

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

HOW HEARTS ARE SOFTENED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 18TH, 1887, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.”—Zechariah xii. 10, 11.

HARDNESS of heart is a great and grievous evil. It exists not only in the outside world, but in many who frequent the courts of the Lord's house. Beneath the robes of religion many carry a heart of stone. It is more than possible to come to baptism and the sacred supper, to come constantly to the hearing of the Word, and even, as a matter of form, to attend to private religious duties, and yet still to have an unrenewed heart, a heart within which no spiritual life palpitates, and no spiritual feeling exists. Nothing good can come out of a stony heart; it is barren as a rock. To be unfeeling is to be unfruitful. Prayer without desire, praise without emotion, preaching without earnestness—what are all these? Like the marble images of life, they are cold and dead. Insensibility is a deadly sign. Frequently it is the next stage to destruction. Pharaoh's hard heart was a prophecy that his pride would meet a terrible overthrow. The hammer of vengeance is not far off when the heart becomes harder than an adamant stone.

Many and great are the advantages connected with softness of spirit. Tenderness of heart is one of the marks of a gracious person. Spiritual sensibility puts life and feeling into all Christian duties. He that prays feelingly, prays indeed; he that praises God with humble gratitude, praises him most acceptably, and he that preaches with a loving heart has the essentials of true eloquence. An inward, living tenderness, which trembles at God's word, is of great price in the sight of God.

You are in this matter agreed with me: at least, I know that some of you are thoroughly thus minded; for you are longing to be made tender and contrite. Certain of you who are truly softened by divine grace are very prone to accuse yourselves of being stony-hearted. We are poor judges of our own condition, and in this matter many make mistakes. Mark this: the man who grieves because he does not grieve is often the man who grieves most. He that feels that he does not feel is probably the

most feeling man of us all ; I suspect that hardness is almost gone when it is mourned over. He who can feel his insensibility is not insensible. Those who mourn that their heart is a heart of stone, if they were to look calmly at the matter might perceive that it is not all stone, or else there would not be a mourning because of hardness. But, whether this be so or not, I address myself to all of you whose prayer is for godly sorrow for sin. It is written in the covenant of grace, "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." I pray that this may be fulfilled in you even now. The object of this sermon is to show how this tenderness is to be obtained, and how an evangelical sorrow for sin can be produced in the heart, and maintained there. I would set forth the simple method by which the inward nature can be made living, feeling, and tender, full of warm emotions, fervent breathings, and intense affections towards the Lord Jesus Christ. While I speak I beseech you to pray : Create in me a tender heart, O Lord, and renew within me a contrite spirit.

It will be instructive to keep to the words of the text. This passage is peculiarly suited to our purpose, and it will add authority to that which we teach. Observe that holy tenderness *arises out of a divine operation*. "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications." Secondly, *it is actually wrought by the look of faith* : "And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him." And, thirdly, the tenderness which comes in this way *leads to mourning for sin of an intense kind* : "They shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon."

I. First, note that **THE HOLY TENDERNESS WHICH MAKES MEN MOURN FOR SIN ARISES OUT OF A DIVINE OPERATION**. It is not in fallen man to renew his own heart. Can the adamant turn itself to wax, or the granite soften itself to clay ? Only he that stretcheth out the heavens and layeth the foundation of the earth can form and reform the spirit of man within him. The power to make the rock of our nature flow with rivers of repentance is not in the rock itself.

The power lies in the omnipotent Spirit of God, and it is an omen for good that he delights to exercise this power. The Spirit of God is prompt to give life and feeling. He moved of old upon the face of the waters, and by his power order came out of confusion. That same Spirit at this time broods over our souls, and reduces the chaos of our natural state to light and life and obedience. There lies the hope of our ruined nature. Jehovah who made us can make us over again. Our case is not beyond his power. Is anything too hard for the Lord ? Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened ? He can change the nether millstone into a mass of feeling, and dissolve the northern iron and the steel into a flood of tears. When he deals with the human mind by his secret and mysterious operations, he fills it with new life, perception, and emotion. "God maketh my heart soft," said Job, and in the best sense this is true. The Holy Spirit makes us like wax, and we become impressible to his sacred seal. Remember, you that are hard of heart,

that your hope lies this way ; God himself, who melts the icebergs of the northern sea, must make your soul to yield up its hardness in the presence of his love. Nothing short of the work of God within you can effect this. "Ye must be born again," and that new birth must be from above. The Spirit of God must work regeneration in you. He is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham ; but until he works you are dead and insensible. Even now I perceive the goings forth of his power : he is moving you to desire his divine working, and in that gracious desire the work has already begun.

