

The New Park Street Pulpit.

SIN SLAIN.

A Sermon

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AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.

“And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him. Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.”—Judges iv. 22.

IF the story of the world's sufferings under different tyrants could all be written, there would be no man found who would be capable of reading it. I believe that even the despots themselves, who have committed the atrocities to which I refer, would not be sufficiently cold-blooded to sit down and read the account of the agonies which their own victims have endured. I have been struck in passing through many lands with the horrible sufferings which in the olden times were endured by the poor at the hands of the rich kings and lords who were their oppressors. In almost every town in which you enter, you either have shown to you the rack, the dark dungeon, the thumb-screw, or the infernal machine, or instruments too horrible to describe—that make one's blood run chill at the very thought and sight of them. Verily, O earth, thou hast been scarred; thy back has been ploughed with many a furrow; from thy veins have gushed forth plenteous streams of blood, and thy sons and thy daughters have had to suffer agonies extreme! But oh! my brethren, I speak in sober earnestness when I declare that all the sufferings that have ever been exercised upon man have never been equal to the tyranny which man has brought upon himself—the tyranny of sin. Sin has brought more plagues upon this earth than all the earth's tyrants. It has brought more pangs and more miseries upon men's bodies and souls than the craftiest inventions of the most cold-blooded and diabolical tormentors. Sin is the world's great Despot. It is the serpent in whose subtle folds earth's inhabitants are crushed. It is such a tyranny that none but those whom God delivers have been able to escape from it. Nay, such a tyranny that even they have been scarcely saved; and they, when saved, have had to look back and remember the dreadful slavery in which they once existed; they have remembered the wormwood and the gall; and at the remembrance the iron has entered into their souls. We have before us, in this chapter, a picture of the children of Israel attacked by a very wicked and powerful king—Jaban, the king of Canaan. It is but a faint emblem, a very indistinct picture of the oppression which sin exercises upon all mankind—the oppression which our own iniquities continually bring upon us.

I want to picture to you to-night, if I can, three acts in a great history—three different pictures illustrating one subject. I trust we have passed through all three of them, many of us; and as we shall look upon them, whilst I paint them upon the wall, I think there will be many here who will be able to say, “I was in that

state once;” and when we come to the last, I hope we shall be able to clap our hands, and rejoice to feel that the last is our case also, and that we are in the plight of the man with a description of whom I shall conclude.

First, I shall picture to you *the sinner growing uneasy in his bondage and thinking about rebellion against his oppressors*; secondly, *the sinner putting to rout his sins and seeking their entire destruction*; and, thirdly, I shall seek to bring to you that notable picture of the open door, and I shall stand at it and cry to those who are seeking the life of their sins—“Come hither, and I will show you the man whom you seek; here he lies—dead; slain by the hammer and the nail; held not in the hand of a woman, but in the hand of the seed of the woman—the man Christ Jesus.”

I. First, then, let us try to picture THE SINNER GROWING UNEASY UNDER THE YOKE OF HIS SINS, AND PLANNING A REVOLT AGAINST HIS OPPRESSORS.

