

The Deliverance of the Fool from His Destruction

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Afternoon, November 28, 1858

(A Posthumous Sermon.)

"Fools because of their transgressions, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." Ps. 107:17, 18, 19, 20

The 107th Psalm is one of the most remarkable portions of God's inspired Scripture, inasmuch as it sets forth in a variety of ways and under different figures the experience of God's saints. There are four characters whom it expressly traces out which I may, not improperly, designate the *wanderer*, the *prisoner*, the *fool* or *backslider*, and the *mariner*. These four characters are set forth and described as types and figures of the saints of God who are led through that peculiar kind of experience. You will find four things are said of them: they have *trouble*, *prayer* or *crying*, *deliverance*, and *praise*. They are all represented as being cast into affliction and trouble; and exercising in their affliction and trouble prayer and supplication. They are all represented as receiving deliverance in answer to prayer, and praise is spoken of as given by all to God. With God's blessing I shall endeavour to open up a little the words before us; and in so doing shall show

I.—First, *Who this fool is*, tracing out as far as the Lord may

enable a little of his character.

II.—Secondly, *His affliction*, which is *his transgression and iniquity*.

III.—Thirdly, How in his affliction he cries unto the Lord.

IV.—And fourthly, How the Lord *speaks, heals, and delivers*.

I dare say some of you may be able to find something in your own experience that may correspond with what the Holy Ghost has here laid before us. We are not allowed to call each other *fools*; for there is an express declaration from the lips of incarnate truth that he who calls his brother a *fool* shall be in danger of hell-fire; but I know of no Scripture that forbids any man calling himself a fool; if there be one I am not aware of it. Nor is there any Scripture that I know of that calls us fools. In the words before us God speaks of some of his people and calls them fools, but only as elsewhere, "Oh, foolish people and unwise." To be a fool in a spiritual sense is to be the opposite of what a wise man is. To act foolishly is to act in a contrary manner to that in which the wise man acts. The wise man is a man who has heavenly instruction in his soul, and acts upon it. He, therefore, sets a watch over the door of his mouth, and walks without stumbling on the right hand or the left. He has no very pressing load of guilt upon his conscience, he is not entangled in the snares of Satan, and thus he acts as a wise man, because despising sin. But the *fool* being sensible of what he is looks to Jesus, "who of God is made unto us wisdom." The *fool* is not the ungodly man, he is not a reprobate; but he is a poor, weak, foolish child of God; he is a vessel of mercy; but he is not blessed with that wisdom and fear of God in lively exercise, he is without that strong nature of God which keeps him from

weak and foolish things, but yet he is a gracious and saved man, though from various reasons in many sad instances he betrays his filth and folly. He has a fool's eye, a foolish heart, which is ever craving after filth and folly; a foolish tongue which is not held by bit and bridle, and a foolish habit of trusting to himself, whereby he often gets into evil, and Satan lays his snares, and he gets entangled; he has a weak imagination, strong passions, and by the powerful thrustings of his unwearied foes he is betrayed into something that brings a reproach, I will not say upon the church, but upon his conscience; he may be saved from bringing a reproach upon the people of God; but he is sensible that he is acting very indiscreetly and unbecomingly, and by these things he brings darkness upon himself. There may be some here who are congratulating themselves that they are not this fool; you may be like the son in the parable who had never done anything wrong at any time; but the Lord did not seem to countenance his good account of himself very much, not but that I believe he was a good man, still he said his father had never given him even a kid to make merry with his friends, nor had he given him the promise of a feast, so what he had to feast upon was his own good opinion of himself, and his own consistency. And a very delicious feast it often was to him. He had not been so bad as his brother, who had spent all his substance; but at best it was a poor feast; the Lord never smiled upon him; but he had that in himself he could look at with gratification; therefore, when his hungry brother came home he was filled with malice and envy against him, with secret pride and self-righteousness. But the fool is one who has no such good conduct, good intentions, good words or works to boast of. He is sensible that in various instances he has gone sadly astray, which has brought trouble into his conscience, and he may be at times exercised in his soul as to whether he is not out of the secret altogether, whether he could ever have had the fear of God in his soul, and he

begins to stagger. He can say that he has "played the fool," as one said of old, "and acted foolishly." But we will take you a little further into the recesses of the words of our text.

II.—"Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, *are afflicted*. Now, these fools have to mourn over their transgressions and iniquities. Poor David was a fool of this kind; he slipped and fell, stumbled and brought guilt upon his conscience. His son Solomon was a fool of this kind, for he sinned and brought great darkness upon his soul. Hezekiah was one of these fools when he showed his goods to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon. Peter was one of these fools when he denied his Lord and Master, and that with an oath. When these holy men brought guilt upon themselves because of their transgressions, they became afflicted.

