

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS.

A Sermon

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“Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.”—Matthew ix. 2.*

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST did not say to the palsied man, “Be of good cheer; thy palsied limbs shall be made strong and well again;” but, before he had cured that terrible malady, he bade him be comforted because his sins were forgiven, as if that would be a sufficient reason for rejoicing even if he should remain palsied. If he should be carried away from the presence of Christ upon his bed just as helpless as when he was let down from the roof into the middle of the crowded room, that would be quite a secondary matter compared with the all-important fact that his sins had been forgiven. David truly wrote, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered;” and he *is* blessed even though he is sick of the palsy, or suffering from all the diseases to which flesh is heir. You remember, too, how the prophet Isaiah wrote, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her,”—what? What shall be the special cause of comfort to the Church of God?—“that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.” She might be in great trouble and distress, her land might be trodden under the feet of invaders, her sons and daughters might be fainting in her streets; but, as her iniquity was pardoned, she had good ground for comfort. To quote another instance that is a close parallel to our text, our Lord said

* Other Sermons by Mr. Spurgeon, concerning the man sick of the palsy, are as follows:—*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,337, “The Physician Pardons His Palsied Patient;” No. 2,417, “First Forgiveness, then Healing;” and No. 3,016, “Good Cheer from Forgiven Sin.”

to the woman in the city, who was a sinner, who had washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed them, and anointed them with ointment,—“Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Go in peace;” and, truly, when sin is forgiven, we may go in peace.

This is the subject upon which I am going to speak,—whatever there may be to cause us sorrow, if our sins are forgiven, we have good reason to be happy. First, I shall try to show you that *the pardon of sin brings true happiness*; next, that *those whose sins are forgiven ought to be happy*; and, thirdly, a solemn warning in conclusion, that *there is no true happiness for unpardoned souls*.

I. First, then, as Jesus said to the man sick of the palsy, “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee;” we learn that **THE PARDON OF SIN BRINGS TRUE HAPPINESS**.

Time would fail us to show all the ways in which the forgiveness of sin is a perennial fount of consolation; but note, first, that *it is one of the surest signs of divine favour*, and anyone who is in the enjoyment of it certainly has abundant reason for being glad. God may give a man great riches, but that would not in itself be a token of favour; it might even be quite the opposite. God may give a man great success in his enterprises, but that also may be no evidence of favour. God may even permit a man to have his heart's desire, and to be filled with this world's follies and pleasures; yet that might be a proof of divine wrath rather than of the Lord's favour. He may have said concerning him, “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” But if a man's sins are forgiven, there is no doubt about God's favour in his case. That brief sentence, “Thy sins are forgiven,” is a clearer token of the favour of God than vats bursting with new wine or barns packed to the roof with golden grain. If thy sins are forgiven thee, thou hast the King's sign-manual to prove that he loves thee.

Forgiveness of sin is also *a proof of divine election*; not merely a sign and token of God's present favourable regard, but an evidence of that ancient favour which God had in his heart towards his chosen even from eternity. There are many common mercies that God gives freely to all sorts and conditions of men. “He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” But the pardon of sin is a special blessing reserved for his own peculiar people, those whose names he wrote in the Lamb's book of life, and whom he gave to his Son in the covenant of his grace, and whom Christ redeemed by his precious blood when he “loved the church, and gave himself for it.” These are the people in whom God takes a peculiar delight, and these are they whose sins are forgiven them for Christ's sake.

If thou, my brother or sister, art one of these highly-favoured ones, then hast thou good reason to be happy. Think for a minute or two upon *what this pardon is*, and then thou wilt see what cause thou hast for happiness. Isaiah tells us that Jehovah hath laid upon Christ the iniquity of all his people, so that this crushing burden has been removed from all of us who are truly his, and surely he who has had such a load taken off his heart and conscience,

must be a happy man. In Psalm lxxxv. 2, we read, "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin." If we have believed in Jesus, our sins are covered even from the sight of God by the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, and they are so concealed from our own eyes that we no longer think of them as condemning us. Can any of us realize that this is our case, and yet remain unhappy? In Isaiah xliv. 22, we read, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." You have sometimes seen the clouds dissipated and scattered so completely that not a vestige of them can be seen; that is how our sins are driven away by God, so shall we not be happy? Sometimes, the pardon of sin is called the casting of sin behind God's back into the depths of the sea; at another time, it is said that "the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found;" and then there is that wonderful description of the work of "Messiah the Prince" which Gabriel gave to Daniel, "to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins." What stronger expression than that could ever be used? If it is Christ's work "to make an end of sins," we may be quite sure that he will do it, and that there will be an end of them for all who believe in him; therefore, let our hearts dance for joy as his gracious Spirit assures us that our sins are as completely annihilated and put away as if they had never been committed.

