

The Divine Perfections Illustrated in the Method of Salvation, Through the Sufferings of Christ

by Samuel Davies

The sermon illustrates how the method of salvation through the sufferings of Christ displays the divine perfections of God.

Scripture: Psalm 85:10, John 12:27, Romans 8:32, 1 Corinthians 2:9, 2 Corinthians 4:6

Topics: "Divine Attributes", "Salvation Through Christ"

Description

Samuel Davies preaches about the divine perfections illustrated in the method of salvation through the sufferings of Christ. He emphasizes how Jesus, troubled by the impending suffering, willingly endured it out of love for sinners and zeal for God's glory. The sermon delves into the harmonious display of God's attributes, the universal reach of salvation, the gracious and benevolent nature of God, and the wonderful and surprising aspects of the plan of salvation through Christ's sacrifice.

Transcript

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of Salvation, Through the Sufferings of Christ

(A Sacramental Discourse)

By Samuel Davies

"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" John 12:27-28

Should a favorite child now come running to you, with all the marks of agony in his countenance, and with these words in his mouth, "I am troubled; my very soul is troubled--and I know not what to say!" it would raise all the tender sensations of parental compassion and concern in your hearts, and you would solicitously inquire, "What ails my dear child? What is the cause of your distress?"

But here your ears are struck with a more strange and impressing sound--you hear the source of all consolation complaining of sorrow: "I am troubled; my very soul is troubled, and in a commotion like the stormy ocean!" You see the wisdom of God, the guide of the blind, pausing, hesitating--at a standstill--at a loss what to say!

And will you not so far interest yourselves in his sorrows, as solicitously to inquire, "What ails my dear Lord? Judas has not yet betrayed him; the rabble have not yet apprehended him, and dragged him away, like a heinous malefactor; as yet his face is not dishonored with spitting nor bruised with blows; as yet I see no crown of thorns upon his sacred head; no nails in his hands and feet; no spear in his side; no streams of blood and water running down his body. He is at liberty, and surrounded with his usual friends. Nay, at this time even the despised Jesus begins to grow popular; the humble Jesus, the man of sorrows, has just now entered Jerusalem in triumph, like a conqueror, surrounded with the applauses and hosannas of the multitude. Now also the first fruits of the Gentiles are brought to him; a number of Greek proselytes beg an interview with him, and desire his instructions; a thing so agreeable to him, that as soon as he hears of it, he cries, out, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified!" John 12:23. And why does my Lord alter his voice so soon? Why, my blessed Jesus--why this sudden fall from joy to trouble, from triumph to sorrow and perplexity?"

The reason was, that though his sufferings were not now upon him--yet he saw them approaching. He saw the fatal hour just at hand; and this immediate prospect raises all the passions of his human nature, and throws him into a sea of troubles. He did not fall into his sufferings through inadvertence, or the lack of foresight; and his fortitude and resolution were not owing to any hopes of escape, or an expectation of better usage. But we are expressly told, that "Jesus knew all things that should come upon him," John 18:4. He saw the rugged road before him--all the way from his cradle to his cross. He rushed into dangers with his eyes wide open, and went on courageously to encounter the last enemy, death, fully expecting to meet him in all his terrors!

Now the foresight of sufferings is a special aggravation; it brings the sufferings upon the anxious expectant by anticipation; they are reflected back upon him, before they are actually inflicted; and thus the pain of a few moments--may be diffused through a length of years. And sometimes the expectation of a trouble is more tormenting than the trouble itself! Our happiness is in a great measure owing to our being happily blind to the future sufferings, and ignorant of future calamities.

But Jesus had not this mitigation of his sufferings: the cross, the scourge, the nails, the crown of thorns--were ever before his mind. So that he could say with yet greater reason than his servant Paul, "I die daily! I am in deaths often!" By this painful foresight, the crown of thorns was always upon his head; the nails were fastened in his hands and feet all his days; and his whole life was, as it were, one continued crucifixion! How peculiarly aggravated, how long continued, how uninterrupted do the severities of his sufferings appear--when viewed in this light! And how does this display his fortitude and the strength of his love! Though he had this tragic prospect before him--yet he did not draw back or give up the arduous undertaking; but he resolutely held on his way. He was irresistibly carried to meet all these terrors, by his ardent zeal for his Father's glory--and his unconquerable love to the guilty creatures whose salvation he had undertaken.

