

Healing and Pardon

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"And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell in it shall be forgiven their iniquity." [Isaiah 33:24](#).

This whole chapter was a gracious message from God to a people who were in extremis. They were made to drink the foulest dregs of sorrow through the invasion of the Assyrians. The highways were waste, the wayfarer ceased. The earth mourned and languished. Lebanon was ashamed and hewn down. Sharon was like a wilderness and Bashan and Carmel shook off their fruits. Then did God arise. When the worst had come to the worst, He laid bare His arm and brought deliverance for His people! Is not this a general rule with God? Is it not a Truth of God fraught with comfort to any of you whose day has darkened down into a seven-fold midnight? When nothing else is left you, God remains and God appears! When all your own strength fails you, your strength shall be to sit still while God arises and becomes your arm every morning, your salvation in the time of trouble!

I would encourage all who are in spiritual distress to gather hope from this chapter, since it is addressed to Zion in her sore affliction. If it is really so, that the joys and blessings which are described in the passage before us come to a people who are driven to the last extremity, why should not such blessings come to you? We have often noted how the Lord delights to look upon the poor and needy and comes with succor to those who are in distress. It is the way of the Lord to look in pity upon those who are cast down. Lift up your heart to Him and cry unto Him out of the depth! Let your prayer rise to His Throne out of the low dungeon. Expect that He will be very pitiful and will have compassion upon you in your misery. Jerusalem was on the brink of destruction when the Lord answered the prayer of Hezekiah and smote the vast host of Assyria. The peril of Jerusalem serves as a dark background to bring out the brightness of my text. The city might have been destroyed by pestilence through its sins, but the Lord says, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell in it shall be forgiven their iniquity."

The great result of God's gracious dealings with His afflicted people is that they glorify His holy name. Observe how in this chapter God is spoken of as being "exalted, for He dwells on high." He is called, "the glorious Lord." Truly our Lord never appears more glorious than in the eyes of those who are brought low and humbled in their own esteem. Their distresses, out of which they are graciously delivered, call upon them to exalt their Savior! They hear a voice saying, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He has broken the gates of brass and cut the bars of iron

in sunder." Our God gets little praise in this fair world which is a masterpiece of His skill, for man refuses to adore. Creation ought to make our voices ring out perpetual Psalms, for it is full of wonders! Providence ought, also, to keep us always making music upon an instrument of 10 strings, but, alas, we yield our praises to inferior workers. We are always backward and slow in the praises of the Lord.

Will a man rob God? Yet we rob Him of His Glory. And so He brings us into straits, that He may display the majesty of His Grace and the infinity of His power in rescuing us. Then are we moved to astonishment and adoration! Then we burst forth into a song as we abundantly utter the memory of His great goodness! At sight of His amazing love, we magnify the Lord and ask others to magnify Him with us, that we may exalt His name together. This is as it should be—let it be so now. Oh, you that have tasted of the Lord's rich Grace in the hour of trouble, praise Him at this good hour! Let the hallelujahs of your soul go up to Him in the courts of the Lord's House. If you cannot speak out your praise, let it wait for God in Zion and unto Him let the vow be performed. Let your expressive silence mean the praise which you cannot

sound forth with your tongue. The Holy Spirit who makes intercession in us with groans that cannot be uttered will also put into us praises inexpressible by words!

As we saw in the reading of this chapter, the Prophet seems to take wing as he proceeds. He rises from note to note, as if, like David, he said, "Selah"—lift up the strain! He makes each note more high, more sweet, more loud than those which preceded it, for he sings unto Him that does great things for His people. The climax is in this verse—"The people that dwell in it shall be forgiven their iniquity." One of the highest notes of praise is in the 103rd Psalm—"Bless the Lord, O my Soul; who has forgiven all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases." Our text is another form of that verse—"The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell in it shall be forgiven their iniquity." Healing and forgiveness are placed in happy conjunction and both bestowed on the Lord's people when they looked not for them.

