

The History of Sundry Fools

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Delivered by

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"Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble and he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction." [Psalm 107:17-20](#).

THE psalm contains one picture in four panels. It illustrates a single experience in its main outlines, for in every case it is written, "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses"; and yet each case is very different from any one of the others. We have variety and similarity. It is just so in the case of the people of God. Our fall, our sin, our call by grace, our prayer, the Lord's answer to that prayer by Jesus Christ—in all these, "as face answereth to face, so doth the heart of man to man." We are wonderfully much alike as children of the first Adam, and alike when we become children of the second Adam; and yet no two children of God are quite the same. In human families we meet with great diversity of features among those who are, nevertheless, the offspring of the same parents. In the great family of God the diversity of the features is very wonderful indeed. Look at the four pictures which are so much alike, and which indeed do but represent one, and yet you shall discover in them marked diversity. Learn you this double lesson—that unless your spot is the spot of God's children you are none of his: but also, do not expect to find that spot exactly the same in you as it is in others of his undoubted offspring. As on earth all flesh is not the same flesh, and as in the heavens all glories are not the same glory, for there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; so in the ordinary life of Christians here below there is one Spirit, but there are divers operations. Therefore do not judge yourself by any man's biography. Do not condemn yourself if, after reading John Bunyan's "Grace Abounding," you say, "I never went into these dark places." Be glad that you never did. After reading Madame Guyon, do not condemn yourself if you never heard her "Torrents," nor felt her ecstasies of divine life. Be sorry that you never have, and aspire after such things, but do not condemn yourself. Here are four pictures, and you may find your likeness in one of the four; but be not so unwise as to condemn yourself if you are not seen in the other three. "I never went to sea," says one, "this cannot picture me." "I never traversed a Sahara," says another, "this cannot picture me." "I never was in prison in the dark," says a third, "this cannot picture me." But it is possible,

dear friend, that you have been a fool, and therefore the sick fool may picture you. When you find yourself in one of the pictures, you may conclude that, as the four are but variations of the same subject, all the four in some degree belong to you. At any rate, if I cannot enter into heaven by twelve gates, I shall be perfectly satisfied to go in at one.

I am only going to bring out two out of the many thousands of things that lie packed away in the wonderful box of my text. There are two things, *the miserable people*, and *the merciful Lord*.

I. THE MISERABLE PEOPLE, first. I am going to describe them, and my object in the description will be to show what some have been who, nevertheless, have been saved. These people are called fools. They abhorred all manner of meat. They drew near to the gates of death. But they were saved for all that, for they cried unto God in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. The inference will be that if ~~I~~if you should happen to be just in the same condition as these people, yet we may have hope that God will save us.

To begin with, the first description of them is that *they were fools*. Now, I must not call you fools, but you have all of you liberty to call yourselves so. I find it forbidden in Scripture for any man to call his brother "fool," but I do not find him forbidden to call himself so. Look well to yourself, and see whether you are not a fool now: ~~at~~at least, if God's grace has saved you, you are bound to own that you were once a FOOL in capital letters; for every unrenewed and unregenerate man is a fool. We call those fools who have a great want of knowledge of things which it is necessary to know. Where other men find their way, they are lost. Where other men know what to do upon very simple matters, they are quite bewildered and cannot tell how to act. I remember when I did not know the way of salvation. I had heard it from my youth up, and heard it explained very simply, too; but I did not know it. Many must confess that, though now they understand what faith in Jesus is, yet they were very slow in catching the idea. It is an idea which a babe in grace can explain, but which wise men, classically instructed, do not receive. I may stand here, and beat my very heart out in trying to make plain how men are to believe and live, and yet out of my congregation not one will receive God's meaning into his heart unless God the Holy Ghost shall enlighten him; for we are such fools that the simplest matters of heavenly truth are utterly unknown to us.

