope and pray that we may gather some few lessons of warning from crimes which have no doubt exercised a great influence for evil upon the masses of our country.

The confession which has been made by Dr. PRITCHARD, maybe taken as a specimen of those which are full often made by impenitent sinners, which can never be regarded as acceptable before the throne of the Most High. Here is a man who is accused of the atrocious crime of murdering his wife and his mother-in-law, and when he answers to the indictment, we are not astonished to hear him plead, “*Not Guilty!*” I am far from being severe upon him for so pleading, but viewing him as a type, I would remind you that thousands of those who call themselves “miserable sinners” in our public services, if they were called to plead before the bar of God, would have the effrontery to say “Not Guilty.” They might not use the words, very probably they would use terms having the opposite meaning, but their *heart-plea* would be, “*not guilty.*” If they had the law of God explained to them and they were questioned upon each commandment, “Have you broken this? Have you broken that?” though ready enough to confess in the gross that they have sinned, when it came to details they would be for denying all. We have heard of a woman who readily allowed that she was a sinner “O yes, sir, we are all sinners. Just so, sir.” But when the visitor sat down and opened the book, and pointing to the commandment, said, “Have you ever had any other God save the Lord?” She did not know that she ever had. “Had she ever taken God’s name in vain?” “O dear no, sir, I never did anything so wicked.” Each precept was explained, and she very positively claimed that she had not broken it. She had not violated the Sabbath; she had not killed anybody; she had not committed adultery; she had not borne false witness, or coveted anything; she was altogether, in detail, innocent, though in the gross she was quite willing to say as other people, “Oh, yes! I am a sinner, of course, sir, we are all sinners!” which, being interpreted, means, “I am ready to say anything you like to put into my mouth, but I do not believe a syllable of it.” The inward speech of the unconverted man is, “I am not guilty.” Ask the unhumiliated transgressor, “Art thou worthy of God’s wrath?” and his proud heart replies, “I am not.” “Art thou worthy to be cast away for ever from God’s presence on account of sin?” and the unbroken, uncontrite soul replies. “I am not. I am no thief, nor adulterer, nor extortioner; I have not sinned as yon publican has done. I thank God that I am not as other men are.” Man pleads Not Guilty, and yet all the while within his heart, so proud and boastful, there may readily be discerned abundant evidence of abounding sin. The leprosy is white upon his unclean brow, and yet the man claims to be sound and whole. If there were no other evidence against us, the very pride which boasts of innocence would be sufficient to convict us of sin, and will be so when we are taught right reason by the Holy Spirit.

The guilty man whose case we are now looking upon as an illustration, *endeavoured, as a means of defense for himself, to involve another in the dreadful guilt and punishment of his atrocious sin.* There were very distinct signs that he would have been perfectly satisfied if the woman who had ministered to his sinful pleasures had been accused and condemned of the crime of which he alone was guilty. Certainly this is the case with the great mass of those who are compelled to acknowledge their sins. Our first parent could not deny that he had taken of the forbidden fruit, but he laid the

blame upon Eve: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." Ah Adam! where is thy manliness, where thy love to thy spouse, that thou wouldest involve in the ruin her who was bone of thy bone so as to escape thyself? And she! she will not take the blame for a moment, but it is the serpent; she casts all the sin on him. In this first case of sin, the attempt was less atrocious than in that of the prisoner before us, because there was real guilt both in the woman and in the serpent, while it does not appear that the servant girl in Pritchard's family had any share in the poisoning. However, the human heart is such, that if we could really throw all the shame and blame of sin upon another who was perfectly innocent, there would be a strong temptation to do so if we might by such means be considered innocent. Nay, let me show that Adam virtually did that, for he said "The woman whom *thou* gavest me," thus virtually laying the blame of his rebellious deed upon God himself. And God, what hand had he in Adam's eating of the fruit of the accursed tree? It was an act of Adam's free will, he did as he pleased concerning it, and the most holy God could in no sense be made partaker of his transgression. Yet, think of it! He would sooner that the great God, who is hymned of angels as the thrice Holy One, should bear the fault of his iniquity than he would bear it himself. Such are we naturally. We may bend the knee and say we are miserable sinners, but unless the grace of God has taught us to make true confession we are always for shifting the burden to some other shoulder, and making it out that after all, though nominally miserable sinners, we are not so bad as a great many other people, and have a deal saddled upon us which really is no fault of ours, but belongs to providence, to fate, to our fellow men, to the devil, to the weather, and I know not what besides.