I shall speak upon our text thus, if the Holy Spirit will help me. First, there is such a thing as present forgiveness—"The people that dwell in it shall be forgiven their iniquity." Secondly, with this forgiveness there comes the removal of the consequences of sin—"The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick." And, thirdly, this makes a remarkable change in the language of the favored people—"The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick." They shall be so greatly blessed that their language shall lose its complaining tone! They shall no longer sigh and lament. They shall now have other things to talk about than their own infirmities and sufferings. "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick, the people that dwell in it shall be forgiven their iniquity."

I. First, then, Beloved, I introduce to you a topic upon which I am sure you have no question, but still, it may do you good to be confirmed in the acknowledged Truth of God.

THERE IS SUCH A THING AS THE PRESENT FORGIVENESS OF SIN. "The people that dwell in it shall be forgiven their iniquity."

There must be a present conscious enjoyable pardon of sin, otherwise there would be no joy in the world for thoughtful minds. To the thoughtless and careless, there might be a flash in the pan, a noisy mirth as the crackling of thorns under a pot, but to the penitent, to the serious, to the careful, where could there be a spark of joy if sin were unforgiven? When we once begin to feel what sin is, to discern its true nature and to understand the just punishment which must follow upon it, we cannot rest under its condemnation. Though God should give us dainties from day to day, clothe us in scarlet and fine linen and set us among the princes of the earth, we would be restless—we would be wretched as long as sin preyed upon our heart. Sin—this casts darkness upon the sun, eclipsing its meridian light. Sin is the blast which withers all the flowers of life. Sin is the gall of bitterness—a drop of it would turn an ocean of pleasure into wormwood! Sin would again blight the Garden, could it be restored. Yes, it would turn Heaven into Hell could it enter there! Sin is a burden which an awakened conscience cannot bear. It crushes the spirit into the dust and threatens further to bear it down, even to the lowest Hell.

But when sin is pardoned, then our hymn which we have just now been singing leaps joyfully to our lips—

"Now, oh joy! My sins are pardoned." Is not this a necessary ingredient in that overflowing cup which the Lord puts to the lips of His redeemed ones? "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord." But without that justification there can be no peace and no enjoyment of life. Believers are spoken of as a blessed people who joy in God—they are bid to always rejoice! The Apostle says, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." Such rejoicing would be impossible if sin were not pardoned and, therefore, we conclude that sin may be pardoned, that it may be pardoned now and that we may know it! If forgiveness is essential to a state of mind which we are exhorted to exhibit, then forgiveness may be enjoyed at this present hour!

Further, dear Brothers and Sisters, there must be forgiveness of sin, otherwise the main motive and fountain of love would be dried up. Forgiveness begets gratitude, gratitude creates love and love brings forth holiness. She that washed the Savior's feet with tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head—would she have done it if she had not loved much because she felt that much had been forgiven her? The motive power of action to a believing man lies hard by the realization that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven his iniquities. When I see my Lord, His own Self, bearing my sins in His own body on the Cross and blotting out my faults forever by His death, then my spirit glows with love, my eyes stream with tears, my heart dedicates itself wholly to Jesus and my life begins to show the effect of my inward emotion!

Sin forgiven leads to sin forsaken. Is it not so? Doubt whether you are forgiven and what can you do? Can you preach a Gospel which has not brought you pardon? Can you go into the Sunday school to try and bring little children

to a Christ who has not forgiven you your sins? But understand that through the one great Sacrifice your iniquities are forever pardoned and then you must love the great Sacrifice and you must praise the Lord who gave Him to die for your sins! Is not this the song of the perfected—"Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, unto Him be Glory forever and ever"? There must be a consciousness of forgiveness, or our lives will be limp, weak, purposeless.

It must be so, that sin can be pardoned and that we can know it, otherwise we would be always in bondage through fear of death. In what jeopardy would we stand every hour, since we might at once sink into Hell! The prospect of death— how terrible would it be to us if sin still accused us unto God! Many of us now contemplate the approach of death with a calm, quiet patience of hope. As our years advance, we are not distressed with the thought that the time of our departure daily draws nearer. This world is not our rest and we do not desire to always live! We anticipate the hour when we

shall—

"Our body with our charge lay down,

And cease at once to work and live." But how could this be if we enjoyed no sense of pardoned sin? It has been my intense delight to be with many members of this Church in the hour of their departure and I have invariably found them rejoicing in hope! I have sometimes heard them sing and I have joined in their holy hymns. More often I have heard their steady calm acknowledgement of their joy in the prospect of being "forever with the Lord." But how could this have been if sin had not been pardoned? Is not this true which we sing—

"If sin is pardoned, I'm secure, Death has no sting beside! The law gives sin its damning power; But Christ, my Ransom, died?"

