

Divine Mercy to Mourning Penitents

by Samuel Davies

Samuel Davies' sermon explores the profound mercy of God towards those who sincerely repent and seek His forgiveness.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 29:19, Psalm 7:11, Psalm 50:22, Jeremiah 31:18, Ezekiel 36:31, Nahum 1:2, Luke 13:3, Romans 8:38

Topics: "Divine Mercy", "True Repentance"

Description

Samuel Davies preaches about the divine mercy extended to mourning penitents, using the example of Ephraim's repentance and God's compassionate response. The sermon highlights the genuine repentance of a sinner, the deep sorrow and shame for past sins, and the tender compassion of God towards those who turn to Him. Davies emphasizes the necessity of true repentance, the transformative power of grace, and the loving acceptance awaiting those who humbly return to God.

Transcript

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By Samuel Davies

"I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning: 'You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the LORD my God. After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I struck my thigh in grief! I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.'

Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him! I will surely have mercy upon him!" declares the LORD. Jeremiah 31:18-20

In these words, we have the mourning language of a penitent child--sensible of ingratitude, and at once desirous and ashamed to return. Sweetly blended with these words--we have the tender language of a compassionate father--at once chastising, pitying, and pardoning. The images are so lively and moving, that if they were regarded only as poetical descriptions founded upon fiction, they would be irresistibly striking. But when we consider them as the most important realities, as descriptive of that sincere repentance which we must all feel, and of that gracious acceptance we must all obtain from God before

we can be happy--what great effect should they have upon us! how may our hearts dissolve within us at the sound of such pathetic complaints, and such gracious encouragements! Hard indeed is that heart, that can hear these penitential strains without being melted into the like tender relentings; and inveterate is that melancholy, incurable is that despondency, that can listen to such expressions of fatherly compassion and love, without being cheered and animated.

This whole chapter had a primary reference to the Jews, and such of the Israelites as might mingle with them in their return from the Babylonian captivity. As they were enslaved to foreigners, and removed from their native land for their sins--so they could not be restored, but upon their repentance. Upon this condition only, was a restoration promised to them. Lev. 26:40-43; Deuteronomy 30:1-16.

In this chapter we have a prediction of their repentance under the heavy chastisement of seventy years' captivity, and of their return thereupon, to their own land. In the text the whole body of penitents among them is called by the name of a single person, Ephraim. In the prophetic writings, the northern kingdom of the ten tribes, as distinguished from the southern kingdom of Judah, is frequently denominated by this name, because the Ephraimites were a principal family among them. And sometimes, as here, the name is given to the Jews, probably on account of the great number of Ephraimites mingled with them, especially on their return from captivity. All the penitent Jews are included under this single name, to intimate their unanimity in their repentance. Their hearts consented, like the heart of one man, to turn to the Lord, from whom with horrid unanimity they had previously revolted.

This single name Ephraim also renders this passage more easily applicable to particular penitents in all ages. Every one of such may insert his own name, instead of that of Ephraim, and claim the encouragement originally given to them. And indeed this whole passage is applicable to all true penitents.

Repenting Ephraim did but speak the language of every one of you, my brethren, who is made sensible of the plague of his own heart, and turned to the Lord. And the tender language of forgiving grace to mourning Ephraim--is addressed to each of you; and it is with a view to you that I intend to consider this Scripture. The text naturally resolves itself into three parts, as it consists of three verses.

In verse 18, we find the careless, resolute impenitent, reduced by chastisement to a sense of his danger, and the necessity of turning to God; and yet sensible of his utter inability, and therefore crying for the attractive influence of divine grace. You hear Ephraim bemoaning his wretched case, and pouring out importunate groans for relief, thus: You have chastised me, and I was chastised, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, which struggles and wearies himself in vain to get free from it, and must be broken and tamed with severe usage. Thus stubborn and unmanageable, have I been. And now, when I am convinced of the necessity of a return to you, I feel my obstinate heart--stubborn, like a wild ox, and I cannot come. I therefore cry to you for the attractive influence of your grace! "Restore me, and I will return; draw me, and I shall run after you! To whom but to you should I return; and to whom but to you should I apply for strength to return? For you only are the Lord my God, who can help me, and whom I am under infinite obligations to serve."

Thus the awakened sinner prayed; and mercy listened to his cries. The attractive influences of divine grace are granted, and he is enabled to return.

This introduces the second branch of the text in the 19th verse, in which the new convert is represented as reflecting upon the efficacy of converting grace, and the glorious change wrought in him by it: "After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I struck my thigh in grief! I was ashamed and humiliated

because I bore the disgrace of my youth." While the returning prodigal is venting himself in these plaintive strains in some solitary corner, his heavenly Father's affections are moving over him.