It is said that when a man is born a slave, slavery is not near so irksome as when he has once been free. You will have found it, perhaps, in birds and such animals that we keep under our control. If they have never known what it is to fly to and fro in the air from tree to tree, they are happy in the cage; but if, after having once seen the world, and floated in the clear air, they are condemned to live in slavery, they are far less content. This is the case with man—he is born a slave. The child in the cradle is born under sin, and as we grow up we wear our manacles and scarcely know that they are about us. Use, we say, is second nature, and certainly the evil nature we have received makes the usages of sin seem as if they were not so slavish as they are. Nay, some men have become so used to their bonds, that they live with no true idea of liberty, and yet think themselves free. Nay, they take the names of freedom, and call themselves libertines, and free-thinkers, and free-doers, when they are the very worst of slaves, and might hear their chains rattle if they had but ears to hear. Until the Spirit of God comes into the heart—so strange is the use of nature—we live contented in our chains; we walk up and down our dungeon, and think we are at large. We are driven about by our task-masters, and imagine that we are free. Once let the Spirit of God come into us—once let a word of life and liberty sound in our ears—once let Jehovah Jesus speak, and we begin to be dissatisfied with our condition. Now the chain frets us; now the fetter feels too small; now we long for a wider march than we had before, and are not content to be fettered for ever to a sinful lust. We begin to have a longing for something better, though we know not what it is. Now it is that the man begins to find fault with what he at one time thought was so passing excellent. He finds that now the cup which seemed to be all honey has traces of bitter in it; the cane once so sweet and palatable has lost its lusciousness, and he says within himself “I wish I had some nobler food than these swine’s husks; this is not fit food for me.” He does not know that God has begun to kindle in him new life and a diviner nature; but he knows this, that he cannot be content to be what he was before. He frets and chafes like the lion in bonds that longs to range in the forest and wilderness. He cannot endure it. And now, I say, it is that the man begins to act. His first action is the action of the children of Israel; he begins to cry unto the Lord. Perhaps it is not a prayer, as we use the term in ordinary conversation. He cannot put many words together. It is a sigh—a sigh for he knows not what. It is a groan after something—an indescribable something that he has not seen or felt, but of the existence of which he has some idea. “Oh God,” saith he, “deliver me! Oh God, I feel I am not what I should be; I am not what I wish to be; I am discontented with myself.” And if the prayer does not take the actual shape of “God be merciful to me a sinner,” yet it means all that, for he seems to say “Lord, I know not what it is—I know not whether it be mercy or grace, or what the name of it may be; but I want something. I am a slave. I feel it all. Oh that I could be free! Oh that I could be delivered!” The man begins now, you see, to look for something higher than he has seen before. After this prayer comes action; “Now,” says the man, “I must begin to be up and doing.” And if the Spirit of God is truly dealing with him, he is not content with prayer; he begins to feel that though it is little enough that he can do, yet he can do at least something. Drunkenness he forsakes; at one blow he lays that enemy in the dust. Then there is his cursing and his swearing—he tries to overcome that enemy, but the oath comes out when he least expects it. Perhaps it gives him weeks of struggling, but at last that too is overcome. Then come the practices of his trade—these, he feels, hurt his conscience. Here is another chain to be filed off—another rivet to be torn off. He toils, he strives, still crying evermore to God, and at last he is free, and that enemy is overthrown. He is like

Barak; the Lord is helping him, and his enemies flee before him. Oh my brethren, I speak from experience now. What a struggle that was which my young heart waged against sin! When God the Holy Ghost first quickened me, I scarcely knew of that strong armour whereon my soul could venture. Little did I know of the precious blood which has put my sins away, and drowned them in the seas for ever. But I did know this, that I could not be what I was; that I could not rest happy unless I became something better—something purer than I felt; and oh, how my spirit cried to God with groanings—I say it without any exaggeration—groanings that could not be uttered! and oh! how I sought in my poor dark way to overcome first this sin and then another, and so to do battle in God's strength against the enemies that assailed me, and not, thank God, altogether without success, though still the battle had been lost unless he had come who is the Overcomer of sin and the Deliverer of his people, and had put the hosts to flight. Have I not some here to-night who are just in this position? They have not come to Mount Zion yet, but are fighting with the Amalakites in the wilderness. They have not come to the blood of sprinkling, but somehow or other—they don't know exactly what condition theirs is,—they are fighting up hill against a dread something which they would overcome. They cannot renounce the struggle; they sometimes fear they will be vanquished in the end. Oh, my brother or sister, I am glad to find the Lord has done so much for thee. This is one of the first marks of divine life when we begin to fight against sin.

