

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

MAN'S SCORN AND GOD'S SUCCOUR.

A Sermon

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“My friends scorn me; but mine eye poureth out tears unto God.”—Job xvi. 20.

We know that Job's sorrows were recorded, not for his honour, but for our profit. We are told to consider the patience of Job, and truly we might often be sustained, cheered, and comforted if we would but look upon that patriarch in the depths of his grief. We are “born to sorrow”; and if our cup be not embittered with it to-night, we must not expect to be long without a taste of the gall in our mouths.

There is one particular sorrow, however, which appertains to the early days of our spiritual life, concerning which I intend to speak to-night. It is the sorrow caused by the scorning of us by our friends. This becomes a very little sorrow to us in after days, but at the first it is a “trial of cruel mockings,” and a very severe one. I suppose the advanced Christian at last can even come to “rejoice in tribulations” of this sort: he counts it to be an honour: he rejoices, and is exceeding glad, when men say all manner of evil against him falsely for Christ's name's sake. But at the first there is nothing, perhaps, more staggering to the young Christian than to find that his “worst foes” are they of his own household, and that they who should have cherished and nurtured in him the piety which is so excellent a flower, do their cruel worst to nip it in the bud.

Without further preface, therefore, we shall try, as the Holy Spirit shall teach and help us, to speak to you upon a *very common trial*, “My friends scorn me,” and then, yet again, meditate on a

remarkable resort and exercise, "But mine eyes poureth out tears unto God." First, then, let us think upon:—

I. A VERY COMMON TRIAL.

"My friends scorn me." What is it they do? They *scorn* me. I shall apply the text to-night to scorn on account of religion. It is lately, my dear young friends—I address myself particularly to you—it is lately that you have been impressed; it is lately that you have considered your ways. There has been an evident alteration in you. You have become of a serious cast of mind; you are now a seeker; you desire salvation. For this reason your friends scorn you. Perhaps they say that you are so miserable that they cannot bear your company. Probably the remark is correct, and you feel it to be so, but they do not know that this misery of yours will end in perfect joy; they do not comprehend this rough ploughing of your soul, which is preparatory to the joyful harvest. They do not understand that the good Physician often uses the lancet, and opens wide the wound before he comes with his downy fingers to close it and to heal it. You are miserable, and you might expect them, therefore, to be the more gentle to you, and to help your faith as much as possible, but instead of that they continually tell you that your company is altogether unbearable, and so they scorn you. Meanwhile, they also insinuate that the attention which you are now paying to religious matters is with a sinister motive and design. They say that you are a hypocrite. They cannot understand that there can be such a thing as religious sincerity. To them it is all hypocrisy. They suppose that all those who seek to live godly lives in Christ Jesus are merely making a pretence with a view to some personal advantage. Do not be surprised if they insinuate that you "cant"; if they mimic any tone that may be peculiar to you; if in any and every way possible they throw in your face the insinuation that you are false and hypocritical. And, perhaps, they also twit you with your faults, which are alas! too many, and are near the surface, and so very easily visible to them.

The old proverb says, "It is easy enough to find a stick with which to beat a dog," and it is very easy for our friends with whom we live to rake up some fault of ours, to exaggerate it, and then to strike us as hard as they can therewith. Very difficult, indeed, would it be for us to live, so as to give them no such opportunity. Even when most careful, our very carefulness is sneered at as sanctimoniousness, and if we are particular, then we are severe, rigid, and, worst of all, "puritanical."

So that, do what we will, we must expect to have faults laid at our door. This is hard to bear. Your friends, in this respect, scorn you. And all the while they also tell you that, make what pretences you may, it is not at all likely that any good will come out of your religion. It is, they say, an old wives' fable, and a cunning story. They have never proved the power of it in their