Sometimes, indeed, he shows he was a man; that he was capable of all the tender and painful sensations of human nature: and if he had not been such, his sufferings would have been no sufferings. At such times his innocent humanity seems struck aghast, pauses and hesitates, and would gladly shrink away from the

burden, would gladly put away the bitter cup. But immediately the stronger principles of zeal for the divine glory, and love to man--gain the ascendant, calm all these tumults of feeble human nature, and irresistibly impel him on to the dreadful encounter in its most shocking appearances! Oh! the generous bravery of the Captain of our salvation! Oh! the all-conquering power of his love!

Readers are in raptures on the bravery of Homer's mythological Achilles--who engaged in the expedition against Troy, though he knew he should never return. But how much more worthy to be celebrated is the heroic love of Jesus--who voluntarily gave himself to infinitely greater sufferings, when he foresaw them all, and knew what would be the consequence!

The language of heightened passions is abrupt and startling; and in such language does our Lord here speak: "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? What petition shall I ask of my Father? Such an hour of distress is a proper time to address him. But what shall I say to him? Shall I yield to the reluctance of my frail, human nature, which would draw back from suffering? Shall I urge the petition that my feeble flesh would put into my mouth, and say, Father, save me from this hour? Father, dismiss me from this undertaking, and resign the glory which you would gain by the execution of it? Father, if it is possible--save sinners in some easier way! Or-- Father, let them perish--rather than that I should suffer so much for them? Shall this be my petition? No! I cannot bear the thought, that my Father should lose so much glory, and the objects of my love should perish. It was to suffer for these important purposes, that I came unto this hour! For this I undertook to be the sinner's Friend and Mediator! For this I left my native heavenly paradise, and assumed this feeble flesh and blood! For this I have spent thirty-three painful years in this wretched world--that I might come to this dismal hour! And now, when it has come--shall I fly from it, or shall I drop an undertaking which I have so much at heart, and in which I am so far engaged? No! This petition I will not urge, though it be the natural cry of my tender humanity! What then shall I say? Father, glorify your name! This is the petition on which I will insist--come on me what will. Let the rabble insult me--as the off-scouring of all things! Let false witnesses accuse me, and treacherous judges condemn me--as a notorious criminal! Let the blood-thirsty murderers rack me on the cross, and shed every drop of blood in my veins--still I will insist upon this petition! Not all the tortures that earth and hell can inflict--shall force me to retract it! Father, glorify your name! Display the glory of your attributes by my sufferings, and I will patiently submit to them all. Display the perfections of your nature, exhibit an honorable representation of yourself to all worlds--by the salvation of sinners through my death--and I will yield myself to its power in its most shocking forms. Let this end be but answered, and I am well content. This consideration calms the tumult of passions in my heart, overpowers the reluctance of my human nature, and makes it all patience and submission!"

I intend, my brethren, to confine myself at present to this part of my text, this petition on which Jesus insists, and in which his mind acquiesces after perplexity and hesitation: "Father, glorify your name!" And it evidently suggests to us this important truth: that the divine perfections are most illustriously displayed and glorified, in the method of salvation through the sufferings of Christ.

This truth I shall endeavor to illustrate, after I have premised that it is most fit and proper that the glory of God should be the ultimate end of all things; and particularly, that it should be his own principal end in all his works. He is in himself the most glorious of all beings, the supreme excellence, and the supreme good; and it is infinitely fit and reasonable that he should be known and acknowledged as such; and that it should be his great end in all his works--to represent himself in this light. It is but justice to himself, and it is the kindest thing he can do for his creatures--since their chief happiness must consist in the enjoyment of the supreme good, and as they cannot enjoy him without knowing it.

Selfishness in creatures is a vile and wicked disposition, because they are not the greatest or best of beings; but for God to love and seek himself above all, is the same thing as to love and seek what is absolutely best; for such he is. The aims of creatures should reach beyond themselves, because God, the supreme good, lies beyond them; they should all terminate upon him, and should not fall short of him, as they cannot fly beyond him, because he is the supreme excellence, and it is not to be found anywhere else.

But for this reason, God must aim at himself, if he aims at what is absolutely best; for he alone is so. For creatures to aim principally at their own glory, to set themselves off, and make it their end to gain applause--is vanity and criminal ambition, because they are really unworthy of it; and were formed for the glory of another, even of the great Lord of all. But for God to make his own glory the highest end, for him to aim at the display of his attributes in all his works--is worthy and just, and infinitely distant from a vain ostentation, because there is nothing else so excellent, and so worthy of a display! His perfections deserve to be represented in the most illustrious light, and demand the highest veneration and love from the whole universe!

