

A LOW ESTATE

A SERMON

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“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

Romans 7:24

THE apostle in the beginning of this epistle takes a four-fold view of sin, its wretchedness, and the threatening's of heaven against the same. First, he sets before us the outward, awful fruits of sin as practiced both by Gentile and by Jew, together with the solemn threatening's and righteous judgments of God appended thereto; and shows us that the only way of escape from that is by becoming a Jew inwardly, by circumcision of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. Nothing but this vital work of God can deliver from that department. Then the second view he takes is that of the universality of sin; as you may see in his 3rd chapter; where he there shows that none is righteous, no, not one; and indicating at the same time the terrible judgments belonging to this universal family of man, being thus all under sin, and under the curse; showing that the only remedy for that, or the way of deliverance from that universality is that Christ is the propitiation for our sins; and that it is by a living faith in his all-sufficient sacrifice by which alone we can be made essentially to differ. The third view he takes of sin is its origin, as shown in the 5th chapter; where by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, for all have sinned; and he shows there the reigning power of that sin; and that the only remedy to meet it is the interposition of the blessed Redeemer in the perfection of his work, in entire contrast to the first Adam; that while in the first Adam we have sinned, and consequently judgment and condemnation have come upon us; yet in the second Adam we receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness to reign in life by one, Christ Jesus. This chapter, the 7th, refers to the fourth view he takes of sin; namely, sin as dwelling in us, sin internally. Thus, he views it externally, universally, originally; and one would think there he would stop; why, you say, surely, we have no more sin to look at; surely we have got rid of sin now; if we have got rid somewhat of its external, and of its universality, and of its origin; surely there is nothing more. Yes, there is, a great deal more yet. And what is that? Something that is in us; the internal. And it is this internal, when convinced thereof, that causes the soul to sigh, and groan, and mourn. And hence, the original word here translated “wretched” is in another place translated “afflicted;” in another place it is translated “misery.” “O afflicted man that I am.” Oh, when a sinner finds out how far sin has afflicted him, and that is something worth knowing; when a sinner finds out how sin has afflicted him, with what a deadly wound it has afflicted him; with what a deadly sting it has afflicted him; when a sinner find this out, then how glad will he be with that remedy which our

God has provided. "O afflicted man that I am; who shall deliver me from this affliction, this deadly wound of sin; wherein I am wounded unto death and eternal condemnation?" Then again, "O miserable man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Great as the misery of man is, if anything could make a man miserable, it is when holiness and justice take hold of a man's conscience and soul, and shake him as it were over the very mouth of hell; and make him feel the wretchedness of the state he is in; and give unto him those fearful apprehensions of the wrath due thereto that shall make his lips quiver, that shall make his very frame tremble, that shall cause rottenness to enter into his bones. Then shall he say, "O miserable man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Oh, how such an experience prepares the soul for mercy. Its very prayer is, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And, oh, wretched man that I am, not fit to be seen; I am that wretched, sin-torn, sin-deformed, sin-corrupted, sin-defiled creature, that angels must look upon me only with abhorrence; that infinite holiness and justice must look upon me with infinite and eternal abhorrence. Oh, wretched man that I am; where shall I hide myself? Is there any hiding place for such a creature as I am? Yes, there is a man who is as a hiding place from the wind; who is a covert from the storm; and who is as rivers of water in a dry place; and who is as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. More and more, as we go on, we shall seek vital godliness for ourselves, and contend for it also in relation to others, that we may not be deceived; for I am sure there is nothing after all that so much concerns us as this great matter, the great salvation enquired after in our text; "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" It is a great thing, a very great thing, for a man to be able authentically, scripturally, and truly, to say as does the Psalmist, and the Psalmist said three very great things then; at least he said two great things, and prayed for another great thing, when he said, "The Lord will perfect that which concerns me." Ah, then, this eternal salvation of my guilty, miserable soul concerns me; and the Lord will perfect it. And then the ground upon which he will do so; "Your, mercy O Lord, endures forever." But at the same time the Psalmist did not stop there; he was blessed with that spirit of godly awe and godly fear that prevented him from dealing presumptuously; and so he closes his testimony in this way: "O Lord, forsake not the work of your own hands for though, Lord, you wilt perfect that which concerns me, and though your mercy does endure forever; yet I know right well that your order of things stands thus: that "for these things I will be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do them for them." So that here is the spirit of testimony, and the spirit of prayer, in sweet accordance with that order of things that God has established. And what have we in our text but the spirit of testimony and of prayer? "O wretched man that I am" there is the testimony of his state; "who shall deliver me from the body of this death;" there is the spirit of prayer or enquiry after that salvation by which alone he could be saved.

