

## **An Ascending Scale, or Steps of Thankful Praise**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day  
Afternoon, June 13, 1865

"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies."  
Psalm 103: 3, 4

Whatever God does, whatever God has done, is for his own glory. No other object, end, or aim can such a glorious Being as the great self-existent I AM have than his own glory and its manifestation to created intelligences. To this truth the Scriptures bear abundant witness. When, for instance, they speak of creation, their testimony is, "The heavens declare the glory of the Lord, and the firmament showeth his handiwork." So witnesses Psalm 8:1: "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens." In a similar strain, in the Book of Revelation, a song of praise issues from the four-and-twenty elders: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." (Rev. 4:11.) Nor is the glory of God less his end and aim in Providence. Thus when the Lord speaks in the Book of Numbers of his providential dealings with the children of Israel, after he had given that grand declaration, "As truly as I live all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord," he adds, "Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it." The glory which they ought to have seen was the glory of God in his

providential dealings with Israel in bringing them out of Egypt with a high hand and a stretched-out arm, in providing for them food from heaven and water out of the rock. (Numbers 14:21, 22.) Nay, the very reason of his providential dealings with Pharaoh was to manifest his glory, as the apostle quotes from the Book of Exodus: "For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." (Rom. 9:17.)

But though the glory of God is thus plainly manifested in creation and in providence, it is in *redemption* that it specially shines forth. We find therefore that after the four living creatures and four-and-twenty elders had fallen down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden vials (or rather as the word means "bowls"), full of odours, which are the prayers of saints, they sang a new song, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation." Nor were the angels mute; for though the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, yet all these mighty myriads said with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and blessing." Nor was creation itself silent, for we read, "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." (Rev. 5:13.) Thus, whether it be in creation, in providence, or in redemption, in all these domains of his wisdom and power, the end and object of God have ever been to manifest his

glory. Nor let any one dare to think that this was, so to speak, a selfish end. We must not measure God by ourselves, or ascribe anything unworthy or unbecoming to him. He is so infinitely above all his creatures that it would be unbecoming his glorious perfections to have as his main object anything but his own glory. And yet it was intended also for the happiness of those to whom his glory should be manifested. God is essentially good; so good that "there is none good but he." His name, his nature is love. To reveal then this goodness, to manifest and make known this love, was to create happiness for, and to fill with bliss and blessedness thousands of millions of created intelligences, both angels and men.

But besides the manifestation of his own personal glory, it always was the eternal purpose of God to glorify his dear Son. He is, as the Scripture testifies, "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his Person." (Heb. 1:3.) God is essentially invisible; for "he dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see." (1 Tim. 6:16.) And yet it was his eternal purpose to make himself seen and known. This is beautifully opened up by the apostle John: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." By "declared him," is meant made him known, discovered, and revealed him. It is in the face or Person of Jesus Christ that we see this glory of God, as the apostle speaks: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6.) Where God works by his Spirit there is a desire to behold his glory. We find therefore Moses pleading earnestly with the Lord, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." But what was the Lord's answer? "Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live." And

yet he gave him his request: "And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand, while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen." (Exodus 33:21, 22, 23.) Now of what was this cleft of the rock typical? Was it not a type of the Lord Jesus?

"Rock of ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in thee."

But what was the glory which the Lord displayed before the eyes of Moses when he stood safely sheltered in the cleft of the rock? "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." (Exodus 34:6, 7.) Thus we see that to be merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, is the glory of God in its manifestation. But what forgiveness is there of sin except in his dear Son? as we read: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Eph. 1:7.)

Our blessed Lord glorified his Father by doing his will upon earth. He therefore said, in his intercessory prayer, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4); and as he glorified the Father so did the Father glorify him, by supporting and sustaining him in the garden and upon the cross, by accepting his sacrifice, raising him from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand as the High Priest over the house

of God. For this he prayed, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was;" and this prayer God answered to the joy of his soul. Truly was that prayer then fulfilled which the church offered for him in anticipation: "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion; remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel." (Psalm 20:1, 2, 3, 4.)

Now as the Son has glorified the Father and the Father has glorified the Son, so there is a people in whom both the Father and the Son will be glorified. He therefore said, "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22); and again, "And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them" (John 17:10.) When, then, God's goodness and mercy in the face of Jesus Christ are manifested to this people whom he has formed for himself that they might show forth his praise, then they give him back his glory. But how is this done? By praising and blessing his holy name for the manifestation of his goodness and mercy to their soul. We thus see in what a blessed circle this glory runs. The Father glorifies the Son; the Son glorifies the Father; both unite in glorifying his chosen and redeemed people; and they glorify Father and Son by giving them the glory due to their name. We therefore read that "the Gentiles glorify God for his mercy." But how? "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles, and laud him all ye people." (Rom. 15:9-11.)

