

# TROUBLES GONE NEVER TO RETURN

## A SERMON

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“And they that swallowed you up shall be far away.” Isaiah 49:19

THERE is not much difficulty in understanding this Scripture in the letter of it, for as the nations around the Jews came in upon them, and swallowed, up house and home, expatriated them, and subjected them to slavery, and privation, and ill-usage, and everything distressing, in contrast to what they enjoyed in their own land, and then for the promise to come in unto such that they who had thus swallowed them up should be far away, there is not, I say, much difficulty in thus understanding the letter of our text, understanding it in this mere temporal sense. But taking it, as we must do this morning, spiritually, I feel sure none will be able to follow me but those who are taught of God, for we shall have to speak of things into which none can enter but those who are convinced of their state as sinners; for in an infinitely worse sense than that which I have stated, all of us are swallowed up by our sin and by the wrath of God, all being sinners, and all, by nature, children of wrath. If it were not so, there would not be room for such a promise as this. Happy, therefore, the man who is convinced of his need of this promise, so as to see and know the need he stands in of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way in which our text can be fulfilled; for it is by him that those things that have swallowed us up shall be far away. I come, then, at once to notice the text, noticing what is expressed, and also what is implied. I will first, then, notice *the distance of the adversary*; “They that swallowed you up shall be far away.” Second, *the dwelling-place of the people so delivered*. Third, and last, *the tribute of praise which this is sure to bring unto the name of the Lord*.

First, then, I notice the distance of the adversary, or tribulation. “They that swallowed you up shall be far away.” In the first place, sin. There can be no doubt about this, that sin has swallowed up both soul and body, that all is altogether corrupt. And I do not know that Satan himself can be more deeply steeped in sin than man by nature is. Hence the representations everywhere given in the word of God of our woeful condition. What, for instance, can be more expressive than that terrible scripture, for that’s what man is, in the eyes of infinite purity, namely, that there is no part “sound,” that is, no part spiritually sound, “but full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores; the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint”? Here is a poor, loathsome creature, swallowed up by his sins. Now where, then, is the remedy? The remedy is in and by Christ Jesus, and it stands thus: “Who is a God like unto you?” Now, view that exclamation in and by Christ Jesus, for there it is God reveals himself in that order of mercy to which the prophet there refers. “Who is a God like unto you? that passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage; he will turn again;

