

THE BEST RECOVERY

A SERMON

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“So will you recover me, and make me to live.” Isaiah 38:16

WE have this morning to notice *the nature, the grounds, and the prospects of recovery, spiritually taken, to which our text alludes*. I notice first then, the nature of the recovery. The disease I need not this morning dwell upon, having dwelt upon that last Lord's-day morning, and also shown how in the second Adam the superior has swallowed up the inferior. And indeed this is the object of the ministration of the gospel from time to time, that while we become buried in one thing and another, and become swallowed up in a variety of things, the glorious gospel of the blessed God, coming with power, may swallow all that up that has swallowed us up, and raise us up at the same time to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus the Lord.

I notice then, first, THE NATURE OF THE RECOVERY; and in so doing, the first thing I come to, is the forgiveness of sins. We have shown that sin is a disease; and therefore, we must now come to the great matter of the forgiveness of sins. And as there was a lump of figs applied to the boil of Hezekiah, we are hereby reminded of the fact that the truths of the gospel must be brought to where the disease is, namely, in the soul, in the heart, in the conscience. Hence runs the promise, “I will restore health unto you, and will heal you of your wounds; because they called you an outcast, saying, ‘This is Zion, whom no man seeks after’” Do not pass lightly over what is there said, “They called you an outcast;” now notice, as soon as ever a man is brought into real soul trouble, not merely turning religious, not converted by a mere mental and moral conversion, but is really brought into soul trouble, wounded by an arrow from the bow of Omnipotence, I mean wounded by the Lord himself, as the Lord has said, “I wound;” when the Lord brings a man into soul trouble, he then becomes by that which the world does not understand, and he therefore, becomes an outcast. “I will also restore health unto you, and will heal you of your wounds.” That man has many wounds, I may say innumerable wounds; he knows that he is full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores from the head to the foot, that there is no part sound; the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. That is the man thus becomes as an outcast. “I will restore health unto you, and heal you of your wounds; because they called you an outcast, saying, ‘this is Zion.’” That is another very powerful suggestion; “this is Zion.” Ah, that man is brought to Zion, brought to believe in Jesus Christ; “he that believes has everlasting life.” And mind you, Zion is the place where Christ reigns in all the characters he bears, where Christ is the surety of the new covenant; there it is the Lord has commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. “This is Zion,

whom no man seeks after;" never mind, if no man seeks after such, the Lord seeks after such; "I will restore health unto you; I will heal you of your wounds; for they call you an outcast, saying, 'this is Zion, whom no man seeks after;'" but it is God's Zion, where our God dwells; where Christ is enthroned, where the blessed Spirit dwells; yes, it is that mount Zion, that kingdom that rules over all; even that everlasting kingdom which can neither be moved nor destroyed.

