

Cases of Conscience

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon vividly portrays the intense inner turmoil and conviction of sin experienced by awakened sinners, guiding them from terror and despair toward the hope and mercy found in Christ's atonement.

Scripture: Psalm 38:4, Psalm 38:8, Psalm 38:6

Topics: "Conviction Of Sin", "Salvation Through Christ", "Spiritual Awakening"

Description

In "Cases of Conscience," C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound spiritual experience of conviction of sin, vividly portraying the sinner's inner turmoil and the heavy burden of guilt. He addresses the varied ways individuals experience this awakening, distinguishing between the work of the Spirit and the attacks of Satan or natural tendencies. Spurgeon offers comfort and guidance to those struggling in despair, pointing them to the mercy and salvation found only in Jesus Christ. This sermon is a compassionate and insightful exposition on the journey from spiritual distress to redemption.

Transcript

"For my iniquities are gone over my head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me." Psalm 38:4.

I HAVE a special purpose before me this evening. I shall endeavor to describe the state of the sinner's heart when it has been awakened, when conscience is set at work, when sin and the judgment of God upon it occupy the mind's attention—that period which John Bunyan describes in his, "Pilgrim's Progress," as being spent between the City of Destruction and the Wicket Gate—that state of mind in which a man is found when he flees from his former sin and desires to escape from the wrath to come, but has not yet found out the way of salvation so as to realize his own pardon and forgiveness through the great Atonement made upon the Cross.

In fulfilling this intention, I propose, first, to speak of the terrors which frequently accompany conviction of sin. Secondly, to describe the cases of some who, while really convicted of sin, are, nevertheless, strangers to those terrors. And then to address a few words of advice both to those who are sorely broken by cruel fears and those, on the other hand, who are more gently brought to Christ

I. There is A GREAT AND APPALLING TERROR OF MIND WHICH FREQUENTLY ACCOMPANIES CONVICTION OF SIN. The experience which I shall try to describe has not been that of all those who are brought to Christ. I must make, as it were, a broad outline—an open sketch without filling it up—a picture in which many, though certainly not all, may be able to read the story of their own passage through the

Slough of Despond.

Usually, when Divine Grace comes into the heart, one of the first things that attends it is a sort of indefinable fear. The man does not know how or why it is that he has such a fear. He felt safe enough before, but now the very ground under his feet seems to be rotten. He played with sin, thinking it was only a trifle, but, suddenly, he is made to tremble at it. He finds that the serpent has a sting and he is afraid of it. Sometimes, by night, he will be scared with visions in his dreams and, by day, something more vivid than visions will appear before him. He now begins to believe that there is a Hell, that there is a just God, that sin must be punished, that he has sinned and that, therefore, he must die! He does not know that he is to do, but he feels that something must be done, either by himself or by somebody else, for his soul is truly afraid. To a greater or less extent, he has first the fear of punishment which afterwards, through the Grace of God, grows into a fear of sin!

Then, as this fear increases, a kind of disquietude and unrest lays hold of the man. David tells us his own experience and his prayer when he was in such a state as I am trying to describe. "O Lord, rebuke me not in Your wrath: neither chasten me in Your hot displeasure. For Your arrows stick fast in me, and your hand presses me sorely. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger. Neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin." That is the case with a man under conviction of sin—he is restless and ill at ease. Those things which he once counted as pleasures now seem to him to be exceedingly wearisome. If he still seeks the amusements which once charmed him, they only sicken him now—he cannot bear to look at them. He has such a sad heart within him that he does not want to have songs sung to him, for they seem to be out of place to such a man as he feels himself to be. The Psalmist's words describe him just now. "Fools because of their transgression and because of their iniquities are afflicted. Their soul abhors all manner of meat and they draw near unto the gates of death."