The convicted criminal who stands before us in our picture *made no confession whatever until the case was proved and sentence pronounced*. The case was clear enough, but he did his best to make it difficult; had he been completely free from the crime, his bearing and tone could have been scarcely more confident when asserting his innocence. I admit that it was very natural that he should not aid to convict himself, it is because it is so natural that the man serves so admirably as a representative of human nature when it makes its impenitent confessions. When it could not avail the wretch to withhold the truth, when facts were brought out so clear, when the jury had decided, when the judge had pronounced sentence, then, and not till then, he yielded to tears and entreaties, and proffered a confession, such as it was. So is it ever with unregenerate humanity; though cognizant of sin, we only acknowledge before the Lord that which is too glaring to be denied. Sin may be held up before the eyes of the man who is guilty of it, and often he will disown his own offspring, or assert that it is not what God's Word declares it to be. Holy Scripture accuses us of a thousand sins which we practically claim to be innocent of, for we flatter ourselves that the Bible puts too harsh a construction upon our actions, and that we are not what it declares us to be. When our fellow-men concur in censuring our fault we are compelled to blush, but of what value is a repentance which owes its existence to the overwhelming testimony of our fellow offenders against us. This force-work is far removed from the free and ready acknowledgments of a man whose heart is touched by divine grace and melted by the love of Jesus. When men are upon their dying beds, when the ghosts of their iniquities haunt them, when the red hand of guilt draws the curtain, when they can almost hear the sentence of the last judgment, then they will make a confession, but may we not fear that it is of little value, since it is wrung and extorted from them by fear of hell and horror of the wrath to come. True repentance wrought in us by the Holy Ghost drops as freely as honey droppeth from the comb, but merely natural confessions are like the worst of the wine

squeezed by main force from the dregs. O dear friends, God deliver you from ungracious confessions of sin, and enable you sincerely to repent at the foot of Jesus' cross!

When the confession came, in the case before us, *it was very partial*. He had killed one, but he professed himself guiltless of the other's death. Villain as he was, on his own shewing, he could go the length of owning half his crime, but then he started back and acted the liar. No, she died by accident, and he, to avoid being charged unjustly—innocent creature as he was—had put the poison in the bottle afterwards. He had the wickedness to feign a wonder that his tale was not believed, and likened those who doubted him to those who would not believe the Lord of glory. Now, the confessions of unregenerate men are precisely of this sort. They will go the length of owning, if they have been drinking, or if they have broken the laws of the state, "yes, we have offended here," but the great mass of sins against God are not confessed, nor allowed to be sins at all. Men will often lay a stress upon sins of which they are not conspicuously guilty, and omit those which are the most glaring. What unrenewed man thinks it a sin to forget God, to forsake the Creator's fountain of living waters for the cisterns of the creature, or to live without God in the world? And yet, these are the most crying of all iniquities. To rob God of his glory, to despise his Son, to disbelieve the gospel, to live for self, to be self-righteous—all these are heinous evils, but what carnal man owns to them as such? Covetousness! again, who ever confesses that? Thousands are guilty of it, but few will own it even in private before the Lord. No confession will be acceptable before God, unless you are willing to make a clean breast of the whole of your evil ways, words and thoughts, before the searcher of hearts. I do not wonder if you should fail to tell to others your offenses; it were not meet you should do so except wherein you have offended them and may make retribution by the confession; but before God you must open all, you must roll away the stone from the mouth of that sepulcher, even though your iniquity, like Lazarus, should stink. There must be no mincing the matter, things must be called by their right names; you must be willing to feel the horrible sinfulness of sin, and as far as you can, you must descend to the very bottom of its terrible guiltiness, and acknowledge its blackness, its heinousness, its devilry, its abomination. No confession will be acceptable before God, if you knowingly and wilfully gloss over any sin; if you make any exception, or are partial with respect to any form of iniquity. That confession which hides some sins and only confesses certain others stops one leak in the soul and opens another.

