

other way but this to the divine favour, no shelter from the sting of unpardoned guilt but here. All other will be but fig-leaf covers.

Is not pardon of sin, and acceptance with God, worth the seeking? It makes a man happy, Psal. xxxii. 1. A man may be rich and yet reprobate, great in this world and yet damned in the next. His portion fat, yet his soul lean. But a justified man is a happy man. Worldly things come from God's hand, but this great blessing from his heart. It will be sweet sauce to the bitterest dish; it will cause you to glory even in tribulation. The righteousness of Christ justifies a man, and this makes every bitter water sweet. "For there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?"

And if you would give evidence of your interest in imputed righteousness, you must do it by inherent righteousness. Shew your faith by your works. Faith without works is dead, being alone. Amen.

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MAN'S INIQUITIES TESTIFYING AGAINST HIM.

SERMON XXI.

JEREMIAH xiv. 7,

*O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake; for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee.*

In the preceding part of the chapter, there is mournful narration of a sad state in which the land was, by reason of a famine. National sins bring on national judgments. In the words of the text, the prophet prays for the removal of the judgment. In the text we have four things.

1. A concession. "Though our iniquities testify against us." He grants that their iniquities, which brought on the judgment and kept it on, did testify against them; or, as the Hebrew, answered against them. We have the same phrase, Isaiah iii. 9, and lix. 12. It is a metaphor taken from judicatories, in which witnesses being in a process, and questions being put to them, they answer, and testify against the guilty. Sin, as the devil, first tempts, then accuseth. When they came to make their address to God, they found their sins at their right, witnessing against them.

2. A petition. "Do thou it." Take pity upon us, and relieve us; arise for our help and our relief. They do not condescend upon the particular thing which they would have him to do for their relief. He knew many ways to bring it about; the prophet, therefore, would limit him to no particular way, for beggars should not be choosers, and sovereignty must be allowed a latitude.

3. We have their plea for mercy. "For thy name's sake." By this they acknowledge the truth of the testimony given in against them by their sins, and justify God in his proceeding against them. They acknowledge their own unworthiness of his favour. By the name of God, is understood God himself. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgression for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "Help us," says the Psalmist, "O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name; and deliver us and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake." These last words, you see, superadds this, namely, as he hath manifested himself to his people. The phrase seems to include a respect to a final cause, and that with respect to his attributes, Exod. xxxiv. 5—7, and so they plead for the manifestation of his own glory, the glory of his grace and mercy, that he would do it for them. Joshua pleads thus, when their enemies were like to overcome them, "And what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" And this is the advantage of the people of God, that his glory is joined with their interests; and particularly as to the judgment of famine. See Ezekiel xxxvi. 30, compared with ver. 32, where it appears that the glory of God suffered through their reproach. There is in this plea, also, a respect to a meritorious cause, which is none else but Messiah, Christ; of whom the Lord says his name is in him, Exod. xxiii. 21, and in whom his glory shines, 2 Cor. iv. 6. We must not think the prophet here addresseth himself to God, absolutely considered; for his majesty would dazzle and confound the eyes of the holiest on earth; but, even under the Old Testament, they directed their prayers towards the temple as a type of Christ, Psal. v. 7; and they very well knew that the glory of his name, which they urged in prayer, behoved to shine through the Messiah.

4. A confession. The prophet confesseth, in the name of the church, backsliding; a grievous sin, a returning to sin after vows, engagements, and resolutions against it; and after beginnings of a reformation. Yea, that these backslidings were many. They had often gone back in many points; and, adds he, "have sinned against thee," where the emphasis lies on the word *thee*. As when David says, "against thee; thee only, have I sinned." They

had lifted up themselves against the sovereign Lord of heaven; even against thee, to whom we must now come for help in our affliction. It comes in as a reason, "for we have sinned against thee;" intimating that they had no hope but in his name; and if that would not do, their case was desperate. But withal, it lays out before the Lord their deep sinfulness, as that whereby his name might be rendered illustrious, in coming over all their many backslidings.

DOCTRINE. That though the iniquities of the people of God, when they are awakened, do testify against them; yet it is their duty and disposition to hold on in their suit, pleading with him for a gracious answer for his own name's sake. Or,

Though the people of God find their iniquities testify against them in their addresses to God; yet they must and will hold on their suit, improving God's own name's sake as their only plea for a favourable answer. Here I shall,

I. Shew what it is for a man to find his iniquities testify against him in his addresses to God.

II. How comes it that sin is found thus testifying against men.

III. I will speak a little to the plea, "For thy name's sake." We are then,

I. To shew what it is for a man to find his iniquities testify against him in his addresses to God. Take these reflections upon it:—

1. Sin is not dead when it is committed. Though it may be buried and out of mind for a time, yet it is buried quick, and lives to be a witness before the Lord, against the sinner. The act is transient, but the guilt is of a permanent nature. "If thou doest not well," said God to Cain, "sin lieth at the door." Lieth as a sleeping mastiff at the door, which will, ere long, awaken. "I will reprove thee," says God to the sinner, "and set them, (thy sins,) in order before thine eyes."