The companions of such a man cannot understand what is the matter with him! They think that he is suffering from a fit of melancholy. So, indeed, he is, but I pray that it may not be a mere fitful spasm, but that it may continue and that it may be increased and intensified until he is "dead, indeed, unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The man's melancholy will then give place to "unspeakable joy and full of glory." He then begins to be a quiet stay-at-home. He tries to find rest there but, somehow, even his own family does not afford him the peace it once did. His wife thinks that something strange has come over him and if she is not herself converted, it must be quite incomprehensible to her. But if she should ever be led forth on the same pilgrimage, she would understand that this is a part of the footsteps of the flock—one of the first of the footsteps of the straying sheep when the Shepherd comes to fetch them back.

This disquietude and unrest of spirit will grow, by-and-by, into a burdensomeness of heart, just as Bunyan describes Christian with a burden on his back which made him sigh and groan. You remember how he pictures the pilgrim—"I saw a man clothed with rags standing in a certain place, a book in his hand and a great burden upon his back. I looked and saw him open the book, and read therein. And as he read, he wept and trembled and, not being able to contain it any longer, he broke out with a lamentable cry, saying, 'What shall I do?'" The man of whom I am speaking comes to just such state as this. He has no visible burden upon his shoulders, yet he has upon his heart a load so heavy that it threatens to crush him to the very dust and to drive him to utter despair! It may be that through the persuasion of his former companions, he is led to indulge in sin as he was known to do, but if so, in the sin he is wretched and after the sin he is far more miserable than he was before! He may sing, but even while he is singing, he will be like the man who could amuse others with his funny sayings while his own heart was heavy within him.

And this becomes the man's constant state of mind—not only can he find no rest, night nor day, but all the while he has to carry his heavy burden wherever he may be! And he cries to the Lord with David, "Day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer."

With some men this state of mind will continue until they come, at last, to utterly loathe themselves. They might even adopt the language of David in the Psalm from which I have taken my text. "I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease and there is no soundness in my flesh." There was one who said that he wished he had been a frog or a toad—anything rather than a man—when he realized how sinful he had been! So detestable did he appear in his own sight for having sinned and wantonly sinned against such light, against such love, against such long-suffering—for having rejected Christ, grieved the Holy Spirit and despised the precious blood which alone can cleanse from sin! All these things come up before the man's mind and he thinks that no doom is too bad for him. "No," he says, "I once thought that it was an unjust thing for a man to be cast away to all eternity, but now I feel that whatever You do with me, O God, it will be impossible for You to be too severe! I deserve all that Your Infinite Justice can bring upon me. I will be quite willing to sign my own death warrant and to set my seal to my own condemnation and say that it is just."

Loathing thus himself and his life, his sin and his pleasures—and loathing even his very existence—the man, if left to himself, will often undergo such terror of conscience that even his body will begin to feel it. His mortal frame, sympathizing with his immortal spirit, will grow sick. There have been some with whom I have myself had to deal, who have had sore sickness through conviction of sin and, for a little season, it did seem as if the only hope for them to be able to live at all was for them to find immediate pardon through the blood of Jesus Christ. There have been some, I doubt not, who have almost been bereft of their senses when they have seen sin in its true colors. Thank God, dear Friends, if you have never come to this! But if you have, thank God for it. There are thousands who have passed through that experience and yet, through the thickest darkness, have come into the brightest Light of God!

The man who is the subject of this conviction will also have a perpetual consciousness of feebleness as David says in the eighth verse of this Psalm, "I am feeble and sorely broken." The strong man suddenly becomes weak as a little child. The very wise man, the keen critic, the severe judge of others suddenly becomes gentle, tender-hearted, soft in spirit. He does not now sit in judgment upon any other man, for he has enough to do in standing before the bar of his own conscience—and he dreads lest he should soon be judged and condemned by his God! He used to talk, in days gone by, a great deal about the dignity and might of man but now he knows more about human depravity and weakness. At one time he used to say, "I can believe in Christ whenever I like. I can be saved whenever I please!" Salvation seemed to him a

very easy matter in those days but now it seems to him to be the hardest thing in the world to believe in Christ! His cry now is—

"But oh, for this no strength have I, My strength is at Your feet to lie."

