

GRACE FOR THE GUILTY.

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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“I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.” — Isaiah 44:22.

THIS declaration was not made to a pious and praying people, who kept near their God, but was spoken to idolatrous Israel, — to those who, after having drunk from the fountain of living waters, turned aside to drink the drops that were to be found in broken cisterns. It was spoken to a people who, after they had tasted the good things of God, and known the high privileges of true religion, yet turned aside with the nations of the world, forsook the God of Jacob, made unto themselves graven images that were no gods, provoked the Lord to jealousy, and moved him to wrath against them on account of their *sins*. These words of wondrous mercy were not spoken to the nation of Israel while living near to God, who notwithstanding would have had sins to mourn over and to be forgiven; but they were addressed to a brutish and foolish nation, to a harlot people, who had committed wickedness with all the idols of the heathen, — to those who had offered incense on their hills to the false gods, who had made their children *pass* through the fire of Topheth, in the valley of the children of Hinnom, — to men who were filled with abominable and loathsome *sins*, men who had committed the crimes of Sodom, and bowed down to Baal and Ashtaroth. This promise was made to those who had wandered far from God; not because they repented, and because they believed,

but simply and out{rely of the sovereign grace of God; because, having set his affection upon them, he would not turn away from them; because, having sworn unto their father Abraham that he would bless his seed for ever, he still remembered them. He forgot them not, notwithstanding they had forgotten him days without number; but provided them a Savior, and now sends them, by the mouth of his prophet, this comfortable assurance, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.”

We will take this text as it shall open to us gradually; and, therefore, we will give you the thoughts as they come to us.

I. The first is, that A MAN’S BINS MAY BE REALLY FORGIVEN LONG BEFORE HE KNOWS IT; for it is written, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions.”

If they knew it, there would be no necessity for telling it to them. If they understood in their hearts that their transgressions were blotted out, what need had they of a prophet to come and tell them that it was so? Long before a man knows that his transgressions are pardoned, God may have pardoned and blotted them out. I do not say that a man receives actual pardon in his own soul, or a sense of justification, without knowing it. I cannot believe, with some, that a man may be born again without being aware of it. I know there never was a natural birth without pangs and pains; and I am equally sure that there never will be a spiritual birth without some suffering and some agonies. A man is not to be born again when he is asleep; he is to know it, and know it he will at some time or other in his life; not constantly, it may be, but nevertheless he will know, even if it be only for an hour, that he is a child of God. Methinks, he who never had one minute of assurance, never had faith. He who never knew himself to be a child of God, who never could say, “I believe in Jesus,” never could see his sins blotted out, — methinks such an one does not know what faith is. It may endure for ever so short a time; but if it be real assurance, it springs from true faith, and the man is saved.

But a man may have his sins blotted out before he knows it; and they may be blotted out when he does not believe that they are, and blotted out when he is full of doubt on the point; yea, they may be pardoned even when he cannot be persuaded that they actually are. I can tell you of persons whom, in my inmost soul, I believe to be the subjects of divine grace; I can see in them the marks of God’s power, — he has convinced them of sin, they are

humble, they are penitent, they are prayerful, they feel their guilt, they confess it; — yet they have a haziness about their views of the atonement, and from this arises great darkness of spirit. They cannot see the plan of salvation, and because they cannot see the plan, they do not therefore get a joyful sense of the thing itself; yet if these persons were soon to die, I am well assured that, before they departed this life, God would give them such a glimpse of sunshine that all the clouds would be dissipated, and they would be able to enter heaven, singing as they waded through the stream of Jordan, “Christ is with me; death is nought. Christ is with me; he is my Helper and my stay.” Long ere they know it, their sins are forgiven.

