

A Mingled Strain

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A SERMON DELIVERED BY

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"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

[Psalm 51:7.](#)

IN what state of heart should we come to the Communion Table? It is no light matter—in what manner shall we come before the Lord in so sacred an ordinance? By the very nature of the sacred supper we are taught that there should be a mixture of emotions. The bitter and the sweet, the joyful and the sorrowful are here intermingled. The Sacrifice of Christ for sin—is it more a subject of sorrow or of joy? Can we look to the Cross without mourning for sin? Can we look at it without rejoicing in pardon bought with blood? Is not the most suitable state of heart for coming to the Communion Table just this—mourning for our transgression and joy because of the great salvation? There is a double character about this holy rite. It is a festival of life and yet it is a memorial of death. Here is a cup—it is filled with wine. This surely betokens gladness. Listen to me! That wine is the symbol of blood! This, surely, betokens sorrow! In my hand is bread—bread to be eaten, bread which strengthens man's heart—shall we not eat bread with thankfulness? But that bread is broken, to represent a body afflicted with pain and anguish—there must be mourning on account of that agony! At the Paschal Supper, the lamb of the Lord's Passover had a special sweetness in it—yet the commandment expressly ran—"with bitter herbs they shall eat it." So is it at this table. Here we, with joy, commemorate the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world—but with deep sorrow we recall the sin which, though taken away, causes us, in the recollection of it, to repent with great bitterness of heart.

Our text is the expression of one who is deeply conscious of sin and yet is absolutely certain that God can put away that sin. Thus it holds, in one sentence, a double thread of meaning. Here is a depth of sorrow and a still greater deep of hopeful joy—"deep calls unto deep." I thought that this expression of mixed feeling might guide us as to our emotions at this holy festival.

I. I shall handle the text by making three observations. The first will be this—THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE LANGUAGE OF A SINNER IS MOST SUITABLE TO A CHILD OF GOD. There are seasons when it is about the only language that he can use, when he seems shut up to it and he uses it without the slightest suspicion that it is out of place upon his lips and, indeed, it is not out of place at all. I suppose that everybody will agree that the language of David in this Psalm was most suitable to his condition. When he prayed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow," he prayed

a proper prayer, did he not? Surely no one is going to quibble with David over this petition and yet I cannot be sure. The modern way of handling the Bible is to correct it here and amend it there—tear it to pieces—give a bit to the Jews, a bit to the Gentiles, a bit to the Church and a bit to everybody—and then make it out that sometimes the old servants of God made great blunders!

We, in modern times, are supposed to be more spiritual and to know a great deal better than the Inspired saints of the Old and New Testaments. But still, I should not think that anybody would say that David was wrong, but if he did, I would reply, "This is an Inspired Psalm and there is not half a hint given that there is any incorrectness in the language of it, or that David used language under an exaggerated state of feeling which was not truly applicable to a child of God." I think that nobody will doubt that David was a child of God and that, even when he had defiled himself, he was still dear to the great Father's heart. I gather, therefore—I feel sure of it—that he was quite right in praying the language of this 51st Psalm and saying, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; according unto the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions; wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!"

Yet this is precisely the way in which an unconverted man ought to pray, just the way in which every soul that comes to God may pray. It is only an enlargement of the prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" This language, so suitable to the sinner, was not out of place in the mouth of one who was not only a Believer, but an advanced Believer, an experienced Believer, yes, an Inspired Believer and a teacher of others, who, with all his faults, was such a one as we shall rarely see the likes of again! Yes, among the highest of saints there was a time with one of them, at least, when the lowliest language was appropriate to his condition! There is a spirit abroad which tells us that children of God ought not to ask for pardon of their sins, for they have been pardoned, that they need not use such language as this, which is appropriate for sinners, for they stand in a totally different position. What I want to know is this—where are we to draw the line? If, on account of a certain sin, David was perfectly justified in appealing to God in the same style as a poor, un-forgiven sinner would have done, am I never justified in doing so? Is it only a certain form of evil which puts a man under the necessities of humiliation?

It may be that the man has never fallen into adultery, or any other gross sin, but is there a certain extent of sin to which a man may go, before, as a child of God, he is to pray like this? And is all that falls below that high-water mark of sin a something so inconsiderable that he need not go and ask any particular forgiveness for it, or pray like a sinner at all about it? May I, under most sins, speak very confidently as a child of God, who has already been forgiven, to whom it is a somewhat remarkable circumstance that he should have done wrong, but still, by no means, a serious disaster? I defy anybody to draw the line! And if they do draw it, I will strike it out, for they have no right to draw it! There is no hint in the

Word of God that for a certain amount of sin there is to be one style of praying and for a certain lower amount of sin another style of praying!