But coming then first to this personal healing, the first mystery or secret of it is, the forgiveness of sins; for this, we are assured, shall every one that is godly pray; every one that has been brought into that state indicated by the Savior when he says, "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick;" and that forgiveness of sins is to be had only through the blood of Jesus Christ. I am sure the Scriptures I am about to lay before you, do set forth that very mercy which you know what it is earnestly to seek; that after you have found that mercy you will seek the same mercy again; and when you have found it again, you will seek it again, because it is that particular mercy above all other mercies that we shall need all the days of our life; and if you have not yet found that mercy, if the Lord has begun a work of grace in your heart, it is that mercy for which you will rightly, sincerely, and constantly seek; I mean that mercy which I have already indicated, namely, the forgiveness of sins, realized in your own soul's happy experience. We come to the 103rd Psalm, where David blessed God with all his heart and all his soul; "Who forgives all your iniquities, and heals all your diseases." Here you see how beautifully he places the two together; as though he should say, all the time there is wrath, all the time there is a curse, all the time sin is unatoned for, sin remembered, and sin unforgiven, sin unpardoned; all the time there is sin between me and the Lord; all the time that exists, I am full of disease, unhappy, miserable, wretched, know not whether I shall be lost or whether I shall be saved; and while men are telling me to come to Christ, and look to Christ, and lay hold of the promise, I am obliged to fall back with this spiritual disease as Hezekiah did with the literal disease. "So, will you recover me, and make me to live." There will be therefore, a seeking after, in private as well as in the public means of grace, the realization of this pardoning mercy. And when the Lord is pleased to bring home the word with power, and to speak home a sense of pardon, there will be then that peace enjoyed with God which is there described by the Psalmist. This then is the great secret of our recovery, realization of the pardoning mercy of God, as described in the 103rd Psalm. At the same time, there is a variety of forms and circumstances under which the soul might appear under a prospect of realizing this pardoning mercy. Isaiah appeared in a different position; the same in substance, but different in form. He said, "Woe is me, for I am undone;" which I think is tantamount to this; woe is me, for I am ruined; sin has ruined me; I am ruined in the fall, ruined in my soul, ruined in body, mined in life, ruined in death, ruined for judgment, and ruined for eternity. But there is a promise that the Lord will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and that he will raise up the ruins thereof and make up the breaches thereof. "Woe is me, I am undone." I know we cannot have much hope while we have nothing but a sense of our ruin; but I do say this, it is one of the greatest mercies we can have, to have this sense of our ruin; "woe is me, I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell among a people of unclean lips," as all by nature are. This conviction arose from the light which the Lord gave him by the contrast of the infinite purity of the Most High, when he heard the Seraphim, and the theme of the Seraphim; there is a kind of epitome of the ministry of the gospel; their theme was this, "Thrice holy is the Lord God of Sabaoth." And what is the declaration of the law in all its terrors, but a declaration of God's infinite majesty, his holiness, his untarnished and untarnishable holiness; and what is the gospel but a declaration of the same? And when a sinner is brought to see and know something of the solemn and awful contrast that exists, his heart sinks

before God, and his language is, "Woe is me, for I am undone." Ah, but then the Lord delights in mercy, and the Lord never convinces a sinner, never wounds, without intending to heal, not in the sense I am now describing; the Lord never humbles, in this sense, without intending to raise up; the Lord never enlightens the eyes of a sinner in this sense, without intending to give him to see something besides that which he at first sees. "Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken from off the altar;" ah, the altar where the sacrifice is; there it is our sins are laid, there the fire of God's wrath came, there our sins are consumed, gone, and destroyed forever; there the Lord can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. "And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, lo, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." Ah, who can describe that love that was now shed abroad in Isaiah's heart, that peace that was enjoyed in his conscience, that sweet fellowship he now had with God? What a wonderful change of scene! Just now it was nothing but wrath, and death, and judgment, perdition, destruction, hell, everything terrific to the last degree; but now, so great is the change by the realization of this pardoning mercy that the soul rises into sweet adoption, into sweet fellowship with Christ Jesus; rises into the perfection that is in Christ, into the conquest of Christ, into the freedom Christ has wrought, into the kingdom of Christ; and such an one stands thus upon the rock of eternal ages, his goings established, a new song in his mouth, even praise unto the Lord God. "So have you recovered me, and you will make me to live." It is then this pardoning mercy, by the efficacious power of a Savior's blood; this is the great mystery, the great mediatorial secret and ground of that recovery, that bringing back of our souls to God, having gone from God in the fall, and personally, it is in this way he brings us back to himself; so are we recovered, and made to live. Again, another appears in a waiting position, standing before the Angel of the Lord, clothed with filthy garments. It is just possible, literally speaking, that Joshua might perhaps have found something better to have clothed himself in; he might have wrapped himself, arrayed himself, literally speaking, in something better; but he preferred to be arrayed in that which would indicate his state; and therefore, his being clothed literally with filthy garments was expressive, was a kind of symbolical expression, figurative confession before God, that just indicated what he was; that all his righteousness was as it were but filthy rags; that he faded as a leaf; that he was as an unclean thing, that his iniquities like the wind had carried him away. He stood before the Angel of the Lord; what a position; just mark; where all those whose sins are forgiven are sure to be brought more or less, into the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ; he stood before the angel of the Lord; and Satan, an adversary, standing at his right hand to resist him. Satan will resist us nowhere else but there; but when we are brought to the messenger of the new covenant, to the angel of the new covenant, and there is a fountain opened, there our sins are taken away, and there is the best robe brought in, there God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus; the great enemy of our souls well knows that if the Savior's work be imputed to us, revealed to us, the word brought home with power, and we once made one with this angel of the new covenant, Satan knows after that he can no more destroy us than he can destroy Jesus Christ, and he will never have another opportunity of trying to destroy Jesus Christ. Satan tried to destroy the Savior in his infancy, he tried to destroy him from time to time all through his life; he tried to destroy him in his death, he tried to destroy him in the grave, by the guard of Roman soldiers that they set; for it is possible that they would, had they been able, have destroyed his sacred body; but then prediction placed matters in another form, and they could not go beyond that which God himself suffered; "Hitherto shall you come, and no farther." Satan knows when the soul is thus once united to the angel of the new covenant that he has lost that soul forever. Here then is the recovery, in this forgiveness of sins. And how many sweet instances we have of this in the New Testament. You recollect well the