The third part of the text represents the blessed God listening to the cries of his mourning child. And while Ephraim is going on in his passionate complaints, God, as it were, interrupts him, and surprises him with the soothing voice of mercy. "Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight?" Surely he is. Or we may understand the words thus, as if God should say, "Whose mourning voice is this that I hear? Is this Ephraim, my dear son? Is this my pleasant child that bemoans himself as a helpless orphan, or one abandoned by his father? And can I bear to hear his complaints without mingling divine consolations with them, and assuring him of pardon? No! For since I spoke against him in my threatenings, I do earnestly remember him still! Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him!" says the Lord.

I shall endeavor to illustrate each of these parts of the text;

and thus shall be led to describe the preparative exercise, the nature and concomitants of true repentance;

and lastly, the tender compassions of God towards mourning penitents.

1. Let us view the returning sinner under his first spiritual concern, which is generally preparatory to evangelical repentance.

And where shall we find him? And what is he doing?

We shall not find him as usual, in a thoughtless hurry about earthly things, confining all his attention to these trifles, and unmindful of the important concerns of eternity. We shall not find him merry and vain, in a circle of jovial, careless companions; much less shall we find him intrepid and secure in a course of sin, gratifying his flesh, and indulging his lusts.

In this enchanted road, the crowd of hardy impenitents pass secure and cheerful down to the chambers of eternal death--but the awakened sinner flies from it with horror; or, if his depraved heart would tempt him to walk in it, he cannot take many steps before he is shocked with the horrid apparition of impending danger! He finds the flattering paths of sin haunted with the terrible specters of guilt; and the sword of divine vengeance gleams bright and dreadful before him, and seems lifted to give the fatal blow!

You will, therefore, find the awakened sinner solitary and solemn in some retired corner, not deceiving himself with vain hopes of safety in his present state--but alarmed with apprehensions of danger. He is not planning schemes for his temporal advantage; nor asking, with sordid anxiety, "Who will show me any worldly good?" but solicitous about his perishing soul, and anxiously inquiring, "What shall I do to be saved?" He is not congratulating himself upon the imaginary goodness of his heart or life, or priding himself with secret wonder in a rich conceit of his excellencies; but you will hear him, in his sorrowful retirement, bemoaning, or (as the original signifies) condoling himself. He sees his case to be really dreadful and sad, and he, as it were, takes up a lamentation over himself. He is no more senseless, hard-hearted, and self-applauding, as he was accustomed to be: but, like a mourning dove, he bewails himself in such pathetic strains as these:

"Unhappy creature that I am! into what a deplorable state have I brought myself! and how long have I continued in it, with the insensibility of a rock and the stupidity of a brute! Now I may mourn over my past neglected and unimproved days, as so many deceased friends, sent indeed from heaven to do me

good--but cruelly killed by my ungrateful neglect and continued delays as to return to God and holiness. Fly back, you abused months and years; arise from the dead; restore me your precious moments again, that I may unravel the web of life, and form it anew; and that I may improve the opportunities I have squandered away! Vain and desperate wish! the wheels of time will not return--and what shall I do? Here I am, a guilty, obnoxious creature, uncertain of life and unfit to die; alienated from God, and incapable (alas! I may add unwilling to return) a slave to sin, and too feeble to break the fetters of my inveterate habits; liable to the arrest of divine justice, and unable to deliver myself; exposed to the vengeance of heaven--yet can make no atonement; destitute of a saving interest in Christ; and uncertain, awfully uncertain, whether I shall ever obtain it!

"And if these guilty lips may dare to pronounce your injured name, O God of grace, have pity upon me! But, alas! I deserve no pity, for how long have I denied it to myself! Ah, infatuated wretch! why did not I sooner begin to secure my unhappy soul, which has lain all this time neglected, and unpitied, upon the brink of ruin! Why did I not sooner lay my condition to heart? Alas! I should have gone on thoughtless still, had I not been awakened by the kind severity, the gracious chastisements of my dishonored Father!"

"You have chastised me!" This, as spoken by Ephraim, had a particular reference to the Babylonish captivity; but we may naturally take occasion from it to speak of those afflictions in general, whether outward or inward, that are made the means of alarming the secure sinner. There are many ways which our heavenly Father takes to correct his undutiful children until they return to him.