he will have compassion upon us.” Compassion upon whom? Why, upon the people who feel that their iniquities have gone over their head; the people that feel that they are by nature swallowed up in sin, that they are steeped in sin, that they are altogether corrupt, and altogether ruined. “Who,” then, “is a God like unto you? passing by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage; and he will turn again, he will have compassion upon us,” who feel that sin has swallowed us up; “and you will cast all their sins into the depth of the sea.” And where is that promise realized but by Christ Jesus? He has swallowed up sin; his atonement, like a mighty ocean, like, I was going to say, a fathomless, and almost going to say, a bottomless ocean, has swallowed up sin. “You will cast all their sins,” not some of them, not merely some of their sins, but *all* their sins, “you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea,” and that in pursuance of a covenant which he had, in infinite love, entered into, as it goes on to say, “You will perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which you have sworn unto our fathers.” Here, then, they that swallowed you up, namely, your sins, shall be far away. Oh, how does an apprehension of this endear the Lord Jesus Christ! Let us have another scripture on this essential matter; the 103rd Psalm. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.” So far, then, has he removed our transgressions from us. There is, therefore, an infinite distance between the Christian and his sins. And if you ask what there is stands between the Christian and his sins, my answer is, The Lord Jesus Christ. He stood between us and our sins, and he has swallowed up those sins; and therefore, they are represented as being at all that distance from us that his atonement could put them; they are represented as being all that distance from us that his righteousness could put them; so that not so much as the shadow of these dark mountains can reach us, not so much as the slightest savor, ill savor, of sin can reach us. Oh, my hearer, being thus one with Jesus Christ, sin at an infinite distance from him, and he from that, we stand there in the open sunshine of Divine approbation; we stand there in the living atmosphere of infinite and eternal love; we stand there in the sweet liberty wherewith Christ has made us free; we stand there free as the Lord Jesus Christ himself is. Why, as I just now said, none but the man who is sensible of his being thus steeped in sin will ever prize this mighty ocean of mercy, which is by Jesus Christ, which alone could swallow up his sins. Oh, when I look at the contemptible things that are set forth as remedies, such as human ceremonies, and human inventions, and human doings, why, all these things I never can find language to express the contempt I feel for all those delusions, when I look, on the one hand, at the solemn fact of human nature being thus steeped, doubly and trebly steeped, in sin, and that nothing, no, nothing but the wondrous death of an incarnate God, nothing but blood with infinite efficacy, nothing but a person with infinite perfection, nothing but a person of absolute eternity, power, and glory could take away sin, or present us before a holy God holy as he is holy, can present us before a righteous God righteous as he is righteous, can present us before a holy God conformed to the integrity of the new covenant; for the Lord desires truth in the inward part; not law truth, nor old covenant truth, but gospel truth. “I will put my laws,” that is, the laws of the new covenant, “into their minds, and I will write them in their hearts.” May the Lord be with his ministers, and with his people, and enable them to enter more and more into this part upon which I am now speaking. I say, he desires truth in the inward part; not law truth, not first covenant truth, but new covenant truth, for it is a new covenant promise. “I will put my laws into their minds and write them in their hearts; and their sins and their iniquities shall be at such a distance from me that I will remember them no more.” And, yet thousands upon thousands in our day expect to get to heaven while they are as blind and as ignorant of God’s new covenant as those that have never read the Bible at all, and many of them that profess to be great Christians are in

enmity against it, and yet expect to get to heaven. Why, none but an infinite God, I say, can constitute us the epistles of Christ; none but the Almighty Spirit of God can write upon the fleshy table of the heart; yes, none but the Almighty Spirit of God can give a heart with a fleshy table to it, for by nature we have nothing but a stony heart. "I will take away the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh," a heart of feeling, and on this fleshy table of the new heart the Eternal Spirit writes the laws of the new covenant, and our text contains one of these laws, that "They that swallowed you up", namely, your sins, "shall be far away." They are far away, first, by their being transferred to Jesus Christ; they are far away, secondly, by what he has done in standing between us and our sins, and atoning for them, and swallowing them up, so that not one of the tops of these mountains shall ever be seen; and they are far away from us also by the testimony of the Holy Spirit; and they are far away from us in that revelation which our God has made unto us. Oh, then, if we would live far away from our adversaries, it must be in Christ. There it is that no plague shall come nigh your dwelling; there it is that no evil shall befall you; there it is that you shall stand in all the solemnities of eternal mercy, and see thousands fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, but no evil shall come unto you; for these your sins that swallowed you up, shall be far away, to return no more forever. Now the sins and the righteousness of the literal Israelite, under the first covenant, came and went away again, and came and went away again; so that the Israelite might be an unrighteous man twenty times during his lifetime, and might be a righteous man twenty times during his lifetime; for the day that he turns from his wickedness, and does that which is lawful and right, then his sins shall not be mentioned to him; and the day that he turns from his righteousness, and does that which is wicked, then his righteousness shall not be mentioned to him; so that he will be wicked one week, and righteous another week, and turnabout and turnabout in a variety of ways; because the righteousness consisted of conformity to that covenant, and so the literal Israelite was sometimes righteous and sometimes unrighteous, and his sins were never very far from him, could easily pick them up again, easily be a sinner again. But here, in Christ Jesus when a man is once righteous, he is righteous forever. There is nothing in the Christian that can alter the fact that he still stands righteous in Christ. There he is, and there is a righteousness that maintains our life, our peace, our liberty, our standing; and when I am as ill-tempered as a witch, I am just as righteous then in Christ as I am when I am on the Mount of Transfiguration, wrapped in the revelations of an eternal world, which I shall possess and enjoy when time shall be no more. Oh, the infinite difference between the puny righteousness of the creature and the righteousness of God, the victory of an incarnate God, the completeness we have in Christ, the eternal sameness we have in him! "You are all fair; there is no spot in you." Oh, what has my soul not realized sometimes in this view of the subject! I have felt a little of the truth of John's words; he says, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Not a cloud to be seen in all the skies of the new covenant; not a cloud to be seen in the whole range of our salvation; all is light, all is clear, and of necessity eternal sunshine here must settle on the head. "They that swallowed you up shall be far away." But then this is to the man who knows that sin has swallowed him up. I dare not hinder your time to bring forward those delusions that men advocate as a remedy for sin; let us therefore go straight on with the truth itself. Now all this, then, endears the Lord beyond description, that Jesus Christ stands between us and our sins; no, more than that, he has trodden those sins to death; he has trodden them down as the mire of the streets; he has blotted them out, put them away, so that not one of these dogs shall ever be able to move a tongue against any of the children of Israel.