This is beautifully developed in the Psalm before us. It begins with blessing and praising God. "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord,

O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Why was it that David called upon his soul to bless the Lord—yea, appealed to every faculty within him to unite in blessing his holy name? Why did he charge it upon his soul not to forget all God's benefits, but bear them in perpetual remembrance? For this reason, that he might render unto God a tribute of thankful praise. Now by this God is glorified, for whoso offereth praise glorifieth him. We cannot add to his glory: for his glory is above the heavens. It is infinite, eternal, ineffable. No creature therefore can add to it or take from it; but he does permit poor worms of earth to glorify him by giving him a tribute of thankful praise. But this we can only do by believing in his dear Son, receiving of his fulness grace for grace, and blessing and praising his holy name for the manifestation of his goodness, mercy, and love, as brought into our soul by his own divine power. This will perhaps, however, be more clear if I am enabled in any measure to lay open and bring before you the rich treasures stored up in our text, in which David with all his heart praises and blesses the God of his salvation.

We may observe in it, I think, what I may perhaps call an ascending scale; for you will observe that it contains four clauses, and that each seems to rise one above another in offering the tribute of praise.

Let us thus look at the words again, carefully examine them, and see what we can find of the grace and goodness of God in them: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases: who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies."

The sweet Psalmist of Israel begins with praising God for the forgiveness of all his iniquities; he rises up a step further to bless him for the healing of all his diseases; he advances

upon higher ground still in praising him for redeeming his life from destruction; and then he puts the crowning glory upon the whole work by adding, "who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies."

In this way, with God's help and blessing, I shall this evening attempt to handle the subject before us.

I.—*"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities."*

i. This is a point on which the children of God are often deeply and painfully exercised. Yes, here it is that their souls often hang trembling as it were in the balance. There is a question to be settled between God and their conscience; there is something to be manifested with power to their hearts; there is a burden to be taken off their minds; there is a voice of mercy to be heard in their bosom. But whence arises this question, this burden, this need of the voice of mercy, of this manifestation of pardon? From a sense of the state into which sin original and sin actual have brought them. But what has made them feel this? Whence has come the light to see, the life to feel what sin is and the evils which sin has wrought? Is it not from God's own work upon their heart? He therefore begins with laying their sins as a burden upon their conscience. Sin has caused a separation between God and them, as he himself speaks: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." (Isa. 59:1, 2.) Nor is this all. We are "alienated and enemies in our mind from God by wicked works" (Col. 1:21); and in the days of our flesh we were "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." (Ephes. 2:12.) There

is then a barrier between them and God; and he can have nothing to do with them and they nothing to do with him until this barrier is removed. But it must be felt to be a barrier before there can be any sensible removal of it. To discover this barrier to us in its reality, its greatness, its insuperable nature, is a part of that divine teaching which is promised to the people of God. When, then, the Lord the Spirit begins his secret and sacred work upon their heart; when he lays judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, he discovers to them this barrier by discovering their iniquity. The work of the blessed Spirit, in commencing the work of grace, is to convince us of sin, to bring our iniquities to view, and to lay them upon our conscience, to reveal the justice of God, as aimed and directed against them, and thus manifest his unspeakable displeasure against all transgression and all transgressors. Until this work is wrought with a divine power, we are what the Scripture calls "dead in trespasses and sins." The first work of grace upon the soul, therefore, is to quicken the soul into spiritual life, and thus bring our iniquities to light, which before were neither seen nor felt, and especially those glaring and open sins in which most of us were found walking. It is he also which discovers to us our secret sins, as working in thought and imagination, and often in lust and desire, if we have not been guilty of flagrant offences, and by setting them in the light of God's countenance, to show us how offensive they are in the eyes of infinite purity. All this is very trying and distressing, and by some it seems to be considered needless. But it is a solemn fact, that until we are exercised with a burden of guilt; until we know by painful experience our lost and ruined condition; until we see something of the holiness and purity of God; until we have some apprehension of his inflexible justice and terrible displeasure against sin, we trifle with him, trifle with our immortal interests, play fast and loose with our own souls, live regardless of all the claims God