He does not find fault with sermons as he used to do. If they do but reach his heart and bring to him even a little comfort, he is pleased and thankful. He is glad enough, now, to eat his food off the poorest platter if he can but get food for his soul. He feels that if the Lord would but send him His pardon, even if it came by a limping messenger, he would not trouble about the messenger, but he would prize the pardon that he brought! He is brought very low—the high-soaring spirit lies in the dust and out of the dust cries—"Lord, save me, or I perish!"

Beside and beyond all this, his soul gets to be in a terrible agony of desire. It has come to this with him—that he must have mercy, that he must be saved! He feels as if he could not take a denial—that it were better for him to die than to continue to live in such a state as that in which he finds himself. He can use the words of our hymn—

"Wealth and honor I disdain,

Earthly comforts all are vain—

These can never satisfy—

Give me Christ, or else I die!"

He has the same sort of look that you may have seen on the faces of starving people when, at last, a roast is set before them. It is bread they need—bread! So this spiritually starving man feels that he must have provision for his soul or he will expire. There is something terribly startling in the cry of, "Fire!" at the dead of night. But the cry of, "Bread! Bread!" seems to come from the very vitals of humanity and to reach the very center of our hearts. So will it be with this man's prayer at last. It is not a matter of, "maybe," with him—he cannot bear to look upon salvation in the light of a perhaps or a maybe—he feels that he must have it, that he cannot take a denial! He agonizes, groans and cries to God, "Lord, save me! Lord, save me! God be merciful to me a sinner!"

We have known some who have gone even further than this until, at last, their prayer has been mingled with despair rather than with faith. They have prayed to God for deliverance. They have, in some sense, looked to Christ upon the Cross. Yet they have not seemed able to believe that there could be power in Him to save them. Some of us have known what it was to have the great Judge of All put on the black cap and pronounce sentence of death upon us. We have gone into the condemned cell and waited there—really expecting to be led out to execution—and to hear the Lord say to us, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." I cannot tell you what is the intense delight of a heart that has been prostrate in the dust when it receives full remission, free forgiveness! It mounts as high, then, as it was known to descend into the depths!

I will mention only one more characteristic of this man under conviction of sin—he probably feels himself a solitary person. David says in this Psalm, "My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague and my kinsmen stand afar off." The man under conviction of sin feels that he is quite alone, that he has no one in the world to help him. I have frequently noticed that young people in this condition have been afraid to mention to their own parents, or to their minister, what they feel. If we try to probe them a little, to find out what is the matter, they are very reluctant to tell us because it seems to them that they are the only persons who ever felt as they do. I believe that almost all those who come to Christ think that they are very singular people—very odd people. I know I thought that there never could be any other sinner as bad as I was—and that none could ever have felt the horror of great darkness that I felt! Little did I think that the path I was then treading, instead of being trodden by one solitary pilgrim, was the beaten track of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims!

II. Now, secondly, I shall endeavor to show you that IT SHOULD NOT BE A CAUSE OF DISQUIET TO ANY OF YOU IF YOU HAVE NOT BEEN SPIRITUALLY EXERCISED TO THE SAME EXTENT AS OTHERS.

Dear Friends, all the distress that is felt by the mind when under conviction of sin is not the work of the Spirit of God, though some of it is. I cannot draw the line and say exactly how far it is the Spirit's work but, certainly, there is a portion of this horror and distress which does not come from God. Therefore, learn this lesson—that it is not necessary for you to traverse the whole ground of every other sinner's experience in passing from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son!

No doubt part of the horror I have been describing comes from Satan. He does not want to lose those who have been his subjects. He sees that one who was once a very contented slave begins to feel his chain irksome and longs to escape from the cruel servitude and, therefore, Satan brings out his great whip to frighten him, tells him that he must not attempt to escape, or he will flog him for his past sins. So the poor wretch crouches down at his feet and Satan says, "Now is my only chance to prevent him from escaping. Servants of the infernal powers attack him, vex him, torment him, insinuate every doubt and every fear and every blasphemy that you can! This is our only opportunity! He will be out of gunshot soon—it is now or never with us. Let us leave no stone unturned to break his heart and ruin him before he gets peace through Christ." No doubt that evil spirit who "worries whom he can't devour," has very often tried to trouble poor sinners because he knew that they were about to escape from his domain. It is not necessary, Brothers and Sisters, and it is not desirable that you and I should know all this horror! That which comes from Satan we should think ourselves happy to escape.