In short, for God to aim at his own glory in all his actions, is but for him:

to do justice to infinite merit;

to display the most perfect beauty;

to illustrate supreme excellence;

to exhibit the supreme good in a just light;

to procure honor to what is in itself most honorable; and

to represent the true God in the most godlike manner.

And what can be more fit or just? A lower end than this would be unworthy of him. The display of God's glory is of more real worth--than the existence or the happiness of ten thousand worlds! And this is the end which he has uniformly pursued--in all the steps of creation, providence, and redemption. This particularly was his end in the permission of sin, and in the form of his administration towards our guilty world, through a Mediator. As, on the one hand, we are sure that he is not at all accessory to sin, as its proper producing cause; so we may be equally sure, on the other hand, that sin has not entered into the world without his permission: that is, it could not have happened--if he had hindered it. Now there were undoubtedly very good reasons for this permission; and one appears evident, namely: that if sin had never entered, it would have been impossible in the nature of things, that some of the divine perfections, particularly his punishing justice and his forgiving grace--should be displayed in the conduct of his providence towards his creatures.

Pardoning grace could never be displayed, if there were no sin to be pardoned; nor vindictive justice, if there were no crimes to be punished. And, consequently, if moral evil had never been permitted, these divine perfections must have been forever idle, concealed, and as much unknown, as if they did not belong to the divine nature! But now there is room for the mediatorial scheme of salvation to our world. And I now proceed to show, that in this scheme--all the perfections of God have an illustrious display, and are represented to the greatest advantage!

Here I would consider this scheme, both absolutely--in itself; and relatively--as a part of the grand administration towards the rational world. In the latter view, I shall consider it but briefly, and therefore I shall begin with it.

Considering it RELATIVELY, as a part of the divine economy towards the rational world, the mediatorial scheme of salvation concurs with the other parts, to show the amiable and wise variety of the divine government, or in how many ways God can answer his ends, and display his perfections in his works towards his creatures.

The Scriptures give us an account of the divine conduct towards two sorts of rational creatures: angels and men. And from thence, we may also learn the wise variety of the divine dispensations towards them.

A part of the angels were preserved in their primitive state of holiness; and a part of them were allowed to fall into sin. But the whole human race was permitted to fall--and not one of them continued in their original state of integrity.

A part of the angels are happy for ever; and so is a number of mankind. But here lies the difference: the angels are continued in a state of happiness, from which they never fell; but the saved from among men are recovered from a state of sin and misery, into which they fell--to a state of happiness, which they had entirely lost.

The angels are entitled to happiness upon the footing of a covenant of works--to which they have yielded perfect obedience; but men are saved entirely upon the plan of the covenant of grace--on account of the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to them and accepted for them, though it is not originally their own. The angels having never offended, have no need of a Mediator, or of redemption through his blood. But it is through a Mediator alone--that guilty mortals have access to God; and they owe their salvation to his death.

As to the fallen angels--there was no Savior provided for them; but to us fallen men--is born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. They were never placed in a second state of trial, or under a dispensation of grace--but given up to irrecoverable ruin immediately, upon their first apostasy; but our guilty race is placed under a dispensation of grace, and made probationers, for a happy immortality after their first fall.

The devils are irrecoverably lost for lack of a Savior--but the sinners from among men perish by the neglecting a Savior.

All the fallen angels, without exception, are remedilessly miserable; but only a part of mankind share in their doom.

The angels stood every one for himself--but Adam was constituted our representative; our concerns were lodged in his hands, and we fell in him.

Now what a surprising variety is here!

Here are some holy and happy beings--that were never otherwise; and some that are recovered to holiness and happiness--that had been deeply involved in guilt and misery!

Here are some rewarded for their own personal works of obedience; and some are saved by the righteousness of another!

Here are some that have access to God without a Mediator--and some through a Mediator!

Here are some that have always gone on in an easy, natural tenor of uniform obedience; and some that have passed through various conflicts and temptations, and ascended to heaven from the field of battle!

Here are some shining in all the glory of native innocence, highly improved--but not new-created; and some repaired from their ruins, and formed anew!