own souls, and they know no better, and therefore they tell you to eat, drink, and be merry—fools as they are to think that this poor flesh and blood ought to have the first care, before the soul that is born for better things; fools, I say, as they are, to think that it ever can be wisdom to live for this little span of time, and to forget eternity, which knows no end! Yet they will tell you to live while you live; that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, to snatch the present joy. They say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, and leave the spirit-world and the land that is to be revealed to those speculative minds who may care for such things," and so, with a hoarse laugh, they would dismiss religion from you, or persuade you, if possible, to forget it. But, my dear friends, you cannot forget it, for if God is dealing with you, his arrows stick fast in the soul. When the Spirit of God comes to deal with a man, if all the devils in hell and all the sinners on earth should laugh around him all day long, it would only drive the shafts deeper into his soul. He who has never felt the power of the world to come is easily driven out of his profession, but he who has once been ploughed and harrowed by the mighty ploughman of conviction never can forget it. I recollect when my sins lay heavy upon me, I would not have been ashamed to have stood up before a parliament of kings and said that I knew sin to be exceeding sinful, and then I thought that the sentence of my condemnation had gone forth from God. Yet, as to having any Scriptural thoughts, they were squeezed out of me by the rough hand of my conscience. I knew that sin was evil before God, and that sin would destroy my soul. How could I doubt it when the hot sweat of horror stood on my brow at the thought of my past life? Doubts then soon fled to the winds. Ah! if God is so dealing with you, sore as the trial is, of being mocked by unbelieving friends, you will bear it, and will come out of the ordeal none the worse; but still, meanwhile, I remind you that Job himself had to say, "My friends scorn me."

Who are these people who scorn you? They are *your friends*, and that makes it the harder to bear. Cæsar said, "Et tu Brute!"—"And thou, Brutus! Dost thou stab?" So, too, one of our Lord's sharpest griefs was, "*He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.*" It is hard for a young Christian to be persecuted by the father to whose judgment he has always looked up with respect. Harder still is it for a Christian woman to find the partner of her bosom steeled against her for the truth's sake. Oh! how they can get at our hearts, these husbands and these wives of ours, and if they happen to be enemies of Christ, what wounds they can make! "My friends scorn me." You would not mind if it were merely the workpeople in the shop. You could escape from them, but you cannot escape from your own family. You would not mind it if the ribald herds around you mocked and taunted you; but some of your friends are people of excellent character, in all points but one. One thing they lack, but the

other things they have in such a degree that you almost blush to think that they excel you, and then it is very hard to have a jeer from such. You had hoped that they would sympathize with you, instruct you, and encourage you; but the very people to whom you looked for assistance have turned against you. One thing let me say: if those who have thus scorned you are merely "friends," and are not related to you, they prove that they are not true friends, and part from their company, I pray you! But if they be those with whom Providence has united you with such bonds, that you must look upon it as being a part of the cross which you have to carry, well, then, you must take up that cross daily, even though it be a heavy and painful one, that you may follow your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. When the three holy children were cast into the furnace, it was at least out of doors, and away from their dwelling, and but for God's rescue it would have destroyed them. But to have a furnace indoors, and to have it always blazing, and to go home every night into that furnace, and to feel each day that the coals are heaped upon you, and still to hold on, and refuse to bow the knee to evil, but remain still the true servant of Jesus Christ—oh! the ordeal is terribly severe! Job said that his enemies scorned him, and why should you be suffered to escape, or expect to come off better than Job? I do trust that this will be in the nature of a good thing for you. It will make you feel less dependent upon an arm of flesh; it will drive you to God, and I am sure that those make the strongest Christians, who have to come out most distinctly and separately from their fellows. It is the very best enjoyment. The Covenanters tell us in their lives that the happiest seasons they ever had were among the bogs, and morasses, and the mountains, and the brown heath of Scotland, when Claverhouse's dragoons were after them. Then Christ seemed doubly precious to them, when the world had cast them out on the heath. Oh! there is no talk with Christ so sweet as that which he gives his people when they walk up the bleak side of the hill with him, with the snow blowing in their teeth. Then he covers them with the mantle of his love, and lets his soul out in springs of love, and comfort, and delight to them. Some of you who do not have persecution might almost wish to have it that you might know those dear delights, those intimate communings, which Christ giveth to his people in the day of battle, and in the time of torment. Your friends may scorn you, but "there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Come to him, and he will not scorn you, but will be your great comforter.

Your friends scorn you, but why do they do so? They do it you know not why. If it be on account of religion, I think I know the philosophy of it. They scorn you because *you are different from them*. I saw a canary bird light on the roof of a house opposite to a window where I was standing, and in almost a second afterwards some thirty or forty sparrows surrounded it, and began pecking away at it, and the reason was very obvious. It was of