Besides, there is a doctrine very much scandalized by certain professors, and rejected by many persons, but which I firmly believe in. I mean, the doctrine of the eternal and complete justification of all the elect in the person of Christ Jesus. It does seem to me that, when the Divine Surety paid our debts, our debts were discharged; that, when he took our guilt upon his head, and suffered for us on Calvary, our sins were in that moment blotted out. Some will say, “But the *sins* were not in existence then.” No, they were not, except in the foreknowledge of God; but the foreknowing God had all those sins written in the book of his foreknowledge long before they were committed, and by the blood of Christ, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” he did for ever blot out the crimes and sins of all his covenant people; so that every one who shall be saved at last *was* justified in Christ when he died. The sins of all who shall be saved were atoned for by Christ, though they know nothing of it until God reveals it to them, by his Spirit, in the moment when they exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If the debt was paid, then surely a full receipt was given; if the crime was then laid on Jesu’s head, and he was then punished for it, surely then the crime ceased to be. If you say that the crime was not in existence, because it was not committed, on the other hand, I would tell you that Christ died for it before it was committed. Therefore we are quite right in saying that it was blotted out before it was committed. I received my pardon when I believed; but it was purchased when Christ died. In *the person of Christ* I was as completely, and as truly, in God’s sight, justified then as I am now; but I knew it not, it was not revealed to me, I could not rejoice in it, I could not be blessed by it. The blood-bought pardon could not absolve me till I had a sense of it; the pardon of Christ could not redeem me from the prison of sin until I knew about it; but yet it was virtually given. When the ransom price was

paid, the freedom was really secured; though the slave was still scarred, and branded, and chained to his our, he was a purchased man, and would one day receive his liberty. Oh! are not your hearts gladdened, and do not your eyes glisten? Though you do not know that you are pardoned, it may be true that your sins are blotted out; though you do not know that you have been justified, it may be true that you are “accepted in the Beloved.” “Oh!” says one, “if I thought there were a hope or even a chance of such a thing for me, I would go to Jesus, though my sins had ‘like a mountain rose.’” “Go, then, poor sinner; and if thou canst not read thy pardon there, if thou canst not see the handwriting of ordinances that was against thee nailed to his cross, come back, and say that I speak not the truth. There have been many sinners who went to Christ full of sin; but there never was one who came back from him as he went. Many have gone to him guilty; but none have been turned away from his door unforgiven, He blots out, as a thick cloud, their transgressions, and, as a cloud, their sins.

A man may have his sins forgiven, then, before he knows it; and a true Christian, who has come to the Lord Jesus, may have his sins blotted out even when he does not believe they are. The devil can make you believe anything. No lawyer is equal to him, — though, some lawyers have most undoubtedly learned a few lessons at his hands; — for not only can he make what is half the truth appear the whole truth, but he can take a lie, and gild it with truth. How often does he persuade a truly justified man that he is not justified! It often comes to pass that, when God has pardoned a poor sinner, the devil will come to him, and tell him that he is not pardoned; and so much logic will he use with him, that he will make him believe that he is not pardoned, although he really is. Though every crime of that man has been forgiven long ago, though all his iniquities have been cast into the depths of the sea, Satan will agitate his conscience, stir up his soul, bind him with unbelief, cast gravel-stones into his food, cause him to eat wormwood and drink the water of gall, as Jeremiah has said, until he will not only deny that he has ever tasted that the Lord is gracious, but he will be in such despair that he will fancy it is not possible that he ever can be saved. Satan will persuade a justified man that he is yet “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” Are there not some of you who have had many pleasant days, many sweet hours of fellowship with Christ, but in some dark moment the thought crossed your mind that you might be a hypocrite, after all? From that hour, you have not been able to come near to him once; and though you have trusted under the *shadow* of his wings,

yet you have not seen the *light* of his countenance. Well, but let me tell thee, brother, the pardon is not revoked because it is concealed from view; the pardon is just as good when thou dost not see it as when thou dost see it. A pardon is a pardon; and though the condemned criminal does not see the pardon, it is unrevoked. God takes care of our pardon for us; he does not put it into our hands, for Satan might take it away from us; but he lets us have a copy of it to read, and though Satan steals the copy, he cannot get the original; that is safe in the archives of heaven. Up there, in the ark: of God, where he keepeth the deeds of the universe, there he preserves the writings of the pardon of our sins. Ay, though I may doubt whether I am pardoned, if I really am so, I am so; and I ought not so much to depend upon my own frames and feelings as upon this, — God hath said to me once, “I have blotted out thy sins;” he hath said it to me twice, I read it in his Word; and though Satan says they are not removed, I believe they are, and I will stand fast in this assurance, because God saith, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions.”