woman sitting at the Savior's feet. Ah, her many sins were her many diseases; her deep dyed sins were her deep-seated diseases, deadly sins her fatal diseases, loathsome sins her loathsome diseases. But, said the Savior, they are all forgiven; "go in peace, your sins are all forgiven you." No wonder that she should love much. So, it was with the man with the palsy; and that poor man appears to have been in despair; it is not said, when Jesus saw big faith, but "When Jesus saw their faith." It is quite possible, indeed I think clear that all of these four persons who brought him had received mercy from the hand of Jesus Christ; for they had faith, the Lord had blessed them with faith, and they believed that the Lord would not reject this poor palsied man; and so they brought him, took the roof off, let him down through the roof, did not believe the Savior would reject him; and the very first sentence applied to the man's disease put that right which had made everything wrong; "Your sins are forgiven you." Thus, then I take this literal disease to be a figure of sin, of what we are by sin; and the recovery as expressive, in the first place, of the pardon of sin realized in our souls.

But I must go on a little further with this. Mind this, if your religion does not bring you to this point, that the first of all mercies, the greatest of all mercies, I speak now of mercies, mind; the most essential of all mercies, the most needed of all mercies; if your religion does not bring you to feel that one thing must be settled, namely, the forgiveness of sins, there can be no life, no peace, no access to God, no love to God, no fellowship with God, no salvation, no seeing God's face without it; this matter must be settled. Hence this is just where the non-professing world and the mere empty professing world are always in the dark; they can settle this great matter of sin with God by a few formalities, or by a few creature doings; or that Christ is a kind of public remedy, say they, for kind of public calamity; and if they add a something of their own, that will settle the matter. Ah, that may satisfy Satan, and the soul that is in the keeping of the power of the prince of darkness; but let one that is stronger than Satan come and cast Satan out; and let that sinner see that the breach between him and his Maker is like the sea, that it is a gulf that none but an incarnate God could ford, and that sin is that which none but an incarnate God could encompass, bear and atone for; and that the curse, the wrath, the indignation, the anguish, the tribulation; the hell which sin has entailed, are such as none but an incarnate God could embody, and could endure and could survive, and could annihilate, put an end to, and bring in eternal life; let the sinner be brought to see this, and then he will seek God in the right way. I am bringing in perpetually, but I shall make no apology for it, every minister seems to have his few favorite scriptures, and I seem to have mine, a few favorite scriptures upon certain points; and that scripture in the 6th of John I again mention, which I think I mentioned the other evening; it is very a favorite scripture of mine, my heart has been encouraged by it times almost without number; where it is said that "every one that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me;" Ah, what is the first thing we find in this glorious *me*? It is that blood that cleanses from all sin, it is that price that was paid for the redemption of the soul; it is that by which the Lord delights in mercy, it is that by which, in one word, as the poet sweetly sings,

"Grace reigns to pardon crimson sins,
To melt the hardest heart."