Note next, that as this tenderness comes of the Spirit of God, so *it also comes by his working in full co-operation with the Father and with the Son*. In our text we have all the three persons of the divine Trinity. We hear the Father say, "I will pour upon the house of David the spirit of grace," and that Spirit when poured out leads men to look to him whom they pierced, even to the incarnate Son of God. Thus the Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father and the Son, fulfils the purpose of the Father by revealing the Son, and thus the heart of man is reached. The divine Father sends forth the Holy Ghost, and he bears witness to the Son of God, and so men come to mourn for sin. We believe in the three persons of the blessed God, and yet we are equally clear that God is one. We see the divers operations of these three divine persons, but we perceive that they are all of one, and work to the selfsame end, namely, that grace may reign by delivering us from our natural impenitence, and by causing us to sorrow because we have sinned. The Holy Spirit worketh not without the Father and the Son, but proves himself to be in full union with both by his operations upon the soul of man. Do not think, therefore, when thou feelest the Holy Ghost melting thee, that the Father will refuse thee : it is he that sent the Holy Spirit to deal with thee. Imagine not that thou canst feel repentance for sin and bow in sorrow at the Saviour's feet, and that Jesus will reject thee ; for it is he who sent the Spirit of grace to bring thee to repentance, and make thee mourn because of the ill which thou hast done. The glorious one God, who made the heavens and the earth, is dealing with thy heart if the Holy Ghost is now working in thee as "the spirit of grace and of supplications."

This operation is an unseen secret work. Thou canst not perceive the work of the Spirit by the senses of the flesh ; it is spiritually discerned. When the Spirit of God was poured out at Pentecost, there were divers signs attendant thereupon, such as rushing mighty wind, and cloven tongues as it were fire ; but these were outward signs only, the Spirit himself is inward and secret. The Spirit is as the wind, invisible save by its effects. The Holy Ghost cometh as the dew which in soft silence refreshes the tender herb. Not with sound of trumpet or observation of man doth the Spirit perform his gracious deeds. His working is one of the secrets and mysteries which no man can explain to his fellow. He that feels the movement of the Holy Spirit, knows that a singular work is going on within him, but what it is, or who it is that worketh it, he knoweth not. Do not, therefore, expect to be informed when the Spirit is upon thee. Marvel not if it should so happen that he is dealing with thee now, though thou knowest it not, "For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not."

The operations of the Holy Ghost are consciously perceived by the human heart, but they are not always attributed to their right cause. Many a man, to use the words of our hymn,

“Wonders to feel his own hardness depart.”

He does not know how his new tenderness has been produced. He finds himself anxious to hear and understand the gospel, and he feels that the gospel affects him as it never did before, but he does not perceive those “invisible” cords of love which are drawing him towards his Saviour. Before long he will cry, “This is the finger of God”; but as yet he perceives not the divine cause. It is well set forth by Mr. Bunyan in his parable of the fire which burned though a man tried to quench it. There was one behind the wall who secretly poured oil upon the fire. He himself was unperceived, but the fire burned because of what he poured on it. You can see the flame, but you cannot see the hidden One who ministers the fuel. The Spirit of God may work in you, my dear hearer, this morning, but it will not be with special token of marvel, or voice, or vision. Not with earthquake, nor wind, nor fire will he come, but with “a still small voice.” He may deal with many of you at once, and yet none may see it in his fellow. I expect that he will work upon many at this time, for much prayer has been put up that the Lord Jesus may be glorified in our midst.