a colour different from themselves. If it had been a sparrow, of their own dark, smoky, dusty hue, they would have let it alone; but here was a golden-winged stranger from the sunny isles, and they must needs persecute it. And so, if you are a bird of paradise, you will find that word of the prophet to be true, "Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird; the birds round about are against her." So you will find the birds round about you—the ravens, and hawks, and vultures—against you. You are not understood, you know. If you are a true Christian, you cannot be understood. The greatest puzzle to a worldly man is a Christian. He is moved by motives which the worldling cannot understand; he is influenced by fears and hopes to which the worldling is a total stranger. They did not know your Lord, and how should they know you? They crucified the Lord of Glory, not understanding that he was God, and so "it doth not yet appear" what you are, nor does the world value you at your proper worth. Do not be astonished at it. It is partly malice and partly ignorance that leads men to scorn you. If, my dear friend, you are a thorough-going Christian, you must not expect to escape scorn, because your life is a standing protest against the lives of others. You fear God, and they do not. You cannot live as they live; you cannot talk as they talk, and when they note even your silence, it becomes provoking to them. If the world could have its way, it would not have a Christian living in it. "No," the worldlings would say, "That man is a living provocation to our conscience; he thrusts thorns into our pillows, and will not let us rest." I am thankful if this is the case with you; but if so, it accounts for very much of the scorning which your friends pour upon you. I will not dwell upon the subject, however. You will have to find out the reason probably in your after-experience.

But now, what is *the best thing for you to do* if your friends scorn you? Well, do not defend yourself. Do not get bad-tempered about it. Do not answer them. The best reply is, in most cases, complete silence. Only speak when you are quite sure that it is better to speak than to hold your tongue. Never give scorn for scorning. Remember that a worldly man may resist evil if he will, but Christ says to his friends, "I say unto you, resist not evil, and when thou art smitten on one cheek, turn the other also." I know that many of those good old non-resistance texts are looked upon as being quite out-of-date, as part of the Bible that is not to be preached. Well, when I get information from the skies that the text is to be covered over or silenced, I will say nothing about it, but so long as I find it there, I must say to you, that that which men of the world call "pluck" and "fine spirit" very often comes only from the devil. Whence come fightings and wars? They come from your own lusts. The Christian's only answer to the persecutor is the answer of the anvil to the blows of the hammer. He bears them, bears, bears them, and breaks the hammer by bearing them. This is how the Christian

church triumphs. She has never made a good hand at carnal weapons. It was an ill-day for our Puritanic sires when they took up arms. It did religion no good in this land, but, I believe, threw it back for a long time. It is for the Christian church to suffer and to suffer on in confidence, and in faith, and to make the world see that the anvil will outlast a thousand sets of hammers, and will triumph when they are all broken to dust. You, dear friends, especially will find it to be your wisest, as well as the most Christian course, to bear everything that is put upon you, and to make no return, except by being more kind and more generous than ever towards those who are most unkind to you.

Let me say, however, take care that you do not give any cause of offence. It is very easy for a man to make a martyr of himself when it is, not his religion, but his particular way of holding it, that brings on the martyrdom. Some people, really, are so ferocious in their convictions, and so grim in their conscientiousness, and so obtrusive continually, that if they be persecuted, it is their manner that is persecuted, and not the gospel which they profess to hold. Do not give people an opportunity of opening their mouths against you, but pray God to make you very wise, so that, as in Daniel's case, they may find nothing against you, save only touching the Lord God whom you worship. And then, that being done, if you are still scorned by your friends, look upon it as coming from God's hands, and that will very much soften it. Ask the Lord what is his purpose in it, what lessons he has to teach you. It may be, it is to keep your pride down, or to strengthen you for some future conflicts or labours in his cause; and when you have waited upon him for direction, rejoice and be exceeding glad that you are permitted to suffer at all for Christ's sake, and so in patience ye shall possess your souls. Walk uprightly before God, live as Christ lived, and, my dear friend, the day will come when you shall have outlived all this enmity, and when those who now mock you will respect you. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." At such a time, it may be, some will be won by your gentleness and your holy conversation to become Christians, too, and what a joy that will be to you!

Now, I know that what I have been saying does not belong to a great many of you; but still, I must sometimes take texts which will apply to these special cases, especially as just now there are many who have been saved—at the Agricultural Hall, and here, and elsewhere, and to whom the struggle for conscience' sake is quite a new thing, and a word or two by way of comfort to them I am sure you will not grudge. And now we shall turn to the second part of the sermon, and we find the patriarch engaged in:—