He, too, is a fool who, when he does know, does not make right use of his knowledge. He is a greater fool than the former one. He knows all about it, but yet he does not do it. He understands that the only way to be saved is to believe in Christ; but he does not believe. He knows that men must repent of sin if they would find mercy; but he does not repent of sin. He knows that life is uncertain, and yet he is risking his soul upon the chances of his continuing to live. He lives as if he had a lease of his life, and was absolutely certain that he could not die till he chose to be converted. Now this is to be a fool ~~to~~to act contrary to your own knowledge and better judgment. How many fools there are of this kind!

We call him a fool who hurts himself without any profit—without any justifying cause. The man who flings his life away to save a nation, or even to rescue one solitary person from death, is a hero; but what is he who, for no motive whatever, will maim himself—will take away his own health—will take away his own life? Are there none such here? Look at the drunkard! Look at the man who is guilty of unclean living! Look at such as prefer this world to the world to come, and throw themselves away on trifles! O sirs, there be many men that have injured themselves so that their sin lies in their bones. Even now they feel the result of their transgressions. The moth is foolish that flies into the candle, and, having burnt itself, dashes again into the flame. We count the ox foolish that goes willingly to the shambles; but there are multitudes of men and women who take delight in sin; and, though every cup around them be poisoned, yet they drink at it as though it were nectar. Verily, sinners are fools!

We are great fools when we think that we can find pleasure in sin, or profit in rebellion. We are great fools when we displease our God,—when our best Friend, on whom our eternal future depends, is despised, neglected, and even rejected and hated by us. It is the extreme of folly when a man loses the good will of one who can help him,—when he rejects the love of a tender mother, and the counsel of a wise father. Some men seem resolved to make their enemies their friends, and their friends their enemies. They put darkness for light, and light for darkness. They go to find the living among the dead, and true helpers among those who pander to their sin. Such fools have you and I been. Peradventure, some here are such fools now.

I call that man a fool who throws away jewels that he may gather pebbles, who casts away gold and silver that he may gather up mire and dirt. And what do they do who fling away heaven and eternal life for the sake of a transient joy, a momentary gain? Are there not some men living in this world only to get what will one day turn into smoke? They know that this great world, and all the works of men that are therein, must be dissolved with fervent heat; and yet they labor to build a mansion for their immortal souls in this place, which is to be utterly burned up. And, meanwhile, thou, O Son of God, Immortal Love, art treated as though thou wert a mere fiction! And thou, great Father, fullness of eternal grace, their backs are turned on thee! And O, holiness, and virtue, and immortal blessedness all of you are suffered to go by while men are hunting for gewgaws and gathering trinkets that shall so soon be taken from them. If haply as you sit here you confess, "I have been a fool; I know I have," then you may gather comfort from the fact that fools were saved. He that has gone to the utmost excess of un wisdom may yet hear the invitation of wisdom, and come and learn at Christ's feet all that is needful for eternal life.

The next thing about these people is rather worse: they were not only fools, but *sinners*. The text says that "fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." You see they had several sorts of sin—transgression and iniquities. They began

with one transgression; they went on to multiplied iniquities. There was first in their heart a transgression against God; afterwards, there were found in their lives many inequities, both towards God and towards man. Sin multiplies itself very rapidly. It grows from one to a countless multitude. We will not go into the details of the transgressions and inequities that you may have committed; but here is the point, these people, who were fools, and full of transgression and iniquity, nevertheless cried to God in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. What form has your sin taken? Think of it in your own heart. But, whatever form it has taken, God is able to forgive you. "All manner of sin and blaspheming shall be forgiven unto men." "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." There is no sin which is unpardonable if men repent of it. The sin that is unpardonable is one of which no man ever thought of repenting, for it is a sin which is unto death, and when committed the man is spiritually dead, and never repents. If there be a sin upon you, however black and foul if it be a horrible sin which I could not mention because it might crimson the cheek of modesty if I did but even hint at it if you are covered with it, polluted with it beyond all imagination yet, of the saints in heaven it can be said, "such were some of you, but ye are washed." You are not more astray than certain others, or if you are, so much the greater shall be the glory of God's grace in saving you. It is written of our Lord that he is able to "have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way." O you out-of-the-way sinners, what a comfortable word that is for you! No sin shall destroy you if you will come to the sinner's Savior. No excellence of your own shall save you if you reject that Savior. Come in all your sin, though it reeks to heaven: though the stench of it be loathsome in your own nostrils, yet, come to Jesus, for "the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