Sometimes he kindly takes away their health--the abused occasion of their wantonness and security, and restrains them from their lusts with fetters of affliction. This is beautifully described by Elihu. "God disciplines people with sickness and pain, with ceaseless aching in their bones. They lose their appetite and do not care for even the most delicious food. They waste away to skin and bones. They are at death's door; the angels of death wait for them." Job 33:19-22

Sometimes God awakens the sinner to bethink himself, by stripping him of his earthly supports and comforts: his estate or his relatives--which drew away his heart from eternal things, and thus brings him to see the necessity of turning to God, the fountain of bliss--upon the failure of the creature streams. Thus he dealt with profligate Manasseh. 2 Chron. 33:11, 12. He was taken in "thorns, and bound in fetters, and carried to Babylon; and when he was in affliction he sought the Lord, and humbled himself greatly before him, and prayed unto him," etc. Thus also God promises to do with his chosen: "I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of my covenant." Ezekiel 20:37; Psalm 89:32; Proverbs 22:15, 29:15.

But the principal means of correction which God uses in conversion, is that of conscience; and indeed without this, all the rest are in vain. Outward afflictions are of service--only as they tend to awaken the conscience from its lethargy to a faithful discharge of its trust. It is conscience which makes the sinner sensible of his misery and scourges him--until he returns to his duty. This is a chastisement the most severe that human nature can endure. The lashes of a guilty conscience are intolerable; and some under them have chosen strangling and suicide rather than life. The spirit of a man may bear him up under outward infirmities; but when the spirit itself is wounded--who can bear it? Proverbs 18:14. "They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." Romans 2:15

Conscience is a serpent in his breast, which bites and gnaws his heart; and he can no more avoid it, than he can fly from himself! Its force is so great and universal, that even the heathen poet Juvenal, not famous for the delicacy of his morals, taught by experience, could speak feelingly of its secret blows, and of agonizing sweats under its tortures. Let not such of you as have never been tortured with its remorse, congratulate yourselves upon your happiness, for you are not innocents! Your conscience will not always sleep; it will not always lie torpid and inactive, like a snake benumbed with cold, in your breast! It will awaken you either to your conversion--or condemnation! Either the fire of God's wrath flaming from his law will enliven it in this world to sting you with medicinal anguish; or the unquenchable fire of his vengeance in the lake of fire and brimstone will thaw it into life--and then it will horribly rage in your breast, and diffuse its tormenting poison through your whole frame! And then it will become a never-dying worm, and prey upon your hearts forever!

But if you now allow it to pain you with beneficial remorse, and awaken you to a tender sensibility of your danger--then this internal enemy will in the end become your bosom friend, will support you under every calamity, and be your faithful companion and guardian through the most dangerous paths of life.

Therefore now submit to its wholesome severities, now yield to its chastisements!

Such of you as have submitted to its authority, and obeyed its faithful admonitions, find it your best friend. And you may bless the day in which you complied with its demands, though before divine grace renewed your heart, your wills were stubborn and reluctant; and you might say with Ephraim: "You disciplined me like an unruly calf!"

That is, "As a wild young ox, unbroken from the herd, is unmanageable, refuses the yoke, becomes outraged at the whip or goad, and wearies himself in struggles to throw off the burden put upon him, and regain his savage liberty, and never will submit until wearied out, and unable to resist any longer; so has my stubborn heart, unaccustomed to obey, refused the yoke of your law, O my God, and struggled with sullen obstinacy under your chastisements! Instead of calmly submitting to your rod, and immediately reforming under correction, instead of turning to you, and flying to your arms to avoid the falling blow--I was unyielding and outraged, like a wild bull in a net! Isaiah 51:20. I wearied myself in desperate struggles to free myself from your chastising hand; or vainly tried to harden myself to bear it with obdurate insensibility. I tried to break the rod of conscience that I might no more groan under its lashes, and my heart forcefully resisted and rebelled against the gracious design of your correction, which was to bring me back to you my heavenly Father. But now I am wearied out, now I am sensible I must submit, or perish, and that my conscience is too strong for me, and must prevail."

You see, my brethren, the obstinate reluctance of an awakened sinner to return to God. Like a wild young bullock, he would roam at large, and is impatient of the yoke of the law, and the restraints of conscience. He loves his sin--and cannot bear to part with it. He has no relish for the exercises of devotion and self-denial; and therefore will not submit to them. The way of holiness is disagreeable to his depraved heart, and he will not turn his feet to it. He loves to be stupidly comfortable, and serene in mind, and cannot bear to be checked in his pursuit of business or pleasure, by anxieties of heart! And therefore he is impatient of the honest warnings of his conscience, and uses a variety of wretched expedients to silence its clamorous remonstrances.