I venture to say this, Brothers and Sisters, going farther, that, as this language is certainly appropriate in David's mouth and as it would be impossible to draw any line at which it would cease to be appropriate, the safest and best plan for you and for me is this—seeing that we are sinners, if we have not been permitted to backslide as much as David, yet we had better come in the same way—we had better take the lowest place, urge the lowliest plea and so make sure work of our salvation! It is safest to assume the greatest supposable need. Let us put ourselves into the humblest position before the Throne of the heavenly Grace and cry, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness: according unto the multitude of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions!"

But is not a man of God forgiven? Yes, that he is! Is he not justified? Yes, that he is! "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Let that all stand true in the highest sense that you can give to it but, for all that, the sinner's cry is not thereby hushed into silence! True children of God cry and let me tell you they cry after a stronger fashion than other children! They have their confessions of sin and these are deeper and more intense than those of others. Whatever our confidence may be, our Lord Jesus Christ never told us to pray, "Lord, I thank You that I am forgiven and, therefore, have no sin to confess. I thank You that I need not come to You as a sinner!" But He put into the mouth of His disciples such words as these—"Our Father, which are in Heaven, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us." I reckon that the Lord's Prayer is never out of date! I expect to be able to pray it when I am on the brink of Heaven and, if I should ever be sanctified to the fullest extent, I shall never turn round to the Savior and say, "Now, my Lord, I have got beyond Your prayer! Now, Savior, I can no more address my Father who is in Heaven in this language, for I have outgrown Your prayer!"

Brothers and Sisters, the notion sounds to me like blasphemy! Never shall I say to my Savior, "I have no necessity, now, to come to Your precious blood, or to say to You, 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.'" Listen, Brethren—"If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship, one with another," and what then? Why, even then, "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." We still need the blood when walking in the light, as God Himself is in the light!

While we are here below, we shall need to use just such language as David did. Appropriate as our text is to the sinner, it is equally appropriate to the saint and we may continue to use it till we get to Heaven! Remember, Brothers and Sisters, that when our hearts cannot honestly use such language, we may think that we are raised up by faith, but it is possible that we may be blown up by presumption! When we do not bow into the very dust and kiss the Savior's feet and wash them with our tears, we may think that it is because we are

growing in Grace, but it is far more likely that we are swelling with self-esteem! The more holy a man is, the more humble he is. The more really sanctified he is, the more does

he cry about his sin, whatever it may be—"Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

When you get the clearest possible view of God, what will be the result? Why, the deepest downcasting in your own spirit! Look at Job. He can answer his wretched accusers, but when he sees God—ah, then he abhors himself in dust and ashes! Was Job wrong in heart? I question whether any of us are half as good as Job! I am sure few of us could have played the man as he did under his sorrows. With all the failure of his patience, the Holy Spirit does not call it a failure, for He says, "You have heard of the patience of Job." He says not, "of his impatience," but, "of his patience." And yet this blessed, patient man—patient even by God's own testimony—when he saw God, abhorred himself! Look at Isaiah, again. Was there ever a tongue more eloquent, more consecrated, more pure? Were there ever lips more circumcised to God than those of that mighty evangelical Prophet? And yet, when he beheld the Glory of the Lord, the train of the Lord filling the Temple, he said, "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."

Those of you that can do so, may come to my Master's table, tonight, as saints—I shall come as a sinner. You that feel that you can come there glorying in your growth in Grace may so come if you like—I shall come feeling that I am nothing, less than nothing! I shall endeavor to come to the Cross just as I came at first, for I find that if I get beyond the position of a believing sinner, I get into a dangerous condition. Safety lies in conformity to the Truth of God and the Truth of God will not allow any of us to glory before God! The more I know the Lord and the more I live in communion with Him, the more do I feel happy in lying at His feet and looking up to Him to be my All in All. I would be nothing, and let Christ be everything. Take this from one who has been a preacher of the Gospel for more than 35 years—and a soul-winner who needs not to be ashamed—I am as entirely dependent upon the free mercy of the Lord this day as ever I was—and I look to be saved in the same manner as the thief upon the Cross.

II. Secondly, let me make another observation. It shall be this—AN EXTRAORDINARY SENSE OF GUILT IS QUITE CONSISTENT WITH THE STRONGEST FAITH. It is a blessed thing when the two go together. David was under an extraordinary sense of sin and right well he might be, for he had committed an extravagant transgression. He had done a very grievous wrong to man and committed great lewdness before the Lord—and when the Spirit of God, at last, awakened his conscience through the rebuke of Nathan, it is not at all amazing that he should have bowed down under a deeply humiliating sense of his own guilt. He was guilty, deeply guilty—more guilty than even he, himself, knew.