Another part of this agony, no doubt, arises from ignorance. If some of those poor weeping souls knew more, they would sorrow less and suffer less. In John Bunyan's, "Grace Abounding," you can trace very clearly that very much of the conflict that he had to endure was the result of his utter ignorance. He knew very little about spiritual things. At first he had but one book, "The Poor Man's Pathway to Heaven." He does not appear to have attended much on the ministry in his early days, so he had not learned much about the Kingdom of Heaven and he was in a state of great darkness when he found his way to Christ. But I do not think that you and I, Beloved, who have been from our youth up instructed in the things of God—if we know the plan of salvation, if we know that simple faith in the precious blood will save us—should desire to pass through these extraordinary agonies and racking of conscience and heart.

Besides, a part of this experience may also come from constitutional tendencies. There are some who seem to have been born on the darkest nights of the whole year and, on every possible occasion, they look rather at the spots on the sun than at the sun itself. Their observations are rather directed to the whirlpools and the barren deserts than to the gently-flowing rivers and green pastures! They have a very keen apprehension of the snakes and other reptiles, but not of the flowers and the birds. They were born in gloom and they seem to carry the gloom of their nativity to their graves—and it seems very natural and very likely, since the Spirit of God does not change our physical constitutions, though He does change our moral nature—that there should be in such people, coupled with that conviction which is the work of the Spirit, a tendency to certain fears and trembling which spring only from the flesh and are not the work of the Spirit

of God.

These few remarks may help to put some here who have been praying to experience these terrors, upon the right track. They will not, I hope, pray for such a thing anymore! Am I addressing any who think they are not saved because they have not known such terrors as some others have experienced? Let me remind you, dear Friends, that there are many of the true children of God who have never known these horrors! I suppose there are many in this church, over which I am overseer, who have not experimentally

known these terrors. They know what repentance of sin is, but the horror of great darkness they have not known. Certainly, in Scripture, we have not many of such cases recorded. I do not think that Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened, ever went through such an experience as David did in this matter. It may be that the Apostle Paul did, for he had scales upon his eyes—and it may be that the blindness of his body was but a picture of the darkness of his mind. But I do not think that Peter, James and John and those other disciples whom Christ called while they were fishing, or engaged in other occupations, knew much about this kind of experience. They knew what repentance of sin was—mark that—and that is the Spirit's work beyond any doubt. But they do not appear to have known that terror which springs from the flesh, or rises from the pit of Hell.

Therefore, dear Brothers and Sisters, since many of the children of God have not felt these horrors, do not look upon those who have felt them as models for your imitation! And do not condemn yourself because you have not gone through an experience similar to theirs. While it is quite certain that some good people have known these terrors, you must remember that there may have been special demons in their case, why it was so with them. What a blessing it has been to others that John Bunyan, who seems to be my chief illustration tonight, passed through such an experience, for, if he had not done so, he could not have written his, "Grace Abounding" and "Pilgrim's Progress." But you and I do not expect to write a "Pilgrim's Progress." We have not that special work to do! But Bunyan had and, therefore, we do not need the peculiar training through which he had to pass.

Certain metals that will have to endure an extraordinary strain have to pass through an annealing process. But other substances which are not put to so severe a test need not be prepared in the same stern fashion. The Apostle Paul traces many of his deep troubles and holy triumphs to the qualifications with which he was fitted for ministering to the saints. "Whether we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer or whether we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation." Beyond a doubt there are some servants of God who have a great work to do in deep waters. In the course of their lifetime they are to contend with Satan in a very special fashion—so the Lord gives them a special training that they may become good soldiers of Jesus Christ from the very commencement of their career. None of you may have to do the work of Luther or Calvin— you will not all have to go forth to address multitudes, as Whitefield did—and you do not, therefore, need the peculiar training which was necessary for them.