has upon us as the creatures of his hand. Besides which, we have naturally many false and foolish ideas about religion; easily satisfy ourselves with some floating opinions about it, and settle down very quietly into some beaten track of formality and self-righteousness, or take up with a light, loose profession. Now we must be awakened, aroused, and, as it were, rescued like a brand from the burning from all these deceptions, that our heart may be made sincere and right before God. This then is the reason why, when the time comes for God to work with power upon a sinner's heart, that he brings his sins to view, that he sets them in the light of his countenance, and lays them with more or less weight as a burden upon his soul. Now observe the effect of this and what springs out of it. This question arises in the sinner's breast, how his sins can be pardoned? He feels that he cannot live or die with unpardoned sin resting upon his head. If his iniquity be not forgiven, how can he stand before the bar of God when he bringeth every secret work into judgment? It was this feeling which made the poor publican cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" which made the Philippian gaoler exclaim, "What must I do to be saved?" This made David say, "There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger: neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long." (Psa. 38:3, 4, 5, 6.) O, how many of the dear children of God—some from self-righteousness, some from ignorance, some from the confusion of their minds, some from the temptations of Satan, some from sitting under legal ministers, and most from a deep sense of their helplessness and inability to bring any peace into their own bosom—are long and painfully exercised with this matter of the forgiveness of sin, and how they shall personally and

experimentally realise it. Now if we are saints at all, and are amongst the number of those who are believers in Christ Jesus, "God hath blessed us (that is, already blessed us) with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" and amongst them with the grand blessing of forgiveness; for "in him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephes. 1:3, 7.) I want you to see, believe, and feel this, that the forgiveness of sin is a blessing with which God has already blessed the whole of his dear family. We therefore read: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." (Col. 2:13.) You see from this testimony that God has forgiven all the trespasses of those whom he has quickened together with Christ. This is a part of the ministry of reconciliation, as the apostle testifies: "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." (2 Cor. 5:19.) But we need something more than the blessed fact. We want the sweet and personal experience of it. To get then at the blessing; to know its power and sweetness in our own breast; to receive it as from the mouth of God, and to know from the testimony of the Holy Spirit that God has pardoned all our sins, forgiven all our iniquities, cast all our sins behind his back—how many of God's dear people who are "saints and faithful in Christ Jesus," and are quickened together with Christ, are exercised upon this point nearly all their days; and many come even to a dying bed before the clear forgiveness of their sins is sealed with power upon their conscience. It is difficult to know why the blessing is often so

long delayed; but doubtless God has wise purposes to answer in thus exercising them. He knows how closely self-righteousness cleaves to them, and he uses these means to strip them of all their wisdom, strength, and power, to empty them thoroughly of all creature goodness, and to convince them that nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ, experimentally sprinkled upon the conscience, cleanseth from all sin.

ii. But let us now take a view of the expression "all our iniquities." How wide the scope, how ample the field, do these words open to our spiritual eye! And do you not observe what strong language the Holy Ghost employs here and elsewhere in testifying against sin, but not too strong at all for the circumstances, nor too strong for the feelings of an awakened soul? Men have invented many terms to lower the character of sin, and pare it down so as to diminish its weight. But the Holy Spirit in our text calls it "iniquities." It is a strong word, but not too strong for any sensible sinner, when we see sin in its true light: for when its awful magnitude and deep dye are discovered to our awakened conscience, language itself falls short of expressing what it appears as contrasted with the view of the infinite purity of God. When, too, we look at the magnitude of these iniquities as aggravated by peculiar and personal circumstances; how many have been committed against warnings, against convictions, against the whisperings of our own conscience, against the admonition of friends; how in various instances we have broken through the hedge of every resolution and done violence to our own knowledge of right and wrong, and yet been drawn on by the power of temptation, been inveigled and entangled by some darling lust, overcome by the strength of some inward corruption, shut our eyes to the consequences, and felt as though that sin we would commit, that lust we would indulge, that gratification we would have if

it cost our soul, O how aggravated have our iniquities been if this has been our unhappy case, and it is the case of many; for so desperately wicked is the heart of man, so determined to have its fill of evil, that I have sometimes felt and said that, left of God, a man would sin one moment and jump into hell the next. Now when God begins to lay these sins thus aggravated upon his awakened conscience, to set his iniquities before his eyes, how low it sinks a man; how it brings him sometimes to the very brink of hell; how it shuts him up at times almost in gloomy despair; how it exercises his mind whether his dreadful iniquities can ever be pardoned. He views his own case as peculiar. Every man best knows his own circumstances, for these are mostly hidden from all but himself. Many sins, unknown to others, are well known to him. The circumstances under which he sinned; the violence done to his own conscience in sinning: the aggravated state of the case, under temptations known only to the individual: all these, as they are opened up to him by the Spirit, and he sees light in God's light, form a heavy and peculiar burden, under which he is ready to sink. But all this is to teach him that nothing but the blood of Christ can cleanse from all sin. It is to drive away all creature hope, break to pieces every expectation formed and centering in the creature; to show him that as the blood of bulls and goats in ancient days could not put away sin, so now no repentance, no reformation, no floods of tears, no amount of prayers, no external change, can ever put away his iniquities. We know, comparatively speaking, little of the inward experience of many whose faces we often see in our midst; and how many hidden and silent ones are shut up in condemnation, sighing and groaning for some application of the blood of sprinkling to their conscience. Now the Lord is often pleased to raise up a hope in his soul that his sins are put away. Sometimes he gets a view by faith of the sufferings and sacrifice, bloodshedding and death of the Lord