But the secret operation of the Spirit is known by its effects, for *it is sweetly productive*. We read in the text of “the spirit of grace and of supplications,” which must mean that the Spirit produces graciousness and prayerfulness in the soul upon which he works. The man is now willing to receive the grace or free favour of God; he ceases to be proud, and becomes gracious. He is put into a condition in which God’s grace can deal with him. As long as you are self-righteous, God cannot deal with you in the way of favour; you are upon wrong ground, for you are making claims which he cannot possibly allow. Mercy and merit can no more blend than fire and water. You must be willing to receive as a free favour what God will never give you if you claim it by right. When thou art made conscious of sin, then forgiveness can be granted. When thou art malleable under the hammer of God’s Word, then will he work his work of love upon thee. When thou dost lay thine own righteousness aside, and take up the cry, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” then shalt thou go to thy house justified. It needs the Spirit of grace to give us grace to receive grace. We are so graceless that we will not even accept grace till God gives us “grace for grace”—grace to accept grace. Blessed is the hour when the Spirit of God comes to us as the Spirit of grace, and works in us that graciousness which makes us value and seek after the free grace of God in its further forms. Grace itself clears out a space in the heart for grace to enter and carry on its work.

It is also said that the Lord will pour out “the spirit of supplications.” This is the creation of desires and longings which express themselves in prayer. When the Holy Ghost works savingly upon the heart, then the man begins to approach the mercy-seat with frequent and fervent supplications. The words may be broken and confused; but what are words? Sighs, tears, heavings of the breast, and upward

glancings of the eye—these are true prayers, and are very prevalent with God. Brethren, we poor preachers cannot make men pray. We can produce a Book of Common Prayer, and read it to them, and get them to utter the responses; but we cannot make them pray by this means: the Spirit of God is still needed. The child may be taught a form of prayer at its mother's knee, and he may repeat it daily till he is old, and yet he may never have prayed in all those years. Only the Spirit of God can produce the smallest atom of prayer. I tell you, there was never a prayer on earth that God could accept, but what first came down from heaven by the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul. But here is the point: have you this "spirit of supplications" this morning? Are you groaning, crying, sighing—"Lord, save, or I perish; give me Christ, or else I die"? Well then, I trust you have come under the sacred outpouring promised in the text—"I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications."

All this leads on towards the tenderness which begets mourning for sin. Again, I say, this is the point from which help must come for the sinner. You that have been striving to feel, and yet cannot feel, and do not feel—you should look to the strong for strength, and to the living for life. He who in the day of his creation breathed into the nostrils of man the breath of life, so that he became a living soul, can infuse the new life into you, and give you with it all the feeling which is natural thereto. Think much of the Holy Spirit, for he can make thee live in the truest sense. It is God's to give thee a tender heart, not thine to create it within thyself. Do not attempt first to renew thy heart, and then to come to Christ for salvation; for this renewal of heart is salvation. Come thou as thou art, confessing all thy hardness, thy wicked, wilful obduracy and obstinacy, confess it all; and then put thyself into the hands of the Spirit, who can remove thy hardness at the same time that grace removes thy guilt. The Holy Spirit can make thy heart as tender as the apple of the eye, and cause thy conscience to be as sensitive as a raw wound, which feels the slightest touch. God grant us grace to deal with him about these things, and not to be looking to ourselves. As well hope to extract juice from the stones of the sea-beach, as spiritual feeling from the carnal mind. He who can make the dry bones live, and he alone, can make the hardened mourn over sin.

II. But now I come to the core and centre of our subject: THIS TENDERNESS OF HEART AND MOURNING FOR SIN IS ACTUALLY WROUGHT BY A FAITH-LOOK AT THE PIERCED SON OF GOD. True sorrow for sin comes not without the Spirit of God; but even the Spirit of God himself does not work it except by leading us to look to Jesus the crucified. There is no true mourning for sin until the eye has seen Christ. It is a beautiful remark of an old divine, that eyes are made for two things at least; first, to look with, and next, to weep with. The eye which looks to the pierced One is the eye which weeps for him. O soul, when thou comest to look where all eyes should look, even to him who was pierced, then thine eye begins to weep for that for which all eyes should weep, even the sin which slew thy Saviour! There is no saving repentance except within sight of the cross. That repentance of

sin which omits Christ, is a repentance which will have to be repented of. If such sorrow may be called repentance at all, it is only as wild grapes are yet called grapes, though they have in them none of the qualities and virtues of the clusters of the true vine. Evangelical repentance is acceptable repentance, and that only; and the essence of evangelical repentance is that it looks to him whom it pierced by its sin. Sorrow for sin without faith in Christ is the hard bone without the marrow: it kills, but never blesses. It is a tempest of the soul with thunder and lightning, but no rain. God save us from remorse! it worketh death.