II. Another remark upon our text is, that **NOTHING CAN SO STRONGLY LEAD A MAN TO COME TO GOD AS A SENSE OF PARDONED SIN:** “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.”

Enthusiastic divines have thought that men were to be brought to virtue by the hissings of the boiling cauldron; they have imagined that, by beating a hell-drum in the ears of men, they should make them believe the gospel; that, by the terrific sights and sounds of Sinai’s mountain, they should drive men to Calvary. They have preached perpetually, “Do this, and thou art damned.” In their preaching, there preponderates a voice horrible and terrifying; if you listened to them, you might think you sat near the mouth of the pit, and heard the “dismal groans and sullen moans,” and all the shrieks of the tortured ones in perdition. Men think that by these means sinners will be brought to the Savior. They, however, in my opinion, think wrongly: men are frightened into hell, but not into heaven. Men are sometimes driven to Sinai by powerful preaching. Far be it from us to condemn the use of the law, for “the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ;” but if you want to get a man to *Christ*, the best way is to bring Christ to the man. It is not by preaching law and terrors that men are made to love God.

*“Law and terrors do but harden,
All the while they work alone;
But a sense of blood-bought pardon,
Soon dissolves a heart of stone.”*

I sometimes preach “the terror of the Lord,” as Paul did when he said, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;” but I do it as did the apostle, to bring them to a sense of their sins. The way to bring men to Jesus, to give them peace, to give them joy, to give them salvation through Christ, is, by God the Spirit’s *assistance*, to preach Christ, — to preach a full, free, perfect pardon. Oh, how little there is of preaching Jesus Christ! We do not preach enough about his glorious name. Some preach dry doctrines; but there is not the unction of the Holy One revealing the *fullness* and preciousness of the Lord Jesus. There is plenty of “Do this, and live,” but not enough of “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*” O sweet Jesus, have not some of thy disciples forgotten thee? Have not some of thy preachers almost lost the sound of thy glorious name, and scarcely known its blest pronunciation? Send us once again, we pray thee, the spirit of love and of a sound mind, that we may preach more fully Jesus Christ our Lord!

But now, my friends, let me ask you earnestly, when aid you over feel, under a sense of sin, the most inclination to come to the Savior? I think you will reply at once, when you felt that there was hope for you, and that he had blotted out your *sins*. No man will come to Jesus while he thinks hardly of him; but when he has sweet thoughts of him, then will he come. You have no doubt heard the old figure, borrowed from John Bunyan, of a certain army that was inside a city, and which was attacked by another host. The king outside said, “Give up the city directly, or I’ll hang every man of you.” “Nay,” said they, “we will fight to the death, and we will never give up.” “I will burn your *city*,” said he, “*and* utterly destroy it, and raze it to the ground, and slay your wives and children. I will wholly cut off the race, and exterminate you.” “Ah!” said they, “then we will fight till we die; we will never open the doors.” Seeing that threats were of no avail, he sent another message, “If you will only open your gates, and come out to me, I will let you go away, bag and baggage; I will give all of you your lives and liberty; and what is more, I will let you have your lands again on a small tribute, and you shall be my servants and friends for ever.” “Straightway,” says the parable, “they unbarred the gates, and came tumbling out to the monarch directly.” That is the way, by the Spirit’s help,