All other religions appear to me to be so little, and contemptible, and puny, and worthless, and lame, and dwarfish, in comparison of the religion of an incarnate God. A great sinner needs a great salvation; and when the great misery of sin is felt, through the depravity, and infidelities, and infirmities of nature, then the greatness of the victory of an incarnate God rises with attraction to the view of that soul, and that soul falls in, shall I say, with Ezekiel's river, and is wafted away into citizenship, into that liberty wherewith Christ has made them free.

Second, the judgments of God shall be far away. The judgments of God have swallowed us up. Say you, It has not swallowed me up? Yes, it has; you may not know it, but it has. God has concluded that you are under sin; so that your sin has in it all the strength of the righteous judgment of God. God has said of your body, that it shall die; that is a self-evident truth. So that his judgments have swallowed us up. Why, what a poor, lame concern is human life altogether. We patch ourselves up as well as we can; we patch our circumstances up as well as we can; we patch up our friendships as well as we can, and we make a hole here and a rent there; we are always sewing and tailoring, pretty well patching things up, and it is but a poor, patched-up concern when we have done, that's what it is. So it is that man is born to trouble. Just as you get a nice little card house there, a fire comes and burns it down; and just as you get a nice little paradise there, a pestilence passes over it, and spoils that and just as you think you have found out a little corner that is exempted from the common fate, where you will have everything that is perfect, and no defects whatever, a thorn will be found there. Oh, my hearer, of everywhere out of Christ it shall be said, "This is not your rest." But it shall never be thus spoken of those that are in Christ, as they stand in Christ, for that is their rest, and that is the refreshing where the weary shall find rest. "O Judah, keep your solemn feasts" the pass-over, and the first fruits, and the feast of tabernacles, "perform your vows", your vows of decision for God "for he has taken away your judgments; you shall not see evil anymore." So that, while the body must die, there comes the promise, as said one in great simplicity, "I know that he shall rise again at the last day." Some of our philosophers say that Old Testament saints knew nothing of the resurrection of the body, it was not yet revealed to them, and yet here is Martha speaking of it as a current belief among them. She did not even ask whether there was a last day; she did not even ask whether he should rise at the last day; it was a current belief. Those who were taught of God understood the Old Testament, and they saw in the Old Testament, in the light thereof, the ultimate day, the rising day, the resurrection day, shown in the 26th of Isaiah and a great many other Scriptures; "Your dead men shall live: together with my dead body shall they arise;" "I know that he shall rise at the last day." And I know, therefore, that the judgments that stood against me are taken away, so that now there is not one threatening in all the Bible that I have anything to do with; only as a schoolmaster, that is all, not a paymaster. Schoolmasters pay us rather roughly sometimes. The threatening's will continue more or less to be our schoolmasters, but not our paymasters, or we should be paid very badly. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." When I read the threatening's of the Bible, ah, there I am, that is my portion apart from Christ, and would be my portion, if I did not belong to Christ. I read the condemnations and the judgments. I see a world swallowed up by a flood, and I say, I shall be swallowed up, if I am not found in Christ, with a more awful flood than that, namely, the flood of immediate wrath from the presence of God. I see the cities swallowed up by the reservoirs of fire bursting forth, but those fires became extinguished; but there are reservoirs of fire that shall swallow us up, which fires can never be quenched, if not found in Christ. I see the Egyptians swallowed up in the Red Sea; I see Dathan, Korah, and Abiram swallowed up by the earth in the wilderness, and I lay these things together, and I say, These are the mere shadows of that dreadful abyss, that awful pit, that