So that when we look at the Savior's description, "Every man that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me;" if I am brought to him, then that is a proof I am taught of God. Although when you are first brought to Christ as a sinner, you have not much definite knowledge

as to the perfections of his work, or the relation he bears, yet if we are taught of God there will be a going on of conviction of what you are in your own heart; and in connection with that there will be a going on of illumination of mind concerning Christ; so we shall go on in a right knowledge of ourselves, and a right knowledge of Christ; and if we have received him, then we shall come into the generation of the righteous, for “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” Those who are taught of God will live all their days by this recovering mercy; we shall want restoring every day, “he restores my soul.” Every visit of his love is a preservative; these visitations are that which the saints in all ages have longed for. “Remember me with the favor you bear to your people, oh, visit me with your salvation.” When you have once really received this grace, you will never after that be contented to live without Christ and without God. I might here enlarge upon the grounds of this recovery. Why were we made to know our state, and to seek a realization in our souls of this pardoning mercy? And why have some of us felt this pardoning mercy again, and again, and again? Where or what is the ground thereof? We come to the scriptures, and the matter is made as clear as can be. Do we, from an apprehension of the suitability of the Savior, and from a realization of his mercy; do we consequently love the Lord? What say the scriptures? “We love him because he first loved us.” And would we have a little more information upon it. “He has not appointed us unto wrath;” meaning that by the sentence of the law he could have sentenced us to eternal wrath, but he has appointed us to obtain salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ. Would we have a little more information upon it? The answer would be this; “Because you are sons, he has sent forth his Spirit into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Would we have a little more information upon it? “He has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” Thus, you will see how ministers of necessity bring these great truths of the Gospel in, in almost every sermon they preach. Because these truths are capable of such a vast variety of form. “As to his sermons (say they,) they are nothing; they consist merely of the leading doctrines of the Gospel; that is all; always preaching the doctrines of the Gospel.” Well, I thought, I do not wish to preach anything else; I do not want another Jesus Christ; I only want the same Jesus Christ in all his variety of adaptation to my necessities; I want no other God; my God has in him an infinite variety of charms and beauties, and an eternity of delights that will make it utterly impossible for the scene ever to become common place; it will be always new, and always fresh, and always precious; and it will take, if I may use such, I was going to say, an unwarrantable expression, it will take us more than eternity to tell out all the varieties that will be found in the infinite God. There is not a doctrine of the Gospel that may not turn itself into such a variety of shapes and forms as to contain more mysteries than all the volumes that have ever been written upon science since the foundation of the world; even if the Alexandrian Library had been preserved to us, as I wish it had been, with its thousands and thousands of volumes; all those would amount to nothing in comparison of the Creator himself; and this is reasonable too, because God himself must be greater than his works. So that bless the Lord, whatever sameness mere professors may complain of, may we rather rejoice in the sameness than not!

But what shall I say, when I come to the next in this department? and that is, the Lord’s delight in pardoning, the Lord’s delight in our recovery, and redemption, and salvation. Now, those parents that would lay down their lives for their children, (and I do not think any others real parents: I call any others but mere animals,) will know something of this, how easily, if they can get the least ground, the faults of their children glide into nothing, how easily they cast them behind their backs. I have been sometimes much pleased with this, when I have heard any person to a mother find