There is a most pestilent and poisonous doctrine now abroad in the world that God does not chastise his people on account of their sins. How awful for any man to spread such an error. What an antinomian doctrine! How contrary to the Holy Spirit! For the Lord says in the 89th Psalm, and one would think that would be enough to prove it, "*If they break my statutes and keep not my commandments; then shall I visit their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes.*" And does not Paul say most definitely in the Hebrews, "*If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons.*" So here the Lord expressly says of these fools that they are afflicted because of their transgressions. Are not their transgressions given as the cause of their afflictions? God it may be afflicts them in body, as we read in 1 Cor. 11:30 of many who were "weak and sickly," and of many who had fallen asleep because they ate and drank as though the Lord's supper was a feast. For this cause some were sick and some taken away

by death. Here they were afflicted with bodily illness, and if you could trace the cause of your bodily indisposition, you might see that the Lord was afflicting you because of some transgression, so that by visiting your body with painful affliction was reminding you of your sins and transgressions, and thus he lays them before your eyes and brings them to bear upon your conscience. It is good in sickness to accept it as a chastisement, and though your conscience is free from any pride or sin, accept the rod for your sins collectively. But if the rod does point out any peculiar slip or fall, take the rod as being directed against it, and beg of the Lord to give you a manifestation of his pardoning love. He may afflict you in providence; you may have a very covetous heart, and he may see how it is continually drawing you aside; at chapel some contrivance may come into your head whereby you may make your business flourish a little more; you may not come with the express purpose of doing so; but instead of hearing the word, you may be devising some schemes which shall secure a larger profit in your business, or you may be seeking after something to gratify your covetous desires. Can you wonder then that the Lord should take away all that which you had gathered together and that he should run counter against these covetous practices? Take it as a chastisement. Or he may be visiting your conscience. You are sensible that there are many things in you that the Lord is displeased with, the hardness of your heart, your iniquity or the coldness of your affections, and many things that the Lord takes keen cognizance of; and then he afflicts your conscience: He draws your mind after himself, and at times exercises you upon this point, whether your soul is right with God; you have no answer to prayer; you hear the saints of God speak of blessed manifestations, and of what comforting words come to them, but you have not one, you are shut up in darkness and fear. Or you may have family trials, a sickly child, or an invalid wife or husband, and even be bereaved of

them by death. Take all these things as God's rod that speaks to you, by which he reminds you of many things in which you have been drawn aside. As the parent or parents afflict the child for what he has done, so the Lord may be afflicting you. It is a very bad spot to be in to have no affliction in mind, conscience or body; it is pleasing to the flesh, but it is a bad place for the soul. If all is comfortable in the family, easy in circumstances, if there is no uneasiness in conscience, no trials within, I am very sure it sets you far from God, and makes you contented to live the life of a beast, eating and drinking and sleeping, to be as you are and what you are without sighing after a manifestation and discovery of Christ to your soul. Most men and women live the life of a beast, and are just occupied for the day in their business; they have no more anxiety about their souls than the beasts that perish, and so it is with the saints of God except the Lord keep the work alive by chastisement, except he brings them back and teaches them what sinners they are and raises their mind to eternal things. You may think yourself very nicely dealt with because you are in easy circumstances and all things seem to go on as you could wish; but if you were the greatest enemy of God he could not take a more favourable way of avenging himself. See the men of business who have no fear of God before their eyes, look what they are when a tide of business comes in, are they not as far from God as man can possibly be. If the shop is filled with customers, how full of glee the tradesman is! Where is the man now that is calling upon the Lord? But if times are bad and things get wrong, he begins to call upon God. Now that he begins to feel more losses from the things of time and sense, he begins to set more store upon the things of eternity. So if God wants to set our affections on things above, he must take them off things upon the earth. This is the way the Lord dealt with those in the 73rd Psalm in whose death there were no bands and whom God set in

slippery places and cast down into destruction. Therefore kiss the rod, hug it, cleave to it, bless God for it, bless him for his afflicting mercies, his chastising strokes; for they are all meant to bring you out of the world. Dread having no furnace, no rod, being left without chastisement: but bless the Lord for every affliction, for every sickness, for every sorrow, for every trial and for every bereavement; bless the Lord for them all. By these strokes he is bringing you nearer to his sacred and sovereign majesty. O these fools, to go on, till it is said, that their soul abhorreth all manner of meat and they draw near unto the gates of death. We know in illness meat has no relish. Here is a man come out of the field with a good appetite, how sweet the smell of cooked food is to him? But take it to a man who is stretched upon a bed of sickness, and it is loathsome to him. Here is the roasted Lamb of which I spoke lately; to a hungry soul, how sweet it is, to the full soul, how loathsome! Well in a sense these fools' souls abhor all manner of meat. They cannot take the pleasure in the world they formerly did, because they have a troubled conscience. They cannot delight in earthly things as other men do, and thus their souls abhor all manner of meat. How disgusting is the light and joyful tone they hear; it is to them light as the drunkard's song. Oh! how loathsome to a soul really concerned about eternal things is the conversation of the ungodly. He feels that he has a soul lying under the wrath of the Almighty, and what an awful thing it will be if he has to be cast into the devouring flame, and there to lie for ever. What are all the sports of folly? He cannot feed upon the meat, this nonsense that fools can. *"He draws near unto the gates of death."* He knows not whether the root of the matter is in him. He fears lest the work has never been begun, lest his joys have been all delusions and were only natural conviction, lest all his past experience should have been nothing but a mass of delusion, deception and hypocrisy. He fears that in a short time he may be in