Mark you, *wherever the Holy Spirit does really come, it always leads the soul to look to Christ.* Never yet did a man receive the Spirit of God unto salvation, unless he received it to the bringing of him to look to Christ and mourn for sin. Faith and repentance are born together, live together, and thrive together. Let no man put asunder what God hath joined together. No man can repent of sin without believing in Jesus, nor believe in Jesus without repenting of sin. Look, then, lovingly to him that bled upon the cross for thee, for in that look thou shalt find pardon, and receive softening. How wonderful that all our evils should be remedied by that one sole prescription, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth"! Yet none will look until the Spirit of God inclines them so to do; and he works on none to their salvation unless they yield to his influences and turn their eyes to Jesus.

Note well that *this look to the pierced One is peculiarly dear to God.* Observe the change of the pronoun in the middle of the verse: "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*." The *me* and the *him* refer to the same person. I lay no special stress upon this, and I do not attempt to *prove* any doctrine from it; but certainly it is remarkable that when we read this verse with defined views as to the oneness of Christ with God, and the union of God and man in one person in the Lord Jesus, we find the pronouns perfectly correct, and understand why there should be "*me*" in one case, and "*him*" in another. If you adopt any other theory, then the passage would seem to be a jumble of words. It is instructive to note that the Lord, instead of saying, "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced," cannot keep himself in the third person, but bursts upon the scene in his own individuality. Either you have here the Father regarding himself as pierced in his Son, or the Lord Jesus Christ himself speaking in the spirit of prophecy of himself, and personally noting those looks of faith and penitence which are fixed upon his sacred person. He has such a delight in those looks of believing sorrow, that he mentions them as having personally beheld them: "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced." Nothing pleases Jesus more than the faith-looks of his people. In every stage of their history the glances of believers' eyes are very precious to him. "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes," saith the Bridegroom in the heavenly canticle. Surely the first glance of a tearful, penitent eye to Christ is very dear to him. He saith, "I have seen him and observed him." Nobody sees our look of faith but himself, and it is not needful that anyone else should

see it : is it not a matter between our own soul and our Lord ? He foresaw that look, and in this verse uttered a prophecy concerning it ; and he looks back upon it with pleasure, keeping it before his mind as a part of his satisfaction for the travail of his soul. The looks of faith and the tears of repentance are precious jewels to our Lord Jesus. He rejoices so much when one sinner repenteth that the angels see his joy. O dear hearts, if this morning, in those pews, you look to Christ believingly, accepting him as God's salvation, then is the promise fulfilled before the eyes of him who spake it, and said, "They shall look on me whom they have pierced." He will be glad of your faith : he invites it, he accepts it, he rewards it. "They looked unto him and were lightened : and their faces were not ashamed." Looking unto Jesus we receive joy, and we give him joy. As he delighteth in mercy, so he delights in those who come to him and accept his mercy. He was lifted on a cross to be looked at, he was nailed there that he might be a perpetual spectacle, and his heart was pierced that we might see the blood and water, which are our double cure.

The look which blesses us so as to produce tenderness of heart, is a look to Jesus as the pierced One. On this I want to dwell for a season. It is not looking to Jesus as God only which affects the heart, but looking to this same Lord and God as crucified for us. We see the Lord pierced, and then the piercing of our own heart begins. When the Lord reveals Jesus to us, we begin to have our sins revealed. We see who it was that was pierced, and this deeply stirs our sorrow. Come, dear souls, let us go together to the cross for a little while, and *note who it was* that there received the spear-thrust of the Roman soldier. Look at his side, and mark that fearful gash which has broached his heart, and set the double flood in motion. The centurion said, "Truly this was the Son of God." He who by nature is God over all, "without whom was not anything made that was made," took upon himself our nature, and became a man like ourselves, save that he was without taint of sin. Being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. It is he that died ! He who only hath immortality condescended to die ! He was all glory and power ; and yet he died ! He was all tenderness and grace ; and yet he died ! Infinite goodness was hanged upon a tree ! Boundless bounty was pierced with a spear ! This tragedy exceeds all others ! However dark man's ingratitude may seem in other cases, it is blackest here ! However horrible his spite against virtue, that spite is cruellest here ! Here hell has outdone all its former villainies, crying, "This is the heir ; let us kill him." God dwelt among us, and man would have none of him. So far as man could pierce his God, and slay his God, he went about to commit the hideous crime ; for man slew the Lord Christ, and pierced him with a spear, and therein showed what he would do with the Eternal himself, if he could come at him. Man is, at heart, a deicide. He would be glad if there were no God : he says in his heart, "No God" ; and, if his hand could go as far as his heart, God would not exist another hour. This it is which invests the piercing of our Lord with such intensity of sin ; it meant the piercing of God. But why ? Why and wherefore is the good God thus persecuted ? By the loving-

kindness of the Lord Jesus, by the glory of his person, and by the perfection of his character, I beseech you be amazed and ashamed that he should be pierced. This is no common death! This murder is no ordinary crime. O man, he that was pierced with the spear was thy God! On the cross behold thy Maker, thy Benefactor, thy best Friend!