Here are some that perish without a dispensation of grace--some without the offer of a Savior; and some for rejecting the offer!

Here are some sinners abandoned forever for the first offence; and some lost by abusing their time of trial and the means of their recovery.

What various theaters are these, on which to display the glory of the divine perfections! What amazing wisdom to form so many different models of government, and so conduct and manage them all--as to answer the best ends!

If there are any of the divine attributes that are most properly exercised upon sinless creatures that never fell--they meet with a proper object in the elect angels.

If there are any perfections that cannot be displayed but upon the guilty--here are guilty men and angels, in the conduct toward whom they may shine in their full glory.

If there be any of the divine attributes that may be represented in the most illustrious light, in the recovery of lost sinners through the obedience and sufferings of a Mediator--here are thousands saved in this way from among men, who will be the everlasting monuments of their amiable glories!

If any of the divine perfections can receive more honor by punishing abandoned criminals immediately given up to remediless ruin--they receive that honor from the everlasting punishment of the fallen angels!

If any of the divine perfections can be displayed to greater advantage, by the punishment of the ungrateful abusers of the means of grace, and a time of trial--the impenitent and unbelieving sons of men are a proper object for them!

To all which I may add, that: here we have the divine perfections displayed in justification by works--and justification by grace.

Here we have the divine perfections displayed in inflicting punishment upon the proper offender--and upon Jesus Christ as a surety.

And whatever glory may be peculiar to one or other of these ways, or may result from them all conjointly as one whole, or system of government, all that glory redounds to the divine perfections!

Thus you see the method of salvation through Christ, considered as a part of the grand scheme of the divine government, tends to the illustration of the perfections of God. It is one link in the bright chain; and should it be broken or removed, the whole system and context would be shattered or left incomplete! Thus Paul tells us, that by the dispensations of grace towards the church, are made known, not only to men--but to principalities and powers (that is, to the angels) the manifold wisdom of God, his variegated and beautifully diversified wisdom. Ephes. 3:10.

And oh! that our eyes may be enlightened to behold and admire it! However little this divine scheme be regarded in our blind and ungrateful world, the various ranks of angels cannot behold it with careless eyes--they stoop, and look, and pry into it, with a divine curiosity and an insatiable eagerness, through all eternity!

But let us now proceed to a more particular survey of this scheme, considered ABSOLUTELY in itself; and, in this view, we shall find the divine perfections are displayed more gloriously by it, than by any other; particularly--as to the degree--the harmony--the universality--the grace and benevolence--and the wonderful and surprising manner of the display.

I. By this scheme--the divine perfections are displayed in the highest degree possible. It appears that such and such attributes not only belong to God--but that they are in him in the highest perfection.

God's GOODNESS had already displayed itself all the world over, in giving life, and breath, and all things to men, from age to age. But what are the blessings of the sun and rain, what are the productions of the earth--when compared to the gift of his only begotten Son, the man that was his fellow, whom he loved more than ten thousand worlds! This is an unspeakable gift; this the richest gift which even the infinite goodness of God could bestow! Almighty love could do no more! The creation and support of millions of worlds would not have displayed such a degree of love and goodness as this.

God had displayed his HOLINESS and JUSTICE, and his abhorrence of sin, by the variety of his judgments upon a guilty world; and he will display these attributes to all eternity by the more dreadful punishments of hell. But the subjects of these punishments are creatures of an inferior order; and they have provoked their gracious Sovereign, and most justly incurred his displeasure, by their own personal crimes. These he may therefore punish, and yet spare his Son.

But Christ becomes the surety of the guilty, and he is chargeable with no sin of his own--but only the imputed guilt of others. The dignity of his person, the greatness of the love of his Father to him, his personal innocence, and the benevolence of his design--plead for him, and seem to promise him an exemption, or at least the mitigation of his sufferings. This now is the greatest trial that can be made, whether divine justice be strictly inexorable, whether God can be prevailed upon by the strongest possible inducements to overlook sin, and dispense with his law. Had the doom of the whole created universe been suspended on it--it would not have been so great a trial.

And what was the outcome? Paul tells us the amazing result, "God spared not his own Son--his one and only Son, but delivered him up to death!" Romans 8:32. When the honor of his justice and holiness were at stake, even the Father would not relent; but with his own mouth he issues out the dread commission, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, says the Lord Almighty! Smite the Shepherd!" Zech. 13:7. Now it even pleased the Father to bruise him, and put him to grief. Isaiah 53:10.