But we must go on with the picture. These people were not only fools and sinners, which are two bad things; but they had a third mischief about them: *they were afflicted*. "Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their inequities, are afflicted." Their affliction was evidently the result of their folly and their transgression. Do I address any who are in that case? I hardly like to say what may have happened to some here. They may be distressed in spirit, and unable to pursue their business with anything like cheerfulness. They may be subject to doleful forebodings and heavy glooms, and all the result of sin in years gone by. They have now got to the core of the apple of sin. It is wonderfully sweet till you get to the core, and then it is bitter, ay, more bitter than death itself.

Once these men were fools and sinners, and now they have to suffer for it. They are afflicted because of their transgression and their inequities. Some suffer in body. Others suffer in estate: their property is all gone now. They have spent all. Riotously, foolishly, wickedly it has gone. They had money once; they have none now. They had the means of livelihood and competence, but they have so sinned that they cannot be trusted now. They are waifs and strays on the great ocean, drifting about, nobody wanting them. How I long to say a

word of comfort to those who are in that condition! If you repent, if you will arise and come to your Father, why should you not be delivered out of your distresses? Do you not see that God does deliver such as you are? Is not the case before you in the text? They were fools afflicted, they were sinners afflicted, beginning to feel, even on earth, a part of the result of their sin. They began to reap those sheaves of fire which they sowed with such merry-making years ago; and, as they put those sheaves into their bosom, they wondered how they could escape being immediately consumed. But they did escape, and so may you. God has saved such as you now are, and all those saved ones should encourage you to hope that he will save you.

The picture is getting black, but we must put on another coat of color. In addition to this, these people *had fallen into a soul-sickness*. Through their trouble and their consciousness of sin, they had fallen into such a state of illness that nothing could help them. The best food was brought to them, but they waved it away: their soul abhorred all manner of meat. Some are in such a state that the amusements which once were joys to them are now wearisome. You have been lately to the theater, and you used to be charmed there. You cannot make out what has come over it: it seems so dull to you. You used to enjoy cheerful evenings with your merry-making friends, but now you would sooner get upstairs alone, for you feel so wretched. When you are alone, there is one person who plagues you: if you could only get away from him, you would be content; but that person happens to be yourself, and there appears to be no rest for you either in company or in solitude. Your soul abhors all manner of meat. I have known souls to get into such a state that books, interesting and instructive, they could not read any longer. They felt no interest in anything of the sort; and poetry, and all the charms of art, which once they very properly enjoyed could afford them no pleasure. The best mental recreation cannot give such persons any stay from their fierce, self-destroying thoughts. Ay, and they even refuse good spiritual meat. If the preacher tries to give them milk for babes, that is too weak for them: if he brings out strong meat, that is too tough for their teeth. If he brings them "wine on the lees, well-refined," that is too heating; if he offers the water of life, that is too cold. Nothing will suit them. They grumble at all kinds of teaching. Religious books do not cheer them; even the Bible itself seems stale and unprofitable. You are in a frightful condition, my friends, are you not? You are so sick that the meat which best would suit you is that which you least care for. Yet God has saved some who have fallen into this wretched way; and he invites you to come to him, and trust in him, with the promise that he will save even you, though you are as bad as you well can be.