"The sting of death is sin" and you cannot take away the sting of death if sin is not taken away! There could be no looking forward with expectancy if there were no acceptance in Christ! It would be impossible to be in a strait, as Paul was, when he said, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." To be willing to be offered up and joyfully to say, "The time of my departure is at hand," would be utterly impossible if Believers did not know and, know of a certainty, that their sins are all forgiven! Once we cried, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow!" We were not in error in that prayer and now, that we have been washed and have heard our Master say, "You are clean every whit," we are not deluded! "We have joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we have received the atonement." We say at this hour, "O Lord, I will praise You! Though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away and You comforted me."

Has not the Lord declared, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake and will not remember your sins"? Yes, great Lord, it is even so! "There is forgiveness with You that You may be feared." There is a city whose inhabitants are forgiven their iniquities! Blessed be the Lord who passes by the trespasses of His people!

Once more—there must be forgiveness, for otherwise the whole system of Grace would be a dead letter and its glorious privileges would be mere shells without a kernel. Where would be salvation, itself, without pardon? How could we be saved from our sins if not forgiven? What glorious Gospel could there be if sin could not be cancelled? We read of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, "to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." But how can we be sons under condemnation? How shall I reckon myself to be a beloved child if my Father is still my Judge and holds over me the sword of Justice? "Your sins which are many are forgiven you," is necessary before the spirit of adoption can enter, to make us cry, "Abba, Father!" There is certainly no possibility of acceptance or justification while sin is unforgiven! I have already shown you that there is no motive to seek sanctification if we are hopelessly condemned for sin. What is even the gift of Christ, Himself, if He does not put away our sin? The whole of the blessings of the Gospel seem to me to have lost their charm unless, first of all, there is cleansing from all iniquity.

Let us now bend our thoughts to a consideration of this great blessing as it is treated of in this chapter. It is plainly promised in the text, "The people that dwell in it shall be forgiven their iniquity." Nor is this a lone word—the same is often declared. I will not occupy your time by quoting the many passages of Scripture in which the pardon of sin is expressly promised. Is it not in the Covenant, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"? "He that believes is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the Law of Moses." Pardon is a promised

blessing. It is God's prerogative to forgive and He delights to exercise it. He says expressly, "I will pardon them whom I reserve." He has pardoned, He does pardon, He will pardon. So stands the Covenant of Love!

If we wish to obtain this free pardon, it will be granted in answer to prayer. Read the second verse, "O Lord, be gracious unto us." This is short, but full. There is sound doctrine in that cry. "The people that dwell in it shall be forgiven their iniquity" is a suitable answer to that petition. If you want pardon of Him who is waiting to be gracious, seek it! It is to be had without money and without price by the man who will stretch out his empty hand to take it. It is all of Grace. If you will have it, God is ready to grant it in answer to your humble cry. "Where sin abounded, Grace does much more abound." The Lord Jesus is exalted on high "to give repentance and remission of sins." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Go to your knees and see if the Lord will not be gracious to you!

Pardon is given in connection with the exaltation of God. Read the fifth verse—"The Lord is exalted." He does not grant this forgiveness until we begin to recognize that He is a great God and a Savior. We must see that He is great in justice and we must bow in penitence and honor that justice! And then we must get some thought of the greatness of His love in giving His Son to die that He might justly forgive us. The greatness of our Lord's compassion in passing by iniquity, transgression and sin must be confessed or we shall never find pardon. Friend, you will never get mercy for your great sin from a little God! He must be a great God to you, or you will never receive the great mercy you need. You must learn to say of Him, "Who is a God like unto You, that pardons iniquity and passes by transgression?" Low thoughts of God create doubts of pardon and doubt holds us in bondage under sin. But high thoughts of God beget hope in the soul and hope leads to confidence—and confidence brings assurance of forgiveness.