And could there be a more astonishing display of justice and the sacred honors of the divine government? Could a more striking proof be given of the infinite holiness of the divine nature, the malignity of sin, and his implacable hatred to it? No! all the punishments of hell can never give such an illustrious display of these perfections!

II. The divine perfections are displayed in the most perfect harmony in this method of salvation. I mean such of them as seemed to jar--to cloud the glory of each other--or to be incapable of being illustrated at

once. These are now reconciled and mingle their beams and, instead of obscuring, reflect a glory upon each other. The matter was so circumstanced, that it seemed really impossible to men and angels to display several divine perfections conjointly. There seemed to be a necessity that one or other of them should be eclipsed. For if grace should be displayed in the universal pardon of sin, without the infliction of punishment, then what will become of justice? How will the holiness of God be displayed? How will the honor of the law and the sacred rights of government be secured? But if these are illustrated by the punishment of sin--then how will the goodness, grace, and mercy of God appear in diffusing happiness, in conferring blessings on the unworthy, and in relieving the miserable!

If sinners are saved without a satisfaction--how will it appear that God is righteous, and hates all moral evil? Or if a full satisfaction is made--how will it appear that their salvation is of grace? Can sin be punished--and yet the sinner escape without punishment? What device shall be found out for this? If sin passes unpunished--then where is the honor of justice? And if all sinners are punished--then where is the glory of grace? If the threatened penalty is not executed--is not the divine veracity rendered suspicious? And if it is executed, what will become of the amiable attribute of mercy?

These, my brethren, are a few of the difficulties with which the case was perplexed; and they would have confounded all created understandings! Nothing but the infinite wisdom of God could surmount them. You see that the illustration of one set of perfections, seems to cast a cloud over another set. To whatever side the Deity inclines--there seems to be a necessity that he should be but half-glorious, like the sun under a partial eclipse. And is there any method in which he may be represented as he is, all-glorious throughout?

How astonishing was the rigid justice of Brutus the judge; who, in spite of all the passions of a father, passed sentence of death upon his own sons, for conspiring against the liberty of their country. While the lovely youths stood trembling and weeping before him, and hoping their tears would be the most powerful defense with a father; while the senate pleaded for the moderation of the punishment, and that they might escape with banishment; while the multitude tremble and expect the decision with horror--the inexorable Brutus rises in all the stern majesty of justice, and with a steady voice, not interrupted with one sigh, turning to the lictors, who were the executioners, says to them, "To you, lictors, I deliver them! Execute the law upon them!"

In this sentence he persisted inexorable, notwithstanding the weeping intercessions of the multitude, and the cries of the young men, calling upon their father by the most endearing names. The lictors seized them, stripped them naked, tied their hands behind them, beat them with rods, and then struck off their heads; while the inexorable Brutus looking on the bloody spectacle with unaltered countenance.

Thus the father--was lost in the judge! The love of justice--overcame all the fondness of the parent! Private interest--was swallowed up in a regard to the public good, and the honor and security of government.

This, perhaps, is the most striking resemblance of the justice of God that can be found in the history of mankind. But how far short does it fall! how trifling were the sufferings of these youths, compared to those of the Son of God! How insignificant the honor of the law and government for which they suffered, compared to that of the divine honor of the law! How small the good of the public, in one case, compared to that in the other!

Yes! Such a method is the plan of salvation through Christ. These apparently clashing attributes harmonize: and are so far from clouding each other, that they are each of them displayed to greater advantage, than if only one had been singly exercised. They reflect a mutual glory upon each other; and

every one appears more illustrious in conjunction with the rest, than if it shone alone with its own peculiar glory.

Here justice is honored by the infliction of the punishment upon Christ, as the surety of sinners; and yet goodness, grace, and mercy, shine in full glory in their salvation.

They are saved upon the footing of strict justice, because their surety made a complete satisfaction for them; and yet they are saved through astounding grace, because it was grace that provided and accepted this method of vicarious satisfaction.

The honors of the divine government are secured by Christ's perfect obedience to the law; and the philanthropy and mercy of the divine administration are also exhibited in the salvation of those who in their own people had broken the law. Thus, according to that prophetic oracle, Mercy and truth are met together, and agreed; righteousness and peace have kissed each other in perfect friendship. Psalm 85:10, 11.

