

I DARE NOT STAND IDLE. I dare not idle stand, while upon every hand...

Visitor Pulpit.

DESPAIR DENOUNCED, AND GRACE GLORIFIED.

A Sermon delivered by C. H. Spurgeon, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

"Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts."

If you thoughtfully consider the text, you will see that it divides itself thus: first, there is a true word—"Behold, they say, our bones are dried;" secondly, there is in it an ill word, which goes beyond the truth—"Our hope is lost;" thirdly, there is a gracious word, a word of mighty love—"Thus saith the Lord God; behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel."

I. Let us begin with that solemn confession which I have styled a true word: "They say, our bones are dried." They describe themselves as dead, as dried, and as divided. They speak of themselves as dead; for a man does not imagine his bones to be scattered about on the plain while he thinks himself to be alive.

Further, these bones could by no means raise themselves. We never heard of such a thing as a dead man restoring himself to life, though he be indeed dead; he cannot lift a hand towards his own reviving. These bones were without trace of life. The flesh was gone, devoured of kites and jackals, or rotted and scattered in impalpable powder to the four winds of heaven. How could these carcasses raise themselves? There was no trace of moisture left upon them; they could not give themselves life or motion; it were a fool's hope to look for such a thing. Is that the dreary fact which forces itself upon you? Do not try to forget it. You are discovering the truth. You are in a lost condition already if you have not believed in Jesus Christ. You are not, as some do vainly talk, in a state of probation; your probation is over, and you are condemned already because you have not believed on the Son of God. In you, there is no spiritual power to stir towards God until his Spirit moves toward you.

Moreover, these people felt that they were cut off from healing agencies. They say, "We are cut off for our parts;" that is each bone is cut off from its fellow, and the whole thing is out of its parts from every hope and comfort. Ah, you think perhaps I am describing an extreme case; but I know that I am picturing some whose eyes are looking upon me at this moment. Happy they who have been delivered from this wretched state; but I had almost said, happy they who are experiencing it, for those who feel their sinfulness are on the road to better things. Brother, I hope your extremity will be God's opportunity. When your bones are dried, then will God come in as the resurrection and the life and make these dry bones live. When you appear to be beyond the possibility of mercy, then God, with whom all things are possible, will deal with you in the way of extraordinary grace, and cause you to rejoice in his salvation.

II. Now, I turn to the point upon which I desire to struggle with some of you this morning, that you may be fetched up to the Spirit's power from the depths of despondency. Here is an ill word in the text: "Our hope is lost." It is a good thing if our false hopes are lost; but true hope is still to be had. Hope is not denied to any man; if he will believe in Jesus, he may yet be saved. Latin, Dum spiro spero, while I breathe I hope; and I turn the proverb over, and say, Dum spero spiro—while I hope I breathe. To render the sentences rather freely will suit me well: "While I live I hope, and while I hope I live." Sinner, your life lies in hope, and while you have hope you have life. To despair is an unwarrantable thing, a thing full of sin, and fraught with mischief, besides being false and unreasonable.

Despair, which is the mind's declaration that there is no hope, is not so much a sickness of the understanding as a sin of the soul. It is a crime against the truth, a high offence against the Lord of love. Despair is a high insult to God; it casts dishonor upon his chief attributes. In the first place, it is most derogatory to the truth of God. If a man says, "I cannot be saved," he contradicts the divine voice: "Look unto me, and be ye saved." God has sent the gospel to men, and it is no other than good news to them; but despair virtually says it is no gospel, it is no good news. God has set up a throne of grace, and promises there to meet with the sinner; but this man professes that there is no throne of grace, for he denies that there can be any grace for him. He refuses to come to the loving Father because he feels sure that he will show no mercy, though he has declared that he will do so. God has given a thousand precious promises, such as this: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." This despairing sinner says he does not believe this; his sin is too scarlet to be made white, the crimson of his guilt is too ingrained ever to be washed away. Thus he gives God's promises the lie, and this is a daring thing to do.