God grants pardon when men are humbled. See the seventh verse—"Their valiant ones shall cry without: the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly." Crying and weeping are good preparations for pardon. In the dust of self-abasement is the place for hope. Jeremiah says of the afflicted, "He puts his mouth in the dust; if so there may be hope." God never pardons the proud—He knows them "afar off," and has enough of them at a distance. With the humble and contrite He dwells, delighting to hear them honor His Law by bemoaning their breaches of it. When you say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," though you dare not lift up your eyes to Heaven, the eyes of Heaven look down on you. You shall go to your house justified if, in God's Grace, you have confessed yourself to be condemned. God also grants this pardon when the heart is searched. Read the 14th verse—"The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?" When we begin to examine ourselves, to fear because of sin and to turn from all hypocrisy, then the Lord will accept us. There must be a laying aside of all insincerity, a dealing with God in truth, before the gracious God can put away our iniquity. Sincerity is indispensable to mercy. How can the Lord be other than a devouring fire to hypocrites?

God will also pardon us when He is acknowledged to be our Ruler and Lord. Look at the 22nd verse—"The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King." Will you have God to reign over you? If so, He will forgive you, but if you will continue to rebel, His wrath shall abide upon you. How can you receive the kiss of love if you do not give the kiss of allegiance? "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry." Accept His rule and He will accept your prayer. We must love His Law or we cannot be discharged from its curse. Be willing to obey and He is ready to forgive.

He will also forgive us when we put our trust in Him. Read the last clause of the 22nd verse—"He will save us." Faith must look for salvation only from the Lord and then salvation will come to it. Oh, how I wish that some poor heart here present would cry this morning, "He will save me! I will take Him to be my King and my Lawgiver, and I will believe for

myself that He will have me!" It is that touch of personal faith which brings peace to the soul. If you will not trust God, neither shall you have peace. But if you will come now, just as you are, and believe that He is able to forgive you and trust Him to do so, then you shall have this promise verified in your experience—"The people that dwell in it shall be forgiven their iniquity."

Is not this a large promise? One might descant upon it by the week together and, indeed, one might rejoice in it to all eternity! I leave it to your quiet musings. If the Prophet says, "Your heart shall meditate terror," viewing it as past and gone, how much more may you muse on mercy, world without end, viewing it as forever your own?

II. Now, with extreme brevity, I want, in the second place, to say that WHEN SIN IS PARDONED, THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN ARE ALSO REMOVED. Sin had made these people sick as Isaiah says in his first chapter—"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." But when iniquity is forgiven, then, "the inhabitant shall not say, I am

sick." Special chastisement is usually removed when any peculiar sin is forgiven. God, under a former age, very manifestly visited sin with chastisement in this life and when He forgave it, He removed the weight of His hand from the offender. Read the history of Israel and see a host of instances. There are still instances in which personal chastisement does follow personal sin in this life, especially among Believers and especially among Believers in Church fellowship. We read of the Corinthians, when they misbehaved themselves, "For this cause some are sickly among you, and many sleep." Within the chosen family there are chastisements unknown to the outside world. But when we go with our confession and find pardon of the Lord, the temporal chastisement is usually removed, or else it is so changed in its purpose as to become quite another thing. Oftentimes, also, great sinners who have, by their gross misconduct, brought themselves into grievous trouble, have found no way of escape from it till their evil ways have been forsaken. The valley of Achor has been their door of hope. Where they have bewailed their fault, they have received deliverance. When the root of bitterness is taken away, the evil which grows out of it has also been removed. When Nineveh repented, its threatened destruction was averted.

But, further, when I speak of the consequences of sin being taken away, this is very apparent in respect of certain sins. A man being a drunk brings himself to poverty—he asks forgiveness for the drunkenness and he ceases from it. By honest industry his abject poverty is soon ended. Within a few weeks you see a difference in the very aspect of the man. Oftentimes when, by some sin of impurity, a sinner weakens his body and injures his health, his cure is much helped by his repenting and forsaking his uncleanness. It may not be so with some great transgressions, for they may leave scars which cannot be healed in this life, but true repentance will turn even these into a means of humiliation and make them serve as safeguards against any return to folly. When sins are frankly confessed and forsaken, then the gracious message comes—"The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die."

