

The Evil and Its Remedy

A Sermon

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“The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great.”—Ezekiel 9:9.

“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”—1 John 1:7.

ISHALL HAVE two texts this morning—the evil and its remedy. “The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great;” and “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

We can learn nothing of the gospel, except by feeling its truths—no one truth of the gospel is ever truly known and really learned, until we have tested and tried and proved it, and its power has been exercised upon us. I have heard of a naturalist, who thought himself exceedingly wise with regard to the natural history of birds, and yet he had learned all he knew in his study, and had never so much as seen a bird either flying through the air or sitting upon its perch. He was but a fool although he thought himself exceeding wise. And there are some men who like him think themselves great theologians; they might even pretend to take a doctor’s degree in divinity; and yet, if we came to the root of the matter, and asked them whether they ever saw or felt any of these things of which they talked, they would have to say, “No; I know these things in the letter, but not in the spirit; I understand them as a matter of theory, but not as things of my own consciousness and experience.” Be assured, that as the naturalist who was merely the student of other men’s observations knew nothing, so the man who pretends to religion, but has never entered into the depths and power of its doctrines, or felt the influence of them upon his heart, knows nothing whatever, and all the knowledge he pretendeth to is but varnished ignorance. There are some sciences that may be learned by the head, but the science of Christ crucified can only be learned by the heart.

I have made use of this remark as the preface to my sermon, because I think it will be forced from each of our hearts before we have done, if the two truths which I shall consider this morning, shall come at all home to us with power. The first truth is the greatness of our sin. No man can know the greatness of sin till he has felt it, for there is no measuring-rod for sin, except its condemnation in our own conscience, when the law of God speaks to us with a terror that may be felt. And as for the richness of the blood of Christ and its ability to wash us, of that also we can know nothing till we have ourselves been washed, and have ourselves proved that the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God *hath* cleansed us from all sin.

I. I shall begin, then, with the first doctrine as it is contained in the ninth chapter of Ezekiel, the ninth verse,—“The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great.” There are two great lessons which every man must learn, and learn by experience, before he can be a Christian. First, he must learn that sin is an exceeding great and evil thing; and he must learn also that the blood of Christ is an exceedingly precious thing, and is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto it. The former lesson we have before us. O may God, by his infinite spirit, by his great wisdom, teach it to some of us who never knew it before!

Some men imagine that the gospel was devised, in some way or other, to soften down the harshness of God towards sin. Ah! how mistaken the idea! There is no more harsh condemnation of sin anywhere than in the gospel. Ye shall go to Sinai, and ye shall there hear its thunders rolling; ye shall behold the flashing of its terrible lightnings, till, like Moses, ye shall exceedingly fear and quake, and come away declaring that sin must be a terrible thing, otherwise, the Holy One had never come upon Mount Paran with all these terrors round about him. But after that ye shall go to Calvary; there ye shall see no lightnings, and ye shall hear no thunders, but instead thereof, ye shall hear the groans of an expiring God, and ye shall behold the contortions and agonies of one who bore

“All that Incarnate God could bear,
With strength enough, and none to spare.”

And then ye shall say, “Now, though I never fear nor quake, yet I know how exceedingly great a thing sin must be, since such a sacrifice was required to make an atonement for it. Oh! sinners; if ye come to the gospel, imagining that there ye shall find an apology for your sin, ye have indeed mistaken your way. Moses charges you with sin, and tells you that you are without excuse; but as for the gospel, it rends away from you every shadow of a covering; it leaves you without a cloak for your sin; it tells you that you have sinned wilfully against the Most High God—that ye have not an apology that ye can possibly make for all the iniquities that ye have committed against him; and so far in any way from smoothing over your sin, and telling you that you are a weak creature and, therefore could not help your sin, it charges upon you the very weakness of your nature, and makes that itself the most damning sin of all. If ye seek apologies, better look even into the face of Moses, when it is clothed with all the majesty of the terrors of the law, than into the face of the gospel, for that is more terrible by far to him who seeks to cloak his sin.