Here also the WISDOM of God is most gloriously displayed, in concerting such an amazing plan as would reconcile these seemingly opposite attributes, and advance the honor of all by the exercise of each; and even of that which appeared most inconsistent with the rest. This scheme bears the peculiar seal and stamp of the most perfect wisdom. In it are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Oh! the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, which appear in it! It was only his infinite wisdom that could invent such a scheme: it surpassed all created understanding. Hence it is often called "the wisdom of God in a mystery: the mystery which has been hid from ages and generations:" and it is said to reveal things "which eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived!" 1 Corinthians 2:9.

To this head I may subjoin, that in Christ, as MEDIATOR, are reconciled the most opposite and seemingly contradictory characters. Things may be truly and consistently predicated of him, which cannot agree to any other being besides himself.

As God-man, divinity and humanity united in one person;

the Ancient of Days--yet not but 1760 years old;

the everlasting Father--and yet the virgin Son, the child of Mary;

the King of kings, and the Lord of lords--and yet the Servant of servants.

The highest dignity and glory--and the lowest condescension and humility, meet in him.

Here is justice punishing every the least sin--and yet grace to pardon the very greatest of sinners!

Here are infinite majesty--and the most transcendent meekness!

Here are the deepest reverence toward God--and a full equality with him!

Here are infinite worthiness of good--and the most perfect patience under the suffering of evil!

Here are a submissive, obedient spirit--and supreme and universal dominion!

Here are absolute sovereignty--and humble resignation.

Jesus conquers--by falling.

Jesus saves others--by dying himself.

The blood of his heart--becomes the grand cure for the dying world.

In him we see the highest love to God--and in the meantime the greatest love to the enemies of God!

In him we see the greatest regard to the divine holiness--and the greatest benevolence to unholy sinners.

It would be endless to enumerate all the opposite excellencies and characters that meet and harmonize in Jesus Christ; but these may suffice as a specimen.

And what a surprising conjunction and harmony of things is here! Things that never did, or could meet in any other, harmoniously center in him. How justly is his name called Wonderful! for as his name is, so is he! And as such, he will appear to all that know him to all eternity! How bright and astonishing is the glory of God--in the face of Jesus Christ!

"That face, in which the carnal mind discovers nothing, but marks of pain and disgrace; that bloated, mangled visage, red with gore, covered with marks of scorn, swelled with strokes, and pale with death; that would be the last object in which the carnal mind would seek to see the glory of the God of life--a visage clouded with the horror of death! Yet in that face, we may see more of the divine glory--than in the face of heaven and earth."

He is the wisdom of God, and the power of God; that is, in HIM is the brightest display of his wisdom and power, as well as all of his other attributes. But I must proceed.

III. The perfections of God are more universally displayed in the method of salvation through Christ, than in any other way.

The wisdom, power, and goodness of God are displayed in the formation of the world; and there are many traces of these perfections, as well as of his justice, discoverable in the government of it. But there is a more full and striking view of these exhibited in the government of the world upon the plan of redemption, with the additional illustration of some other attributes, which would have been unknown or discovered only by some feeble glimmerings, if the world had never been governed upon this plan.

Here, as I observed, the GOODNESS of God in all its forms is illustriously displayed:

Grace is displayed in bestowing free favors upon the guilty and undeserving.

Mercy and compassion are displayed in relieving the miserable.

Patience and long-suffering are displayed in bearing so long with provoking, obstinate rebels.

Whereas if there had been no guilt, misery and rebellion permitted to enter into the world; or if no guilt had been pardoned, no misery relieved, no rebellion endured--there would have been no room for the display of grace, mercy, and patience.

Here justice shines, and shines with peculiar advantage; now it appears to be an inseparable attribute of the Deity, and which he can in no case dispense with.

Here veracity appears unstained, in executing the penalty of the law, even upon the darling Son of God.

The majesty of the divine government and its sacred rights, these, too, are represented as inviolable and venerable, and demanding the regard of the whole creation! Whereas, if there had been no guilt, there could have been no object upon which the solemn honors of divine justice might be displayed! And if all guilt had been pardoned without satisfaction, this majestic attribute, so venerable and so amiable in the character of a ruler--would have been forever concealed; or rather, great umbrage would have been given, that such a perfection did not belong to the supreme Governor of the world. And a judge without justice, a lawgiver who does not enforce his laws by proper sanctions, could be agreeable to none but willful criminals! The petty kingdom of the earth would soon become a scene of lawless violence and confusion under such a ruler; and how dreadful would be the case, if the whole universe were under such a judge!