Further, in the case of Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, if some of the temporal results of sin do not cease, yet it is only in appearance that they remain, or rather they remain for other purposes, benign and useful—not as wrathful inflictions. If by past sin one has brought himself into a state of sickness, or poverty, or depression, these may leave their traces upon him, but from the day in which he finds pardon, these will not be punishments inflicted by a Judge, but chastisements lovingly appointed by a Father. A father may chasten his child very severely, but this is not the same as pain inflicted by the sentence of a judge. It is one thing for a parent to shut his child in a room because he has done wrong, but it is quite another thing for a magistrate to send him to prison for a crime! The act may seem the same, but the feeling of the authority commanding the chastisement is very different. Believers do not escape the sorrows of this life, but then, no sorrow that comes to a Christian is sent as a penal infliction. It is not sent as a vindication of Law, but as a tender parental discipline. Vast is the difference between the chastisement of love and the infliction of justice. To the forgiven man, "all things work together for good," yes, even those things which naturally follow upon the sin which is now forgiven. The curse is turned into a blessing! The poison acts as a medicine! That which kills the impenitent helps the cure of a Believer!

Yes, look at death itself. Do Christians die as a punishment for sin? God forbid! God lays no punishment on those who have accepted Jesus as their Substitute, for He has borne the whole of their punishment and it is not possible that God should exact punishment twice—first at the hands of their Surety—and then again at their own. Death is no punishment to the Believer—it is the gate of endless joy! It is not death to die, now that Jesus has died, yes, rather, has risen and gone into Glory on our behalf! We thank God that the bitterness of death is past. Death itself is mentioned in the list of our possessions—"All things are yours, whether life or death." Maybe we shall not die at all, for our Lord may come all of a sudden and if He comes while we are alive and remain we shall not sleep, though we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. Rest assured, Believer, that since God has forgiven your sins, He has dried up the well of bitterness and you shall drink no more of it. Or, if it seems to come to your lips, it shall be so changed in its character that it shall be a healing draught!

Believe, once more, that all the eternal penal consequences are gone from the forgiven man. For him there can be no condemnation at the Day of Judgement! For him there can be no, "Depart, you cursed!" For him there is no blackness of darkness forever! For him no worm that dies not, no fire that never can be quenched! In Christ Jesus he stands before God as if he had never sinned! Yes, he wears the perfect righteousness of Christ and, arrayed in that precious robe, he can face the terrors of the last tremendous day without alarm! "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God

that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." Sin gone,

the root of all evil is gone! "Comfort you, comfort you My people, says your God. Speak you comfortably to Jerusalem and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

III. The specialty of what I want to say lies in my last point—that THE LORD EVEN CHANGES THE TONE OF

HIS PEOPLE'S SPEECH. "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick." That is the point! Why shall they not say, "I am sick"?

First, they have no need to say it when the Lord comes and dwells with them, for the Sun of Righteousness has risen upon them with healing in His wings. When Jesus healed the sick of the palsy, He said to him, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." Pardon and healing were one! Spiritually the pardoned one shall not need to say, "I am sick," because his soul diseases then receive a healing medicine.

All spiritual disease receives its deathblow when sin is forgiven. Sin is crucified by the same Cross which brings Atonement. You may have to struggle with it, for the corruption of the flesh still remains, but "sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under the Law, but under Grace." The Lord's name, to the forgiven one, is Jehovah-Rophi—"The Lord Who Heals You." Albeit, you may feel full of distempers, any one of which might be fatal to you if left alone, yet in the reception of pardon, there comes to you a new life which will conquer all those distempers. "Whoever is born of God, sins not." The new nature sins not. John says, "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin," that is to say he cannot sin as others do—it is not the rule and drift of his life. There is a change worked in the Believer of the most wonderful kind, as it is written, "A new heart, also, will I give them, and a right spirit will I put within them. I will put My fear in their heart, and they shall not depart from Me." Now though we can say that the old nature is sick and sick to death, so that the sooner it is utterly destroyed the better, yet speaking of ourselves as renewed by the Holy Spirit we delight in the Law of God after the inward man. God has made us to be holy in our desires and aspirations—and has renewed the image of His own perfect Self within us, so that we have no longer need to say, "I am sick."