Jesus; and though the blood of sprinkling is not clearly or fully revealed unto, or sprinkled upon his conscience, yet he sees it by the eye of faith, as sprinkled upon the cross, and the only possible atonement for sin. He thus gets, as it were, in the distance a passing view of a suffering Christ, a bleeding Jesus, an atoning Lamb of God, as the children of Israel looked upon the serpent in the wilderness; and though this falls very short of what he looks and longs for, yet it raises up a hope and expectation of coming mercy. It also effectually cuts off all expectation of pardon and peace from any other quarter, and thus fixes his eyes upon the cross as the only spot where mercy and justice meet together, the only fountain open for all sin and uncleanness, the only place where a guilty sinner can meet with a forgiving God. Faith being sometimes much strengthened by this view of the cross, and much softness of spirit, and melting of heart being found and felt at the sight his hopes rise very high, and it seems almost as if Christ was about to speak a forgiving word to his soul and to manifest himself in the power of his blood and love. But the view fades away, and he is suffered to doubt again, to fear again, to distrust every mark he has received of the mercy of God; to call in question everything he has tasted, felt and handled of the word of life, until sooner or later in some unexpected moment Jesus is pleased to reveal himself to his soul, to bring the blood of sprinkling into his conscience, and give him a clear evidence that all his sins are pardoned, and all his iniquities, so great, so black, so aggravated, are forgiven.

But though this is for the most part the usual way, we must not lay down a rigid, precise, fixed rule, and erect an unbending standard on this point. Some have the substance of pardon in the feeling who have not the clear application of the blood. They, as the apostle speaks, "receive the atonement" (Rom. 5:1), that is, receive it into their hearts by

faith, and feel its blessed effects as revealing peace with God. They have therefore the substance of pardon and peace, by receiving that through which they flow; they have the enjoyment of it, the deliverance it brings, the liberty it produces, the love which it draws forth, the repentance and godly sorrow which it creates, though the words, "thy sins be forgiven thee," might not have been spoken with a special power to their soul. They have received Christ into their hearts in the full efficacy of his atoning blood, which they could not do till he came nigh and manifested himself, and they have all the fruits and effects of his dying love by which they love him and live to his praise.

iii. But now take another point into your spiritual view—God *never forgives by halves*. We look at this sin and we look at that sin, we call to mind this and that slip or fall, and sometimes say with bitter grief and mournful cry, "O, that I had never committed that sin! O, that I had never broken out in this or that direction! O, that my lust, my pride, my covetousness, my angry temper, my foolish lightness, my carelessness, and carnality had never overcome me at that time! O, that I had never spoken that foolish word, done that sad thing, that I had never fallen into that snare of the flesh! O, that I had never got entangled in that awful trap of the devil!" Have you not sometimes pondered over the various ways in which you have been drawn aside into some by-path, until you are almost ready to give up all hope and to sink into despair, as scarcely believing it possible that grace could be in your heart? Thus we keep looking at individual sins, weighing this and that in the balance of conscience, not seeing the awful number of the whole as an overwhelming mass; and we expect perhaps that God will forgive this particular sin and that particular sin, as if that were the great thing to be done. God does not forgive so. He forgives all or none. It is either a full remission of all our sins, or pardon of

no single one of them. Have I not already brought before you that gracious word from the Colossians, "having forgiven you *all* trespasses?" (Col. 2:13.) And what a testimony there is through the Scriptures to the same precious truth. How John says, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin." (1 John 1:7.) How our gracious Lord declares, "*all manner* of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." (Matt. 12:31.) How the prophet declares, "thou wilt cast *all their sins* into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19); and how blessedly does the Lord himself speak, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins" (Isaiah 44:22); and again, "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." (Jer. 50:20.) How plainly and clearly do all these testimonies preach as with one united, harmonious voice that precious, glorious doctrine, that where there is forgiveness there is a forgiving of all iniquities, a casting of all trespasses behind God's back, a full and free, eternal, irreversible blotting out and putting away of every sin and every transgression.