You and I, perhaps, may also be, by God's Grace, favored with a deep sense of sin. But I hear some people say, "Did I understand you rightly, Sir, or did my ears deceive me? Favored with a deep sense of sin?" "Yes, I said that, for while sin is horrible, a thorough sense of it, bitter as it is, is one of the greatest favors with which God blesses His chosen! I am sure that there are some of God's children whose experience is shallow and superficial, for they do not know the heights and depths of redeeming love—neither are they established in the Doctrines of Grace—and all because they were never deeply plowed with a sharp sense of sin! These know nothing of subsoil plowing, so as to turn their very hearts up under the keen plow of the Law. But that man who knows what sin means and has had it burned with a hot iron into the core of his spirit—he is the man who knows what Grace means—and is likely to understand its freeness and fullness! He who knows the evil of sin is likely to know the value of the precious blood! I could scarcely ask for any of you a better thing than that you should fully know, in your own spirit, the horribleness of sin as far as your mind is capable of bearing the strain.

David was so conscious of his guilt that he compares himself to a leper. The language of the text refers, I believe, to the cleansing of lepers. Hyssop was dipped in blood and then the sacrificial blood was sprinkled upon the polluted individuals to make them clean. David felt that he had become a leprous man. He felt like one who had contracted the horrible, the polluting, the incurable disease of leprosy! He felt that he was not fit to come near to God, nor even to associate with his fellow man. He confessed that his guilt was such that he ought to be put away, shut out from the assembly of the people. His guilt had polluted a whole nation, of whom he was the representative and to whom he was the example. Did you ever feel like that? I tell you that you do not know all the pollution of sin unless you have been made to feel yourself to be a polluted thing! If you had 50 leprosies, they would not pollute you like sin, for a poor leper is not really polluted—he may bear a grand and noble soul within that rotting body!

Sin, alone, is real pollution, hellish pollution, abominable pollution! There is nothing in Hell that is worse than sin—even the devil is only a devil because sin made him a devil—so that sin is the most horrible and intolerable evil that can fall upon the spirit of man. David felt that dreadful Truth of God. But yet, mark you, though he felt the horror of the disease of sin, his faith was strong enough to make him use the confident language of the text, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." "Black as my sin is, filthy as it is, if You do but purge me, O my God, I shall be clean!"

Yes, David is sure that God can cleanse him. He pleads as one who has no question upon the matter towards God. His prayer is—"You purge me, and I shall be clean! Apply the precious blood of the great Sacrifice to me, O God, and I shall be whiter than snow!" There is about the Hebrew a sense which I could hardly give you, unless I were to put it thus—"You will un-sin me." As though God would take his sin right away and leave him

without a speck of sin, without a single grain of it upon him! God could make him as if he had never sinned at all! Such is the power of the cleansing work of God upon the heart that He can restore innocence to us and make us as if we had never been stained with transgression at all! Do you believe this? Do you believe this? Oh, you are a happy man, if, under the deepest conceivable sense of sin, you can still say, "Yes, I believe that He can wash me and make me whiter than snow!"

But will you follow me while I go a step farther? The words of our text are, in the Hebrew, in the future tense and they might be read, "You shall purge me and I shall be clean," so that David was not only certain about the power of God to cleanse him, but about the fact that God would do it—"You shall purge me." He cast himself, confessing his sin, at the feet of his God and he said, "My God, I believe that, through the great Atonement, You will make me clean!" Have you faith like that of David? Do you believe this? Beloved, some of us can boldly say, "Yes, that we do! We believe not only that God can pardon us, but that He will. Yes, that He has pardoned us and we come to Him, now, and plead that He would renew in us the cleansing work of the precious blood and of the water which flowed from the side of Christ— and so make us perfectly clean! Yes, we believe that He will do it! We are sure that He will and we believe that He will continue to cleanse us till we shall need no more cleansing!"

Hart's hymn sings concerning the precious blood—

"If guilt removed, returns and remains, Its power may be proved again and again." This witness is true and we set our seal to it.

The Psalmist David believed that although his sin was what it was, yet God could make a rapid cleansing of it. He speaks of the matter as worked promptly and speedily. It took seven days to cleanse a leper, but David does not follow the type when the reality excels it! He says, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean." It is done directly, done at once—washed and whiter than snow! It will not take seven days to wipe out the crimes of seven years! No, if a man had lived 70 years in sin—if he did but come to his God with humble confession and if the precious blood of Jesus were applied to him—his sins would vanish in the twinkling of an eye! The two facts come together. "Purge me—I shall be clean. Wash me—I shall be whiter than snow." It is done at once! Note the rapidity of the cleansing.

Mark the effectual character of the purgation. "Purge me, and I shall be clean." Not, "I shall think that I am," but "I shall be. I shall be like a man perfectly healed of leprosy." Such a man was not purged in theory, but in reality, so that he could go up to the court of the Lord's house and offer his sacrifice among the rest of Israel. So, if you wash me, Lord, I shall be really clean! I shall have access to You and I shall have fellowship with all Your saints.