fearful destiny, that awaits every one that is not found in Christ Jesus the Lord, that is not found believing in him, that is not brought to know Jesus. He has swallowed up the judgments, he is the only way, as the apostle gives us to understand, of escape from the wrath to come; "even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." So, I have to do with these circumstances to learn by them as my schoolmasters, but not my paymasters, no. "We are not under the law, but" says the apostle, "under grace." And I am sure the Scriptures would pay too much respect to Jesus Christ to interfere with them that are under grace. I am sure God the Father loves his people that are under grace too much to allow any judgment to reach them. No judgments can reach them. "Let Zion rejoice because of your judgments." Why, the judgments of God to these people are a wall of fire for their defense, not a fire in the midst of Zion for their destruction, but a wall for their defense. "I," says the Lord, "will be a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst." And thus, these judgments, by Christ Jesus, shall be far away. "Will you condemn the righteous with the wicked? That be far from you." Constituted the people righteous by his grace, justified freely by his grace, constituted righteous in Christ, and then condemned? That be far from you. Impute their sins to Christ, and impute his work to them, watch over them all the days of their unregeneracy, bring them at last to know him, and into sweet reconciliation to him, and yet condemn them? That be far from you. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies." So, then, "violence shall no more be heard in your land, wasting nor destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise." Thus, then, your sins and the judgments of God that swallowed you up shall be far away, by Christ Jesus the Lord. Hence, in the 9th chapter of Ezekiel, when the commission of judgment was given to destroy the enemies of the Lord, there were some that sighed and cried after this order of mercy; and upon them that sighed and cried to see the abominations described in the 8th of Ezekiel put into the place of the mercy-seat and the sacrificial order of things, the Lord commanded, "Come not near any man upon whom is the mark;" set a mark upon all that sigh and cry after the mercy and salvation that I have; and to the men with the destroying weapons, "Come not near them;" not only do not destroy them, but do not frighten them, do not alarm them, do not take a threatening attitude; do not go as though, Well, I have, half mind to kill you; I hardly know what to make of you; no. Go not near the door where the blood is. Shall the angel go and knock, and say, Who is there? Well, I see you have the blood on the posts of the door, but I do not know hardly what to do about sparing you; what sort of a character have you been? I have heard so and so about you. Not a syllable; the blood is there; the man is saved. "Come not near the man upon whom is the mark." "That be far from you." Not to come near the man? Well, but suppose it be that black-looking, sunburnt, heathen, foreign, distant, strange sort of woman called Ruth; is she to be here at Bethlehem, and to be honored? Yes, said Boaz, reproach her not; do not even reproach her; and let fall some handfuls on purpose for her; let the handfuls fall; she knows, according to the law of gleaning, all that is left belongs to the gleaner; let fall some handfuls for her; and let her drink out of the vessels of water the young men have drawn; reproach her not, reproach her not; say a word against her if you dare, Mister Reaper; I will dismiss the first man that says a word against her. And Boaz himself reached her parched corn and made her feel at home. And so, does the Lord when we understand him, he makes us feel at home. He does not come near us with his judgments; therefore, those judgments that swallowed you up shall be far away. The Lord never thought of such a thing as condemning you; never thought of such a thing. "I know the thoughts I think toward you," the Lord says, "thoughts of peace, not of evil." Why, I love you, and never thought of hating you; I have chosen you, and never thought of rejecting you; I have ordained you to life, and never thought of altering the decree; I have given you to my dear Son, and if he could