Now nothing short of such a full, free, complete and perfect forgiveness could satisfy God or satisfy us. It could not satisfy God; for one sin unforgiven would shut us out of heaven as much as a thousand. It could not satisfy us, either in earth or heaven. If the guilt of one sin remained upon our conscience at death, it would fill us with fear, and could we enter heaven with it? The guilt of that one sin would make us ever tremble before the purity of God, and mar ever rising joy. Neither sin in its guilt nor sin in its filth, though it be, so to speak, but the smallest that could be committed by man, could stand before the purity of God in glory. We thus see why all sin must be forgiven, washed away, cast behind God's back, or there is no standing before him, who is a

consuming fire. We need not then be ever dwelling upon individual sins, but should be ever casting ourselves into that sea of love and blood in which all are drowned and for ever washed away.

II.—But I now pass on to my next point, where I find the Psalmist rising a step higher in what I have called the "ascending scale:" *"Who healeth all thy diseases."*

i. When the Lord first begins his work of grace upon our heart, we are not sensible of the disease of sin as thoroughly infecting the whole of our nature. We are like a person attacked with some incipient disease. He feels himself what is called out of sorts, his general health impaired, his nerves unstrung, his appetite capricious, his flesh and strength wasting. He sees these symptoms of illness, but does not know what those symptoms indicate, and very probably are marks of some fatal disease. He spits blood, perhaps, and has a pain in his side, a hacking cough, perspires much at night, and has other marks of consumption, but he does not see that these are merely indications of a very grave malady. So we look at this sin or that sin, which are merely symptoms of a thoroughly corrupt and diseased nature; far deeper than the outbreakings of it, which, comparatively speaking, are but eruptions in the skin; or to speak more scripturally, like those signs of leprosy which Moses describes in Leviticus. (Lev. 13.) We are, perhaps, like a consumptive patient, who thinks that if he can but get the cough cured, or the pain removed, or the hectic flushes abated, get a little flesh put upon his bones, and feel more strong and active, he would soon be well. And so he would; but, alas! these are but symptoms, and there is no use curing the symptoms while the disease remains and is daily gaining strength. So there is no use looking at this or that sin, and trying to cure this or that evil when, as the prophet speaks, "from the sole



of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores." (Isa. 1:6.) We may go on sometimes in this way for a long time, hoping and hoping that as this and that sin is cured, we shall, by and by, get cured of the whole. But after a time God the Spirit, as he keeps searching the heart and casting fresh light into the mind, discovers the fatal secret by leading us to see, feel, and realise the disease of sin as infecting the whole of our nature. But this discovery fills a man with consternation and dismay; for this is now his language, "I have committed iniquity; I have sinned against God. These sins he has mercifully pardoned. But O! after he has pardoned all these sins and healed all these backslidings, to find that there is a secret something within me which is ever breeding fresh!" We thus learn that there is no making a clean bill of health, and reporting that all taint of infection has disappeared; no casting off and throwing away all sin like a worn-out filthy garment, without a rag being left behind to hold and disseminate fresh disease. But it is rather like destroying one crop of vermin, and leaving behind a whole host which have slyly crept away, and are ever breeding in the dark vermin afresh. Or it is like some malady that may seem for a time subdued and apparently cured, and then breaks forth again with double virulence. How, for instance, we see sometimes consumption or cancer apparently cured, and yet how they break forth again worse than before. So it is with that dreadful disease of sin which has infected the whole of our being. It may for a time seem subdued, removed, and almost if not fully healed; but again and again it breaks forth worse than before—not worse I mean in outward act, but worse in inward sense and experimental feeling.

But have you ever considered the meaning of the word "disease," as descriptive of our state by nature? You know what a diseased body is, or, what is worse, a diseased mind;

how in both of these cases everything is wrong, out of order, thrown off its right balance, and the consequence perpetual pain and suffering. So it is with the disease of sin. It makes everybody wrong and everything wrong; disorders the eye, distempers the ear, turns every benefit into bane, and wholesome food into little less than poison. Everything is a burden, full of labour, weariness, and dissatisfaction; life a misery, days wearisome, and nights sleepless.

ii. But having thus seen the general character of disease, let us now look at some of the special diseases which infect our nature, and two above all others as most generally known and felt with which God's people are afflicted.

1. The first which I shall name is the disease of *unbelief*. When the blessed Spirit convinces of sin, he convinces also of unbelief. (John 16:9.) But this sin of unbelief usually is not felt so much as the guilt of particular and more open sins. At any rate, we do not usually see and feel it at first as an inbred disease. When faith was strong, as it was when the Lord appeared, unbelief did not come to the fore. It hung behind, as it were, invisible in the shade; it lurked in the secret recesses of the heart, undiscovered, like a thief in the night. But after a time, when faith begins to slacken, this disease of unbelief comes to view; it crops out to the surface, like the hard rock that was covered over with soft herbage; when flowers and grass grew upon it, its depth and hardness were not seen. But we soon begin to find under all this soft and springy turf there lies a hard rock, going down into the very bowels of the earth. O how this wretched unbelief rises to view as the turf is stripped off! How like an unbidden and unwelcome guest at a marriage feast, its very presence mars all comfort, beats out of the hand every sweet morsel of food or cheerful cup, arising like a spectre at the very time when we want its company least, robbing us of all peace and