Observe also that the pardon of sin *completely changes a man's position in relation to God*. Before he was forgiven, he was in the position of a condemned man, the wrath of God was abiding upon him. If his conscience had been awakened and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he felt that the sword of divine justice was drawn from its sheath, and hanging over his head as by a single hair. I remember well the time when neither night nor day had I either peace or comfort. I knew that God must be angry with me because of my sin, and that I was "condemned already" because I had not savingly believed on his only-begotten Son. But the moment a man's sins are forgiven, his spirit begins to rejoice in God his Saviour. Then his days are full of peace, and he can fall asleep at night without fearing death even should the silent messenger come for him ere he wakes. He is no longer the slave of sin and Satan, but a free man in Christ Jesus. He is no longer a rebel, hiding here and there to avoid arrest by the officers of justice; but he is welcomed as the King's own son, and received with loving embraces into his Father's bosom. Surely there is no greater comfort under heaven than a sense of sin forgiven, and of reconciliation to God by the death of his Son. An earthly courtier, whose whole life at court depends upon his monarch's favour, feels that, if his sovereign frowns upon him, his position is imperilled, and all his joy has departed; but when he again basks in the sunshine of his sovereign's smile because his offence has been forgiven, then is his life once more filled with happiness. Even so is it with us; in past days, we were under the frown of our great Lord and King, and we were in utter misery, and almost in

despair; but now that his smile rests upon us, and he has forgiven us all our transgressions, we can sing, yea, and even dance for joy of heart that our sins and iniquities he will remember against us no more for ever.

The pardon of sin also *makes a change in all that surrounds the one who is forgiven*. That is a terrible text of Scripture, "I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already;" and many a man has realized in his own life the truth of that divine declaration. The whole world, so far as it is loyal to its great Creator, is against the man who is the enemy of God, even as the stars in their courses fought against Sisera; but to the man who is at peace with God we can say, as Eliphaz said to Job, "Thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee." Paul was not a whit too positive when he wrote, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Deliverance from sin seems to the forgiven man to cause such a change in everything around him that the things which he used to regard as curses now appear to him as blessings, just as aforetime his blessings (as he called them,) were transmuted into curses. Blessed is the man who has had his sins forgiven; he is the man who can truly say, "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come;" and it is to him and others like him that the Lord says, "Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." The saved man is such a happy man that, like John Bunyan when he was converted, he wanted even the crows in the field to share his joy.

In the pardon of sin, too, blessed be God, *there is a reversal of the sentence which had been pronounced upon us as sinners*. As I speak of this great fact, I cannot help remembering the time when I would have cheerfully given my eyes, or anything else that was dear to me, if I might but have been assured that my sins were all forgiven; for the dread of the wrath to come filled my spirit, and I knew not how soon I might be summoned to appear before the bar of God, to hear the sentence that my sins had merited. I felt that I would willingly lie in prison, and have nothing but bread and water for my sustenance if I might only have my sins blotted out; and now that, trusting to the atoning sacrifice of Christ, I know that my sins are all forgiven for his sake, I find my tongue quite inadequate to tell of the joys I have experienced and still feel through knowing that the sentence justly passed upon me has been reversed. So now, instead of fearing that the messengers of divine justice will arrest me, and drag me off to the eternal prison-house, I join in Paul's triumphant challenge to heaven, and earth, and hell, and cry, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." There is no hell for a pardoned sinner. God may chasten him as

his loving Father, but he will never condemn him as his Judge. No penal wrath can fall upon him, for it is contrary to Jehovah's righteous rule to punish those whom he hath absolved. The day of wrath has passed for him, and his portion now is unspeakable joy and bliss which will culminate in indescribable bliss and glory for ever and ever.

Sometimes,—and it is true in the case we are now considering,—when persons, who have been attainted for high treason, have been pardoned by their sovereign, the attainder is removed, and their estates, which had been sequestered, are restored to them; and, in like manner, *all that we had lost by our treason against the Most High is restored to us.* It is true that we find not a literal earthly paradise such as Adam had, but we can walk with God quite as closely as he ever did; and, in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we can have closer communion with God than our first father enjoyed in his unfallen state. Our soul has fruits to feed upon such as Adam never tasted, we drink from a fountain whose streams are more precious than the river that watered the garden of Eden; in fact, as we often sing,—

“In Christ, the sons of Adam boast,
More blessings than their father lost.”