II. A REMARKABLE RESORT AND EXERCISE.

His friends were scorning him, but he did not answer them. He had a sharp word or two, certainly, but still, the direction of his

mind and the bent of his spirit went another way. He thought of God and forgot them. Herein is wisdom. When you are perplexed with a trouble, when you are mortified by some wicked person, do not let that thing always fret you. Have you never noticed how you may torment yourselves with some little thing if you like? There is a fly in the room, and that fly may be almost as much a trouble to you as though it were an eagle, if you will let its buzz be always in your ear; and if you keep on thinking about that buzzing fly, you can magnify it into a big dragon with wings. But if you forget it, and go on with your writing or your needlework, the fly may buzz away fifty times as much, but it will not trouble you. It is a very blessed thing, when, having a care which you cannot get over, you take it to God in prayer, and so get over it. I will tell you what I have sometimes done with some of my difficulties. I have turned them over: I have looked at them in all shapes and ways. I have considered every way of getting over them. I have been vexed, troubled, and distressed for the time, and at last I have come to feel, "Well now, I cannot do anything in this: it is a hard shell, I cannot crack it: and I have frequently been enabled by grace to deliberately take that matter and put it upon the shelf and say, "I will never think about that again as long as I live, by God's grace: I have done the best I could with it, Lord, and if it does not come right that is now thy business, and not mine, and I will be done with it for ever." Sometimes you will find that the trouble will come right directly you leave it alone. It is just your meddling with it that makes the difficulty. You do not see that at the time, but as soon as you just get out of the way, the whole thing comes right at once. God's wheels of providence grind much more accurately than any of the wheels of our mental calculations, and when we are altogether out of joint, then it is that God comes in and shows us what his wisdom and power can do. Leave, then, the scorning friends, and betake yourselves to your God.

It is a very great mercy, let me say, that we may go to God when we are cast out by our friends, that if there be no other ear that will listen, God's ear will always listen, and that if in all the earth there should not remain a sympathizing heart, there is the heart of the man, Christ Jesus, still to be appealed to; and we shall never appeal to the sympathies of the Son of God in vain. Oh! my brethren, when every other door is shut, the door of God's grace is ever open still. Let all other ports be blocked; your vessel can always run into that one harbour which all the devils in hell cannot close, the harbour of infinite love and unfailling care. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." In your darkest seasons, your very worst times, fly to your God and he will deliver you.

It seems from the text, however, that all Job could do was to pour out from his eyes a flood of tears. The word "tears" is not in the original Hebrew; but it is put into the translation, as it

is supposed to give simpler sense to our ears. His "eye poured out," however: by which he meant that he did not so much pour out tears, as his very heart itself. As that grand old expositor, Joseph Caryl, says, "Job's heart was hot within him, and the steam of his fierce trouble distilled itself in drops of tears which fell upon the ground." It was *Job's inmost soul that he poured out before God*. Now, there are many kinds of tears, but the best kind are those described in the text, "Tears unto God." What a capital sermon somebody might make out of that! "Tears unto God"! Tears not poured out to men, nor unto the earth, nor unto myself, but unto God. Tears put into his bottle. Libations poured at the foot of his altar. Tears wept for God: for God to see, for God to hear, for God to think upon, for God to accept. Not tears for tears' sake: but tears like those of the penitent, tears in the privacy of one's loneliness, tears only unto God. I hope, dear friends, there are some among us who know the meaning of these tears. Some of you, I trust, are even now pouring forth the tears of repentance. Oh! those are blessed tears, tears of repentance that are tears unto God! It sometimes falls to my lot to have to talk to people about their sins. Sometimes they wish that I should do so, and when I have tried to set their sins in their true light, tears have come. There have been tears because the offence has damaged the young man's character, tears because it injured the young man's friends, tears because a mother was grieved. Well now, when I have seen all these tears, I have been glad of them, such as they were, but they are not all the tears that we want. If you can only get one tear because the sin grieved God, it is worth a whole bottleful of the other tears. To see sin in the light of God's countenance is to see it truly. David hit the nail on the head when he said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." My dear hearer, you may be very sorry that you did wrong, because it brought you into trouble; you may be very sorry indeed, because you cannot take the position in life which you once occupied, but that is not a repentance that can serve you before God. But if you are sorry to think that you have grieved God; if, like the prodigal, you say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight"—these are tears unto God, and are such as he receives.

The next kind of tears unto God are *the tears of desire*. I wish these were more frequent. Those are the prayers that prevail with God which are well salted with tears. I am afraid that the most of us do not pray as we should; but if we want to prevail, like Jacob, we must remember that Jacob wrestled with the angel, and then he prevailed. Weeping which reveals the soul's wrestling will often do what nothing else can, in bringing us great benedictions.

We have all felt the power of tears over our own feelings and affections, but the power of tears over God, who shall describe it? The blood of Jesus secures all he wills, and when our tears look

towards and plead the blood of Jesus, then those tears cannot be refused.