In short, he will do anything, he will turn to anything--rather than turn to God. If his conscience will be but satisfied, he will forsake many of his sins. He will, like Herod, Mark 6:20, do many things, and walk in the

whole round of external religious duties. All this he will do, if his conscience will be but bribed by it. But if conscience enlarges its demands, and, after he has reformed his life, requires him to have a new heart, requires him to turn not only from the outward practice of gross vices--but from the love of all sins; not only to turn to the observance of religious duties--but to turn to the Lord with all his heart, and surrender himself entirely to him, and make it the main business of life to serve him; if conscience, I say, carries its demands thus far--he cannot bear it, he struggles to throw off the yoke!

And some are cursed with horrid success in the attempt! They are permitted to rest content in a partial reformation, or external religion, as sufficient; and so go down to the grave with a lie in their right hand! But the happy soul, on whom divine grace is determined to finish its work, in spite of all opposition, is allowed to weary itself out in a vain resistance of the chastisements of conscience, until it is obliged to yield, and submit to the yoke. And then with Ephraim it will cry: "Restore me--and I will return!" This is the mourning sinner's language, when convinced that he must submit and turn to God, and in the meantime finds himself utterly unable to turn.

He makes many attempts to give himself to the Lord; but oh! his heart starts back and shrinks away, as though he were rushing into flames--when he is but flying to the gracious embraces of his Father! He strives, and strives to drag himself along--but all in vain. And what shall he do in this extremity--but cry, "Lord, Restore me--and I will return! Draw me--and I shall run after you. Work in me to will and to do--and then I shall work out my own salvation.

"Lord, though I am sensible of the necessity of turning to you, though I exert my feeble strength in many a languid effort to come--yet I cannot so much as creep towards you, though I should die on the spot! Not only your Word--but my own experience now convinces me that I cannot come unto you--unless you draw me. John 6:44.

"Others vainly boast of their imaginary power, as though, when they set themselves about it, they could perform some great achievements. Thus I once flattered myself--but now, when I am most capable of judging, that is, when I come to the trial, all my boasts are humbled! Here I lie, a helpless creature, unable to go to the physician, unable to accept of pardon and life on the easy terms of the gospel, and unable to free myself from the bondage of sin! And thus I must lie forever, unless that God, from whom I have revolted, draws me back to himself. Turn me, oh you who have the hearts of all men in your hands, and can turn them wherever you please! Turn me--and then as weak and reluctant as I am--I shall be turned. This backward heart will yield to the almighty attraction of your grace! Here am I--as passive clay in the hand of the potter; incapable to fashion myself into a vessel fit for your house; but you can form me as you please. This hard and stubborn heart will be malleable and pliable to your irresistible power."

Thus you see the awakened sinner is driven to earnest prayer in his exigency. Never did a drowning man call for help, or a condemned malefactor plead for pardon--with more sincerity and ardor! If the sinner had neglected prayer all his life before now--he flies to it as the only expedient left! Or if he formerly ran it over in a careless, unthinking manner, as an insignificant form--now he exerts all the importunity of his soul! Now he prays as for his life, and cannot rest until his desires are answered!

The sinner ventures to enforce his petition by pleading his relation to God, "Restore me, and I will return, because you are the LORD my God." There is a sense in which a sinner in his unregenerate state cannot call God, his God; that is, he cannot claim a special interest in him as his portion, nor cry "Abba, Father," with the spirit of adoption, as reconciled to God. But even an unregenerate sinner may call him my God in

other senses:

He is his God by right, that is, though he has idolatrously yielded himself to other gods--yet by right he should have acknowledged the LORD only.

He is his God--as that name denotes authority and power, to which he should be subject.

He is his God--as he would now choose him to be his God, his portion, and his all, which is implied in turning to him.

He is his God--by anticipation and hope, as upon his turning to him he will become his reconciled God in covenant.

He is his God--by outward profession and visible relation.

The force of this argument, to urge his petition for converting grace, may be viewed in various lights.

It may be understood thus: "Restore me--for you only who are the Lord of the universe, and have all the creation at your control. You alone, who are my God and ruler, and in whose hand my heart is--are able to turn so obstinate a creature as myself! In vain do I seek for help elsewhere. Not all the means upon earth, not all the persuasions, exhortations, invitations, and terrors that can be used with me--can turn my hard heart; it is a work befitting the Lord God Almighty, and it is you alone can effect it."

Or we may understand the plea thus: "Restore me--and I shall turn to you; to you who are the Lord my God, and to whom I am under the most sacred obligations to return. I would resign your own right to you; I would submit to you who alone has a just claim to me as your servant."