Then courage, brethren! There shall be another picture painted soon, and that shall be thy picture too, when thou shalt be more than a conqueror, through him that hath loved thee. But I dare say this is not the picture of all here. There are some of you who say you are not slaves, and, therefore, you do not wish to be freed. But I tell you, sirs, if any earthly potentate could command you to do what the devil makes you do, you would think yourselves the most oppressed beings in the world. If there should be a law passed in Parliament, and there should be power to put it into execution, that you should go and sit several hours of the night until midnight, and drink some vile poisonous stuff that would steal away your brains, so that you have to be wheeled home, you would say, "What vile tyranny! to force men to destroy their souls and bodies in that way;" and yet you do it wilfully of yourselves. And of the one blessed day of rest—the only one in seven that we have to rest in—if there were an enactment passed that you should open your shops on that day, and pursue your trade, you would say, "This is a wretched land, to have such tyrants to govern it;" you would declare you would not do it, and yet the devil makes you, and you go and take down your shutters as greedily as if you would win heaven by your Sunday trading. What slaves do men make of themselves when they most think themselves free! I have seen a man work harder and spend more money in seeking pleasure in that which makes him sick and ill—which makes his eyes red and his whole body feverish—than he would have done if a thousand acts of parliament had tried to drive him to do so. The devil is indeed a cruel tyrant with his subjects, but he is such a tyrant that they willingly follow him. He rivets on them his chains, and whilst they think they are going of their own free will, he sits grinning all the while and thinking how when their laughter will change to bitterest tears, they shall be undeceived in the dread day in which hell's fire shall burn up their delusion, and the flames of the pit shall scatter the darkness that has concealed the truth from their eyes. Thus much, then, concerning the first picture—the sinner discontented and going to war with his sins.

II. And now we have the second picture—THE SINNER HAVING GONE TO WAR WITH HIS OWN SINS, HAS, TO A GREAT EXTENT, BY GOD'S GRACE, OVERCOME THEM; but he feels when this is done, that it is not enough—that external morality will not save the soul. Like Barak, he has conquered Sisera; but, not content with seeing him flee away on his feet, he wants to have his dead body before him. "No," says he, "it is not enough to vanquish, I must destroy; it is not sufficient to get rid of evil habits, I must overcome the propensity to sin. It is not sufficient to put to flight this sin or the other; I must trample the roots of corruption beneath my feet, that sin itself may be slain." Mark, my dear hearers, that is not a work of the Spirit which is not a radical work. If you are content merely to conquer your sins and not to kill them, you may depend upon it, it is the mere work of morality—a surface work—and not the work of the Holy Spirit.

Sirs, be not content with driving out thy foes, or they will come back again to thee; be not satisfied with wearing the sheep's skin; be not content till thy wolfish nature is taken from thee, and the nature of the sheep imparted. It is not enough to make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, it must be broken and a new vessel must be given; be not satisfied with whitewashing the tomb. The charnel house must be empty, and where death reigned, life must reign. There is no mistake perhaps more common in these dangerous times than to mistake externals for internals, the outward sign for the inward grace, the painted imitation of mortality for the solid jewels of spirituality. Up, Barak! up, thou son of Abinoam! thou hast routed the Sisera of thy drunkenness; thou hast put the hosts of thy sins to flight: but this is not enough. Sisera will return upon thee with twice nine hundred chariots, and thou shalt yet be overcome. Rest not content till the blood of thine enemy stain the ground, until he be crushed, and dead, and slain. Oh, sinner, I beseech thee never be content until grace reign in thy heart, and sin be altogether subdued. Indeed, this is what every renewed soul longs for, and must long for, nor will it rest satisfied until all this shall be accomplished. There was a time when some of us thought we would slay our sins. We wanted to put them to death, and we thought we would drown them in floods of penitence. There was a time, too, when we thought we would starve our sins; we thought we would keep out of temptation, and not go and pander to our lusts, and then they would die; and some of us can recollect when we gagged our lusts, when we pinioned their arms, and put their feet in the stocks, and then thought that would deliver us. But oh, brethren, all our ways of putting sin to death were not sufficient; we found the monster still alive, insatiate for his prey. We might rout his myrmidons, but the monster was still our conqueror. We might put to flight our habits, but the nature of sin was still in us, and we could not overcome it. Yet did we groan and cry daily, "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" It is a cry to which we are accustomed even at this day, and which we shall never cease to utter, till we can say of our sins, "They are gone," and of the very nature of sin, that it has been extinguished, and that we are pure and holy even as when the first Adam came from his Maker's hands.