2. When the man draws near to God in the exercise of his worship, sin meets him there; appears to him as a terrible ghost. So it is in the text, Isa. lix. 11—13. Many times the Christian's sin, which was before out of his sight, meets with him before the throne of grace. When the soul draws nigh to God, the brightness of his glory makes their spots to appear. "Woe is me!" said Isaiah, "for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." Former sins then come to mind, which makes David say, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions." Present sinfulness is then also ready to stare the man in the face.

3. Sin testifies two things for God against the man. *First*, their sins witness their unworthiness of any favour from the Lord, and makes them say, with the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." And with Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." Sins also testify against men their liableness to punishment, yea, to a curse instead of a blessing, so that the soul is often made to fear some remarkable judgment; for a guilty conscience is a terrible companion in the presence of a holy God. When sin gives in such a testimony, no wonder they stand trembling, fearing to hear the doom pronounced next.

4. This witness is convincing. So, in the text, we find the panel denies not the testimony, but pleads for mercy. Sin, testifying against the man before the Lord, stops the sinner's mouth. "I acknowledge my transgressions," says David, "and my sin is ever before me." A man may shift the conviction of others, and deny their testimony; but here, himself is both the guilty person, the accuser, and the witness.

5. Upon this, the gracious soul is filled with holy shame, and self-loathing. The person says, with Ezra, "O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass grown up unto the heavens." So the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Now his sin has found him out; and as a thief is ashamed when his crime is discovered, so is that soul; and this holy shame is vented by confession, self-judging, self-condemning, and self-abhorring. Then he hath a difficulty to get a name to express sufficiently his own vileness, and then he is the chief of sinners in his own esteem.

*Lastly*, He is damped, and his confidence before the Lord is marred as to any access to him, or obtaining favour at his hand. "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." When the man lived near God, he had boldness and access with confidence unto the Father; but now his backslidings stare him in the face, and it is much if he be not quite overcome, and made to say, "my hope and strength is perished from the Lord." Then faith has difficulties indeed to grapple with, which may make it stagger; but then the soul must fall to the plea, "for his own name's sake." I now proceed,

11. To shew how comes it, that sin is found thus testifying against men.

1. It flows from the nature of sin and guilt upon an enlightened conscience. God hath said, "But if ye will not do so, behold ye have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out." Conscience is a tender part, and when it has light it cannot but testify against the man, when he appears in the presence of an offended God. The conscience of some is seared, and so they find nothing of this testimony; but sin will lie down in the grave with them; and awake when they awake.

2. It is a punishment from the Lord for former backslidings and miscarriages. Sin that is sweet in the mouth, is hereby often made bitter in the belly. Confidence with God is no small mercy, and the want of it can be no small judgment to them that know the happiness of such a case.

*Lastly*, God so orders it, that it may be a mean to humble them, and make them more watchful against sin for the time to come. Then the Lord says to them, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of Hosts." "What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." By these, the soul is brought to repenting Israel's resolution. "I will go and return to my first husband; for then it was better with me than now." And the bankrupts resolve, in the Lord's strength, that if they had their stock recovered again, they will look better to it.

III. I shall speak a little to the plea. "For thy name's sake."

I told you in the explanation, that it imports two things:

1. That we must plead with him for his Christ's sake; and when guilt stares us in the face, we must look to God through the vail of Christ's flesh. A guilty conscience presents to the sinner a God armed with vengeance. It is then the wisdom of the sinner to desire, Exod. xx. 18, 19. When the avenger of blood pursues, let us flee to the city of refuge; and when we are to appear before the Lord, we must embrace Christ in the arms of faith. It was the custom of the Molossians, when they were to seek a favour of their prince, they took up his son in their arms. This is the way in the court of heaven. This is a safe and sure way, for in him the father is well pleased, and we shall be accepted in the beloved.

2. We must plead with him for his glory's sake. Punishing of sin glorifies God much, but pardoning of sin glorifies him more. He is tender of his own glory, and so should we. So our Lord teaches us to pray, "for thine is the glory." When God hears, the benefit redounds to us, the glory to him; and so we are to make use

of it as a plea for a hearing; and this way of pleading empties a soul of all confidence in itself, and gives glory to God.

For APPLICATION. We, especially such of us as are to sit down at the table of the Lord, may here see our case and our cure (as for those who will not seek God, their sins cannot testify against them before the throne of grace, seeing they come not there; but before the tribunal they shall testify, and there they must come) when we are thinking on this solemn address unto God. If we look a little into our consciences, we will be fair to see a tribunal erected there, and our sins giving in a testimony against us; and what else means that terror and dejectedness of spirit that sometimes seizeth professors upon the news of such an occasion approaching? What is the matter, but that they hear the bridegroom cometh, and they are not ready to go out to meet him. The people of God have been filled with joy at such a time, and it is a guilty conscience, surely, that makes it otherwise.