Our text, if we take one of the things fairly implied, would come before us in a threefold form. Here is first *the state*; "O wretched man that I am" here is, secondly, *the deliverance indicated*; "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death;" and third, *the contentment*; that is, his contentment with that deliverance, indicated in the next verse, as well as in after parts of the epistle. Now I may in the commencement just observe, before I describe wherein the wretchedness consists, in order that we ourselves may test ourselves by the apostle's testimony, ns to whether we are brought into the same path; for if we are not brought into the same path of preparation for the gospel, then we are not in the way to the right reception of the gospel; for without being brought in at the straight gate, and into that narrow path which leads unto life, we certainly must be lost. I just observe, at the beginning that it is a personal matter. "O wretched man that I am." And the more you look at the first part of our text altogether I am sure the more you will like it. It is not, O

wretched man that is, or O wretched woman that is, or the other is; but “O wretched man that *I am*,” Oh, that is a good thing literally, even, when people have sense enough to mind their own business, and let others alone. And so spiritually when a man finds so much work at home, with his own heart and his own soul’s affairs, that his own personal sins become a greater burden to him than the sins of all the world besides, that is a good sign, when a man is thus walking personally before God, under a sight and sense of what he is; with, “O wretched man that I am.” This is the spirit that will cause Christians to esteem each other better than themselves.

First. Now there are four things which I shall notice that made up or constituted the wretchedness here testified; and these four things are set before us in this form; at least I shall notice them for the sake of clearness in four parts. The first is that of *apostasy from God*; the second is that of *the wickedness of the heart*; the third is that of *legal slavery*; and the fourth is that of *immoveable hindrances*. These four things are the things that made the apostle cry out in the language of our text, “O wretched man that I am.”

First then, that of *apostasy from God*. This is rather indicated perhaps than expressed in the chapter. You will recollect, that in the first part of this chapter the law of God is spoken of as a husband; as the first husband; and if that husband be dead, then the woman is at liberty to be married to another. Here, you observe, is our apostasy from God indicated; for we did in the first Adam apostatize from God; so that this our first husband, the law, divorced us, on the ground of our apostacy. And of all apostasies, only imagine this apostasy. Only look at it. What was it? Why, it was nothing less than this; it was an apostasy from the holy, the righteous, the true, the everlasting, the blessed, the glorious Jehovah; it was apostasy from him, into an alliance with the old serpent, the devil. Such was the apostasy; such was the infinity, I was going to say, of the depth to which we fell; such was the difference of the connection. From being one with the blessed God, he having provided all that was needed for his happiness man glided off into oneness with the old serpent, into a covenant with death into a covenant with hell. This is the apostasy; and this is an apostasy that was infinitely detestable in the eyes of infinite purity. Thus, the law divorced us; and we stand divorced, under the curse, and without hope, and without God in the world. I think the apostle does include this idea; for this is certainly one thing that the law does convince of; for by the law is the knowledge of sin; and it is by the law that we are taught the depth of our apostasy, the direfulness of our apostasy, shall I say the deadliness of our apostasy. There is no language that we can use that shall be too strong to express this dreadful apostasy. Well might the apostle say, “O wretched man that I am in the fall what am I fallen into? I am fallen into the scorpion-folds of the devil; I am fallen under the dominion of the dragon of hell; I am fallen into the territories of the king of the bottomless pit; and what have I to meet me in that fall? A fire that can never be quenched; a stream of brimstone kindled by the eternal indignation of the everlasting God. What a fearful condition is mine. “O wretched man that I am.” I wish I could see ministers make a more extensive use of God’s law than they do, in order to show to their hearers something of the depth, the degradation, the awfulness, the deadliness of that sin into which we came by apostasy from God. The apostle handles a great subject when he speaks of transition from this first husband from whom we apostatized, to that Husband, Christ Jesus, from whom we can never apostatize. Now my hearers, in this first apostasy God has found a remedy; and even in the apostasy from the old covenant God found a remedy, as we see thousands of the practical violators of that covenant were on the day of Pentecost, as well as in after years, brought to know the Lord. But if we apostatize from the Gospel, apostatize from Christ, apostatize from him, then we shall never meet a remedy