But I again remind you that you must have that which is the work of the Spirit! Repentance and abhorrence of sin you must have! But that which is beyond this, which God employs as a disciplinary training for some of His servants, is not necessary for all of you to have. If you had felt such horrors as others have experienced, you might not have been in your right senses now. The Lord, who tempers the wind to the shorn sheep, has tempered the Spirit's convictions to you. Possibly you are of a feeble constitution and you could not safely pass through what some strong men have endured. Your spirit may be so tender, your mind may be so susceptible, that it would have been broken if it had been subjected to the rough handling that others have had. You know that a physician, when he seeks to cure a number of patients, treats them in various ways. He gives a good dose of medicine to a strong soldier and lets it work its way. But if he has to deal with a feeble girl, he gives her only a small dose, lest the larger quantity should kill her. So our Lord, when He is curing us of the evil disease of sin, acts differently in different cases and, with some of us, He works very gently.

It is not necessary for me to say any more upon this point except to remind you that these horrors and terrors are not essential to salvation, or else they would have been commanded. Faith and repentance,

the essentials to salvation, are commanded—"Repent and be baptized, every one of you." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." The things that are essential to salvation are put very plainly in the Scriptures. I do not read anywhere in the Word of God, "Be tempted of the devil and you shall be saved." I do not read, "Feel a horror of great darkness and you shall be saved." I do not find the Lord commanding you to despair in order that you may be saved. So far from these things being essential to salvation, they are often stumbling blocks in the way of sinners seeking the Savior—and devices of the devil from which may God deliver us!

To doubt, for instance, whether Christ can save me is a heinous sin! To think that my case is so bad that God cannot blot out my sin is to doubt His Omnipotence and to do Him grievous dishonor. For me to despair of receiving the mercy of Christ is to do despite to that generous and self-sacrificing Savior who bled to death on Calvary's Cross! To think that He is either unable or unwilling to forgive us is to add to our former offenses—and that which is, in itself, sinful cannot be a help to salvation! That which is, in itself, the very climax and culminating point of human guilt—to doubt the love, kindness and mercy of God—cannot, in any sense, be a desirable thing in any child of God! To repent is one thing, but to despair is quite another matter. To dread sin and to loathe it is one thing—but to doubt the power of the blood of Christ to cleanse from all sin is quite another.

III. Now, having handled these two points, let me close with WORDS OF ADVICE TO BOTH THESE CLASSES

OF PERSONS WHOM I HAVE BEEN DESCRIBING.

Dear Friends, you who are frightened and alarmed, vexed and troubled, I know what you are saying, "Oh, that we could escape from this misery!" There is another friend, over yonder, who has never had these fears and he is saying, "I wish I had them, for, if I had them, there would be some hope for me." If you do not have them, you want them—and if you do have them, you want to get rid of them! There is no pleasing you either way. But good physicians do not seek to please their patients, but to cure them! It is not their aim to make the medicine palatable, but to make it efficacious. So, the Lord does not study our wishes, but gives us what is best for us—and we are very foolish to wish to have it otherwise.

Let me remind you who are in terror because of sin that the only way to escape from that terror aright is to flee at once to Jesus! As a good old woman, who had long been accustomed to reading "The Pilgrim's Progress," wisely said, "No doubt Mr. Bunyan described what he went through before he found Christ, but he did not picture the way of salvation as he might have done. Evangelist ought to have said to the pilgrim, 'Do you see that Cross yonder? And do you see