My dear hearer, if you cannot get peace, do not cease praying until you have obtained it. If you long for your sins to be pardoned, and have been praying a long time for this—it may be for weeks or months—pray again to-night, and do not give over praying until you know you have prevailed with God. Can you bear to perish? Can you endure to be cast away? If you cannot, then be importunate. Lay hold upon the horns of the altar, and let this be your vow, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” Then, when it comes to tears, you will get it. When it comes to your very souls being poured out before God, then shall God say unto you, “Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace.”

Once more; these tears may be *tears shed on behalf of others*. We should prevail for the salvation of others if we thought more of their cases, when on our knees, and worked our souls more thoroughly into tempests of sacred and holy passion on their behalf. We cannot expect to see our children saved unless we can weep over them. We must not expect to see our congregations blessed, unless our soul bleeds for that congregation. And when I say “tears,” I do not mean those drops from the eyes alone, for some of us could not cry if our souls depended on it, and yet we may, though we let fall no watery tears, shed some of the best tears, tears dropping like sweet-smelling myrrh upon the altar of the all-seeing God. Oh! we must get to feel that we cannot let men die. We must get to feel as if we should die ourselves if they were lost. We must feel so desperately in earnest about it that we cannot sleep, nor go our way in peace, unless such and such persons be turned unto God, and find peace in Jesus. If this be our spirit, we shall have our desire, and we shall see our beloved ones saved.

Thus, then, it seems that Job, instead of dealing with his enemies, spent his time in dealing with his God, and as words failed him, he took himself to the more potent rhetoric of tears, and so melted his way into God's heart, resting by faith upon the merits of the Redeemer who was yet to come. Do you do the same, my dear friends, and God will give you the blessing you need.

But some of you say, “I should never think of weeping before God: I have no dealings with God.” Nay, but he will have dealings with you. If you should not now repent of your sins, you shall repent some day, but that shall be when repentance is too late. Tears of repentance here on earth are signs of grace; but tears of sorrow in perdition are only signs of bitter and destroying remorse. “There shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.” Oh! may God the Holy Spirit convince us of sin here and now, whilst there is a hope of mercy, that we may fly to Jesus' wounds, be washed in his blood, and be saved: for if not, rest assured that we shall be convinced of sin one day when sin can never be pardoned, but the worm undying of self-accusing shall

gnaw at our consciences for ever, and for ever, and for ever. Ah! my dear hearer, do not boast because you cannot repent. Do not play the fool after that fashion, but the rather ask God to break your heart of stone, and so help you to repent. A tender conscience is such a blessing, that you may well bemoan yourselves until God bestow it. Remember, however, that Jesus Christ can give a tender heart. It is one of the blessings of the covenant of which he is the Surety. "A new heart also will I give them, and a right spirit will I put within them: I will take away the stony heart, and give them a heart of flesh." Plead that covenant promise, and if you plead it now, believing in Jesus and trusting in him, you shall get that new heart; you shall get a heart that can weep before God, and so you shall be accepted through the righteousness of Jesus, and your tears and your supplications shall prevail.

I may never speak to some of you again, but oh! I should like to leave that thought with you, that to suffer for Christ is honour, and that to weep before the Lord is the truest pleasure. But if you have despised in your heart those that are persecuted, recollect that day when Christ shall come, and all his holy angels with him. If you laugh at Christians now, you will no longer laugh, but lament then. Your song then—or rather wail—shall be very different from the one you sing now. Oh! may you now, while yet life lasts, and the day of mercy is not over, seek Jesus, cast in your lot with his people, take up his cross, that by-and-by you may wear his crown, suffering now—if need be—in sharing his reproach and shame, that then you may be delighted with his glory.

The Lord himself grant it to everyone of you! Amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM XXII. 1—22; and SONG OF SOLOMON I. 1—7, II. 1—7.

PSALM XXII.

Stand and look up at Christ upon the cross, and look upon these words as his. He himself is the best exposition of this wondrous psalm.

Ver- es 1, 2. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.*

Gethsemane!—there is the key—a prayer unanswered at that time: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." It was not possible. He must drink it. "In the night season I am not silent."

3. *But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*

No hard thoughts of God, even when he was forsaken. A forsaken Christ still clings to the Father, and ascribes perfect holiness to him.

4-6. *Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man: a reproach of men, and despised of the people.*

How low did Christ descend for our sakes—not only low as man, but lower still! Never was godly man forsaken of God, and yet Jesus was;