Or the words may be understood as an abjuration of all the idol-lusts to which the sinner was enslaved before: "I will turn to you; for to whom should I turn--but to the Lord my God! "What have I to do any more with idols?" Hosea 14:8: "Why should I any longer submit to other masters, who have no right to me? I would renounce them all; I would throw off all subjection to them, and avouch you alone for the Lord my God!" Thus have the Jews renounced their false gods upon their return from Babylon.

Or we may understand the words as an encouragement to hope for converting grace, since it is asked from a God of infinite power and goodness: "Though I have most grievously offended, and had I done the thousandth part so much against my fellow creatures, I could never expect a favorable admission into their presence; yet I dare ask so great a favor of you, for you are God--and not man: your power and your grace are all divine, such as befit a God. I therefore dare to hope for that from your hands, which I might despair of from all the universe of beings besides."

Or finally, the passage may be looked upon as a plea drawn from the sinner's external relation to God, as a member of his visible church, and as dedicated to him: "Restore me--and I will turn to you, whose name I bear, and to whom I have been early devoted. I would now of my own choice acknowledge the God of my fathers, and return to the guide of my youth. And, since you have honored me with a place in your visible church, I humbly hope you will not reject me now, when I would sincerely consecrate myself to you, and become your servant in reality, as well as in appearance."

In this sense the plea might be used with peculiar propriety by the Jews, who had been nationally adopted as the peculiar people of God.

In whatever sense we understand the words, they convey to us this important truth: that the awakened sinner is obliged to take all his encouragement from God, and not from himself. All his trust is in the divine mercy, and he is brought to a happy self-despair.

Having viewed Ephraim under the preparatory work of legal conviction, and the dawn of evangelical repentance; let us now view him,

2. As reflecting upon the surprising efficacy of grace he had sought, and which was bestowed upon him in answer to his prayer. We left him just now crying, "Restore me--and I shall be turned!" And here we find him actually turned: "After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I struck my thigh in grief!" When the Lord exerts his power to subdue the stubbornness of the sinner, and sweetly to allure him to himself--then the sinner repents; then his heart dissolves in sincere, unselfish relents. His sorrow and concern before conversion are forced and mercenary; they are occasioned only by a selfish fear of punishment, and he would willingly get rid of them! But now, his grief is free and spontaneous; it flows from his heart as freely as streams from a fountain! He now takes pleasure in tender relents before the Lord for his sin; he delights to be humble, and to feel his heart dissolve within him. A heart of flesh, soft and susceptible of impression, is his choice; and a stony, insensible heart a great burden. The more penitent--the more happy; and the more senseless--the more miserable he finds himself.

Now also, his heart is actuated with a generous concern for the glory of God. Now also, he sees the horrid evil of sin as contrary to the holiness of God, and an ungrateful requital of his uninterrupted beneficence. We learn from this passage, that the true penitent is sensible of a mighty turn in his temper and inclinations. "Surely after I strayed, I repented." His whole soul is turned from what he formerly delighted in--and turned to what he had no relish for before. Particularly his thoughts, his will, and affections are turned to God. There is a heavenly bias communicated to them--which draws them to holiness; like the law of gravitation in the material world.

There is indeed a new turn given to his outward practice; the world may in some measure see that he is a new man; but this is not all; the first spring that turns all the wheels of the soul and actions of life is the heart--and this is first set right. The change within is as evident as that without; and could our eyes penetrate the heart--we would clearly see the great change. In short, "If any man is in Christ--he is throughout a new creature; old things are passed away, and behold, all things are become new!" Apply this touchstone to your hearts, my friends--and see if they will stand the test!

The penitent proceeds, "After I came to understand, I struck my thigh in grief!" The same grace that turns him--also instructs him; nay, it is by discovering to him the beauty of holiness, and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that it draws him. He is brought out of darkness, into marvelous and astonishing light, which surprises him with new discoveries of things! He is instructed particularly:

as to the necessity of turning to God,

as to the horrid ingratitude, vileness, and deformity of sin,

and as to his folly and wickedness in continuing so long alienated from God. By the way, have you ever been let into these secrets, my hearers?