Christ has restored to us all that we lost by sin, and has added new blessings which Adam never had; so that now, as Dr. Watts truly wrote,—

“All things are ours; the gift of God,
The purchase of a Saviour's blood;
While the good Spirit shows us how
To use and to improve them too.”

Or, as Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “All things are yours; whether. . . the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.”

I will only mention one other thing that clearly shows that the pardon of sin brings true happiness; it is this. *To many of us, it is the greatest joy we know to be able to do anything that brings glory to God, and extends his kingdom in the earth.* But, beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, we could not have done this if our sins had remained unforgiven. We should have been incapable of proclaiming the gospel to others if we had not proved its sweetness ourselves. I always feel that I can make Paul's language my own, and say, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this *grace* given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Many of you, my brethren, can say the same; others of you can apply the spirit of the apostle's words to your Sunday-school teaching, your house to house visitation, your tract-distribution, or any other form of service by which you seek to win souls for Christ, and so to bring glory to God. It is most

blessed work in which you are engaged, but you could never rightly have engaged in it if you had not yourself first enjoyed the blessedness of the man "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." What is there of covenant blessing, what is there of experimental godliness, what is there of fellowship with God, what is there of foretaste of the bliss eternal that we could have known if, first of all, the Lord had not forgiven us all our iniquities? This, which is in itself a choice blessing, includes many other choice blessings, and therefore it should make all those who possess it supremely happy.

II. The second part of my sermon is an application of the first part; what I have been saying to you is true, therefore carry it out; which means that **THOSE WHOSE SINS ARE FORGIVEN OUGHT TO BE HAPPY.**

First of all, *is it not most becoming that they should be happy?* Remember our Saviour's parable of the prodigal son; he comes home in rags, but he is lovingly welcomed by his father's warm embrace and fond kisses, his rags are taken off, and the best robe is put in their place, the fatted calf is killed, and there is general rejoicing throughout the house. Now imagine, if you can, this newly-received prodigal sitting down and weeping amid the joy of all around him. I can conceive that his tears flowed copiously enough at first when he found himself so graciously forgiven, and was made to feel that he was at home once more; yet, surely, even those must have been mainly tears of joy though some bitter drops of grief for the past wasted years must have been mingled with them. Methinks, that day he could not have even a headache, for the joy of his heart must have driven away all his aches and pains; and if, before, he had been footsore and weary with his long journey from the far country, the exhilaration and delight of such a home-coming must have revived and refreshed him. When "they began to be merry," surely there was not one there who was happier than he was; and, beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, we are in the same position as he was; so, now that God has pardoned us, shall we sit as mourners at the great gospel feast to which we have been so lovingly welcomed? Angels are rejoicing over us; shall we be moaning and groaning, sighing and crying, murmuring and complaining? All our fellow-Christians are glad to hear that we have tasted that the Lord is gracious; shall they rejoice over us, and shall not we ourselves rejoice?

"Oh, but I am so poor!" says one. I am sorry it is so with thee, my dear friend, but shall a sense of thy poverty have more power over thy mind than a sense of God's forgiving love? "Ah, but I have a sick one at home!" sighs another. I admire thy sympathetic feeling, but shall that be permitted to outweigh thy feeling of gratitude to God for saving thy soul from everlasting destruction? After all, is there anything in the world that is worthy to be compared with the incalculable mercy of sin forgiven? What if I am poor? Yet I am forgiven. What if I am sickly? Yet I am forgiven. What if I shall soon die? Yet I am forgiven. Our sin being forgiven, the very sting of death is drawn, and

therefore we can sing, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Then next, *have we not the very best reasons for rejoicing?* John Bunyan rightly says that any man who wears the flower called "heart's ease" in his bosom is a happy man; but where does that flower grow except in the garden of forgiveness of sin? The heart is heavy when sin is resting upon it, but it is light and joyous when sin is removed. I would bear any affliction rather than be burdened with a guilty conscience; would not you, my brother or sister? As long as conscience is clear and cleansed, other matters are of small account, and we need not fear even the devil himself. The principal element in true happiness is a heart at peace with God, and a pardoned sinner has that; then ought he not to show it in his very face? Ought not his whole mien and manner to be blessedly joyous because he is at peace with God? The Lord himself says that such a man is blessed, and can his verdict be set at nought? Shall he say that thou art blessed because he hath forgiven thy transgression, and covered thy sin, and wilt thou bow thy head as if thou wert a bulrush, and that he had forgotten thee? When God's declaration is that those who are forgiven are blessed, and when he bids them be glad in him, and even shout for joy, it must be right for them to do as he commands, and it would be wrong for them not to do so. O ye pardoned ones, pray the Lord to enable you to shake off the gloom that now enshrouds you, and to give unto you "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness"!