Here also is a most illustrious display of divine power. Though Christ was crucified in weakness--yet omnipotence shone even upon the cross. This may seem a paradox. The Jews thought Christ's crucifixion was a demonstration of his lack of power; hence they upbraided him, that he who wrought so many miracles, allowed himself to hang upon the cross. But this was the greatest miracle of all. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him!" They named the reason, without taking notice of it: that was the very reason why at that time he saved not himself--because he saved others. The motive of his enduring the cross was powerful divine love, stronger than death! The fruits of it, powerful divine grace, the power of God unto salvation, Romans 1:16, making new creatures, raising souls from the dead; these are acts of omnipotence!

We justly admire the power of the Creator, in the motion of the heavenly bodies; but the motion of souls towards God as their center is far more glorious. The curse of the law was a weight sufficient to crush a world. So they found it, who first brought it upon themselves. It sunk legions of angels, who excel in strength--from the heaven of heavens--to the bottomless pit! And the same weight hung over the head of man. Man, after numberless ages, would have borne but a small part; the wrath to come would have been wrath to come to all eternity. But Christ had strength to bear it all, to bear it all at once, to bear it all alone! And what a glorious manifestation of his might was this! of the noblest kind of might--that he was mighty to save!" I might be more particular--but time will not allow.

IV. The scheme of salvation through the sufferings of Christ gives the most gracious, benevolent, and amiable display of the divine perfections.

This is evident at first sight, from this consideration, that by this scheme sinners, such sinners as we, may be saved. Oh the joyful sound!

Salvation for the lost!

Pardon for the condemned!

Sanctification for the unholy!

Life for the dead!

What can be more agreeable to us? Angels contemplate this plan with eternal pleasure, though they do not need nor receive such blessings from it; and how much more should we who are so nearly interested!

Goodness, grace, and mercy, are always the favorite attributes to guilty creatures such as we are; and where do they shine so bright in heaven or earth, as in the cross of our dying Jesus?

But you will say, "Suppose that the sins of men had been pardoned, and they saved, without the sufferings of Christ in their stead? Suppose that the stern attribute of justice had never been displayed in the infliction of punishment either upon sinners, or upon their surety, where would have been the injury? Would not the Deity have appeared in a still more amiable light, as all benevolence and mercy?"

So guilty criminals may surmise, whose interest it is that there should be no such attribute as punitive justice. But I appeal to angels, who are not parties, as criminals are--but competent judges! I appeal to every lover of virtue and piety; nay, I appeal to the common sense of mankind, whether a ruler without justice would be an amiable character in their view?

Would they choose to live under a government where vice, violence, and crime were not restrained by the execution of the law--but shared in the rewards, or at least, in the indemnity of perfect obedience? Would they choose a king, who, through a false notion of lenity and mercy, would allow criminals to pass with impunity? Do not the innocent part of the subjects approve of the conduct of their rulers in condemning and executing criminals, as well as in protecting themselves? And what a murmuring spreads through a government, when such crimes are tolerated or approved?

The complaint we hear of the excessive strictness of divine justice, the cruelty of eternal torments, etc., is the voice of guilt, and we should regard it no more than the clamors of a band of robbers against the just laws of their country.

JUSTICE, my brethren, is not that grim, horrible, and forbidden attribute, which the guilty are apt to imagine; it is not only a majestic--but an amiable, agreeable, lovely perfection; it is a part of the moral beauty of the divine nature; it is essential to the character of a good ruler; it is necessary to the public good; it is absolutely necessary to the exercise of goodness itself.

The judicious, well-conducted exercise of goodness is not a promiscuous, indiscriminating communication of happiness at random; but the communication of happiness according to the real characters of the subjects; it supposes a distinction of the obedient and disobedient. No government can exist without this; and this is the very nature of distributive justice.

Hence it follows, that the display of divine justice, as well as grace, in the sufferings of Christ, represents the divine nature in an amiable light to us, as infinitely worthy of our love as well as of our fear. But,

V. The way of salvation through the sufferings of Jesus Christ gives the most wonderful and surprising display of the perfections of God.

That is a cause of wonder and surprise, which is astonishing and uncommon, new and unexpected; and certainly we can never meet with things more strange, uncommon, and unexpected, than in the way of salvation through Christ! I have mentioned some of them already with another view; and now I shall enumerate a few wonders more.