Nor does the gospel in any way whatever give man a hope that the claims of the law will be in any way loosened. Some imagine that under the old dispensation God demanded great things of man—that he did bind upon man heavy burdens that were grievous to he borne—and they suppose that Christ came into the world to put upon the shoulders of men a lighter law, something which it would be more easy for them to obey—a law which they can more readily keep, or which if they break, would not come upon them with such terrible

threatenings. Ah, not so. The gospel came not into the world to soften down the law. Till heaven and earth shall pass away, not one jot or tittle of the law shall fail. What God hath said to the sinner in the law, he saith to the sinner in the gospel. If he declareth that “the soul that sinneth it shall die,” the testimony of the gospel is not contrary to the testimony of the law. If he declares that whosoever breaketh the sacred law shall most assuredly be punished, the gospel also demands blood for blood, and eye for eye, and tooth for tooth, and doth not relax a solitary jot or tittle of its demands, but is as severe and as terribly just as even the law itself. Do you reply to this, that Christ has certainly softened down the law? I reply, that ye know not, then, the mission of Christ. What said he himself? The Lord hath said in the law “Thou shalt not commit adultery;” hath Christ softened the law? No. Saith he, “I say unto you, that whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” That is no softening of the law. It is, as it were, the grinding of the edge of the terrible sword of Divine justice, to make it sharper far than it seemed before. Christ hath not put out the furnace; he rather seemeth to heat it seven times hotter. Before Christ came sin seemed unto me to be but little; but when he came sin became exceeding sinful, and all its dread heinousness started out before the light.

But, says one, surely the gospel does in some degree remove the greatness of our sin. Does it not soften the punishment of sin? Ah! no. Ye shall appeal to Moses; let him ascend the pulpit and preach to you. He says, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die;” and his sermon is dread and terrible. He sits down. And now comes Jesus Christ, the man of a loving countenance. What says he with regard to the punishment of sin? Ah! sirs, there was never such a preacher of the fires of hell as Christ was. Our Lord Jesus Christ was all love, but he was all honesty too. “Never man spake like that man,” when he came to speak of the punishment of the lost. What other prophet was the author of such dread expressions as these?—“He shall burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”—“These shall go away into everlasting punishment;” or these—“Where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.” Stand at the feet of Jesus when he tells you of the punishment of sin, and the effect of iniquity, and you may tremble there far more than you would have done if Moses had been the preacher, and if Sinai had been in the background to conclude the sermon. No, brethren, the gospel of Christ in no sense whatever helps to make sin less. The proclamation of Christ to-day by his minister is the same as the utterance of Ezekiel of old—“The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great.”

And now let us endeavour to deal with hearts and consciences a moment. My brethren, there are some here who have never felt this truth. There are many of you who start back affrighted from it. You will go home and represent me as one who delights to dwell on certain dark and terrible things that I suppose to be true—you say within yourselves, “I cannot, I will not, receive that doctrine of sin; I know I am a frail weak creature; I have made a great many mistakes in my life—that I will admit; but still such is my nature, and I therefore could

not help it; I am not going to be arraigned before a pulpit and condemned as the chief of criminals; I may be a sinner—I confess I am with all the rest of mankind—but as to my sin being anything so great as that man attempts to describe, I do not believe it; I reject the doctrine.” And thinkest thou, my friend, that I am surprised at thy doing so? I know thee who thou art; it is because as yet the grace of God has never touched thy soul that therefore thou sayest this. And here comes the proof of the doctrine with which I started. Thou dost not know this truth, because thou hast never felt it; but if thou hadst felt it, as every true-born child of God has felt it, thou wouldst say, “The man cannot describe its terrors as they are; they must be felt before they can be known, and when felt they are not to be expressed in all their fulness of terror.”

But come, let me reason with you for a moment. Your sin is great, although you think it small. Remember, brother, I am not about to make out that thy sin is greater than mine. I speak to thee, and I speak to myself also, thy sin is great. Follow me in these few thoughts and perhaps thou wilt better understand it. How great a thing is one sin, when according to the Word of God *one* sin could suffice to damn the soul. One sin, remember, destroyed the whole human race. Adam did but take of the forbidden fruit, and that one sin blasted Eden, and made all of us inheritors of the curse, and caused the earth to bring forth thorns and thistles, even unto this day. But it may be said could one sin destroy the soul? Is it possible that one solitary sin could open the gates of hell, and then close them upon the guilty soul for ever, and that God should refuse his mercy, and shut out that soul for ever from the presence of his face? Yes, if I believe my Bible, I must believe that. Oh, how great must my sins be if this is the terrible effect of one transgression. Sin cannot be the little thing that my pride has helped me to imagine it to be. It must be an awful thing if but one sin could ruin my soul for ever.

Think again my friend, for a moment what an imprudent and impertinent thing sin is. Behold! there is one God who filleth all in all, and he is the Infinite Creator. He makes me, and I am nothing more in his sight than an animated grain of dust; and I that animated grain of dust, with a mere ephemeral existence, have the impertinence and imprudence to set up my will against his will! I dare to proclaim war against the Infinite Majesty of heaven. It is a thing so audacious, so infernally full of pride, that one need not marvel that even a sin in the little eye of man, should, when it is looked upon by the conscience in the light of heaven, appear to be great indeed.