Jesus, the Son of God made flesh, and bleeding and dying there? Look to Him and you shall be saved! Trust Him and your sins shall all be put away at once.' That is the true Gospel which gives peace to troubled hearts." So I say to you, poor troubled Friend, and to you who are not troubled, flee to Christ! Trust the Son of God to save you and He will save you! Trust Him to put away all your past guilt and He will do it. Trust Him to keep you in the future and He will vouchsafe you His promised aid. Trust Him with the enormous load of your sin and He will take it upon His shoulders and roll it into the Red Sea of His atoning blood! Trust Him with the foul disease of your evil habits—and with the touch of His healing finger you will be made whole! Say not, "I am too miserable to rest on Him," but rest on Him, however miserable you may be. Say not, "I am not in a fit state to come to Christ," for whatever state you are in, you are fit to come to Christ. He needs no fitness in you except that, just as you are, you trust in "the Lamb of God,

which takes away the sin of the world." May the Holy Spirit enable you to do so! I will not argue with you about your doubts and fears, your, "ifs," and your, "buts." This is God's commandment to you, poor Sinner—"Trust in Christ." So, do not dare to disobey it, but may the Holy Spirit compel you to obey it, for then shall you go on your way rejoicing because your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you!

To you who have not felt such terrors as I have been describing, what shall I say? Do not displease the Lord by seeking for them. Do not begin fretting and complaining because you have not been tried as others have been. If a child cries because he has not been whipped, he ought to have full satisfaction! If a young man should go to a physician and complain that he was afraid he would not continue to live because he had not had the measles, or whooping cough, or scarlet fever, what would the physician say to him? The most likely reply would be, "Be thankful, Sir, that you have not had those maladies." If you cry because you have not had to smart under the Lord's rod, it may be that you will have your desire granted to your cost! The Lord may say, "That sinner might have gone straight to the Cross, but he would not. He wanted to go through the Slough of Despond, so he shall go through it—and he shall flounder about in it with the frogs croaking in his ears and the filth rolling into his mouth for many a day—until he knows better than to dictate to his Heavenly Father." If you have not gone to Sinai with Mr. Worldly Wiseman to hear its thunder and to see its lightning, be thankful that you have not! Flee from all these things to Christ, without asking Him for a preparatory training in the terrors and horrors which some have had to experience! Trust in Christ and you shall find salvation at once!

I was reading, the other day, the preface to the hymn of a very excellent writer. There is a passage in the memoir in which the author says that "he stuck by a feeling religion, and a feeling religion stuck by him." Well, dear Friends, I am afraid that many of you find that "a feeling religion" does stick by you—but I believe that is one of the worst kinds of religion in the whole world! It is a believing religion that saves the soul! And those who are so dependent upon feelings are in the seventh Heaven of delight one day and in the depths of despair the next! They go up and down so quickly because they are built upon the sandy shifting foundation of their own emotions! Be not so foolish, Beloved! Build on what Christ did, on what Christ was, on what He is and what He suffered! Building so, you shall find Him "the same yesterday, and today, and forever"—and your hope, faith and comfort shall abide with you—since they are founded upon the immovable Rock of Ages!

I have tried to preach the Gospel simply tonight. Remember, Souls, that the Word is not preached in vain. We are either, "a savor of life unto life," or, "of death unto death" to our hearers. Which is it to you, dear Friends? Is it a savor of death unto death to you, O impenitent Sinner? And is it to you, O penitent Soul, a savor of life unto life? By this test shall you tell which it is—if you now, from your heart, trust Christ, in obedience to the Lord's command, then has the Gospel saved you and you may go in peace. "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." "Man, your sins are forgiven you." "Arise, take up your bed and go to your house." Go your way, for the Lord has had mercy on you! Glorify Him in the family and tell others, wherever you can, what great things the Lord has done for you!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALM 38; ISAIAH 53.

I am going to read two portions of Scripture. In the first—the 38th Psalm—we shall hear a suffering servant of Jehovah crying out to his God.

Psalms 38:1. O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath: neither chasten me in Your hot displeasure. "If You do rebuke me, do it gently, O my Lord! If You do chasten me, let not Your displeasure wax hot against Your

servant."

2. For Your arrows stick fast in me, and Your hand presses me down. God may aim His arrows even at His own children and He may lay His hand very heavily upon those whom He deeply loves.

3. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. David was under the afflicting hand of God even with regard to his bodily disease. He could have borne the pain if it had been merely physical—but there was a sense of sin mixed with it which made it sting him in his very soul.