not have managed you, I would have given you up: but he can manage you; I never thought of taking you away again. I have included you in my covenant ordered in all things and sure, and I never thought of altering it. I have sworn by myself, and that oath is immutable, and I wish you to know it, that you may have strong consolation, a consolation that shall rise in tide high enough, to swallow up your tribulation, and make you know that I am your exceeding joy, and that all your springs are in me the Lord.

In the third place, not only sins and judgments that have swallowed us up shall be far away, but tribulations also shall be far away. Yes, sorrow and sighing shall flee away. We have had some beautiful instances of this, we have some, I should say, recorded in the Bible, and some of us know something of it experimentally, too. Now, Job's tribulations swallowed him up, and his trouble was never so far from him before as it was after his captivity.

And so, "they that swallowed you up," these losses and tribulations, "shall be far away." How often does the Lord fulfil this in the experience of his people! If I am speaking to any over head and ears in trouble, you will not be always so. Ah! I see no way out. But then the Lord himself knows what he will do; not merely what he *can* do, but what he *will* do; and you know that what he will do, that he can do. The Lord help you to see it, and believe it, and rest upon it, and look to him. Well, say you, I shall be glad when he does turn my trouble away then. Of course, you will; I do not doubt it; I believe you will; I do not believe all you say, but I do believe that. And you have the word of God on your side. When the people were tossed about and swallowed up by the waves and thought they would be swallowed up by the sea altogether, they cried unto the Lord in their distress, and he heard them, and answered them, and commanded; and there was a great calm, and then they were glad, because they were quiet. Therefore, I do believe you will be glad; and I do believe the Lord will not let you always be over head and ears in trouble. The Lord help you to believe that. Never mind about what you cannot see; you cannot see how five thousand can be fed with five penny loaves and two halfpenny fishes, or two farthing fishes, a farthing each. How are five thousand to be fed? Let them be quiet and sit down in fifties. Why, we shall all look foolish together, Lord. No, you won't; you sit still, and see the salvation of your God; you have walked far enough; be quiet; just do as I bid you; that will be quite enough. And so, bless the Lord, when we can watch his hand, and look to him, he himself will work, and who shall hinder him? And those troubles that swallowed you up shall be far away. Soul troubles, bodily troubles, family troubles, worldly troubles, whatever troubles they may be, here stands the promise; the time shall come when all shall be far away.

But I have two more points here now. The next is that of death. Death is an enemy, and the apostle says it is the last enemy; and this last enemy, death, shall be far away. Oh, what an infinite distance, here I use the term infinite, not as I have done in the previous parts of my discourse, comparatively, but I use it here abstractedly and absolutely, that your distance from death will be infinite. You will never approach it; death will never approach you, and you will never approach it. Jesus Christ having swallowed up death in victory, we have before us, by him, infinite duration. What a little thing is human life in comparison of that infinite duration that awaits those that are brought thus to understand and to receive the testimony of Jesus Christ!

But there is another thought, and a thought solemn to the last degree; it is a truth that the world would swallow up the church, and has done so sometimes, as far as it could. Ah, then, take our