At the creation, a world was brought out of a state of non-existence into being; but in this way sinners are brought into a state of complete happiness and glory--out of a state infinitely worse than that of nonexistence. In the old creation, as there were no preexistent materials or tendency to existence, so there was no resistance. But in the new creation, there is a strong resistance, an obstinate opposition of

corrupt nature against the operation; and yet, behold all things are made new! Who would ever have thought that the apostate angels would have been abandoned to remediless ruin--while a Savior is provided for the inferior order of man! Had Adam been plainly informed that He, by whom he and all things were made, would assume his frail and mortal nature--how would he have wondered! And how must angels wonder, to see the Creator and the creature made one person! To see their Lord and Master become man, a man that in his best estate was made lower than they!

How astonishing, that guilty mortals should be saved by the death of the Lord of life!

How astonishing that a church should be purchased by the blood of God! How strange and surprising, that the reputed son of the carpenter, the despised Nazarene, should be made "head over all things! that every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord"--who had been so basely insulted and treated as the most contemptible malefactor!

How astonishing, that the reputed criminal, condemned by Pilate, and crucified on Mount Calvary--would be made the only Savior, and the supreme Judge of mankind!

How astonishing, that the blood of the cross--would restore peace to earth and heaven, and be the grand remedy of a dying world!

How astonishing, that the guilty should be redeemed by the death of the innocent!

How astonishing, that death should be conquered by the death of the Author of life!

How astonishing, that the greatest sin that ever was committed on our guilty globe, namely, the murder of the Son of God, should be the occasion of the pardon of sin, even for his murderers!

Are not these, my brethren, astounding, unprecedented things! Can you find anything like them in heaven or earth? These are objects of grateful amazement to all the redeemed multitude through all the periods of their happy immortality.

I shall now CONCLUDE with a few practical reflections and exhortations:

1. You hence see what should principally recommend the gospel scheme to us; namely, that it promotes the glory of God, and gives such an advantageous, amiable, and majestic view of his perfections. This is the grand design of God, and the only design worthy of him in all his works, and particularly in making this gospel scheme. It was this consideration induced the blessed Jesus to go through his painful work, and therefore on this account principally, we should delight in this method. And this is the disposition of all those that are conformed to God, and have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Our own salvation should indeed be dear to us--but not merely because it is ours--but because it tends to bring glory to God--the great end of all things. Therefore,

2. Those who have never been sensible of the glory of God manifested in this method of salvation, and charmed with the divine perfections displayed therein--have not complied with it, and cannot be saved by it. None can be saved by it--who do not heartily approve of it; and none can rationally approve of it--until they see its glory. It is the characteristic of all true believers, that God has shined into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6, and 3:18.

It is natural to all the guilty, to desire to be saved--but they are not solicitous about the glory of God; let them be but safe, and the selfish creatures care little for anything else. But heaven itself is recommended to a pious soul--by the thought that it may be brought there in a way that tends to advance God's glory. Alas! if this is the case, how many of you are far off from the only plan of salvation! you see no peculiar glories in it, and it does not attract your hearts as the grand scheme for illustrating the divine perfections; and consequently you have no saving interest in it.

3. Hence see the aggravated guilt of not accepting this method of salvation; it is a hostile attempt upon the divine glory; it is the worst of sacrilege; and as such Jehovah resents it.

4. You who are upon the gospel plan--may hence see how secure you are of salvation. Your salvation in this way, is for the glory of the divine perfections. God is so far from having any objections against it, that on the other hand, his honor is advanced by it; and therefore he will take the same care of your salvation, just as he will of his own glory, which is concerned therein.

5. These things may endear the institution of the Lord's supper to you as exhibiting these glories, by sacred emblems, to your senses: therefore you should esteem it, and reverently attend upon it. It is true, this ordinance represents the Lord Jesus in his lowest state of abasement. But even in his lowest state, there appears a peculiar glory.

6. These things may furnish you with proper materials for meditation this day. Fix your thoughts upon the glories of God displayed in a crucified Jesus! Take a survey of the scheme of salvation through his blood, as bringing not only salvation to you--but honor to him; and wonder, love, and adore!

Finally, let us all fall in with this glorious method of salvation; and join with God and Christ, and the whole creation, in glorifying God in this way; and in this way, and none else, we shall find salvation for ourselves!

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