But think again, how great does your sin, and mine seem, if we will but think of the ingratitude which has marked it. The Lord our God has fed us from our youth up to this day: he has put the breath into our nostrils, and has held our souls in life; he has clothed the earth with mercies and he has permitted us to walk across these fair fields; and he has given us bread to eat and raiment to put on, and mercies so precious that their full value can never be known until they are taken from us; and yet you and I have persevered in breaking all

his laws wilfully and wantonly: we have gone contrary to his will; it has been sufficient for us to know that a thing has been God's will, and we have at once run contrary thereunto. Oh, if we set our secret sins in the light of his mercy, if our transgressions are set side by side with his favours, we must each of us say, our sins indeed are exceeding great!

Mark, I am not now addressing myself solely and wholly to those whom the word itself condemns of great sin. We of course do not hesitate for a moment to speak of the drunkard, the whoremonger, the adulterer, and the thief, as being great sinners; we should not spare to say that their iniquity is exceeding great, for it exceeds even the bounds of man's morality, and the laws of our civil government. But I am speaking this day to you who have been the most moral, to you whose outward carriage is everything that could be desired, to you who have kept the Sabbath, to you who have frequented God's house, and outwardly worshipped. Your sins and mine are exceeding great. They seem but little to the outward eye—but if we came to dig into the bowels thereof and see their iniquity, their hideous blackness, we must say of them they are exceeding great.

And again, I repeat it, this is a doctrine that no man can rightly know and receive until he has felt it. My hearer, hast thou ever felt this doctrine to be true—"my sin is exceeding great?" Sickness is a terrible thing, more especially when it is accompanied with pain, when the poor body is racked to an extreme, so that the spirit fails within us, and we are dried up like a potsherd; but I bear witness in this place this morning, that sickness however agonizing, is nothing like the discovery of the evil of sin. I had rather pass through seven years of the most wearisome pain, and the most languishing sickness, than I would ever again pass through the terrible discovery of the terrors of sin. There be some of you who will understand what I mean; for brother, you have felt the same. Once on a time, you were playing with your lusts, and dallying with your sin, and it pleased God to open your eyes to see that sin is exceeding sinful. You remember the horror of that state, it seemed as if all hideous things were gathered into one dread and awful spectacle. You had before loved your iniquities, but now you loathed them—and you loathed yourselves; before, you had thought that your transgressions might easily be got rid of, they were matters that might be speedily washed out by repentance, or purged away by amendment of your life; but now sin seemed an alarming thing, and that you should have committed all this iniquity; life seemed to you a curse, and death, if it had not been for that dreary something after death, would have been to you the highest blessing, if you could have escaped the lashings of your conscience, which seemed to be perpetually whipping you with whips of burning wire. Some of you, perhaps, passed through but a little of this. God was graciously pleased to give you deliverance in a few hours; but you must confess that those hours were hours into which it seemed as if years of misery had been compressed. It was my sad lot for three or four years, to feel the greatness of my sin without a discovery of the greatness of God's mercy. I had to walk through this world with more than a world upon my shoulders, and sustain a grief that so far exceeds all

other griefs, as a mountain exceeds a mole hill; and I often wonder to this day how it was, that my hand was kept from rending my own body into pieces through the terrible agony which I felt, when I discovered the greatness of my transgression. Yet, I had not been a greater sinner than any one of you here present, openly and publicly, but heart sins were laid bare, sins of lip and tongue were discovered, and then I knew—oh, that I may never have to learn over again in such a dreadful school this terrible lesson—“The iniquity of Judah and of Israel is exceeding great.” This is the first part of the discourse.

II. “Well,” cries one, turning on his heel, “there is very little comfort in that. It is enough to drive one to despair, if not to madness itself.” Ah friend! such is the very design of this text. If I may have the pleasure of driving you to despair, if it be a despair of your self-righteousness and a despair of saving your own soul, I shall be thrice happy.