Well, I have some here, I have no doubt, who are like Barak pursuing after Sisera, but who are faint-hearted. You are saying, "My sin can never be forgiven, it is too great, it must escape from me, and, even if it were put to flight it never could be overcome; I am so great a sinner, a sinner of such a double dye, a scarlet sinner I must always be. I was born in sin, and I have grown up in it; and as the twig is bent the tree is inclined. Who can make straight such a gnarled oak as I am? Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? if so, I, who am accustomed to do evil, may learn to do well." You begin to think that rivers might sooner run up-hill, than you could run to God and righteousness. You are tired of the battle, and ready to lay down your arms and die. But you cannot, you must not go back to be the drunkard and the swearer that you were before, and die in despair of ever overcoming the sin within; nor must you think, "Oh, I have entered upon a fight that is too much for me, I shall yet fall by the hands of mine enemy."

III. Come hither, I bring you to the third picture. I stand at THE DOOR to-day, not of a tent, but of a TOMB, and as I stand here I say to the sinner who is anxious to know how his sins may be killed, how his corruption may be slain, "Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest, and when you shall come in, YOU SHALL SEE YOUR SINS LYING DEAD, AND THE NAILS IN THEIR TEMPLES."

Sinner, the sin thou darest is forgiven, thou hast wept, sore before God, and thou hast cast thyself on Christ and on Christ alone. In the name of Him who is the Eternal God, I assure thee that thy sins are all forgiven. From the book of God's remembrance they are blotted out. They are as clean gone as the clouds that floated through the sky last year, and distilled their showers on the ground. Thy sins are gone; every one of them; the sin over which thou hast wept, the sin which caused thee many a tear is gone, and is forgiven.

Further—dost thou ask where thy sin is? I tell thee thy sin is gone, so that it never can be recalled. Thou art so forgiven that thy sins can never have a resurrection. The nail is not driven through the hands of thy sins, but through their temples. If thou shouldst live twice ten thousand years no sin could ever

be laid to thy charge again if thou believest in Christ Jesus. Thou hast no conscience of sin left. "As far as the east is from the west," so far hath he removed thy transgressions from thee. God hath spoken and said,—“Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee,” and it is done; none can reverse the sentence. He has cast thy sins into the depth of the sea, and they can never be found again. Nay, further, sinner, for thy peace and comfort, thy sins are not only forgiven and killed so that they cannot rise again, but thy sins have *ceased to be*. Their dead bodies, like the body of Moses, are brought where they never can be found. More than this, they do not exist. Again, O child of God, there doth not remain so much as a shadow of sin: “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?”—much less prove it against them. What dog can wag his tongue to accuse?—much less, what witness shall rise up to condemn? God hath justified thee, O sinner! if thou believest; and if thou art so justified, thou art as much accepted in God’s sight as if thou hadst never sinned. Had thy life been blameless and thy path been holy even to perfection, thou hadst not been more pure in the eyes of Divine justice than thou art to-night if thy faith is fixed on the cross of Christ. Right through the brain of all thy sins, the hammer has driven the nail of Christ’s grace. The spear that pierced the Saviour’s heart, pierced the heart of thine iniquity; the grave in which he was buried was the tomb of all thy sins; and his resurrection was the resurrection of thy spirit to light and joy unspeakable. “Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest.” This is a refreshing sight, even to the child of God, who has seen it long ago, and it will ever be solemn for us to contemplate the sin. It must ever be a direful spectacle; for an enemy, even when dead, is a ghastly sight. The head of Goliath, even though it makes us smile when it is cut off, is yet the head of a grim monster, and he is a monster even when he is slain. God forbid we should ever glory in sin, but it is a theme for joy to a Christian when he can look upon his sins drowned in the blood of Jesus,

“Plunged, as in a shoreless sea;
Lost, as in immensity.”

My soul looks back to the days of my youth, and remembers her former transgressions,—she drops a tear of sorrow; she looks to the cross, and sees them all forgiven, and she drops there tears of gratitude. My eye runs along the days of manhood, and observes, with sorrow, omissions and commissions innumerable; but it lights up with a smile most rapturous when I see the flood of Jesus’ blood swelling over the sands of my sins till they are all covered and no eye can behold them. Oh! child of God, come and see the man whom thou seekest, here he lies slain before thee. Come and see all thy sins for ever dead; fear them not; weep for them; avoid them in days to come, and remember they are slain. Look at thy sins as vanquished foes, and always regard them as being nailed to his cross—to his cross who

“Sang the triumph when he rose.”