for that; there remains no more sacrifice. So, if we are brought to know him, it will be well to hold him fast, for there is no other remedy: it will be well to hold fast the testimony of Christ, for there is no other remedy; well to hold fast the words of eternal life by him, for there is no other; it will be well. As Isaiah beautifully expresses it, or the Lord by him, "Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keeps the Sabbath from polluting it;" meaning that eternal rest that is by Jesus Christ; "and takes hold of my covenant;" for there is no other but that; as I have said before, there is no remedy if we apostatize from that; in this new covenant, ordered in all things and sure, here we come to the latter days, here we come to the last days, here we come to the last remedy, apostatize from this, and all is over, all is gone, there is nothing, no, nothing left through all the ages of time, or through the countless cycles of eternity, nothing can appear unto such but wrath and fiery indignation, that shall consume them from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. I do think if professors knew a little more, experimentally, of the depth of their apostasy, and of the infinite importance of the Gospel, they would not trifle with it as they do. It is enough to make a man with the fear of God before his eyes, and the love of God in his heart, and any experience of those solemn things, when he hears a man that he sometimes hopes is a brother in the Lord say, Never mind about doctrine; when he hears a man that professes to be a Christian talk in that way, it is enough to make a man tremble to the very center of his soul; whereas every truth of God's gospel is worth more than a thousand worlds. If you ask David what they were to him, he said they were more precious to him than gold, even fine gold, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. So, my hearer, a knowledge of the depth of our fall, and of our utter helplessness, will make us tremble and sigh, and come in with the apostle in this department, and say, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" or this body of death.

The second thing that made him wretched was the wickedness of his heart. "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me." And a good thing it did deceive you. He thought, that is, before he was quickened by the grace of God, that as he had taken the law as a rule of life and had lived somewhat in the letter of it, there was nothing the matter. But when the commandment came into his conscience, "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me," not infused in me, but developed in me, of course that is the meaning, "all manner of concupiscence." There is a heart to come before God with; there is a heart to meet the holy God with; there is a heart to serve God with; there is a heart to go to heaven with; there is a heart to meet God's law with; there is a heart to be accepted of God with. "All manner of concupiscence." Oh, you Pharisees, that are dead in trespasses and in sins, and in whose hearts the fountains of the great deep are not broken up, when you come before God in your formalities, your prayers are an abomination to the Most High, they stink in the nostrils of infinite purity, for they savor of all manner of pride and arrogance, and demoniacal sins, blasphemies, and enmities "of your hearts; the "all manner of concupiscence," is that all that I have to come before God with? As the Lord lives it is that is all. You may be outwardly sinless as an angel, that does not alter it; you may be as busy as the bee about your religious duties, doesn't alter it, not the slightest remedy whatever. You may have great eloquence, and understanding of the language of heaven and earth, doesn't alter it; you may have great confidence, be an enterprising man, lower mountains, exalt valleys, and astonish your fellow-creatures by your wonderful power, doesn't alter it; just the same. You may give your goods to feed the poor, doesn't alter it; you may give your very body to be burned at last, doesn't alter it; that is what you are; and apart from the work of God in the soul, and apart from the Christ of God, this is all you have to stand before God with. Are you, my hearer, convinced of this? Have you