Nor ought it to be forgotten, that *when the criminal had confessed his sin, yet still in the last confession*—which we may suppose to have been true, *there are words of extenuation, and nothing to indicate any deep and suitable sensibility of his great enormity*. He hints at reasons why he was scarcely accountable—a sort of madness and the influence of strong drink must be execrated for the crime, and not the man himself. O God, thou knowest how often in our natural confessions, before thy grace met with us, we made wretched and mean excuses for ourselves! We said that a strong temptation overcame us; it was an unguarded moment; it was our constitution and our besetting sins; it was our friend who led us astray; it was God's providence which tried us; it was anything rather than ourselves—we were to blame, no doubt, but still there were extenuating circumstances. Beloved friends! a man can never make a true confession till he feels that sin is his own sin, and is willing to confess it as such; he must cease to apologize any longer, and must just stand forth before the Lord, and cry, "I have sinned, willfully and infamously, and here, standing in thy presence, I acknowledge it: but if a word of apology could save my soul, I dare not utter it, for I should again be guilty of a lie." May this teach us to seek out rather the aggravations of our

sin than fancied extenuations of it. Try to see the worst of thy case, sinner, more than to gloss it or gild it over and make it seem better than it is.

All this, remember, was committed by this miserable murderer, who is so soon to appear before his God, not through ignorance, but *in spite of a clear consciousness of the wrong of his deed*. Had he been some person of a low mental organization, or of neglected intellect, there might be some plea. If, for instance, he had never been able to read, and had received his only education amid thieves and vagabonds, there might have been some excuse, and we might have said, "It is the sin of the community which fails to provide moral and religious instruction for the people;" but here is a man who knows better, who, I suppose, had listened to thousands of sermons, had a knowledge of the Bible, had pretended to pray, was well taught as to the matter of right and wrong, and yet still, in defiance of all this, he sins, and to make the matter worse, shows no signs of softening of heart, no tenderness, no melting, nothing of deep regret, and shame, and contrition, and humbleness of heart, but is, apparently (I say no more) as obdurate in confessing his guilt as when he was denying it. Ah! but there are too many who make confession, having no broken hearts, no streaming eyes, no flowing tears, no humbled spirits. Know ye this, that ten thousand confessions, if they are made by hardened hearts, if they do not spring from really contrite spirits shall be only additions to your guilt as they are mockeries before the Most High. Let these suffice as remarks upon unacceptable confession. Oh Lord, let thy Holy Spirit give to the guilty one, of whom we have been speaking, and to us all that broken and contrite heart, which thou wilt accept through Jesus Christ!

The second case must now come before us, and here again I do not desire to speak anything about the state of heart of CONSTANCE KENT, I only speak of her outward act, and only of that as a symbol of true confession. Here is one avowedly guilty of a most atrocious murder, a very great and terrible crime; but when she appears in court she is brought there upon her own confession; her life was in no danger from the witness of other people. She surrendered herself voluntarily, and when she stood before the judge, *she pleaded guilty*. No doubt her anxious friends had suggested to her the desirableness of pleading "Not guilty," hoping to save her life by failure in the evidence, or plea of insanity, or some other legal method of saving criminals from the gallows. Mark, however, how distinctly she says "Guilty;" and though the question is repeated and space is given her to retract, her reply is still the one self-condemning word "GUILTY!" Even so before the Lord, whenever we come to confess we must approach him with this cry, *Guilty, Guilty!* "Lord, I cannot say anything else. If hell be my eternal portion for it, I dare say no other. The stones in the streets would cry out against me if I denied my guilt. When my memory shows me the record of my days, its truthful witness is that I have broken thy law; and when my conscience looks at the way in which I have transgressed, it cannot say anything but this, 'Thou hast wilfully broken God's law and thou deservest his wrath.'" Now sinner, thou shalt never be at peace with God until thou art willing unreservedly to plead "Guilty." That self-righteous spirit of thine must be cast out as though it were the very devil, for it is next akin to the devil, and is quite as mischievous, and thou must be brought down humbly to lie at the foot of Jehovah's throne and confess that thou dost richly deserve his wrath, for thou hast defied his righteous law and sinned against him with a high hand. You must plead "Guilty," or remain guilty for ever. You shall never find pardon through Jesus Christ till you are willing, truly and really, to own yourself a sinner.