4. 5. For my iniquities are gone over my head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. David had some painful old sores. I mean old sins and they seem to have broken out again and again. And when he wrote this Psalm, he was groaning in his spirit at the remembrance of them. His faith was at a low ebb and his feelings were of the most bitter and sorrowful kind.

6. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. Yet he was a true child of God all the while, for this is, according to its title, "A Psalm of David," concerning whom the Lord said, "I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, which shall fulfill all My will." God's flowers do not have sunlight 24 hours in the day. They have their night seasons when it is not only dark, but it may also be heavy with the cold dew, or trying with a sharp frost.

7, 8. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sorely broken: I have roared by reason of the turmoil of my heart. That is an expressive word that David uses—"I have roared." He felt as if his prayers were more like the agonized cries of a wounded beast than the intelligent supplications of a human being—least of all, of a man of God. And sometimes, when the spirit is greatly bowed down, it cannot express itself in words, but has to be content with groans, cries, sobs and tears.

9. LORD, all my desire is before You; and my groaning is not hid from You. What a sweet, sweet Truth that is! Happy is that man who, in the time of deepest darkness, can still grasp that Truth of God and hold it fast. "Lord, my groaning is not hid from You! I could only roar out my complaint, or groan it out, but You could hear it just as well as if I had ordered my words aright before You."

10, 11. My heart pants, my strength fails me: as for the light of my eyes, it also is gone from me. My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague; and my kinsmen stand afar off "Relatives and friends alike all get away from me as far as they can, for they cannot bear to be in such sorrowful company."

12, 13. They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long. But I, as a deaf man, heard not: and I was as a dumb man that opens not his mouth. Although David was a tried man, he was, at least at that time, a wise man. God did not leave His servant to act or to speak foolishly and, Beloved, when men are unjustly rebuking and reproaching you, there is nothing more wise than to act as if you did not hear them! It is the very acme of wisdom if you can keep quite quiet and not answer them—refusing to make any apologies or extenuations—or even showing any sign that you have so much as heard what they have said!

14, 15. Thus I was as a man that hears not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs. For in You, O LORD, do I hope. What sublime faith there is here! It is easy to have faith in sunshiny weather—to have faith when

you have the least need of it. There are plenty of people who fancy they are believing in God when everything is going well with them. It is one thing to believe when you are lying at anchor in a peaceful harbor—it is quite another matter to believe when you are at sea in a storm. David hoped in God when trouble had come upon him wave upon wave—"For in You, O Lord, do I hope."

15. You will hear, O LORD my God. ' 'Even if I do not hear You, You will hear me and if no man shall hear me, You will hear my prayer and answer my supplication."

16-20. For I said, hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slips, they magnify themselves against me. For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare my iniquity. I will be sorry for my sin. But my enemies are vigorous, and they are strong: and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. They also that render evil for good are my adversaries; because I follow what is good. We need never be afraid of any man's opposition when the reason for his being our adversary is that we "follow what is good," as our translators quaintly express it.

21, 22. Forsake me not, O Lord: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord, my Salvation. Now we shall see, as we read that wondrous 53rd chapter of Isaiah, not a man of God in trouble, but the Son of God in trouble! And we shall see Him, also, as a deaf man that hears not, "and as a dumb man that opens not His mouth."

Isaiah 53:1-9. Who has believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He has no form nor comeliness and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned everyone to His own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare His generation? For He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of My people was He stricken. And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth. Those wicked men were His enemies because He did "follow what is good." They that rewarded Him evil for good were His adversaries even as they are ours.

10. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him. We might say the same of that tried child of God whose utterances we read just now—"It pleased the Lord to bruise Him."

10, 11. He has put Him to grief: when You shall make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities. What gracious Gospel words these are, even though they were recorded under the old dispensation! Oh, how you who are full of iniquity ought to catch at these Inspired declarations which so clearly set forth the substitutionary work of Christ on behalf of the guilty! If you realize your need of such a Savior as He is, how these words ought to gladden Your heart!

12. Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He has poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

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