some fault with her children, if she will not instantly, before almost you can get a word out, have some little excellency at hand; and if there is not one, she will fancy one; and the less you say upon the matter the better, depend upon it. And I am sure it is not unscriptural to use this illustration. I like to see such feelings; I do not understand those parents that look upon their children as mere blocks, as if they had no souls. If then we are capable of this affection, capable of this feeling, capable of agonizing at the throne of grace for their eternal welfare; if we feel thus towards our children, how much more shall your heavenly Father? Ah, my hearers, we have but a mean view of the delight he has in receiving a poor prodigal home; we have but a mean view of the delight he has in finding his pieces of silver, his precious treasure; we have but a mean view of the delight he has in bringing his wanderers home; in searching out and finding out his sheep where they have been scattered in the dark day. Just at that day when we are sinking in despair, Christ is coming after us; just at that day when we think the Lord is far off, he is coming towards us, with a heart full of love, and eyes full of pity, and hands full of mercy; all our sins are gone, forgiven, forgotten, to be remembered no more for ever; he will remember us only by that which is well pleasing in his sight; remember us by his love, remember us by his mercy, remember us by his dear Son, remember us by his covenant, remember us by what he has for us; forgetting us in all other respects, and remembering us only by that by which he delights to remember us. "Who," then, "is a God like unto you, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin, passing by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" "So, will you recover me, and make me to live."

Third. I will now notice THE PROSPECT, "And make me to live." What is the kind of life that we shall live? I will notice it under four parts: first, *it will be a life of freedom; then a life of gratitude; then a life of assurance; and then, a life of fellowship with God*. First, it will be a life of freedom; as Hezekiah himself describes; and I wish with that subject of freedom I could go straight forward, but I cannot; I shall meet with a drawback; cannot help it, though I lament it. He himself describes the freedom; he says, "For peace I had great bitterness; but you have in love to my soul;" nothing else could do it, no works, no merit in creature doings; there is nothing between Hezekiah and the love of God to unite the two; love comes and unites itself to Hezekiah's soul by Christ Jesus, without any creature works whatever; "You have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for you have cast all my sins behind your back." Behind the back of Jehovah, behind the back of eternity, at any infinite distance; as far as the celestial east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. So, shall I live in this sweet freedom; brought up from the pit of old Adam, the pit of sin, and of death, and the curse; all my sins cast behind the back of Jehovah; and Christ occupying the place of my sins; Christ appears in the presence of God for us. Here is a life of freedom, a life of precious faith. "The life that I now live in the flesh is by faith of the Son of God." It is a life, then, of Gospel freedom, of spiritual freedom, wherein God appears as the Father, having set us free from all law accountability and responsibility; Christ is the Surety, he stands engaged for our bodies, our souls, our life, our death, our acceptance, our resurrection, our glorification; it all rests with him; all judgment is committed unto the Son. This is the life that Hezekiah would live. But ah, Satan there came in. He can turn himself; as soon as he sees one form of attack is unsuited to us, he then adopts another form of attack. No sooner was Hezekiah brought into this sweet freedom than alas, alas, he became proud, messengers came from Babylon to congratulate him upon his recovery. What does he do? Does he bear testimony of what he is as a sinner? Does he bear testimony of what the Lord had done for him? Does he set forth before these messengers the great secret of his recovery; and thus, hide himself, as it were, and set forth the name of the great and the everlasting God alone? Alas! no. He was got into carnal ease,