“ Alas ! and did my Saviour bleed ?
 And did my Saviour die ?
 Would he devote that sacred head
 For such a worm as I ? ”

Look steadily at the pierced One, and *note the suffering* which is covered by the word “pierced.” Our Lord suffered greatly and grievously. I cannot in one discourse rehearse the story of his sorrows; the griefs of his life of poverty and persecution; the griefs of Gethsemane, and the bloody sweat; the griefs of his desertion, denial, and betrayal; the griefs of Pilate’s hall, and the scourging, and the spitting, and the mockery; the griefs of the cross, with its dishonour and agony. The sufferings of our Lord’s body were only the body of his sufferings.

“ ’Twas not the insulting voice of scorn
 So deeply wrung his heart ;
 The piercing nail, the pointed thorn,
 Caused not the saddest smart :

“ But every struggling sigh betray’d
 A heavier grief within,
 How on His burden’d soul was laid
 The weight of human sin.”

Our Lord was made a curse for us. The penalty for sin, or that which was equivalent thereto, he endured. “ He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” “ The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” Brethren, the sufferings of Jesus ought to melt our hearts. I mourn this morning that I do not mourn as I should. I accuse myself of that hardness of heart which I condemn, since I can tell you this story without breaking down. My Lord’s griefs are untellable. Behold and see if there was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow! Here we lean over a dread abyss and look down into fathomless gulfs. Now we are upon great waters, where deep calleth unto deep. If you will steadfastly consider Jesus pierced for our sins, and all that is meant thereby, your hearts must relent. Sooner or later the cross will bring out all the feeling of which you are capable, and give you capacity for more. When the Holy Spirit puts the cross into the heart, the heart is dissolved in tenderness. *Cruæ in corde*, as the old preachers used to say, this is the source of godly sorrow. The hardness of the heart dies when we see Jesus die in woe so great.

It behoves us further to *note who it was that pierced him*—“ They shall look on me whom *they* have pierced ”; the “ they,” in each case, relates to the same persons. We slew the Saviour, even we, who look to him and live. If a man were condemned and put to death, you might enquire who it was that slew him; and you might be told that it was the judge who condemned him; but that would not be all the truth. Another might blame the jury who brought in the verdict of guilty, or

the executioner who actually hanged him ; but when you go to the root of the matter, you would find that it was the man's crime which was the real blameworthy cause of his death. In the Saviour's case sin was the cause of his death. Transgression pierced him. But whose transgression ? Whose ? It was not his own, for he knew no sin, neither was guile found in his lips. Pilate said, "I find no fault in this man." Brethren, the Messiah was cut off, but not for himself. *Our* sins slew the Saviour. He suffered because there was no other way of vindicating the justice of God and allowing us to escape. The sword which else had smitten us was awakened against the Lord's Shepherd, against the man that was Jehovah's fellow. Truly may we sing—

"'Twas for my sins my dearest Lord
Hung on the cursèd tree,
And groan'd away a dying life
For thee, my soul, for thee.

" Oh, how I hate those lusts of mine
That crucified my God ;
Those sins that pierced and nail'd his flesh
Fast to the fatal wood !

" Oh, if my soul were form'd for woe,
How would I vent my sighs !
Repentance should like rivers flow
From both my streaming eyes."

If this does not break and melt our hearts, let us *note why he came into a position in which he could be pierced by our sins*. It was love, mighty love, nothing else but love which led him to the cross. No other charge can ever be laid at his door but this, that he was "found guilty of excess of love." He put himself in the way of piercing because he was resolved to save us. He loved us better than he loved himself. And shall we hear of this, and think of this, and consider this, and remain unmoved ? Are we worse than brutes ? Has all that is human quitted our humanity ? If God the Holy Ghost is now at work, a sight of Christ will surely melt our heart of stone.