Ought we not to cultivate this blessed flower of true Scriptural happiness far more than we do? I find myself frequently depressed in spirit,—perhaps more so than any other person here, and I find no better cure for that depression than to trust in the Lord with all my heart, and seek to realize afresh the power of the peace-speaking blood of Jesus, and his infinite love in dying upon the cross to put away all my transgressions. As I gaze upon the incarnate God there made sin for me that I might be made the righteousness of God in him, streams of comfort flow into my soul from his many wounds. I could sit at Calvary, and weep; but I could not sit there without singing. It is strange, yet is it true that, in the hour of our greatest grief, we find comfort soonest in the place where grief reached its climax. Calvary was the very summit of sorrow for our dear Lord and Saviour, yet it is the death of sorrow to his people; and the cross, which caused him unspeakable agony, brings consolation and joy to all who put their trust in him. If we meditated more upon what Christ did to procure peace and pardon for us, we should more fully rejoice over the redemption that he bought for us when he gave "his life a ransom for many;" and if we more clearly realized what the pardon of sin really means, and how many other precious blessings are bound up in the same bundle with it, if we continually sought to live as pardoned men and women ought to live, we should find that nine out of ten of the things that depress us would be driven away, like clouds before a Biscay gale.

And mark, beloved, that *this source of joy will always abide with us*. "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee;" is a message that always gives comfort and joy. While we are young, perhaps we are foolish enough to look elsewhere for happiness; but when we grow old, and cares and sorrows increase, happy indeed are we if we have the happiness that comes from pardoned sin. If we are rich, we are apt to look to our wealth for consolation; but when we are brought down to penury, what a source of happiness it is to us if our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake! The believer's sins are pardoned when he is most joyous on the top of Tabor, but they are equally pardoned when he is in Doubting Castle in the clutches of that grim old tyrant, Giant Despair. He who has once looked by faith to Jesus Christ and him crucified is pardoned anywhere, and pardoned everywhere, pardoned at all times, and pardoned under all circumstances. The comforts that spring out of growth in grace are variable, but the comfort which arises from the forgiveness of sin is ever full, and rich, and true. If we are forgiven, we ought to be glad and rejoice all our days, and we should be specially joyful whenever the time comes for us to die. We need have no fear about departing out of this world, for we are not going into the presence of an angry God, but to meet him who has forgiven all our sins. We shall gather up our feet in the bed, as some dear ones who were with us lately did when it was time for them to go; and we shall defy the last enemy, and bravely pass through his dominions, not fearing arrest there because we have received that plenary absolution which is a passport even through the realm of death.

If we enjoyed this happiness as we ought, I really do not know what there is that could distress us, because the joy of being forgiven would override and overtop any sorrow that could come upon us in any conceivable circumstances. Our sin being pardoned, there is no cause for our heart to be troubled; the greatest grief is gone, the master-sorrow is removed. Dear children of God, let me press upon you and upon myself also the duty of maintaining a sacred cheerfulness of spirit. Let not the men of the world be truthfully able to say of us that we are a sad and mournful lot of people. If any people under heaven have a right to be happy, *we* have. When all the joys of this life grow dim, ours begin to burn more brightly. I can understand a man in business, who only lives to make money, being crushed when he becomes a bankrupt; but I cannot understand your being like that, my dear brother, if you live to glorify God in your business and in everything else. I can comprehend a worldly man saying, "I have nothing left on earth now that my darling is dead;" but I cannot comprehend your saying it, my brother or sister, for your sins are forgiven; and now, however God may deal with you, his strokes are gentle and tender, not at all like those that you deserved to have when you were unrepentant and unforgiven. Let all of us who believe in Jesus not only ask that his joy may remain in us, but also that our joy may be full. I wish we could all be so calm, so confident in God, so joyous under all circumstances that all around us would be compelled to ask,

“What is the secret of these people’s happiness? They have no immunity from trouble, they have as much to vex and annoy them as we have, what is it that makes them even glory in tribulation?” I wish they might often be obliged to ask that question, so that we could give this answer, “Those whose sins are forgiven ought always to be happy, and that is the secret of our continual joy.”