happiness, and as if dropping poison into the very springs of life. There is, I believe, scarcely any other disease of the soul which seems so thoroughly to have spread itself through the whole of our being, to produce such distempered views of God and ourselves, and set itself so determinately against the word of God itself. In these points it much resembles a diseased mind, such as we often see in unhappy individuals, which sees nothing aright and takes everything wrong; which you can neither rectify nor comfort, persuade nor guide, but which is ever listening to its own persuasions, and can listen to nothing else.

2. But another disease is *helplessness*. It is so naturally. Weakness, prostration of strength, inability to raise hand or foot may be and is a mark of very serious disease; nay, a disease in itself. Look at that poor paralytic lying helpless upon his bed: what a miserable object he is. Look at that poor saint, as unable to raise hand or foot, as unable to move any one of his spiritual limbs as the paralytic patient himself. Is not his helplessness a disease as great and dangerous as unbelief can be? Some diseases are attended with much bodily pain and suffering. How sharp, how lancinating are the pains of cancer. How torturing is tic, how painful is pleurisy, how racking and severe is headache. So it is with some spiritual diseases. What fiery darts Satan can shoot into our mind; what painful corruptions he can stir up; what vile suggestions he can infuse. What sudden sharp pains there are in the soul under the injection of these fiery darts of Satan, like the lancinating pangs of cancer, or the acute throb of sudden tic. But there are complaints in which the patient gradually sinks without any very great pain, without much apparently severe disease. In consumption, though it is a great mistake to think that usually it is a painless disease, yet some gradually seem to decay until they die of sheer exhaustion, without suffering acute pain. So

in paralysis and similar complaints, as softening of the brain. May we not trace a similar analogy in the case of spiritual diseases? Some of God's people are not so painfully exercised as others with the fiery darts of the devil, nor so tormented with the workings of inward corruption, nor so pressed down by the power of unbelief. Their chief complaint is a sense of helplessness. They seem so languid in the things of God, have such a fainting spirit, such an inability to press forward, such a gradual weakening of every faculty, and a sinking down into self as though they must sink away and die under positive exhaustion. Now all this is the effect of spiritual disease; it springs from the corruption which entered into and took possession of us at the fall.

3. But let us look a little further still. The effect of the fall was not only to produce special diseases but to fill us with disease throughout. It is so sometimes naturally. Some persons are full of disease, like the man spoken of in the gospel, "full of leprosy" (Luke 5:12); their whole system and constitution thoroughly vitiated by hereditary complaints. So sin has thoroughly diseased us, poisoned our very blood. It has diseased our understanding, so as to disable it from receiving the truth; it has diseased our conscience, so as to make it dull and heavy, and undiscerning of right and wrong; it has diseased our imagination, polluting it with every idle, foolish, and licentious fancy; it has diseased our memory, making it swift to retain what is evil, slow to retain what is good; it has diseased our affections, perverting them from all that is heavenly and holy, and fixing them on all that is earthly and vile.

But O what an unspeakable mercy it is that God has provided not only a Redeemer in the Lord Jesus, so as to insure the forgiveness of sins through the redemption which he has wrought, but has made him also the Healer of diseases; not

only constituted him as a Saviour, and a great one, but a Physician: not only given him out of his own bosom to shed his precious blood to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, but raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, that he might heal by his word "all manner of sickness and all manner of disease." He thus becomes "Jehovah Rophi," the Lord my healer. As he testifies of himself: "I am the Lord that healeth thee." (Exodus 15:26.) View, then, God's poor diseased people; see them lying as it were in Bethesda's porch, all waiting for the approach of the great Physician; knowing that one look of his eye, one touch of his hand, one word of his mouth, can heal all their diseases. See this poor, diseased family of God, some complaining of one disease, some of another, some of a third; but all like a number of sick folk, gathered at the door of a dispensary, or patients lying in the wards of a hospital, or such a suffering mass of humanity as would meet your eye after some dreadful railway collision, where you would see some almost dying, others fainting away with pain and terror, others lying upon the road with broken limbs and blood streaming down their faces, but all feeling the terrible shock. So it is with God's poor, diseased family: one you may hear complaining of his broken limbs, another of his fluttering, agitated heart, a third of the internal wounds of his conscience, a fourth of his bruised hands and maimed feet; but each and all mourning and languishing under a sense of the disease of sin, and the sad effects which the collision of the fall has wrought. But turn your eyes away and look in another direction. See here approaching the gracious Lord, and going round, so to speak, from ward to ward, addressing a kind word to this patient, administering a healing balm to that, giving a smile of encouragement to a third. See too how every eye follows him, all seeking some help from his hand. Now when this gracious healer sends his word, for it is by his word that he heals (Psalm 107:20), it brings with it

instantaneously a medicinal power. Was it not so in the days of his flesh? How, at a word from his lips, a touch from his hand, every disease fled. So it is now. When he speaks all complaint ceases; disease disappears under its touch; pain and suffering are assuaged by his kind look, his sympathising voice, his gracious smile: and the very appearance of the Physician, though but for a few moments, does the patient good.