We turn therefore from that terrible text to the second one,—the first of John, the first chapter, and the seventh verse;—“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” There lies the blackness; here stands the Lord Jesus Christ. What will he do with it? Will he go and speak to it, and say, “This is no great evil; this blackness is but a little spot?” Oh! no; he looks at it, and he says, “This is terrible blackness, darkness that may be felt; this is an exceeding great evil.” Will he cover it up then? Will he weave a mantle of excuse and then wrap it round about the iniquity? Ah! no; whatever covering there may have been he lifts it off; and he declares that when the Spirit of truth is come he will convince the world of sin, and lay the sinner’s conscience bare and probe the wound to the bottom. What then will he do? He will do a far better thing than make an excuse or than to pretend in any way to speak lightly of it. He will cleanse it all away, remove it entirely by the power and meritorious virtue of his own blood, which is able to save unto the uttermost. The gospel does not consist in making a man’s sin appear little. The way Christians get their peace is not by seeing their sins shrivelled and shrinking until they seem small to them. But on the contrary; they, first of all, see their sins expanding, and then, after that, they obtain their peace by seeing those sins entirely swept away,—far as the east is from the west.

Now, carrying in mind the remarks I made upon the first text, I call your attention for a few moments to the greatness and beauty of the second one. Note here, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from ALL sin.” Dwell on the word “all” for a moment. Our sins are great; every sin is great; but there are some that in our apprehension seem to be greater than others. There are crimes that the lip of modesty could not mention. I might go far in this pulpit this morning in describing the degradation of human nature in the sins which it has invented. It is amazing how the ingenuity of man seems to have exhausted itself in inventing fresh crimes. Surely there is not the possibility of the invention of a new sin. But if there be, ere long man will invent it, for man seemeth exceedingly cunning, and full of wisdom in the discovery of means of destroying himself and the endeavour to injure his Maker. But there are some sins that show a diabolical extent of degraded ingenuity—some

sins of which it were a shame to speak, of which it were disgraceful to think. But note here: “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin.” There may be some sins of which a man cannot speak, but there is no sin which the blood of Christ cannot wash away. Blasphemy, however profane, lust, however bestial; covetousness, however far it may have gone into theft and rapine; breach of the commandments of God, however much of riot it may have run, all this may be pardoned and washed away through the blood of Jesus Christ. In all the long list of human sins, though that be long as time, there standeth but one sin that is unpardonable, and that one no sinner has committed if he feels within himself a longing for mercy, for that sin once committed, the soul becomes hardened, dead, and seared, and never desireth afterwards to find peace with God. I therefore declare to thee, O trembling sinner, that however great thine iniquity may be, whatever sin thou mayest have committed in all the list of guilt, however far thou mayest have exceeded all thy fellow-creatures, though thou mayest have distanced the Pauls and Magdalens and every one of the most heinous culprits in the black race of sin, yet the blood of Christ is able now to wash thy sin away. Mark! I speak not lightly of thy sin, it is exceeding great; but I speak still more loftily of the blood of Christ. Great as are thy sins, the blood of Christ is greater still. Thy sins are like great mountains, but the blood of Christ is like Noah’s flood; twenty cubits upwards shall this blood prevail, and the top of the mountains of thy sin shall be covered.

Just take the word “all” in another sense, not only as taking in all sorts of sin, but as comprehending the great aggregate mass of sin. Come here sinner, thou with the grey head. What are we to understand in thy case by this word *all*? Bring hither the tremendous load of the sins of thy youth. Those sins are still in thy bones, and thy tottering knees sometimes testify against the iniquities of thy early youth; but all these sins Christ can remove. Now bring hither the sins of thy riper manhood, thy transgressions in the family, thy failures in business, all the mistakes and all the errors thou hast committed in the thoughts of thy heart. Bring them all here; and then add the iniquities of thy frail and trembling age. What a mass is there here! what a mass of sin! Stir up that putrid mass, but put thy finger to thy nostrils first, for thou canst not bear the stench thereof if thou art a man with a living and quickened conscience. Couldst thou bear to read thine own diary if thou hadst written there all thy acts? No; for though thou be the purest of mankind, thy thoughts if they could have been recorded, would now if thou couldst read them, make thee startle and wonder that thou art demon enough to have had such imaginations within thy soul. But put them all there, and all these sins the blood of Christ can wash away.

Nay, more than that. Come hither ye thousands who are gathered together this morning to listen to the Word of God; what is the aggregate of your guilt? Hither ye have come, men of every grade and class, and women of every age and order; what is the mass of all your united guilt? Could ye put it so that mortal observation could comprehend the whole within its ken, it were as a mountain with a base, broad as eternity, and a summit lofty almost as

the throne of the great archangel. But, remember, the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin. Let but the blood be applied to our consciences and all our guilt is removed, and cast away for ever—all—none left, not one solitary stain remaining—all gone, like Israel's enemies—all drowned in the Red Sea, so that there was not one of them left, all swept away, not so much as the remembrance of them remaining. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin."