Here, also, is a very wonderful point in the passage before us concerning danger averted, for you know that when a city is besieged, one of the most certain consequences in old times was the plague. The inhabitants could not get out to receive fresh air. They were denied necessary provisions and so they became faint and ready to be preyed upon by pestilence. Yet the Lord promised that when He worked deliverance for the cooped up inhabitants of Jerusalem they should not say, as other besieged citizens do, "I am sick." I will take up my parable and show the spiritual parallel to this. God will avert the pestilence of sin from pardoned men. They shall be preserved from those moral pests which slay their thousands. You were once the victim of every fever of sin, but now your sin is forgiven. You pass unharmed through the temptations which surround you. God will preserve the true Believer

from the malaria of corruption which is in the world through lust. He shall be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." You shall not be obliged to say, "I am sick," because others are so, for the Lord shall keep you from the pestilence that walks in darkness, even from insidious and deceitful errors and sins. Remember that marvelous promise, "The Lord shall preserve you from all evil: He shall preserve your soul." The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in. In answer to your morning prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One," you shall be preserved in purity and uprightness and from all the devices of the devil, for "that Evil One touches you not."

Here, again, is another point. The inhabitant could not say, "I am sick," and yet the Assyrians died in a single night. They laid themselves down to slumber in their tents, expecting speedily to divide the spoil—

"But the angel of death spread his wings on the blast, And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed. And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill, And their hearts but once heaved and forever grew still." The Lord, in this case, put a difference between His people and their enemies. Multitudes died outside, but inside the city, where you might have expected things to be much worse, the inhabitant did not say, "I am sick." Today we live in an age when sin abounds—a moral pestilence is slaying its thousands. I dare not describe what is going on in the camp beyond, into which we have no desire to enter, but the Lord is a wall of fire around His people! If your sin is forgiven, the plague of deadly sin shall not come near your dwelling! Even to the end shall the Lord watch over you, so that, preserved in

moral sanity, you shall not have need to say, "I am sick." On the contrary, you shall sing, "He restores my soul: He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

Next, they shall have no thought of saying, "I am sick." He that feels the joy of pardoned sin forgets all his pains and griefs. In my own body I know what it is to be vexed with sore pains and yet to feel such rest of heart that I have felt no desire to complain. When we rejoice in Divine love we make small account of our bodily condition! If deaf, blind, or otherwise full of infirmities of the flesh, we make small reckoning of the whole when we know the joy of pardoned sin. The inhabitant shall not say, "I am sick," because he says, "I am forgiven." The Lord gives to His people, at times, such peace and joy in believing that though they are poor, they do not say, "I am poor," but sing, "I am forgiven, I am forgiven!" A Brother had grievously offended and had been put out from Church fellowship for his sin. He so behaved that his pastor thought of him with pain and was glad to avoid an interview with him, for it only produced a sad attempt at self-justification. At length the Lord brought him to a better mind. He sought his pastor and said, with tears, "Will you shake hands with me?" The pastor replied, "Right gladly. I rejoice to feel that the past is all forgiven. How are you?" The repentant one made this reply, "I am quite well, now that you restore me to your esteem." The poor man was extremely ill, but the joy of being once more in his old place in his friend's

thoughts made him refuse to say, "I am sick." The news of victory has made lame men leap. How much more shall it be so when the Lord Jesus manifests His power to save and the Holy Spirit assures the heart of blood-bought pardon? Then, indeed, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick."

Many a child of God, when weary, has renewed his strength at the remembrance of pardoning mercy. Though almost spent, the assured Believer has gone on preaching, or visiting the sick, or conducting his Bible class, because he has felt under such obligations to his Lord that he could go on till he dropped. When a torrent of joy streams through the soul, it bears it right over all hindrances caused by weakness or weariness. Since Jesus has saved us, we ask no discharge from His service because we are sick—our love to Him acts as a tonic and strengthens us. We keep our name on the muster-roll, take our place in the ranks and feel that till we die we will not ask to be excused so long as we can creep out at our Master's call!