And when instructed in these, "I struck my thigh in grief!" This gesture denotes consternation and amazement; and nature directs us thus to express these passions. Ezekiel is enjoined to use this gesture

as a prophetic action, signifying the horror and astonishment of his mind. Ezekiel 21:12. This action, therefore, of the penitent, intimates what consternation and amazement he is cast into, when these new discoveries flash upon his soul. He stands amazed at himself. He is struck with horror to think what an ungrateful, ignorant, stupid wretch he has been all his life--until this happy moment! "Alas! what have I been doing? abusing all my days in ruining my own soul, and dishonoring the God of all my mercies! contentedly estranged from him, and not seeking to return! Where were my eyes, that I never before saw the horrid evil of my conduct and the shocking deformity of sin, which now opens to me in all its hideous colors! Amazing! that divine vengeance has not broken out upon me before now! Can it be that I am yet alive! Alive in the land of hope too! Yes, alive, a humble pardoned penitent! Let heaven and earth be astonished at this, for surely the sun never shone upon a wretch so undeserving! so great a monument of mercy!"

The pardoned penitent proceeds: "I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth!" Jeremiah 31:19.

We are ashamed when we are caught in a sordid, vile and scandalous action! We blush, and are confounded, and know not where to look, or what to say. Thus the penitent is heartily ashamed of himself, when he reflects upon the sordid dispositions he has indulged, and the vile and scandalous actions he has committed. He blushes at his own inspection; he is confounded at his own tribunal. He appears to himself--a sordid, vile contemptible wretch; and, though the world may honor him--he loathes himself, as viler than the earth he treads on; and is secretly ashamed before the face of man. And how then shall he appear before God? How shall he hold up his face in the presence of his injured Father?

He comes to God ashamed, and covering his head. He knows not what to say to him; he knows not how to look him in His face--but he falls down abashed and confounded at his feet. Thus was penitent Ezra ashamed before God. He fell upon his knees, and lifted up his hands (his eyes, like the publican, he dared not lift up) unto the heavens, and he says, "O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. But now, O our God, what can we say after this? For we have disregarded your commandments!" Ezra 9:5-10.

Thus it was foretold concerning the repenting Jews. "Then you shall remember your ways and be ashamed. You shall be confounded and never open your mouth any more, because of your shame!" Ezekiel 16:61-63. There is good reason for this conscious shame, and therefore it is enjoined as a duty: "Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel!" Ezekiel 36:32.

And what is the cause of this shame in the mourning penitent? "Oh," says he, "it is because I bear the disgrace of my youth!" That is, "I carry upon me (as the original word signifies) the brand of infamy. My youth, alas! was spent in a thoughtless neglect of God and the duties I owed him; my vigorous days were wasted in sensual extravagances, and gratifying my carnal inclinations. My prime of life, which should have been sacred to the author of my existence, was spent in rebellion against him! Alas! my first thoughts, my virgin love, did not aspire to him; nor did my young desires, as soon as fledged, wing their flight to heaven. In short, the temper of my heart, and my course of my life, from the first exercises of reason--to this happy hour of my conversion, were a disgrace to my rational nature! I have degraded myself beneath the beasts which perish!"

"Behold, I am vile! I loath and abhor myself for all my filthiness and abominations!" Ezekiel 36:31. "And how amazing is the grace of God--to honor so base a wretch with a place among the children of his love!"

Thus I have delineated the heart of penitent Ephraim. Let me ask you, my friends--is this your picture? Have you ever felt such sincere relentings, such just consternation, such holy shame and confusion? There can be no transition from nature to grace, without these. You all bear the disgrace of your youth, you have all spent some unhappy days in the scandalous ways of sin, and your consciences still bear the brand of infamy. And have you ever been made deeply sensible of it? Has God ever heard you bemoaning yourselves thus in some mournful solitude, "You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined." Is there any such mourner here this day? Then listen to the gracious voice of your heavenly Father, while,

3. I am illustrating the last, the sweetest part of the text, which expresses the tender compassion of God towards mourning penitents. While they are bemoaning their case, and conscious that they do not deserve one look of love from God--he is represented as attentively listening to catch the first penitential groan which breaks from their hearts.

Ephraim, in the depth of his despondency, probably did hardly hope that God took any notice of his secret sorrows, which he suppressed as much as possible from the public view. But God did hear him--God was watching to hear the first mournful cry; and he repeats all his complaints, to let him know (after the manner of men) what particular notice he had taken of them. "I have surely heard, or hearing I have heard." That is, "I have attentively heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus!"

What strong consolation may this give to desponding mourners, who think themselves neglected by that God to whom they are pouring out their weeping supplications! He hears your secret groans, he courts your sighs, and puts your tears into his bottle! His eyes penetrate all the secrets of your heart, and he observes all their feeble struggles to turn to himself; and he beholds you--not as an unconcerned spectator--but with all the tender emotions of fatherly compassion! For, while he is listening to Ephraim's mournful complaints, he abruptly breaks in upon him, and sweetly surprises him with the warmest declarations of pity and grace:

"Is this Ephraim, my dear son, whose mourning voice I hear? Is this my pleasant child, or (as it might be rendered) the child of my delights, who thus wounds my ear with his heart-rending groans?" What strange language is this--to an ungrateful, unyielding rebel, who continued obstinate--until he was wearied out; who would not turn--until drawn; who deserved to fall a victim to justice! This is the language of compassion all divine, of grace that befits a God.