eternity, and that all his sins will sink him as with a mill-stone into the depths of hell. Now you would hardly think this man was a saint of God. Where is his religion? Where are his joys, peace, faith and love? You cannot see any of these things in him, nor can he see them in himself. But he is Christ's and it is that that makes him feel what he does. Now we come to

III.—The crying of the soul in this extremity. There is a crying unto the Lord in their trouble. But it is trouble that forces the cry. Men never really cry to the Lord in earnest except they get into trouble. It is not the prayers of a man at ease that enter the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, the half-hearted prayers; but the prayer of the soul that is in trouble, in the waves of affliction and sorrow. When the billows of God go over a man's head, and he sinks into deep waters, then he prays. So these fools spoken of in our text, they cry unto the Lord in their trouble. What a mercy to have a Lord to cry unto! A throne of grace, a foot-stool of mercy, a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God! What a mercy that the Lord does not leave his people in despair, to sin and Satan, and that he does not thrust them into perdition, there to make hell's arches ring with their cries of misery and horror. But whilst there is life there is hope, and though this poor fool must always take a low place, yet there is a cry in his soul, and a Lord of pity and compassion to hear that cry which it pours out. You never can sink so low as not to have a cry to cry unto the Lord in your soul, if you fear his great name. It is your mercy, privilege, and blessing to know that there is a God, and to know that if you cry to God in trouble he will hear you, therefore, cry on, poor soul, give not up, give not way to despair, cry unto the Lord, and the more you are troubled the more do you cry. Now comes

IV.—*Deliverance.* "He saveth then out of all their distresses."

Oh, how kind! Oh, how compassionate the Lord is! to hear the cry of his poor children here below! "He saveth them out of all their *distresses*." Those distresses of mind, those pangs of a guilty conscience, those doubts and fears, harassing temptations, and those painful anticipations of the world to come. He appears for them, helps them, stretches out his arm. "*He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.*" He sends a word of promise, of sweet invitation, or a word that brings with it pardon, peace and deliverance. God sends the word with power into their heart, and when the word comes, deliverance comes with the word, because directly the comforting word reaches the heart, Satan flies, darkness disappears, doubts and fears give way, the hard heart softens, and Jesus comes with the word and reveals himself with a divine power to the heart, and nothing but the word coming with a divine power into the heart can ever heal backslidings, quiet the distressed mind and disperse the doubts and fears that harass a living soul. And he delivers them from their destructions. We would have destroyed both body and soul. Have not some of you had snares so subtle and a nature so strong you could not deliver yourself from them? Again and again your feet were entangled; again and again you were caught in the snare and you felt that that snare would be your destruction. Beware of giving way to the first snare, to the first temptation. Many a man has fallen in a course of sin by giving way in the first instance to temptation which he might have resisted. But temptations, sin and a wicked heart ever working together overcame him so that his feet are entangled. But for God's special grace many a snare would have been our destruction; if the Lord had not taken them out of the way we should have been entangled by them. These snares are spread in every thing we do, in our meat, drink, and clothing, in our body and family, in our business and occupations and in our walks, our goings out and comings in. There is not a single

step we can take where secret snares are not spread for our feet, and these snares would certainly prove our destruction but for God's grace. You may think not; but if you saw them you would perceive that there was a snare laid even in your toil and business, but—

"Seldom do we see the snares,
Before we feel the smart."

These poor fools have been caught in the snares and they would have destroyed body and soul, but for the grace of God. You may read of men guilty of the most atrocious crimes; and if you observe you will see that they went on little by little, from one thing to another, till at last they became manifestly noxious criminals. How many an apprentice has been tempted to take a little in the first instance, and then has gone on till he has destroyed his character, and, it may be, brought himself to circumstance which result in his being a prisoner for the rest of his life. Beware of the first sin. Many a drunkard has begun by merely taking a little. Therefore, beware of forming habits and of being entangled in them. Beg of the Lord to deliver you from them; for the Lord will keep his people; he "will keep the feet of his saints," and he will preserve them to the end.