Again, what else means that fear of not attaining to communion with God in the ordinance. The soul is afraid that all go wrong; that the Lord turn to them the back and not the face, and that they meet a judgment instead of a blessing. What guilt creates these fears? Now I shall condescend upon some particular iniquities that will readily stare us in the face, while we are making this address to God.

1. Our former unworthy communicating. Have we not handled the holy things of God with unclean hands, and profaned the ordinance by rash approaches to it? No wonder this testifies against us now, and mars our confidence before the Lord.

2. Our living at a distance from God, and not endeavouring to keep up communion with God in our ordinary walk. This, in our approaches to God on solemn occasions, may meet us with that entertainment which God gave the Israelites, when he said to them, "Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation." They that are habitually prepared have less to do than others, to get actual preparation. But O! it is a sad reflection for the soul to think, now I am to seek access to God in this solemn duty; but ah! I have slighted it when I might have had it; and will the Lord give it me now, will he answer me when I call.

3. The sins by which religion hath been wounded, and by which we have given occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. Thus David's sin was ever before him. No wonder the soul in this case be afraid to sit down at the Lord's table with his people, lest the Lord be provoked to send some judgment upon him, by which his glory, bespattered with the sinner's folly, may be vindicated.

4. Our returning to these sins which we have sometimes renounced, against which we have resolved and vowed. Conscience may tell some of us we have returned with the dog to our vomit. Backslidings stared them in the face in the text, and marred their confidence with the Lord. Backsliding is very provoking in the sight of God; and no wonder that the sense of it make the soul to tremble in approaching to God.

5. Not improving access to God, when we had it. Sometimes people are at great pains to get communion with God, and nearness to him; and when they get it, how easily do they let it go. "The slothful man roasteth not that which he taketh in hunting;" and therefore no wonder that they meet with that challenge which may make them stagger, "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people we are Lords; we will come no more unto thee?"

6. Present indisposition of soul for the work to which we are called. Solemn ordinances require solemn preparation. When the bridegroom is coming our lamps should be trimmed, but it is to be feared many of us are far from it. How can a dead and stupid frame of spirit fail to bring us heavy tidings, and prophecy evil things concerning us?

*Lastly*, The sin of our nature, the spring and source of all these. The evil heart, "the heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." That corrupt bent and inclination of the soul to evil, and evil continually. That body of sin, which makes us so unmeet for the communion of the body of Christ, and for all duties. This is that which often stares them in the face, so as it looks them out of countenance before the Lord.

But what shall a sinner do, who has these or the like testifying against him, and marring his confidence before God?

1. You must not give over, you must plead in opposition to them all. Satan sometimes gets advantage here. But pray consider your need. Mercy you must have, God's favour you cannot want. Therefore you must reason with yourselves as the lepers at the gate of Samaria, and lay down Esther's noble resolution, "that you will go in unto the king, and if you perish, you perish."

2. Betake yourselves to this plea in the text, and plead with God for his own name's sake. He will yet be gracious unto you. Acknowledge that you are unworthy of any favour, that you deserve to be made a monument of his vengeance; but this plea, for God's own name's sake, being left, you must improve it in your addresses to God. Give away yourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, receive him as he hath offered himself to you. And then,

1. Plead the sufferings of Christ, and his satisfaction to justice. Plead the sufficiency of his merit, whereby he is able to save to the uttermost; the design of his sufferings to save sinners, and even the chief of sinners; the fruit of his sufferings; and cast yourself on Christ, resolved, if you perish, to perish at his footstool, and there will be no fear. Here you will get an answer to all the objections that conscience and the law can form against you.

2. Plead free grace and mercy, *Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.* The sun shines without hire, and God is gracious to sinners, because he will be gracious. Are our sins great, grace will be the more magnified in pardoning them. Wherefore is free grace manifested, but to be communicated? Depth of misery is the most fit object for exceeding riches of grace. This pleading is very acceptable to God. "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."

Plead the glory of his name in the world, *Joshua vii. 9.* You are called by his name. Without his help you cannot stand; and if you fall, his name will be dishonoured. If you get access to him, and communion with him, you shall live. If he send down the influences of his Spirit, you shall bring forth much fruit, and this will tend to his glory, *John xv. 8.* If he deny his influences, you will be withered creatures, and so God will be dishonoured.

*Lastly,* Plead his word. Say, "Lord, thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." All men are liars, but he is faithful and cannot deny himself. Get hold of a promise, and in time of need bring it forth, as Tamar did Judah's signet, &c., *Gen. xxxviii. 25.* This was Jacob's way, "And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good." O! but I fear the promises belong not to me. *ANSWER.* Lay thou hold on Christ as he is freely offered, and then be sure all the promises are thine, for they all meet in him. Amen.