Constance Kent was *anxious to free all others from the blame of her sin*. Her counsel says, in open court, "Solemnly, in the presence of Almighty God, as a person who values her own soul, she wishes me to say that the guilt is her own alone; and that her father and others, who have so long

suffered most unjust and cruel suspicions, are wholly and absolutely innocent.” This is well spoken. I know nothing of this young woman’s heart, but using her as an illustration rather than an example, we are safe in saying that it is a very blessed sign of true repentance when the sinner cries out with David, “I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight.” There will be in a gracious penitent no attempt to lay the blame upon the tempter, or upon providence; no dwelling upon circumstances, the suddenness of the temptation, or the hastiness of one’s temper. “Oh God,” says the sinner, ” I have sinned *myself*; I have nothing in the world that is so truly my own as my own sin. For this my sin, I alone am accountable, and I feel it, and I cannot, I dare not impeach any one else with being guilty of *my* sin. I must stand in my own person before thee, O God, even if that involves my eternal ruin.” It will never do for you to lay the blame on your mothers and fathers because they did not teach you better, upon the minister for not being earnest enough, or upon your master for telling you to do wrong. It is true that we may be partakers of your sins in a measure, but if you be sincerely penitent, the guilt which will strike you will not be another man’s guilt, nor another man’s share in your sin, but your own guilt. A sinner has not been brought truly before the Lord in humble contrition, unless his cry is “Lord! I have sinned, I have sinned so as to be guilty *myself*, in *my own person*. Have mercy upon *me!*”

The unhappy young woman now condemned to die *needed no witness to come forward to prove her guilt* and ensure her conviction. No one saw the deed; it was done so secretly that the most expert detectives were not able to find a satisfactory clue to the mystery. There may be collateral evidence to support her confession; it may, or it may not be true that her conviction would now have been certain had her confession been retracted; but she did not need that, for without any voice of man to witness she witnessed against herself. It will never suffice for us merely to confess to the Lord what other people have seen, and to feel guilty because we know that the case is reported in the neighborhood. Many people who have fallen into sin, have felt very penitent because they knew they should damage their names, or lose their situations; but to have your private sin brought before you by conscience, and voluntarily without any pressure but the burden of sin itself and the work of the Holy Spirit, to come before God and say, “Lord, thou knowest in this matter I have offended, and though none saw me except thine eye and mine; yet thine eye might well flash with anger at me, while mine shall be wet with many a tear of penitence on account of it:” that is what you need, Sinner, thou must come before God now and let out thine heart without any external pressure. Spontaneously must thy soul flow out, poured out like water before the Lord, or thou must not hope that he will give thee pardon.

She confessed all. It was a solemn moment when the judge said, “I must repeat to you, that you are charged with having wilfully, intentionally, and with malice killed and murdered your brother. Are you guilty or not guilty?” Yes, she was guilty, just as the judge had put it. She did not object to those words which made the case come out so black. The willfulness?—yes, she acknowledged that. The intention, the malice?—yes, all that. The killing, the murdering—was it just murder?—was it nothing less? No, nothing else. Not a word of extenuation. She acknowledges all, just as the judge puts it. She is guilty in very deed of the whole charge. Sinner, will you confess sin as God puts it? Many will confess sin after their own fashion, but will you confess it as God puts it? Are you brought to see sin as God sees it? as far as mortal eye could bear that dreadful sight, and do you confess now just what God lays to your door, that you have been his enemy, a traitor, full of evil, covered with iniquity? Will you confess that you have crucified his dear Son, and have in all ways

deserved his hottest wrath and displeasure—will you plead guilty to that? If not, you shall have no pardon; but if you will do this, he is merciful and just to forgive you your sins through Jesus the great atoning sacrifice.