He that despairs insults God's power. He doth in effect tell the Lord that he pretends to a power which he does not possess. God saith: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;" the man saith he will not trust in Christ, for he does not believe that God can save him; he declares that he has gone beyond the bounds of mercy, and so he tells the ever gracious One that he has no power to save him. The Lord loves not that his omnipotence should thus be denied. He is grieved with those who thus limit the Holy One of Israel. They that would restrain his power shut out one of the brightest beams of his glory.

But despair abundantly casts dishonor upon God's mercy. Know ye not that his mercy endureth forever? "The Lord God merciful and gracious" is one of the ways of his manifestation. Has he not told us that he "delighteth in mercy"? Yet if you say: He will not have mercy upon me, I have out-sinned his grace; I have gone beyond all possibility of forgiveness," you do as much as lies in your power to spit in the face of the God of love.

Despair brings out the devil, and crowns him in Christ's stead. Despair says: Satan: "Thou art victorious over the mercy of God; thou hast conquered Christ himself." Christ saith that he is revealed that he may destroy the works of the devil, and you stand up and say: "Here are certain of the devil's works which Jesus cannot destroy; namely, my sin and my sinful inclinations." You wave the flag of the devil in the face of an insulted Savior; and whereas he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, you in fact tell him that he has not half the power to save that Satan has to destroy, that Satan can be more successful in destruction than Christ can be effectual in saving.

I go a little further, and I say, with a deep feeling of solemnity, that this heinous sin of despair tramples on the blood of Christ. Christ has died and shed his blood, and we know that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin. We have God's word for it; yet here is a man who says, "It cannot cleanse me from my sin." If we look deep into the essence of actions we shall see that despair despises the atonement and denies its efficacy. We tell the man that there is forgiveness, but he mutters, "It is not for me;" we tell him that Jesus Christ has emptied his veins to fill a sin-cleansing fountain, and he answers: "It may be true; he may be able to save all others, but not me." Now, what you have a right to say to other people may also say, and if all united with you it would be tantamount to declaring that the crucifixion is an empty show, that the Redeemer's atonement is a mere pretence, and that Christ is powerless to save.

Despair has something in it of sinning against the Holy Ghost; for the Holy Spirit brings you rich cordials in the promises of God, which will raise your spirits and will restore you from death; and what will you do with them? You take them and dash them against the wall, as if this almighty medicine, devised by infinite wisdom, were the deceitful nostrum of a quack, and you could not receive it. It seems to me a great and horrible offence to deny the testimony of the Spirit of God, even of him who gives to the Holy Scriptures, inspiration and certainty, and this you do when you refuse to believe for eternal life.

Despair makes a man ready for any sin, for there are many that say, "I can never go to heaven, therefore I will take a good swing here, and get what pleasure I can while it is within reach." Have I not heard them say, if not in words yet in their actions, "There is no mercy for me, and I may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. I will go the whole hog now I am at it; I will, at least, know the heights and depths of sin, as there is no chance of mercy for me?"

Oh, this despair—avoid it, I pray you, as you would avoid death itself for it will render all means of grace useless to you. If ye will not believe, neither shall ye be established. If you fall into despair, the songs of Zion will be dolorous ditties in your ears, and the preaching of the gospel might as well be the preaching of the law. See how a despairing man shuts his ears; like a deaf adder that will not hear, chariots you never so wisely; it matters not what the theme may be—if it be infinite mercy, free forgiveness, and everlasting love, yet, as long as the soul is despairing, you do but make it the more wretched. The hopeless hearer rejects all consolation, his soul refuseth to be comforted, and his despair embitters every morsel he eats and every drop he drinks.

Despair, too, is certainly vain and wicked, because it has no Scripture whatever to support it. Oh, pray you, "but there are many dark Scriptures." I know there are; but I have not time this morning to take them up one by one, and show that they need not lead any man to despair; but there is one text in the Bible which covers all texts, be they black as they may. I do not mind what the passages of Scripture are, nor what they testify; I am sure they speak the truth, and therefore I know they cannot speak contrary to other parts of divine revelation. Here is the famous text: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

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