This passage contains a most encouraging truth: that, however vile and abandoned a sinner has been--yet upon his repentance, he becomes God's dear son, his favorite child! God will, from that moment, regard him, provide for him, protect him, and bring him to his heavenly inheritance, as his son and heir! "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!" Romans 8:38-39. Nothing shall separate him from his father's love--but "he shall inherit all things." Revelation 21:7. Yes, all things are his already in title, and he shall be made "greater than the kings of the earth!" He shall be made such as befits so dignified a relation as that of a son to the King of kings, and Lord of lords!

And is not this magnet sufficient to attract all this assembly to their Father's house? Can you resist the almighty force of such compassion?

Return, you perishing prodigals! Return! Though you have sinned against Heaven, and before your Father, and are not worthy to be called his son--yet return, and you shall be made his dear son--the child in whom He delights! Are none of you in need of such strong consolation as this? Do you need encouragement to return, and are you ready to spring up and run to your Father's arms upon the first assurance of acceptance? If this is what you need, you have an abundance for your supply. Are all your souls then in motion to return? Does that eye which darts through the whole creation at once, now behold your hearts moving towards God? Or am I wasting these gracious encouragements upon stupid creatures, void of sense, who do not care for them; or that are so conceited of their own worth, as not to need them? If so, I retract these consolations, with respect to you, and shall presently tell you your doom!

But let us further pursue these melting strains of paternal pity: "Though I often spoke against him--I still remember him." Many and dreadful were the threatenings denounced against the sinner, while impenitent; and, had he continued impenitent, they would certainly have been executed upon him. But the primary and immediate design of the threatenings, are to make men happy--and not to make them miserable! They are designed to deter them from disobedience, which is naturally productive of misery; or to reclaim them from it, which is but to restrain them in their career to ruin.

And consequently these threatenings proceed from divine love--as well as the promises of our God; from love to the person, though from hatred to sin. So the same love which prompts a parent to promise a reward to his son for obedience, will prompt him also to threaten him, if he takes some dangerous weapon to play with. Or, to choose a more pertinent illustration, for God is the moral ruler--as well as the gracious father of the rational world: the same regard to the public well-being, which induces a lawgiver to annex a reward to obedience, will also prompt him to add penalties to his law to deter from disobedience. His immediate design is not to make any of his subjects miserable--but to keep them from making themselves and others miserable by disobedience! Though when the threatening is once denounced, it is necessary it should be executed, to vindicate the veracity of the lawgiver, and secure his government from insult and contempt.

Thus when the primary end of the divine threatenings, namely, the deterring and reclaiming men from disobedience, is not obtained--then it becomes necessary that they should be executed upon the impenitent in all their dreadful extent! But when the sinner is brought to repentance, and to submit to the divine government, then all these threatenings are repealed, and they shall not hurt one hair of his head! And the sinner himself will acknowledge that these threatenings proved necessary mercies to him, and that the denunciation of everlasting punishment was one means of bringing him to everlasting happiness, and that divine vengeance in this sense conspired with divine grace--to save him!

Consider this, you desponding penitents, and allay your terrors. That God, who has written such bitter things against you in his Word; earnestly and affectionately remembers you still, and it was with a kind intent to you that he thundered out these terrors at which you tremble. These acids, this bitter medicines, were necessary for your recovery. These coals of fire were necessary to awaken you out of your lethargy. Therefore read the love of your Father, even in these solemn warnings. He affectionately remembers you still; he cannot put you out of his thoughts.

"Therefore my heart is troubled for him--my heart yearns for him!" adds the all-gracious Jehovah! This is astonishing beyond conception! How can we bear up under such words as these? Surely they must break our hearts, and overwhelm our spirits! Here is the great God, who has millions of holy beings to serve him, and who is absolutely independent of them all--is troubled, his very heart troubled--for a rebellious, useless, trifling worm! Be astonished at this, you angels of light, who are the witnesses of such amazing, such unbounded compassion! And wonder at it, O you sons of men, who are more intimately concerned in it! Stand and adore, as it were, in statues of admiration!