III. Now we must close with the sorrowful reflection that FOR THE UNFORGIVEN, THERE IS NO TRUE HAPPINESS.

An unconverted man may have what he calls joy, but it is the joy of madness. If he were rational and thoughtful, and saw things as they really are, he could not have any real joy as long as he remained unpardoned. Suppose, sinner, you are in trouble; these are only the first drops before the great storm of divine wrath that awaits you; and that sickness of yours, that bereavement, that poverty,—these are only the beginning of that awful hurricane that will break upon your devoted head. I cannot say to you, “Be of good cheer in your trouble,” for there is worse trouble to come to you. “Many sorrows shall be to the wicked.”

Perhaps you tell me that you are not in trouble; on the contrary, you are prospering exceedingly; everything you touch seems to turn to gold. You invite me to pay you a visit, and are proud to show me over your princely mansion, your spacious grounds, and your lovely gardens; but my principal thought is, “How will you like to leave all this?” As I see how anxious you are to add field to field, and farm to farm, I cannot help remembering what God said to a man who seems to have been very much like you, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall these things be, which thou hast provided?” What a terrible change it must have been for the “rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day,” when “in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, and cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame;” and what a terrible change it would be for you, my friend, to go from all your riches into hell! Yet I do not know whether it makes much difference to you if you are rich or if you are poor so long as you are unforgiven.

Possibly, your heart is hardened, and you mean to brazen it out before God; and, like Belshazzar, you would even send for the sacred vessels out of the temple, and mingle blasphemy with your Bacchanalian festivities. Then I would remind you of the mysterious handwriting upon the wall, “TEKEL: Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.” Thou mayest be very bold just now; but, ere long, thou wilt be made to crouch in terror before God when he lifteth up his rod to smite thee. Whether thou art hardened or not, whatever thy condition may be, I see no road to happiness for thee so long as thou art unpardoned. There is nothing in life or in death, in time or in eternity, that can comfort a man whose sins are not forgiven; and there is nothing that you can ever do which will give you true comfort while you remain an

unforgiven sinner. You may give up certain sins, and make some sort of reformation; but, as long as all your old sins continue unpardoned, you will not have even started on the right road. No, there is no hope for you until you fall prostrate before the throne of God, confessing your guilt, and beseeching his mercy. *Do it now.* Now, while he sits upon the throne of grace, and stretches out to you the silver sceptre of his mercy, come and bow at his feet, and cry, "O Lord, for thy dear Son's sake, blot out all my iniquities!" and he will do it, and *do it now.* If thou wilt trust in the Lord Jesus Christ now, thou shalt go out of this house perfectly forgiven, and in thy soul thou shalt know that thou art forgiven, for the Spirit of God shall bear witness with thy spirit that it is so. Come then to the fountain filled with precious blood, for there thy sins can be all washed away. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," and he will say to thee, as he said to the man sick of the palsy, "Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." God grant that it may be so with many here, for Jesus sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM LXII.

(The Exposition belonging to the above Sermon is too long for the space available, so it has been transferred to Sermon No. 3,228, "Oh, how He Loves!")

Verse 1. *Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.*

Waiting upon God, if not true and sincere, is only a mockery; it is also an insult to the Lord; and, so far from bringing us a blessing, it would only bring us a curse.

The Hebrew hath it, "Truly my soul is silent before God," for faith asks no questions, raises no objections, starts no difficulties, but is content to wait quietly God's time, believing that all will be well. David meant, "My soul in silence waits only upon God: from him cometh my salvation, and from no other quarter;—not from the Assyrians, nor from the Egyptians, nor from my own might or wisdom, but from God alone." I hope that we have not only come up to this service in our bodies, but that we have brought our souls also to wait upon God. It is unutterably sad when we go to a place of worship, and leave our souls somewhere else. Soul-worship is the very soul of worship, but worship without the whole heart and soul is soulless and dead.

2. *He only is my rock and my salvation;* he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved.*

He may be moved as an old oak is moved in a storm; its branches are shaken, but its trunk stands fast, and its roots get all the firmer grip upon the soil. He may be moved like a ship which is tossed, but which still doth not drag its anchor, so he can truly say, "I shall not be greatly moved."

3. *How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence.*

David's enemies were very many, yet see how he speaks of their enmity: "How long will ye imagine mischief?" He speaks as if it were nothing but imagination, that would never come to anything more; and, blessed be God, they who think of destroying God's people do but imagine what will

* See *The New Park Street Pulpit*, No. 80, "God Alone the Salvation of His People."