to get a sinner to come in penitence to Jesus, to tell him that the Lord says this, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." Come along, beloved I Why are you afraid of Jesus? He says, "Return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." Come along, brother, to the Lord Jesus, if thou art a sinner. I speak to that one who feels himself a lost and guilty one. Come with me to Jesus, for he has blotted out thy transgressions, as a thick cloud, and, as a cloud, thy sins; and he has redeemed thee. "Oh!" says one, "I dare not come in; he will frown upon me." Come and try him. He says he has forgiven you; come you in at the door, and you will find it true that Christ has forgiven you. Methinks I see you standing and looking at yourself, and saying, "Oh! was I not worse than ten thousand fools to be afraid to come in, — to be afraid to trust him, when he had pardoned me beforehand? Was I not worse than ignorant, to stand back from my best Friend, as if he had been a lion, — to start away from the dear Jesus who had purchased my ransom, as if he were my foe? One would think, dear friends, when you are so loth to come to Christ, that you were coming to receive condemnation instead of coming to be saved. Men come unwillingly to execution; and must they come as unwillingly to Christ as they do to the slaughter? You think him some angry judge; you have bad ideas of my sweet Jesus, or else you would not keep away from him when he is continually crying, "Return unto me," "Return unto me;" but you would so love him, and rejoice in him, that you would feel the greatest pleasure in the world in coming to him?

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON.

PSALM 125.

Verse 1. *They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.*

Various conquerors have destroyed the buildings upon Mount Zion, but the mountain itself is still there. None have ever dug it up, and cast it into the Mediterranean Sea. It stands fast, and will stand there as long as the world endures; and "they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion," they shall abide as firmly as that sacred mountain does. Nothing can move them, or remove them; they are in the hands of Christ, and none can pluck them thence. "My Father, which gave theta me, is greater than all;" says

Christ, “and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” Oh, what a solidity does faith give to a man!

2. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.

This verse shows the believer’s safety, as the former one showed his stability. As the mountains stood to guard the sacred city, so does God stand round about his people as a wall of fire. Before any can hurt the believer, they must first break through the ramparts of the Godhead. It is not merely said that horses of fire and chariots of fire are round about his people, though that is true; but that the Lord himself is round about them, and that not occasionally, but “henceforth even for ever.” I believe in the eternal safety of the saints, and I would base it upon these two verses alone if there were no other Scriptures to that effect. If they never are to be moved any more than Mount Zion, and if God is round about them for ever, then they must live, and they must stand. There is no “if” or “but” put in here, — “provided that they behave themselves,” and so on. No; but, trusting in God, they never shall be moved, and God will be round about them as their sure defense.

I fancy I hear someone say, “If it be so, why am I tried and troubled?” Ah, my brother, it was never contemplated that you should be free from trouble! There is a rod in the covenant; and if you never feel it, you may suspect that you are not in the covenant.

3. For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.

You will feel that rod, but it shall not rest upon you. The days of persecution shall be shortened for the elect’s sake; and though, perhaps, the devil may be more furious with you than ever, having great wrath because he knows that his time is short; yet God will put an end to your suffering, your persecution, your oppression, for he knows your frame, and he is aware that, perhaps, if the temptation were pushed too far, you might yield. Therefore will he makes way of escape for you; he means to try and test you, but not too much, he will abate the fierceness of man’s wrath, and deliver you.

4. Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.

True believers are good; especially are they good at heart, for grace has made them so, and God therefore will do them good. He will bless them more and more; he will sanctify them, and prepare them for the ineffable goodness that is at his right hand for ever and ever.

5. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.

There are there always have been — in the Church of God some who have been the Church's dishonor. They have crooked ways of their own, and, in due time, under stress of persecution, or through temptation, they "turn aside unto their crooked ways." They leave the path of trustfulness and holiness, as Judas did, as Demas did, as many beside have done. What will God do with them? He will "lead them forth;" he will show them up; he will bring them into the light; and in what company will he lead them forth? Why, "with the workers of iniquity," for if they were not such in outward action, they were really so in thought and heart. And where will he lead them? He will lead them forth to execution; they shall go among the malefactors, they shall be led forth to die. But will this hurt the Lord's people? No; when the chaff is separated from the wheat, the wheat shall be all the purer. "Peace shall be upon Israel." All the Lord's chosen, pleading, princely people — his Israel — shall have peace upon them. May we all be found amongst them, for Christ's sake! Amen.