Furthermore, notice that *looking to the pierced One causes mourning in every case*. All hearts yield to this. Under the power of the Holy Ghost *this works efficaciously of itself*. Nothing else is needed. "They shall look upon me," and "they shall mourn." Faith in Christ is sufficient for the production of acceptable and deep repentance ; this, and this only, without mortifications and penances.

Let me also say to you, beloved, that *the more you look at Jesus crucified, the more you will mourn for sin*. Growing thought will bring growing tenderness. I would have you look much at the pierced One, that you may hate sin much. Books which set forth the passion of our Lord, and hymns which sing of his cross, have ever been most dear to saintly minds because of their holy influence upon the heart and conscience. Live at Calvary, beloved ; for there you will live at your best. Live at Calvary, and love at Calvary, till live and love become the same thing. I would say, look to the pierced One till your own heart is pierced. An old divine saith, "Look at the cross until all that is on the cross is in your heart." He further says: Look at Jesus until

he looks at you. Steadily view his suffering person until he seems to turn his head and look at you, as he did at Peter when he went out and wept bitterly. See Jesus till you see yourself: mourn for him till you mourn for your sin.

The whole of this subject leads me to observe that the conversion of the Jews will come from a sight of the crucified Messiah. I conclude from this text that Israel will be brought to know the Lord, not by a vision of Christ in his glory, but by a sight of Christ in his humiliation. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for him." But I also conclude that this holds good of all mankind. By the preaching of Christ crucified will their hearts be broken. The cross is God's hammer of love, wherewith he smites the hearts of men with irresistible blows. Men tell us we should preach Christ as an example. We do preach him as an example, and rejoice to do so; but we can never allow that view of our Lord to overshadow our preaching of him as a sacrifice for sin. He suffered in the room, and place, and stead, of guilty men, and this is the gospel. Whatever others may preach, "we preach Christ crucified." We will ever bear the cross in the forefront. The substitution of Christ for the sinner is the essence of the gospel. We do not keep back the doctrine of the Second Advent; but, first and foremost, we preach the pierced One; for this it is that shall lead to evangelical repentance, when the Spirit of grace is poured out. O brethren, whatever else you preach, or do not preach, preach Christ crucified! Jesus Christ my Lord as crucified is my main topic, and shall be till I die. I trust you feel a pleasure in thinking of the Lord Jesus in any character in which he is revealed, but yet the cross is that whereon he is most lifted up, and this is the chief attraction for sinful men. Though it be to the Jews a stumblingblock and to the Greeks foolishness, it is still the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

III. My time is nearly over, and therefore I must only for a minute touch upon the surface of my third subject: THE SIGHT OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED WILL PRODUCE A MOURNING FOR SIN OF A VERY THOROUGH CHARACTER. It will be *immediate*. If the Spirit of God grants us an inward sight of Christ, we shall bleed inwardly at once. The sentences are fast joined together—"They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn." How rapidly the Spirit of God often works! "His word runneth very swiftly." With a single blow of grace the bars of iron are broken. Saul of Tarsus was foaming at the mouth with rage against Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples, but a flash and a word changed him. "Why persecutest thou me?" showed him the pierced Lord, and, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" was his speedy answer. One glimpse at Christ will make yonder stubborn sinner bow the knee. Look on him, Lord!

This mourning, according to our text, is *refined and pure*. They shall mourn *for him*, they shall be in bitterness *for him*. For Jesus they sorrow rather than for themselves. Sin is not mentioned in these verses, and yet the sorrow is all concerning sin. The grief for sin itself is overborne and compassed about by the greater grief occasioned by the sad results of sin upon the person of the pierced One. Sin is grieved over as it is against the Lord: even as David cries, "Against thee, thee

only, have I sinned." The mourning of a penitent is not because of hell: if there were no hell he would mourn just as much. His grief is not for what sin might cost himself, but for what it has cost the Substitute. He bemoans himself thus: "Oh, how could I have pierced him! How could I have wounded the Beloved? Lover of my soul, how could I have pierced thee?" True penitents smite upon their breasts as they behold their Saviour bleeding on the tree. This is the sense of sin which is the mark of God's electing love, the token of the effectual calling of his grace.