She had not, nor had her counsel for her, *a single word to say by way of apology*; in fact, at her request, one supposed excuse was utterly discarded: “She wishes me to say that she was not driven to this act, as has been asserted, by unkind treatment at home, as she met with nothing there but tender and forbearing love.” Her counsel might have said she was very young—it was hoped that her youth might plead for her. Being young, she might be readily led astray by an evil passion—might not that excuse her? It was long ago, and her confession was her own; she had brought herself there into that dock—might not this be a reason for mercy? Nothing of the kind. The judge might think so if he pleased, but there was nothing said for her about that, nor did she desire that it should be suggested. She might secretly hope, but her confession was so thorough, that there was not a single word to sully its clear stream. So, sinner, if you come before God, you must not say, “Lord, I am to be excused because of my position—I was in poverty, and I was tempted to steal; or, I had been in bad company, and so I learned to blaspheme; or, I had a hard master, and so I was driven to sin to find some pleasure there.” No; if you are really penitent, you will find no reason whatever why you should have sinned, except the evil of your own heart, and that you will plead as an aggravation, not as an excuse. “Guilty! guilty! guilty! am I, O God, before thy face; I offer no excuse, no extenuation. Thou must deal with me upon pure mercy, if thou dost save me, for justice can only award me my well-deserved doom.”

Notice that when she was asked whether she had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon her, there was still a solemn silence. Was there no reason to be given why the dreadful sentence of being hanged by the neck until dead, should not be passed upon a young and weeping girl? She did not so much as hint at one. I remember well the time when I thought there was no reason why the flames of hell should not consume me, and why the crushing weight of God’s wrath should not roll over me for ever and for ever. Methinks every sinner who has really come to Christ, has been made to feel that however angry God may be with sin, he is not one whit too angry. Until we know the power of divine grace, we read in the Bible concerning eternal punishment, and we think it is too heavy and too hard, and we are apt to kick against it, and find out some heretic or other who teaches us another doctrine; but when the soul is really quickened by divine grace, and made to feel the weight of sin, it thinks the bottomless pit none too deep, and the punishment of hell none too severe for sin such as it has committed. This is not the emotion of a mind rendered morbid by sickness, but these are the genuine workings of God the Holy Ghost in the soul, bringing the man to stand guilty before the Lord, with his mouth closed, not able to say a word against the sentence of divine justice. May God bring such there who have never been there yet!

In the confession, as we read the story, there was *much tenderness*. I do not wonder that the judge exhibited deep emotion, who could help it? Remember, I am not pretending to know her heart, I am only judging the externals; as far as the externals went there seemed to be a great brokenness of spirit. She appeared really to know what guilt meant, and to stand there with this resolve upon her soul, that though she could not make any atonement for her crime, she would acknowledge it honestly, and accordingly she confessed it as one who felt within her own soul the terrible weight of her guilt. This is the manner in which we must stand before God if we would find mercy. It is all very well for us to use fine language, but words alone are worthless. Those

words which come fresh from your lips, dictated by your own heart, because the Holy Ghost is there, will suffice if the heart be in them. It is to the contrite that the promise is given. Look to Jesus for contrition, for without it there is no pardon.

II. Thus we have tried, as far as we could, to bring out the distinctions which pertain to confessions, and now let us have a word or two upon THE EXERCISE OF THE PREROGATIVE OF MERCY ON GOD'S PART.

“Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” In every case where there is a genuine, gracious confession, mercy is freely given. There is a notion abroad, that confession deserves mercy. We read in the papers such remarks as these, “expiating sin by confession,” or, “made such atonement as he could by confessing his sin.” Confession makes no atonement in any shape whatever. There is no one single word in that law which I read to you this morning, in the twentieth of Exodus, about the possibility of taking away sin by mere confession. Justice has but one rule, and that is, *sin must be punished*. If the sinner violates law, law in the case of man may remit the penalty, but in the case of God *never*. The attributes of God are not like the qualities of man, they never come into collision with one another, nor do they abridge the sphere of each other. The justice of God is as awful and all-reaching as if he had not a grain of mercy, while the mercy of God is as unrestrained and Almighty as if he were utterly unjust. The reason why sin can be forgiven in the case of a penitent sinner is, because for that sinner Jesus Christ has borne the full weight of all the wrath which his sin deserves. The fire-cloud of Jehovah's wrath was waiting for the sinner—the sinner must receive the whole of its dread discharge; but for every sinner that repenteth and believeth in him Christ stood beneath that terrible cloud, and all the lightning was discharged on *him*. He suffered as incarnate God, all the chastisement which was due to his people. The grief of our Saviour we can never tell: the woes of Gethsemane and Gabbatha and Golgotha are not to be expressed, but they were accepted by God in the stead of all the suffering and grief which the law most righteously claimed on every law-breaker. And now, through what Christ Jesus has done, the eternal mercy of God comes streaming forth in perfect consistency with justice. Mercy provided the great substitute, and now mercy with loving heart calls upon sinners repenting and believing, and assures them that all sin is put away through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Let every sinner know, then, that although his repentance does not deserve mercy, the God of love has been pleased to promise free pardon to all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, because Christ deserves it. Pardon is given to penitent sinners as a matter of justice, as well as mercy, because of the throes, and grief, and agonies of the Divine Redeemer.

How consistent it is with the nature of things that penitent sinners, and penitent sinners only should obtain mercy through Jesus Christ! When you read the story of the man who made no confession till it was forced out of him, although you can respond to his wish, “Fellow creatures, pray for me,” you cannot feel much sympathy, if any, with him. His conduct seems to harden one's heart against him, not merely because of his guilt, but because of the lie of his confession. But, when you read the other story, although it contains no request to pray, you find you do not want one for your heart cries at once, “Father forgive her;” and you think within yourself, “If the prerogative of mercy can be exercised in this case, let it be.” If it were put to a show of hands of all our country whether the law should be executed on Constance Kent, I think we should all say “Let the penitent sinner live.” Great was her offense, and no excuse is to be offered for her, as she offers none for herself. It was a great and dreadful crime, which must be a blight upon her all her days, yet, let her be spared for she has confessed most fully—not on the ground of justice, but on

the ground that this seems to be a case in which, if the prerogative of mercy is to be sovereignly exercised at all, it should now have free scope. Methinks when the eternal God sees a poor sinner standing before himself, and hears him cry, "I am guilty, Lord! I am guilty through and through! I alone am guilty! I have broken thy law! If thou smite me thou art just! My heart is broken because I have sinned. I cannot be more wretched than I now am, for sin is my plague and my misery; and while I confess it I do not think that my confession has any merit in it. Save me for Jesus' sake!" "Why, methinks," the mighty God says, "I have brought that soul, through my grace, into a state in which it is ready to receive the precious gift of justification and pardon through the blood of my dear Son."

See how one grace gives a fitness for another. The sinner is brought to Jesus, his heart is broken, and then it is ready to be bound up. The penitent sinner has paid honour to the prerogative of the law-giver. He has, as far as he could do so, dethroned the law-giver by his sin, but now by his confession he restores him to his throne. Such a sinner knows the bitterness of sin, and knowing its bitterness, he will hate it for the future. If he be pardoned, he will not go back as the dog to his vomit, or the sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire. This pardoned sinner will not take to himself the credit of having been pardon by his confessions, he will not go abroad and talk lightly of his sin, he will be sure to speak much of the leniency of the Law-giver and the power of Jesus' precious blood; he will admire evermore, even in eternity, the mighty grace which pardoned such as he is. On the other hand, if man were forgiven, and no true penitence wrought in him, what would be the result? Why, it would be turning wolves loose upon society. Methinks if God gave forgiveness to men without working a work of grace in them by which they are brought to repentance, it would be offering a premium for sin, it would be breaking down the floodgates which restrain vice, it would be destroying all the excellent fruits which free grace is intended to produce. What! is the man to be pardoned for all the past and to remain without repentance for his evil ways? Then will he make the future just as the past has been; nay, he will sin with a higher hand and with a stronger arm, because he sees with what impunity he may rebel. What! shall a proud, unhumiliated sinner rejoice in the forgiving love of the Father? Then will he arrogantly boast that there was not much evil in his sin after all; he will be no singer to the praise of sovereign grace, but rather, with the boastful lips of the legalist he will render unto himself praise for the dexterous manner in which he has escaped from the condemnation due to sin. God will give pardon to those only to whom he gives repentance, for it were unsafe to give it elsewhere. God bring us down and lay us in the dust, for then, and then only, are we prepared to hear him say, "Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee."