I find some read this sentence in the past tense—"The inhabitant shall not say, I have been sick." The joy of pardon makes us ignore the sorrow of the past. "You shall not remember the reproach of your widowhood any more." Since their enemies were all gone, the citizens of Jerusalem rejoiced in their safety and said nothing about what they had suffered. Many of the sick left their couches, crowded the battlements and looked out with pleasure towards the quarter where the foe had been. The Assyrian power was broken—the great king had fled! The men of Jerusalem forgot they had been half-starved and that the plague had been among them. The inhabitant did not say, "I am sick." Their misery was swallowed up in victory. Glory be to God for such mercy as this! When God changes our estate from condemnation to acceptance, then is our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing because "the Lord has done great things for us, of which we are glad."

Again, these people did not say they were sick since they had a motive for not saying so. You remember a late sermon upon the four lepers who went out and divided the spoil? [Sermon #1908, Who Found It Out?] They did not say, "We are lepers"—that was forgotten and they entered tents as if they had been in health. They went into one pavilion and ate and drank. And then they went into another. Men free from leprosy could not have made themselves more at home! They took away gold and silver and hid it, though they were lepers. So, when the Lord pardons our sin, there is a prey to be taken—riches of Grace are at our disposal. Notice the verse that comes before the text, "The lame take the prey." Doubtless, this was literally true—numbers of persons in Jerusalem were scarcely able to get about, for some had rheumatism and others had broken bones, so that they could hardly limp along the public way. But when it was announced that the rich camp of the Assyrians was to be spoiled, the lame made a shift to be there! Old women quite decrepit and men who had long kept their beds suddenly rose to activity and none of them said, "I am sick."

They had a motive for getting well, directly, for great wealth was to be had by the gatherer! From a pardoning God there are such mercies and such blessings to be received that we who have little faith and are weak in heart, suddenly find our spirits revive and we gather our share of Divine gifts! A sense of pardon strengthens the weak hands and confirms the feeble knees and we become mighty to lay hold upon the benefits of the Covenant!

The inhabitant did not say, "I am sick," for the time was come for glorifying the God of Israel! Everybody was shouting, "Hallelujah!" up and down the streets of Jerusalem—who could say, "I am sick"? Children were singing and young men and maidens were dancing because Judah was free from her foe! And even the sick folk merged their sighs and groans in songs and Psalms. Jehovah had triumphed! His people were free and it seemed to be with the people of Jerusalem as it was with Israel in Egypt—"there was not one feeble person in all their tribes." When the Lord pardons our sin, the weakest, the feeblest, the most despondent, the most despairing among us will not say, "We are sick," but our soul shall magnify the Lord! Pardon impels us to duty and stimulates us to praise! We no longer mourn and murmur, but we sing because the might of the enemy has melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

Yet once again, and I have done. Pardoned people shall not say they are sick, for by a little anticipation they shall declare the very contrary. In a little time—how little a time none of us can tell—we shall be where the inhabitant shall never be sick again! The Lord has begun to heal us and the healing virtue which His Grace has infused into us will work us health and cure till we shall be without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing! His salvation will also perfectly heal our bodies. Today the body is dead because of sin, though the spirit is life because of righteousness. The regeneration of the body takes place at the Resurrection and when we shall rise again, it will be in the image of the Lord Jesus! It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power! We shall not rise with dim eyes, dull ears, deformed limbs, or feeble frames. Having eaten the leaves of the Tree of Life, we shall be healed of all that ailed us here below! We are on our way to eternal health! We have the life within us which is to be perfect forever and ever!

Why should we, then, say, "I am sick"? If a man could be quite sure that he would be in perfect health, tomorrow, he would say little about the sickness of an hour. A blind man who will see, tomorrow, hardly numbers himself with the blind! Before another Sabbath comes round, some of you may be with the angels, yes, before tomorrow's sun shall rise you may be where they "need no candle, neither light of the sun." Happy men to be so nearly well—so nearly Home! Happy beings who shall so soon be—

"Far from a world of grief and sin, With God eternally shut in!"

Then shall you realize the fullest meaning of these words, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell in it shall be forgiven their iniquity."

Who comes this way? Who comes this way? Welcome, Brothers and Sisters, to pardon and healing through our Lord Jesus. Who is going the other way? Let such a sad wanderer consider his way, retrace his steps and seek his God who, in Christ Jesus, can heal him! O you who are now sick unto death, ask to be forgiven and healing will come from the pardoning hand. God bless you! Amen.