carnal importance, carnal consequence, carnal confidence; showed them all the treasures of his kingdom, in order to give them an impression what a great man he was. If I show them all the treasures of my kingdom, they will see I can hire armies all round about, and they will never come to fight against me; what a great man I shall be. Ah, Hezekiah, all this treasure that you have boasted of shall go to Babylon, and your offspring shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. What a stain was that on the pride of his glory? Ah, what an axe was that laid to the root of the tree of his pride; and Hezekiah felt it too. "Good is the word of the Lord;" yes; solemn, but it is good; yet "there shall be peace and truth in my days." So, you see, we are never out of danger; the Lord alone can keep us; if we do not err in one way, we are pretty sure to err in another. There he was brought into freedom, yet it was in this freedom that he got into that carnal state, and was thus acting more like a man of the world than like a man that had just realized mercy at the hands of the Lord. I could bring other instances of this from the Bible, and show that some of the most ungodly men have rightly reprov'd even children of God; but I forbear for the present. Is there then a man or a woman here this morning that has got the freedom of the gospel? Have not you realized the solemn fact that Satan has tried to make you careless, tried to make you despise that which you know after all is essential to the real health of your soul? Has not Satan sometimes tried to persuade you that no minister can instruct you; that you know all that you can know? When I come into this pulpit, I never suppose I can instruct any of you; I never came into the pulpit with such a feeling in my life; I very often feel that there are many of you ought to be in the pulpit instead of me, and I in the pew. Well then, say you, what is the good of your coming? Because, although I cannot instruct, the Lord can; and though I can speak only the words that the Lord enables me, if he attend the word with power, enable you in the power of his Spirit to read out your interest in eternal things; ah, then you will say, I was instructed this morning; the minister was the means, but it was the Master that did the work; he fastened the nail in the sure place; he brought home to my soul his love, his pardoning mercy, so that the minister, though he feels his ignorance, and incapability of instructing himself, much less others, still he must not on that ground be discouraged; because the Lord has said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." It is not, therefore, the minister's great knowledge, but it is the grace that is in his heart, when he speaks from his own soul's experience in simplicity and earnestness; it is the Spirit of God alone that can touch the souls of the hearers. "Paul may plant, and Apollos water; but God alone can give the increase;" Nevertheless Satan takes advantage of this life of freedom. I have seen in my time persons who have gone off into presumption, denying some part of God's truth; and they have gone off into such a spirit that it has been a greater privilege to get away from them than to be with them; their language to me has seemed more like the language of a daring hypocrite than of a saved, broken-hearted sinner. However, even these, among churches, if they are God's people, he will turn in his own time all their presumption into a kind of fire that will by and by bum them out of it. I knew an instance of this of a man many years ago, in the country. I could not endure his company. He could talk Gospel words as well as any man in the world; but it was in that Spirit and that way that I could not bear his conversation. Now that man, when he came to die, declared to a friend of mine, that he had not a spark of grace in his heart; "If ever I had had a spark of grace in my heart, (he said,) I never could have treated the people of God in the way I did. However, the Lord did bring home a scripture with power to his soul before he departed: "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin;" and in the power of that scripture I believe he did die in peace at the last; still, at the best, broken bones are not very pleasant things; and it is a great thing to be kept where David was when he said, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation." So, that the greater the privilege

we have, the more Satan envies us, the more he will try to make us abuse the great and unspeakable mercy of being brought into the freedom of the everlasting Gospel. And then it will be a life of gratitude. What is there approaches so near to the joys of heaven as when the soul is filled with sweet gratitude to God? What is their theme in heaven, but giving thanks unto God and the Lamb? Oh, it is a blessed life to live, a life of gratitude to him who has loved us, saved us, blessed us, and ever will bless us. And then it is a life also of assurance. "What is the sign?" said Hezekiah, "that I shall go up into the house of the Lord." The sun goes back ten degrees. You know my idea upon that; it may be fanciful, perhaps it is. The sun went back ten degrees; and certainly there are ten commandments, and Christ certainly walked in these ten commandments, and shone upon them always during his life; and in his death he went back to the first commandment again; he went back ten degrees in his atoning death; and that atoning death, Christ having shone in his life and in his death as the Son of Righteousness upon every commandment, magnified God's law, that stands as the mediatorial, sacrificial pledge, assurance, that we shall go up to the house of the Lord, to the house of eternal glorification; "for whom he justifies, them he also glorifies."

Lastly, this life will be a life of fellowship with God. Those in olden time that abode with the Lord, what could they not do? It mattered not whether Pharaoh, a Red Sea, a dreadful desert, a rolling Jordan, the walls of Jericho, united nations; mattered not what stood against them; in fellowship with God they could conquer all. And so, with Hezekiah, he was preserved because he abode in fellowship with the Lord his God. Depend upon it, friends, I speak the truth when I say that real prosperity, unequalled prosperity lies in fellowship with God. May the Blessed Spirit then, quicken us more and more into sweet fellowship with the blessed God, that we may go on to live a life of fellowship with Him who will never leave us, never forsake us.