seen yourself in this light, and do you feel this to be the truth? Do you know something of the workings of your wicked heart? Do you know that swarms of evil thoughts proceed from the heart? And do you know that your heart is as bad, or worse, if possible, than the devil himself? It is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, and the magnitude of its enormity, and the vast variety of ways in which it deceives your soul, are known only to God himself. There is not a blasphemy in hell that your old nature has not a lodgment for, and a corresponding principle to unite with it. The worst dregs of hell, and the concupiscence's of your heart, have a kind of chemical affinity one for the other; they eagerly unite; and when Satan and your wicked heart get together, you are all but a devil. And those who are convinced of what they are, confess this; and put their hand, as it were, upon their mouth, saying, "Unclean! Unclean! Unclean! that is all I have to say of myself." Oh, how this will break a sinner down; it will break his heart, break his confidence, break his self-gratulations all to pieces, make him loathe himself in his own sight, tremble at the majesty of heaven, and cry out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" I know angels cannot; I know men cannot; I know I cannot work myself out of it; I have tried; the more I try to work myself out of it, the deeper into it I seem to get; that instead of the Lord saying, Turn again, O son of man, and you shall see less and less, less and less, until by and by, by your exertions, you shall reach that perfection that some poor creatures are boasting of; so far from this being the case, it is, "Turn again, son of man, and you shall see greater abominations;" more and more. Oh, how this will make us loathe ourselves in our own sight. Not only then our direful apostasy, but also the wickedness of the heart is another thing, I say, that helps to make up our state of wretchedness, and brings us to cry out, "O wretched man that I am." It is not a mere formal testimony; nor is the apostle here mourning a few deficiencies. Some tell us that what made the apostle wretched was that he was deficient in some things, and that he was responsible, and could not keep that responsibility good; this is what men tell us; but does the word of God tell us this? I am telling you now what the word of God sets before us; read for yourselves, judge for yourselves, understand for yourselves. Am I wrong in what I have said of the apostasy? Was not the fall a direful fall; from God to Satan, from heaven to hell; from the holy and blessed God to the cursed old serpent of hell; was it not direful, and am I making it worse than it is? And am I making out the human heart to be worse than it is? Is there an expression in the whole range of all the vocabularies upon the surface of the globe that could convey by implication more, "All manner of concupiscence?" We have a great many mysteries in our experience; we come to the Bible, and the holy Bible explains them all, and at the same time finds a remedy. If the holy apostle stand up, and say, "You have done wrong in loosing from Crete; you should not have loosed from Crete;" he does not stop there; no. "Now be of good cheer; for though you have done wrong in loosing from Crete, taken a wrong step, yet not a hair of the head of one of you shall perish. An angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, has appeared unto me and showed me the remedy." So, my hearers, the very tact of the greatness of the remedy indicates the greatness of the necessity; and if we have not discovered that greatness of necessity; then there is something most materially lacking in our religion.

The third thing that made up the apostle's wretchedness, or helped to make it up, was that of his legal slavery; and yet not legal, 14th verse; "we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin." Was there a contrast ever greater? "The law is spiritual; I am carnal, sold under sin sold into slavery. Will the law help me out? No, no; the law will laugh at my calamity; the law will mock when my fear comes; may rattle my chains; I may try to excite pity; but Sinai will do nothing