But I hear you say, “Well, I have faith enough to believe that my sins are overcome in that way, and that they are conquered and dead in that respect; but O, sir, as to *this body of sin within me*—I cannot get it killed, I cannot get it overcome.” Now, when we begin the divine life, we believe that we shall get rid of our old Adam entirely. I know most of you had a notion when you first started in the pilgrimage, that as soon as ever you received grace, depravity would be cast out—did you find it so, brethren? I have heard some preachers laugh at the theory of the two natures. I never answered them, for I dare say they would not have comprehended me if I had tried the experiment; but one thing I know—that the theory of the two natures in a Christian is no theory to me, but a truth which daily proves itself. I cannot say with Ralph Erskine—

“To good and evil equal bent,
And both a devil and a saint;”

but if that is not the truth it is very near to it; it is next door to it; and while on the one hand I am able to see sin perishing within, on the other hand I cannot fail to see the struggle which my soul has to wage against it, and the daily warfare and fightings that necessarily ensue. I know that grace is the stronger principle, and that it must overcome at last; but there are times when the old man seems for a little to get the upper hand—Ishmael prevails, and Isaac is cast to the

ground; though this I know, that Isaac has the promise and Ishmael must be driven out. Well, child of God, if you have to look upon the Sisera of your sin still fleeing from you—be of good cheer; it is but the experience of all the people of God. Moreover, there have been many who have said they did not feel this; but, my dear brethren, they did feel it, only that they did not use the same language as we do who have felt it. I know one or two good brothers who say they believe in perfection, but I find all the perfection they believe in is the very perfection that I preach. It is perfection in Christ, but they do not believe in perfection in themselves. Nor do I believe that any Christian who reads his own heart for a single day, can indulge the idea of being totally free from the risings of depravity, and the risings of the heart after sin. If there be such, I can only say, “I wish I could change places with thee, brother, for it is my hard lot to have wars and fightings day by day, and it seems difficult to say sometimes which way the matter will end, or how the battle will be decided.” Indeed, one could not know it at all except by faith, for sight seems to lead to an opposite opinion. Well, be of good cheer, Christian. Though the old man is not slain in you, as you know personally yet I would have you remember that as you are in Christ, the old man is crucified. “Knowing that your old man is crucified with him.” And know this, that the day shall come when the angels shall open wide the door, and ye that have been panting after your enemy, like Barak pressing after Sisera, shall hear the welcome Spirit say, “Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest,” and there shall lie thine old inbred lusts, and he who is the father of them, old Satan himself, all chained and bound and cast into the lake of fire. Then will you sing indeed unto the Lord, “Oh! sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; his right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory.” Till then, brethren, pursue after your sins. Spare them not, neither great nor small, and God speed you that you may fight valiantly, and by his aid utterly overcome them.

As for thee, poor sinner, whom I lately reminded that thou canst not slay thy sins, nor work out thy salvation, thou canst not be thine own deliverer. Trust in thy Master. Put thy soul into the hands of him who is able and willing to preserve and keep it, and to protect it; and mark me, if to-night thou wilt have nothing to do with thyself, but wilt give thyself to Christ entirely, then to-night thou art saved. What if my Master should give me to-night some fishes at the first shaking of the net, and what if some poor sinner should say within himself—

“I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin,
Hath like a mountain rose;
I know his courts, I’ll enter in,
Whatever may oppose.”

Come, sinner, come! Nay, do you say you cannot come? “My sins, my sins!” Come, and I will show thee thy sins nailed to the cross of Christ. “But I must not come,” says one; “I have so hard a heart.” Come, and I will show thee thy hard heart dissolved in a bath of blood divine. “Oh! but,” still thou sayest, “I dare not come.” Come, and I will show thee those fears of thine lulled into an eternal sleep, and thy soul resting on Christ shall never need to fear again, for thou shalt be his in time, his in life and death, and his in an eternity of bliss.

May the Lord add his blessing now, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.