It is true? Surely, these words are not to be taken literally, as though the Deity were capable of sorrow, or any of the human passions! But he here condescends to adapt himself to the language of mortals, and to borrow such images as will convey to us the most lively ideas of his grace and tenderness to mourning penitents. And no image can answer this end better than that of a father, whose affections are yearning over his mourning child, prostrate at his feet, and who, with eager embraces, raises him up, assuring him of pardon and acceptance!

If any of you know what it is to receive a penitent child in this manner, while all the father is tenderly working within you--you may form some affecting ideas of the readiness of our heavenly Father to receive returning sinners from this tender illustration.

The Lord concludes this moving speech with a promise that includes in it--more than we can ask or think, sealed with his own sacred name. "I will surely have mercy upon him!" That is, "I will show abundant mercy to him! I will give him all the blessings which infinite mercy can bestow!"

What more can be needed? This promise includes pardon, acceptance, sanctification, joy in the Holy Spirit, peace of conscience, and immortal life and glory in the eternal world! Oh sirs! what a God, what a Father is this! "Who is a God like you--who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea!" Micah 7:18-19

And can you, you mourners in Zion, can you fear a rejection from such a tender Father? Can you dread to venture upon such abundant mercies? Is there a mourning Ephraim in this assembly? I may call you, as God did Adam, "Ephraim, where are you?"

Let the Word of God find you out, and force a little encouragement upon you: "Your heavenly Father, whose angry hand you fear, is listening to your groans, and will measure you out a mercy--for every groan; a blessing--for every sigh; a drop, a whole draught of consolation--for every tear. His affections yearn for you, and he addresses you in such language as this, "Is this my dear son? is this my pleasant child?"

And as to you, you sturdy impenitents, you abandoned profligates, you careless formalists, you almost Christians; can you hear these things--and not begin now to relent? Do you not find your frozen hearts begin to thaw within you? Can you resist such alluring grace? Can you bear the thoughts of continuing to be enemies to so good, so forgiving a Father? Does not Ephraim's sincere petition now rise in your hearts, "Restore me--and I shall be turned?" Then I praise God upon this happy day; you have this day become God's dear sons, the children of his delight.

But is there a wretch so senseless, so wicked, so abandoned to sin--as to refuse to return? Where are you, hardy rebel? Stand forth and meet the terrors of your doom! To you I must change my tone, and instead of representing the tender compassions of a father--I must denounce the terrors of an angry judge:

Your DOOM is declared and fixed--by the same lips which speak to penitents in such encouraging strains; by those gracious lips that never uttered a harsh censure. "God is angry with you every day!" Psalm 7:11. "Unless you repent--you shall surely perish!" Luke 13:3. The example of Christ authorizes me to repeat it again; "Unless you repent--you shall surely perish!" verse 5. "The God who made you--will destroy you! And he who formed you--will show you no favor." Isaiah 26:11. "You are treasuring up wrath in horrid affluence against the day of wrath!" Romans 2:5.

"The LORD is a jealous God, filled with vengeance and wrath. He takes revenge on all who oppose him and furiously destroys his enemies! The LORD is slow to get angry, but his power is great, and he never lets the guilty go unpunished. He displays his power in the whirlwind and the storm. The billowing clouds are the dust beneath his feet. At his command the oceans and rivers dry up! In his presence the mountains quake, and the hills melt away; the earth trembles, and its people are destroyed. Who can stand before his fierce anger? Who can survive his burning fury? His rage blazes forth like fire, and the mountains crumble to dust in his presence!" Nahum 1:2-6

These flaming thunderbolts, sinners, are aimed at your heart, and if you can harden yourself against their terror--then let me read you your doom before we part! You have it pronounced by God himself: "Let none of those who hear the warnings of this curse consider themselves immune, thinking: 'I am safe, even though I am walking in my own stubborn way.' This would lead to utter ruin! The LORD will not pardon such people. His anger and jealousy will burn against them. All the curses written in this book will come down on them, and the LORD will erase their names from under heaven. The LORD will separate them from all the tribes of Israel, to pour out on them all the covenant curses recorded in this Book of the Law!" Deuteronomy 29:19-21

And now, stubborn sinner, if you can return home careless and senseless with this heavy curse upon you--do not expect a word of comfort; do not expect any blessing--until you are made truly penitent! "For how shall I bless--those whom God has not blessed?"

The blessing of our text may fall upon one on your right hand, and one on your left hand--but the curse is your lot! And this curse--you must have from the hand of God himself! If you continue hardened and insolent in sin--you must lie down in eternal sorrow! "Consider this, you who forget God--or He will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue!" Psalm 50:22

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