But the case was worse than that, for we read, "They draw near unto the gates of death." This poor creature was *almost dead*. He could see death-gate and hell-gate right before him. He was lying at death's door, expecting every moment to be thrown through the portal into eternal destruction and endless wrath. I remember when I lay in bosom of despair in my own apprehension. I knew that I was condemned on account of sin, and my conscience said

"Amen" to the condemnation. I could not plead any reason why I should not at once be taken out to endless execution on account of my sin; and I certainly felt the dread shadow of coming wrath falling upon my soul. AND YET I AM SAVED blessed be God! And so shall you, dear hearer, though you be ready to die, and ready to be damned, be saved by faith in Jesus. Though you begin to feel the fire-shower falling, and the first of the dread drops have already buried their way into your soul, yet may you escape. The Savior comes to those who

Buried in sorrow and in sin,
At death's dark door do lie.

He brings "salvation" to such; and he says to the dying sinner, "This day has salvation come unto thy house." What a glorious gospel we have to preach to you miserable people!

But yet we have not quite touched up the picture with the last shade of black. This man not only lay at death's door, full of trouble, full of distress, but he was *surrounded by many destructions*. In the twentieth verse we read, "and he delivered them from their destructions." What! Are there many destructions to a man? Oh, yes, a great many! I have known one man destroyed by his shop, another by his wife, another by his children. Many a woman is destroyed by her clothes; many a man is destroyed by his eating; millions are destroyed by their drinking. Everything about us will destroy us unless God saves us. There are a thousand gates to hell, though there is only one road to heaven. One man may perish by debauchery; another may perish by respectability. One man may be lost in the ale-house; another man may be lost through his teetotalism, if he makes a god of it. One man may go down to hell by his want of common decency, and another by his pride, and prudery, and self-righteousness. Do not deceive yourself—the way to ruin is easy, and many crowd it. If you want to go to heaven, well, we shall have to tell you a great deal about what is to be believed; but if you want to go to hell, I have no need to tell you anything,—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" A little matter of neglect will land you in hell. But it is not a little matter of thought that will bring you to heaven; there must be a stirring up of the entire soul—an awakening of the whole man to seek after God in Christ Jesus; or else you shall perish. Surrounded, then, with destructions—snares about your bed, snares about your table, snares in your solitude, snares in the street, snares in your shop, snares at dawn of day, and snares at set of sun—you are in awful, terrible danger; and yet persons surrounded with destructions have been saved, and why should not you? They have cried to God in their trouble, and he has delivered them out of their destructions; will he not do the same at your cry? What a charming word is this for desponding spirits!

II. I have but a minute or two left, where I should have wished for an hour, to speak upon THE MERCIFUL LORD.

Very briefly indeed. This merciful Lord appears in this picture where you do not at first see him. I think I see him in that first verse: *he sent the affliction*. "Fools, because of their

transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." Ah me! "Are afflicted." Who afflicted them, then? Why, their own Father—their own Shepherd, who saw that they would never come back to him if it were not for affliction. I see you, friend. You are a stray sheep, and I could not get you back. Now you cry, "Alas, I am in trouble!" I am sorry that you should be troubled, but I am not altogether sorry. I can see the black dog is worrying you. It is that he may get you back to the Shepherd. Many will not come back till the black dog has his teeth in their flesh, but if it surely drives you to the good Shepherd, it will be your true friend. I question whether many of us did come to the Lord Jesus Christ until we were afflicted in some way or other. Our bright days led us more and more into sin. Then came a dark day; and then we began to turn. "When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land." Blessed be God for the famine! "He began to be in want": now he will have to test his gay friends and flatterers. There was a gentleman who had drunk his champagne, and put his feet under his mahogany; and the prodigal said, "Now I have fed that man, I dare say he will entertain me now I am in poverty." "I cannot help you," he replied. "Can you give me some employment?" "No. What are you worth? Well, you can feed my pigs." And he "sent him into his fields to feed swine." That is the black dog again. If the gentleman had said, "Oh, yes, my dear young fellow, you were very generous when you had plenty of money, I am very sorry for you, come and live with me: while I have a crust you shall have part of it;" that would have been the worst thing that could have happened, for the prodigal son would never have thought of going home. I say that your troubles are mercies in disguise. Your sicknesses, your poverty, and your misery—oh, I bless God for them! The heavenly Father has sent this rumbling waggon to bring you home to himself. Oh that you would but come to yourself! Oh that you would but come to him! See, the grace of God appears in the very affliction of these rebellious fools.