In this mourning there is *a touching tenderness*: "They shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." It is not a son lamenting for a father, for there the grief might be as much for the loss of the father's care and help as for the father's self; but in the case of a father mourning his young son, the father is not supposed to lose anything but his boy; his grief is for the child himself. Mourning for a son is caused by a peculiarly pure and unmixed love. Somewhat that is of the earth earthy may enter into the mourning for a wife; but for his son a father laments with a love which none may question. For an only son the mourning is bitter indeed, and for a firstborn it is as gall and wormwood. The Israelite was specially sensitive concerning the death of his offspring. To lose his firstborn was as when a nation loses its prince. To lose his only son was to quench the light of the house. The old man mourns, "I am as good as dead. I am blotted out of the book of the living, for I have now no son to bear my name. The lamp has gone out in my tent, for my son, my only son, my firstborn, has gone down to the gates of the grave!" The case was hopeless for the future; none remained to continue his family among those who sit in the gate, and the old man rent his clothes and wept sore. It is a bitter mourning which we have when we see Jesus slain by our sins. Were it not for the consequences which grace has caused to flow therefrom, our sorrow would be hopeless and helpless; for we feel that in killing Jesus we have destroyed our best, our only hope, our one and only joy. His death was the hiding of the sun, and the shaking of the earth, and we feel it to be so within our own souls. All that is worth having is gone when Jesus is gone. When God's only Son, his firstborn, dies, we sympathize with the great Father, and feel ourselves bereaved of our chief joy, our hope, our delight.

This sorrow is *intense*. The word "bitterness" is used twice. Sorrow at the cross-foot is sorrow indeed, sorrow upon sorrow, grief upon grief. Then we have bitterness and bitterness, bitterness upon bitterness, the bitterness of bitterness. Thank God, it is a healthy tonic: he that hath tasted this bitterness may say, "Surely the bitterness of death is past."

And this kind of mourning is *very extraordinary*. The prophet could not recollect any mourning which he had ever heard of that was like it, except the lamentation of the people for the death of Josiah. Then all Judah mourned, and Jeremiah wrote sad dirges, and other prophets and poets poured forth their lamentations. Everywhere throughout the land there went up an exceeding great and bitter cry, for the good king had fallen, and there were no princes of like mind to follow him. Alas, poor nation! it was thy last bright hour which saw him ride

to the battle; in his death thy star has set! In the valley of Hadadrimmon the mourning began, but it spread through all the land. The fatal fight of Megiddon was wailed by every woman in Jerusalem. Bravely had Josiah kept his word, and sought to repel the Egyptian invader; but the hour of Judah's punishment was come, and Josiah died. A mourning as sincere and deep comes to us when we perceive that Jesus died for us. Blessed be his name; the joy that comes of it when we see sin put away by his death, turns all the sorrow into joy.

This mourning is *personal grief*; every man repents apart, and every woman apart. It is a private, personal grief; it is not produced by the contagion of example, but by the conviction of the individual conscience. Such sorrow is only to be assuaged by Jesus Christ himself when he is revealed as the salvation of God.

Brethren, I am conscious that I have not preached as I ought to have preached this morning. I have been mastered by my subject. I could sit down alone and picture my divine Master on the cross. I delight to do so. It is my comfort to meditate on him. I see him hanging on the tree, and carefully survey him, from his head encircled with the thorns, down to his blessed feet, made by the nails to be fountains of crimson blood. I have wept behind the cross at the marks of the dread scourging which he bore; and then coming to the front I have gazed upon his pierced hands, and lingered long before that opened side. Then I feel as if I could die of a pleasing grief and mournful joy. Oh, how I then love and adore! But here before this crowd I am a mere lisper of words—words which fall far below the height of this great argument. Ah me! Ah me! Who among the sons of men could fitly tell you of his unknown agonies, his piercing anguish, his distraction and heart-break? Who can fully interpret that awful cry of "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Alone I can hide my face and bow my head; but here what can I do? O Lord, what can thy servant do?

"Words are but air, and tongues but clay,
And thy compassions are divine."

I cannot tell of love's bleeding, love's agony, love's death! If the Holy Ghost will graciously come at this time, and put me and my words altogether aside, and set my Lord before you, evidently crucified among you, then shall I be content, and you will go home thoughtful, tender, hating sin, and therefore more deeply happy, more serenely glad than ever before. The Lord grant it for his name's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Zechariah xi. 3; xii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—296, 284, 290.