Once more—David believed that God could give him internal cleansing. "In the hidden parts," he says, "You shall make me to know wisdom." I like that about the text. It is, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean." Where?— Hands? Yes. Feet? Yes. Head? Yes. All this

is good, but what about the heart? There is the part that you and I cannot cleanse, but God can! Imagination, conscience, memory—every inward faculty—the Lord can purge us in all these! "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." This includes the whole man. And this declaration falls from the lips of a man who knew himself to be as defiled as he could be, a very leper, only fit to be put away into his own house and shut up there for fear of contaminating the rest of mankind! He boldly says, "If the Lord washes me, I shall be clean, I am certain of it! I shall be perfectly clean and fit to have communion with Him."

Notice one more remark on this point, namely, that David, while thus conscious of his sins, is so full of faith towards God that he appropriates all the cleansing power of God to Him—"Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." There are four personal words in one verse. It is easy to believe that God can forgive

sin in general, but that He can forgive mine in particular—that is the point! Yes, it is easy to believe that He can forgive man, but to believe that He will forgive such a poor specimen of the race as I am is quite another matter! To take personal hold upon Divine blessings is a most blessed faculty. Let us exercise it. Can you do it? Brothers and Sisters, can you do it? You that cannot call yourselves Brothers and Sisters, you far-away ones, can you come to Christ, all black and defiled as you are and just believe in Him that you shall be made whole? You will not be believing too much of the Great Sinners' Friend! According to your faith be it unto you.

III. This brings us to our third and last point, upon which I will speak with great brevity. Notice that A DEEP SENSE OF SIN AND A CONFIDENT FAITH IN GOD MAKE THE LORD'S NAME AND GLORY PREEMINENTLY CONSPICUOUS. God is the great Actor in the text before us. He purges and He washes—and none but He. The sins and the cleansing are, both of them, too great to allow of any inferior handling.

"Purge me" He makes it all God's work. He does not say anything about the Aaronic priest. What a poor miserable creature the priest is when a soul is under a sense of sin! Have you ever met with a person who has been really broken in heart who has gone to a priest? If so, he has been made ashamed of his looking to man, for he has found him to be a broken cistern that can hold no water! Why, my Brothers and Sisters, if we had this platform full of popes and one poor soul under a sense of sin to be comforted—the whole lot of them could not touch the sinner's wound, nor do anything to stanch the bleeding of his heart! No, no, the words of the best of men fall short of our need! As the dying monk said, "Tua vulnera, Jesu!"—"Your wounds, Jesus!" These can heal, but nothing else can! God must, Himself, wash us! Nothing short of His personal interposition will suffice.

Now, notice the next word, "Purge me with hyssop." We must have faith, which is represented by hyssop. How little David makes of faith! He thinks of it only as the poor "hyssop." Many questions have been raised as to what hyssop was. I do not think that anybody knows. Whatever it may have been, it was a plant that had many little shoots and leaves, because

its particular fitness was that the blood would cling to its many branches. Its use was that it stored the blood and held it there in ruby drops upon each one of its sprays—and that is the particular suitability of faith for its peculiar office. It is an excellent thing in itself, but the particular virtue of faith lies in this—that it holds the blood so as to apply it. Scarlet wool was used in the ceremony of cleansing and the scarlet wool was useful because it soaked in the blood and held it within itself. But the hyssop was still more useful because while it held the blood, it held it ready to drop. That is how faith holds the great Sacrifice—it holds the atoning blood upon every spray, ready to drop upon the tortured conscience! Faith is the sprinkling hyssop—it is nothing in itself, but it applies to the soul that which is our cleansing and our life!

David, moreover, seems to me to say, "Lord, if You will purge me with the blood of the great Sacrifice, it does not matter how it is done! Do it with the little hyssop from off the wall. However tiny and insignificant the plant may be, yet it will hold the precious drops and bring them to my heart and I shall be whiter than snow." It is God, you see—it is God all the way through.

"And I"—there is just that mention of himself. But what of himself? Why, "I shall be the receiver. I shall be clean." "I." What about that intensive, "I"? "I shall be whiter than snow"—I shall be the material on which You work—the guilty pardoned—the polluted made clean—the leper made whole and permitted to come up to Your House.

That is all I ask of my Lord tonight—that He will let me come to His table and be the receiver, the eater, the drinker, the cleansed one, the debtor, the bankrupt debtor, plunged head over heels in debt to the heavenly Creditor! Oh, to be nothing! To lie at His feet! Oh, to be nothing but washed—washed in the blood! How sweet it is no longer to ride on horses, but to have God for your All in All—no longer to go forth, sword in hand, boasting our strength and glorying in what we can do—but to sit down at Jesus' feet and sing the victory which He, alone, has won!

Come, let us pray from our very hearts, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." God bless you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.