But note this, further: *they began to pray*; and here we see the Lord again; for no one seeks after God till God has put the prayer into his heart, and breathed a new life into his spirit.

Then as soon as ever he did pray, *the Lord heard the prayer*. We read, "*He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.*" So, beloved, all that God has to do, in order to save us, is to send us his word. He has done that by sending his dear Son, who is the incarnate Word. He sends us the word in the shape of the Holy Scriptures; he sends us the word in the preaching of his servants; but what we want most of all is to have that word sent home by the power of the Holy Spirit. "He sent his word, and healed them." There is nothing that you want to-night but to have the word which the Lord has spoken sealed home to your heart, so that you accept it, and believe it. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

I want you to notice how the Lord rescued these people. You see, they could not eat. They had reached such a state of sickness that they could not take anything; they abhorred

all manner of meat, and we do not find that the Lord sent them any meat. No, he sent his word. Did he send his word like a tonic, to give them an appetite? No, he made surer work. Many doctors try to deal with the disease, but God does not. He deals with the patient himself, and his constitution. *He healed them* radically. Then, when he had healed them their appetite came back. They did *not* abhor all manner of meat when once God had healed them. The Lord does not operate upon the symptoms, but upon the person; he does not deliver us from this sin and that sin and the other sin; but he takes away the old heart, out of which the sin comes, and gives a new heart, out of which there come repentance, and faith, and a change of life. If you have a lantern, and it is dark, you may polish the outside of it as long as ever you like, and no light will come out of it: the first thing to be done is to put a candle inside the lantern. This is what the Lord does; and then, when he puts the candle inside the lantern, we say to ourselves, "this lantern looks very dirty, it must be cleaned." Is it any fouler than it was before the light was put into it? It is the same lantern exactly, but, when you put the candle into it, you perceive how dirty it is by the light shining within. It is of no use to try to clean and polish it up till you have placed the lighted candle in it. You know how Mr. Moody puts it. A lady, we will say, takes a looking-glass, and she looks into it and she sees a spot on her face. That is the use of the looking-glass—to reveal spots; but you never heard of a lady trying to wash her face with a looking-glass, for that is not its use. No, the looking-glass shows the spots, but it cannot take the spots away. First of all, by means of the law, we find out our spots, but we have to go to Jesus Christ, in the gospel, to get those spots taken away. Blessed are those who have gone to him!

"He sent his word, and healed them." With one word, the Lord Jesus at this hour can heal every sin-sick soul before me, for where the word of a King is, there is power. He spake, and the heavens were of old; let him but speak again, and there will be new heavens and a new earth to you. Poor sinner, you are dead, but all that Christ did when he raised the dead in his time was to speak to them; and his word by these lips, through his Spirit, can raise you out of your death in sin. If you are black as the very fiend of hell, and steeped up to the throat in every infamy that God abhors, yet if his word shall come to you, and you receive it into your soul, you shall be saved upon the spot, and delivered from your destructions. Here is a word of the Lord. Obey it, I entreat you. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." Here is another; hearken to it, and live:—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Let all that labor and are heavy-laden come unto Christ, and he will give them rest. The Lord grant that you may come at once, without delay, and to his name shall be the praise. Amen and Amen.

Portion of Scripture read before Sermon—Psalm 107.

Hymns from "Our Own Hymn Book"—30, 606, 697.