But how does he heal these diseases? He heals them chiefly by subduing them; for in this life they are never thoroughly healed. The promise runs: "He will subdue our iniquities." (Micah 6:7.) To subdue them is to restrain their power. Thus he sees one suffering under the power of unbelief. He gives him faith; this subdues his unbelief. Here is another poor languid patient, dying of exhaustion: he gives him strength. Here is a third mourning under his corruptions: he gives a drop of his blood to purge his conscience, and a taste of his love to warm his heart. He sees a fourth crying under the strong assaults of Satan: with one look Satan flies and the soul is set free. Thus with infinite wisdom blended with infinite love and power, he passes on from bed to bed of every sick patient, administering health wherever he goes. O what a blessed thing it is to know something of having our diseases healed; that there is one who can sympathise with his poor afflicted people, who can stretch forth his hand to heal, or apply a word suitable to their case! With infinite skill and power, this blessed physician has a remedy for every disease, and the remedy is always felt to be exactly suitable to the exigency of the case. It goes, so to speak, at once to the right spot: it heals the malady wherever it be, and whatever it be, just in the right way, and just at the right time. No disease is too deep for it to reach, no complaint too complicated for it to cure, and no secret complaint hidden even from the patient's own eyes which he cannot dispel by

his look and heal by his word. O then how good it is to bring all our diseases before the Lord! In a case of bodily sickness or painful complaint we uncover freely our malady to a physician whom we can trust; we tell him every circumstance and disclose every symptom. So should we go to the Lord with all our diseases, tell him all our complaints, unfold to him all our sorrows, and fully and freely lay before him everything that burdens the conscience, pains the mind, distresses the soul, looking and waiting until he speaks the word, and every malady is healed.

III.—But we pass on to the next step in the ascending scale.  
*"Who redeemeth my life from destruction."*

The first step was the forgiveness of all iniquities; the second the healing of all diseases; the third is the redemption of life itself from destruction, insuring thereby the certain salvation of the soul.

When God commences the work of grace he plants spiritual life in his people's hearts, but this life is exposed to a thousand foes and a thousand fears. The preservation then of this life is in some points a greater miracle and a richer mercy than the healing of disease. Would it not be a greater triumph of medical skill, if a physician could guarantee you from all attacks of illness, or prolong your life for ten years, than if he cured you of some passing complaint? To redeem then our life from destruction is a higher mercy and a greater miracle than healing present disease. For let us consider what this life is exposed to, and then we shall see what a marvel it is that it is kept alive in a sinner's breast, when he is surrounded on every hand with that which but for the mighty power of God must inevitably destroy it. For we may be said to be moral suicides, as God declared to Ephraim: "O, Ephraim, thou hast destroyed thyself." Is not this a true bill?

Does not thy conscience fall under it as a well founded accusation? Hast thou not willingly with thine eyes open run into some sin, which, but for God's mercy and upholding hand, would have proved thy certain destruction? Have you not stood upon the very brink of some deep pit down into which another step would have plunged you? You do not learn this lesson at first. You look back sometimes to the time when God was pleased to deposit his life in your breast. It was a memorable season with you, for he then communicated his fear, and made your conscience alive and tender. But though convinced of sin you did not then know the evils of your heart. But if your profession has been of any long standing, and especially if you have been much exercised with temptation, you now look back and wonder how the life of God has been preserved so many years in your soul. You have been sunk sometimes into such carnality that you could find scarcely any difference between yourself and the most carnal professor. You have felt such emptiness of all good, such proneness to all evil, and seemingly such a careless abandonment of the things which at one time you held with such warmth and tenderness, that you trembled lest you should prove a poor empty professor, worse than those against whom you have so often spoken. Now when you have been sunk under the weight and guilt of these things laid upon your conscience, you have wondered how you stood in days past, where you stand now, how and why you are what you are, and have not been swallowed up, overcome, and carried away into the pit of destruction. Sometimes Satan has tempted you to suicide; sometimes to give up all your profession; sometimes to blaspheme the name of God; sometimes to disbelieve every sacred truth; sometimes to think the Bible altogether inconsistent, confused, and contradictory, and that all religion itself was but a delusion. You have had all these things working in your mind till you have trembled lest you should turn out at last a