text as a threatening to such; that at the judgment day the ungodly, that would have swallowed up the church, shall, in the most awful sense of the word, be far away. One lifted up his eyes in hell, and saw Lazarus, afar off, in Abraham's bosom. Oh, what a gulf, which none can ford, will then be forever fixed between the saved and the lost! God grant that not one of you may at that tremendous day be found on the Savior's left hand, to be sent by almighty vengeance into an infinite distance from the presence of God, from the glory of his power, and from that holy, happy company, and that glorious scene, where joy forever reigns. Our text thus applies to those that live and die untaught of God, that live and die unborn of God, that live and die without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world. They will, indeed, be far away, as far as almighty vengeance can put them, to return no more forever, even where the fire is not quenched and where the worm dies not. Oh, happy man, then, who already feels that sin and the judgments of God have swallowed him up in the first Adam and in himself, and that he is crying to God for mercy, and longing to be found upon that rock that will bear him up when the earth and the works therein shall be burned up and forever pass away. How solemn the language when applied thus to the lost "They that swallowed you up shall be far away." "Gone down," says Ezekiel, "into hell; this is Pharaoh and all his host," far away.

But my next point or part was that of *the dwelling of these people who are thus delivered*, who are thus receivers of the testimony of Christ. The former part of this verse says, "For your waste and your desolate places, and the land of your destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants." "Your waste and your desolate places." This historically and literally means, of course, the land of Judea; the inheritances allotted to the twelve tribes became waste and desolate places; and they, apostatizing from God, the very land intended for their preservation became the land of their destruction. Where were the Jews destroyed by the Roman armies? In their own land. So that their inheritances through their apostacy became waste; their land through their apostacy became the land of their destruction. But now comes in a new covenant, in which this literal Canaan shall be too narrow, too little to be good enough for these New Jerusalem inhabitants. And there are two reasons why that land would not do for these inhabitants of the New Jerusalem; first, because the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, whose sins Christ has swallowed up in the way I have this morning described, these inhabitants are spiritual, and therefore a literal land is not suited to them; these inhabitants live upon the bread of eternal life, they are refreshed by the water of eternal life, they are cheered by the wine of eternal joy, they wear robes of immortality, they live in a city of everlasting foundations, where they need neither sun, nor moon, nor stars, for the Lord God gives them light, and the Lamb is the light thereof. "Your sun shall no longer go down, neither shall your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended." So that this literal land shall be too narrow, too inferior for these spiritual people; for these people are a spiritual people, therefore they require a spiritual inheritance, and a larger inheritance, for it is a number that no man can number. And so, therefore, says Peter, here is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away. Their inheritances became waste; but can our inheritance in Christ Jesus become waste? Can the love of God ever cease to be productive? Can the mediation of Christ ever cease to be productive? Can that become a waste place? Their land became the land of their destruction through their apostacy; but can our heavenly land become the land of our destruction through apostacy? No; he that has begun the good work will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ. So that "in that day," that gospel day, this new covenant day, "shall this song be sung in the land of Judah," not the literal, but the spiritual land, "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Here,

then, the Lord has something for his people that accords with the dignity of the Savior, the constitution of the people, the greatness of his love, the solemnity of his covenant, and sacredness of his immutable oath.

But lastly, *the tribute of praise to the Lord from these people*. The 124th Psalm will give us this very beautifully. "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side." There is a two-fold contrast there; first with man, in these matters, vain is the help of man; therefore, "if it had not been the Lord who was on our side." And then it contrasts with false gods; if it had not been Jehovah, if it had been some dependent god, some local god, some idol god, some false god, their help had been in vain. "If it had not been Jehovah who was on our side, when men rose up against us," his people, "then they had swallowed us up quick; the waters had overwhelmed us; the stream had gone over our soul; then the proud waters had gone over our soul." Is it not so? Ah, what care your sins for you? They are like proud waters; they smile at your attempt to stop them; they would roll over you and carry you away like a straw down to eternal perdition. But then, if God be on our side, he is mightier than the mighty waves of the sea. Therefore, said the church, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers." Ah, what an escape is this! to be brought to understand the truth, to receive the truth, and enjoy the truth of what Christ has done. "The snare is broken," never to be mended again; "the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord;" and whatever strength there is in that name, that is, to be our strength; all the life, and grace, and mercy in that name, is to be our supply, and the duration of that name is to be our duration. "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." And if he be the Creator, then we ask the question, Is anything too hard for the Lord?