Yet, once more, in the praise of this blood we must notice one further feature. There be some of you here who are saying, "Ah! that shall be my hope when I come to die, that in the last hour of my extremity the blood of Christ will take my sins away; it is now my comfort to think that the blood of Christ shall wash, and purge, and purify the transgressions of life." But, mark! my text saith not so; it does not say the blood of Christ *shall* cleanse—that were a truth—but it says something greater than that—it says, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son *cleanseth*"—cleanseth now. And is it possible that now a man may be forgiven? Can a harlot *now* have all her sins blotted out of the book of God? And can she know it? Can the thief this day have all his transgressions cast into the sea; and can he know it? Can I, the chief of sinners, this day be cleansed from all my sins, and know it? Can I know that I stand accepted before the throne of God, a holy creature because washed from every sin? Yes, tell it the wide world over, that the blood of Christ can not only wash you in the last dying article, but can wash you now. And let it be known, moreover, that to this there are a thousand witnesses, who, rising in this very place from their seats, could sing—

"Oh, how sweet to view the flowing
Of my Saviour's precious blood,
With divine assurance knowing,
He has made my peace with God"

What would you not give to have all your sins blotted out *now*? Would you not give yourself away to become the servant of God for ever, if *now* your sins should be washed away? Ah, then, say not in your hearts, "What shall I do to obtain this mercy?" Imagine not there is any difficulty in your way. Suppose not there is some hard thing to be done before you can come to Christ to be washed, O beloved! to the man that knows himself to be guilty, there is not one barrier between himself and Christ. Come, soul, this moment come to him that hung upon the cross of Calvary! come now and be washed.

But what meanest thou by coming? I mean this: come thou and put thy trust in Christ, and thou shalt be saved. What is meant by believing in Christ? Some say, that "to believe in Christ is to believe that Christ died for me." That is not a satisfactory definition of faith. An Arminian believes that Christ died for everybody. He must, therefore, necessarily believe that Christ died for him. His believing that will not save him, for he will still remain an unconverted man and yet believe that. To believe in Christ is to trust him. The way I believe in Christ, and I know not how to speak of it, except as I feel it myself, is simply this: I know

it is written that “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” I do firmly believe that those he came to save he will save. The only question I ask myself is, “Can I put myself among that number whom he has declared he came to save?” Am I a sinner? Not one that utters the word in a complimentary sense, but do I feel the deep compunction in my inmost soul? do I stand and feel convicted, guilty, and condemned? I do; I know I do. Whatever I may not be, one thing I know I am—a sinner, guilty, consciously guilty, and often miserable on account of that guilt. Well, then, the Scripture says, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.”

“And when thine eye of faith is dim,
Still trust in Jesus, sink or swim;
Thus, at his footstool, bow the knee,
And Israel’s God thy peace shall be,”

Let me put my entire trust in the bloody sacrifice which he offered upon my behalf. No dependence will I have in my playings, my doings, my feelings, my weepings, my preachings, my thinkings, my Bible readings, nor all that. I would desire to have good works, and yet in my good works I will not put a shadow of trust.

“Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling.”

And if there be any power in Christ to save I am saved; if there be an everlasting arm extended by Christ, and if that Saviour who hung there was “God over all, blessed for ever,” and if his blood is still exhibited before the throne of God as the sacrifice for sin, then perish I cannot, till the throne of God shall break, and till the pillars of God’s justice shall crumble.

Now, sinner what then hast thou to do this morning? If thou feelest thy guilt to be great, cast thyself entirely upon this sacrifice by blood. “But no,” says one, “I have not felt enough.” Thy feelings are not Christ. “No, but I have not prayed enough.” Thy prayers are not Christ, and thy prayers cannot save thee. “No, but I have not repented enough.” Thy repentance may destroy thee, if thou putttest that in the place of Christ. All that thou hast, I repeat this morning, is this—dost thou feel thyself to be a lost, ruined, guilty sinner? Then simply cast thyself on the fact that Christ is able to save sinners and rest there. What! do you say you cannot do it? Oh may God enable you, may he give you faith, sink or swim, to cast yourself on that. “Well! but,” you say, “I may not; being such a sinner?” You may; and God never yet rejected a sinner that sought salvation by Jesus. Such a thing never happened, though the sinner sometimes thought it had. Come, the crumb is under the table; though thou be but a dog come and pick it up; it is a privilege even for the dog to take it; and mercy that is great to thee, is but a crumb to him that gives it freely—come and take it. Christ will not reject thee. And if thou be the chief of sinners that ever lived, only simply trust thyself upon him, and perish thou canst not, if God be God, and if this Bible be the book of his truth. The Lord now help each one of us to come afresh to Christ, and to his name be glory.