but lightning, and thunder, and storm, and clothe its rugged sides with the darkest clouds; and the trumpet so far from lessening its demands, will wax louder and louder. I may cry out that I'm sold, that sin keeps me in slavery, that sin will drag me down to hell, that sin will damn me to all eternity; and the law of God will, I say, laugh at my calamity, and mock when my fear comes; terrible as is my calamity. I am now viewing things apart from Christ; we shall have to traverse this ground over again presently, to see the entire adaptation of the remedy. "I am carnal; sold under sin." If any of you were travelling in one of the Slave States, or some of them, and if a person or persons came and took you, and sent you into slavery, without the slightest hope by anything you can do of getting free, you would feel that to be miserable; would you not? So, the apostle would thus set forth our state as captive exiles, trembling lest we should die in the pit, or that our bread should fail we are put into a pit, wherein, as it were, there is no water. "Oh, wretched man that I am!" Oh, alas, alas for the flesh! for the flesh! where is the flesh all this time? where are the doings of the creature all this time? Surely if anything demonstrates the fact that all flesh is grass, and the goodness thereof as the flower of the grass; the grass withers, and the flower fades, and the grace and the fashion of it passes away; I think these circumstances do; for the flesh to lend no help in any of these cases. Here is the soul trembling and crying out where is the piety of the flesh? where is the holiness of the creature? where are your formalities? Why, not one of them appears; but the poor creature is left in all its misery, and the gods that it has been looking to are all fled from it. Where are your gods? let them deliver you, says Satan, taunting such a one. Oh, that is a great mercy, when we are brought to know our necessity, however painful the path.

And then, the fourth thing that helped to make up his wretchedness, was the hindrance which this sin within him was in his access to God. And here I must remind you of a very important matter; and that is that men tell us that none but Christians have any conflict; but that is not true. Every professor has a conflict, a natural and a moral conflict. The unclean spirit goes out, or from some motive or another the man takes up a profession; he has a great many inclinations contrary to the decency of that profession, contrary to the decorum of that profession, contrary to that estimation in which he wishes to be held by professors. There is the conflict. And he will talk of his conflicts, too; he will talk of being burdened; there will be a semblance in his experience to the experience of the people of God. It will be a moral conflict; you will have that, but it will not stop there: if yours be only natural and only moral, why, it is only the flesh conflicting with the flesh, that is all. The moral flesh says, I will be moral; the immoral flesh says, I won't. The moral flesh says, You shall. It is the creature with the creature; devil with devil; and pride with degradation, one contending against the other. All this is merely natural; there may be this conflict, and is this conflict, and a sharp conflict too; and this passes off in the professing world for the conflict described in the 7th of Romans; whereas, such persons are not conscious experimentally of the things I have spoken of this morning, and consequently are not prepared for the reception in vitality and reality of that remedy which God has provided in all its exact adaptation and certainty to the necessities of the sinner. You have all heard of the celebrated Horace, an ancient, learned man, who lived sixty years before the Christian era, lived in the heathen world. What does he say upon this? Why, he himself had a conflict; he was determined to be a little bit something different from the rest; his conscience accusing and excusing, and he put his conflict upon record; and it runs thus:

"My reason this, my passion that, persuades;
I see the right, and I approve it too;

The wrong condemn, and yet the wrong pursue.”