I take it for granted that there are some here who will say, "I wish I could repent. I know that it would not merit eternal life. I understand that faith—faith in Jesus Christ is the way by which I must be saved, but I would be humbled on account of sin." My dear friend, your desire to be humble may perhaps be an indication that you are already in that condition; but, if you are lamenting your hardness of heart, I will suggest two or three things. Remember *your past sins*. I do not want you to write out a list of them all, there is not paper enough in this world for that, but let some of them start out before your memory, and if they do not make you blush, they might to do so. Next think over all *the aggravations of those sins*. Recollect the training you had as a child. You were blessed with godly parents. Remember the providential warnings you received. Think of the light and knowledge against which you have offended; that tenderness of conscience against which you kicked. Then I beg you to consider *against what a God you have offended*, so great, so good, so

kind, who has never done you a displeasure, but has been all generosity and kindness to you till this day. Your offenses have been insults against the King of heaven. Your transgressions have been undermining, as far as they could, the throne of the eternal majesty. Look at sin in the light of God, to be humbled. And if this will not do it, let me pray that God the Holy Spirit may take you to *the foot of the cross*. Remember, that in order that sin might be put away, it was necessary that God should be veiled in human flesh. No one else could bear the load of sin but God, and he only could bear it by becoming man. See the suffering of the Saviour when “despised and rejected.” Mark the spitting, the shame, the smiting. Watch his wounds;

“Count the purple drops, and say,
'Thus must sin be wash'd away.'”

And surely, if God the Holy Ghost bless it, such a meditation will make thee see the blackness and vileness of sin. John Bradford said, that when he was in prayer, he never liked to rise from his knees till he began to feel something of brokenness of heart. Get thee up to thy chamber, then, poor sinner, if thou wouldst have a broken and contrite spirit, and come not out until thou hast it. Remember, that thou wilt never feel so broken in heart as when thou canst see Jesus bearing all thy sins. Faith and repentance are born together, and aid the health of each other.

“Law and terrors do but harden,
All the while they work alone;
But a sense of blood-bought pardon,
Will dissolve a heart of stone.”

Go as you are to Christ, and ask him to give that tenderness of heart which shall be to you the indication that pardon has come; for pardon cannot and will not come unattended by a melting of soul and a hatred of sin. Wrestle with the Lord! say, “I will not let thee go except thou bless me.” Get a fast hold upon the Saviour by a vigorous faith in his great atonement. Oh! may his Spirit enable thee to do this! Say in thy soul, ” Here I will abide, at the horns of the altar; if I perish I will perish at the foot of the cross. From my hope in Jesus I will not depart; but I will look up still and say, Saviour, thy heart was broken for me, break my heart! Thou wast wounded, wound me! Thy blood was freely poured forth, for me, Lord let me pour forth my tears that I should have nailed thee to the tree. O Lord, dissolve my soul; melt it in tenderness, and thou shalt be for ever praised for making thine enemy thy friend.”

May God bless you, and make you truly repent, if you have not repented; and, if you have, may he enable you to continue in it all your days, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus 20 and Psalm 32.

Indexes

Index of Scripture References

Job

1:8

Psalms

32 32:5

Jeremiah

12:5

2 Corinthians

5