vile infidel, or die in despair. Yet hitherto God has kept you: he has preserved your life from destruction. David said, "I am as a wonder to many" (Psalm 71:7), but you can say, "I am a wonder to myself." The world, the devil, and your own evil heart all have been for years aiming at this precious life of God, all stretching out their hands to strangle and suffocate it; and yet, mysterious wisdom, unspeakable grace, and tender compassion! how he has kept the holy principle alive, not suffered his fire to die out from the altar, or the lamp in the temple to expire for want of fresh oil. O, the mystery of redeeming love! O, the blessedness of preserving grace to have our life redeemed from destruction! We can look back, it may be, to sundry places in our lives, when, like David, we could say, there was but a step between us and death, and yet we have been preserved, upheld, and kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Observe the expression, "*redeemed*," and how it connects the soul with the work of redemption by the Lord Jesus. Christ has redeemed our life by his own precious blood. Such a price being paid for it, it cannot be lost.

A sight and sense of this sinks the soul very low, and yet sets the Lord very high. It makes us see how great a thing redemption is, how wonderful the love of God, how incessant his tender care and preserving power, how blessed and yet how mysterious the work of grace upon the soul is, that sin cannot defile it, Satan cannot quench it, nor anything in earth or hell effectually destroy it.

IV.—But we now come to our last point, the crowning point of all, the highest point in the ascending scale, which seems to set its seal upon all the foregoing: "*He crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.*"

i. The coronation of a king puts the last and highest seal

upon his reigning authority. This made the spouse say, "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart." (Song Sol. 3:11.) And what a day will that be when the anti-typical Solomon is crowned Lord of all. Thus there is a crown put upon the soul which is healed of all its diseases, and whose life is redeemed from destruction. It is as if God could not be satisfied till he had put the crown of his lovingkindness upon the soul, until he had himself crowned the heart with his own love. And not only love, but "lovingkindness"—kindness mingled with love, love overflowing with kindness. Thus when God is pleased to reveal a sense of his lovingkindness, to show how he has been at once so kind and at once so loving; so kind in forgiving sin, so kind in healing disease, so kind in preserving life from destruction, and all flowing out of the bosom of his eternal love, it is a putting on the crown of all his goodness. And he does it with his own hand: "Who crowneth thee." God from heaven his dwelling place puts upon the soul the crown of his lovingkindness and tender mercies. And what is the effect? The soul puts a crown of glory upon his head. So the soul has the crown of grace, and God has the crown of glory. This is being crowned with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

And O what a crown it is! How it crowns all our iniquities, hides them from God's sight as a crown covers a monarch's brow. How it crowns all our trials that we have had to pass through, severe and cutting as they were at the time to the flesh. How it crowns all our bereavements by putting upon the bereaved heart the crown of God's lovingkindness. How it crowns all our prayers by enabling us to see their gracious answer. How it crowns all God's dealings with us in providence and in grace, and stamps lovingkindness upon

them all; for the crown includes everything in it. As the Queen's crown includes her royalty, her dignity, her power—for all are symbolized thereby—so God's lovingkindness, put upon the heart as a crown, includes and secures every blessing for time and eternity.

ii. And what an effect it produces. It is a sense of God's tender mercies which breaks the heart and produces real repentance and godly sorrow for sin; for this is the feeling of the soul: "O that I could have sinned against such tender mercy as revealed in the Person and work, sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus. O what a wretch ever to have sinned as I have done. O what a monster to have given way to this and that sin and temptation, provoking God, if possible, to cast me away for ever from his presence." And yet his lovingkindness, his tender mercies, prevailed over all. He would not take an advantage of me. He would not seize me in the very act of sin and overwhelm my soul in hell. But he mercifully brought me out of sin, and crowned me with lovingkindness and tender mercies. This not only brings forth a song of praise unto God, but constrains the soul, by every sweet constraint, to walk in his fear and live to his honour and glory. O these things come warm upon the heart wherever they are truly felt. They are urgent motives to live to his praise and walk in his fear; not to grieve his holy Spirit; but, being such debtors to grace, to live, walk, and act in such a way as to bring honour to his worthy name.

I have endeavoured this evening to lay my hand upon the state and case of God's family, and speak a word for their encouragement. Those who travel in the strait and narrow path long to hear their case touched upon and entered into, and some testimony given to the reality of the work of grace upon their heart. So I leave it in his gracious hands, who can do with it as seemeth good in his sight, and put on another

crown, even the crown of his own blessing, which maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.