There is a confession from a heathen; you see the semblance, there is a near approach to the Christian; and yet that man was utterly ignorant of the Bible, or anything divine, and yet conscious of a conflict. And so were many of the ancient philosophers, many of whom I could name that have left upon record expressions indicative of this consciousness. But that is not the conflict, or rather that is only the threshold of the conflict; that is only the beginning of the conflict; that is only a very small part of the Christian’s real conflict. Wherein lies the real conflict of the Christian? Now, watch me if you can. The apostle’s trouble in this department consisted in this one thing, that the evils of his nature shut him out from fellowship with God, shut him out from prayer, and from the light of God’s countenance, and from all that enjoyment of God which he could wish to have; so that the things that he would do, he could not, and the things that he would not, these he did. Now, as this is a most important point, I must make it yet clearer, if possible. I will take some external circumstances, and these external circumstances I am about to lay before you shall be illustrative of those internal powers that keep us away from God; and if those powers within us had the same power to keep God from us as they have to keep us from God, eternal despair would be our portion. But bless the Lord, while these powers keep us away from him, they cannot keep him from us; for who can hinder him? Oh, when he comes in, then mountains flow down, then the beasts of the forest lie down in their dens, and all the earth is constrained to keep silence, when God is manifestly in his holy temple. I will take some external circumstances; I will take, in the first place, Joseph. The Lord revealed to Joseph very great things relative to his future exaltation. Joseph was (I think we may judge both from his manner and from our own experience) persuaded that the Lord having manifested these things to him that he was to be, he would have nothing to do but go on enjoying the revelation the Lord had made to him. Just so some of you, when first brought to love the Lord, first brought into liberty. “Why,” say you, “now all I have to do is to go on and enjoy this love, to go on and enjoy this salvation, to go and enjoy this grace, to go and enjoy this mercy, to go and enjoy the blessed God. Oh, what prospects are opened up to me; the stars of heaven, the sheaves of the earth, all doing obeisance as it were. What a happy man am I.” But external circumstances came; and those very things made it needful, lest Joseph should suppose that he had any hand in fulfilling it himself; see how he was shut out; his brethren hated him cast him into a pit. And do not the corruptions of your nature very often cast your soul into a pit? They cast Hezekiah’s soul into a pit; “I said, I am cast out of your sight,” said Jonah; and Hezekiah said, “I said, I shall not see the Lord in the land of the living. For peace I had great bitterness; but you have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for you have cast all my sins behind my back.” Do not the evils of our nature serve our souls in this way? And was Joseph sold? Would not our sins sell our souls? Do not your sins try hard to make you go back into Egypt, to give up your religion altogether; as to the dreams you have had, they will not come to anything; you thought you were going to heaven, you had better give it all up. And does Joseph come, in the eyes of some, from Potiphar’s wife’s testimony, under something like disgrace? and is cast into prison; can’t get to the Lord; these external circumstances shut him out all this time. So, the devil will, by means of your old man within you, by means of the sins within you, he will reproach you, shut you up in prison, and will despise you, and you will be a poor miserable creature. Now, just as Joseph was kept by external circumstances in a position where he was kept apparently far from the Lord; not but that the Lord was preparing him for what he had promised him, still it was not the path that he would have chosen just so the Christian, by the evils of his nature, and by the consciousness of them, may be kept from what he would enjoy, by them be constrained to undergo

what he would not naturally choose to undergo; and as these were the paths by which Joseph came to his exaltation; so, my hearer, your being cast into a pit, your being brought into captivity, and as it were sold into Egypt and all this degradation, why, it is the way to your exaltation. The King will need you by and bye; the message will come by and bye; the butler may forget you, but God will not forget you; your nearest friends may forget you, but the Lord will not forget you.

“His ear attends the softest call;
His eyes can never sleep.”

Thus then, while we are so shut out from God, so shut out from all that is dear to our hearts, we cannot walk in the light of his countenance. Instead of this, “the things that I would I do not; the things that I would not, those I do. O wretched man that I am.” Again, take Moses, though I might have gone back further, and taken Jacob first; he is rather a favorite of mine, as all good men are, those that stand manifest good men; but we will not go back. Moses, he thought salvation was close at hand; we shall soon be all free; I will go to work; slays an Egyptian; makes a mistake, and a terrible mistake it was, goes away into the wilderness, and there he was forty years. Just so the evils of our nature cause us to make some mistake or another; get us into a passion and cause us to make some mistake or another; and we go into the wilderness if not for forty years at least, for a long time; and there we are. Why, Moses, why don’t you go and bring salvation to the Israelites? Because the Lord has not yet brought salvation to me; and if he does not first bring the salvation to me, I cannot bring the salvation to them: and then only if he is with me. The dead professor does not mourn God’s absence, does not thirst for fellowship with electing grace, eternal life, new covenant rights and advantages. If he can keep the natural conscience quiet by his morality, by his formality, and by his hypocritical pretension to do to others as he would others should do him, there he is satisfied, he wants nothing more; whereas the Christian cannot live in his own doings, in his own righteousness; we shall never be satisfied, we shall never be glad, till we see the Lord. “Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.” “We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,” and with nothing less; “even of your holy temple.” I must close. We shall have another sermon upon this next Sunday morning.