

NEVER DESPAIR

A SERMON

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“In you the fatherless find mercy.” Hosea 14:3

THIS word “fatherless” in our text is, when spiritually applied, a characteristic of the whole human race; all by nature are in a state of destitution, and no one paternally, in the spiritual and most weighty sense of the word, to care or to provide for them. Hence the Savior represents us spiritually as orphans; but he says, “I will not leave you comfortless,” or, as the literal rendering would be, “I will not leave you orphans.” The fatherless who shall or who did find mercy are described in the beginning of this same chapter, “O Israel, return unto the Lord your God;”, taking the word “Israel” here to mean the new covenant Israel of God, that shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, and shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end, the meaning is that they shall return unto the Lord their God; “for you have fallen by you iniquity;” that is we have fallen by the fall of man; for the sin of Adam is our sin; it is both transferred and imputed to us; so that by one man's disobedience all have become sinners. Thus, we have fallen by our iniquity. And when a sinner is convinced of his entire apostasy from God in the first Adam, then here comes the direction, and the manifestation of the Lord's goodness, “Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, take away all iniquity.” If you look to 1 John 1:7, you will there see a beautiful explanation of this taking away all iniquity “If we walk in the light,” that is, if we walk by faith in Christ, for he is the light, and “God is in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;” “we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleans us from all sin.” There is the testimony, among many others, in answer to the prayer here, “Take away all iniquity.” Jesus has not left the shadow of one sin: his precious blood cleanses from all sin. And then by this sacrifice of Christ comes acceptance with God, “receive us graciously.” As the prodigal was receive graciously, so every suppliant sinner is by Christ Jesus not merely received but received graciously. “So, will we render the calves of our lips;” meaning that we will not be ashamed with our lips to acknowledge what you have done for us, and that we can rejoice in hearing testimony of the great things you have thus manifested unto us. Then comes renunciation of all confidence in anything of a creature kind: “Asshur shall not save us.” Asshur of course here means Assyria, and Assyria may represent the world. And so, we may say the world shall not save us. Now we all of us, until born of God, seek only the deliverances, shall I say only the salvation, which the world can give. But when taught of God, and made acquainted with the depth of our fall, and our need of the perfection of Jesus Christ, then no longer will we look to

such deliverances as the world can give; the world shall not save us; alas! theirs is a delusive salvation; neither will we have any confidence in creature power; “neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our gods.” They are made acquainted with the depth of their fall, their need of the perfection of Christ, and brought to the solemn acknowledgement, “For in you the fatherless find mercy.”

I will take a twofold view of our text; first *circumstantially*, and secondly *spiritually*.

First, I will take it *circumstantially*; and my object in so doing is to work out the comfortable doctrine that the Lord does bring about a great many manifestations of very great mercy by means of afflictions and troubles. We find in the Holy Scriptures that the fatherless, the widow, the poor, the stranger, are generally put together as objects of the Lords special sympathy and care; but of course, it means the fatherless that are blessed with the spirit of grace and supplication; and the Lord does sometimes by those means bring them into a concern for eternal things. Now it is not my intention, of course to confine my remarks to those who may be literally so placed, because I have a further object, to remind you that as the Lord does take advantage of those circumstances, some of which I will bring before you, just so with you; whatever affliction, whatever trouble, whatever drawback there may be, there cannot be the slightest doubt that if you can come in with those experiences we shall have especially in our second part to dwell upon, the Lord has gracious purposes in thus dealing with you. Now the Lord said “You shall neither trouble a stranger, nor oppress him; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt;” that is, If a man come to you (as though the Lord should say to the Jew) who is not a Jew, yet if he fears my name, if he comes from a far country for my great name, if he heard of my name and is brought to know there is no God like unto me, then he shall dwell in any of the gates that seem best to him. So it is now, we rejoice to see such a stranger brought; when we see one brought that heretofore has not feared the Lord, but has now found out what a poor, destitute, solitary creature he is and has heard that in the Lord, he shall find mercy, we rejoice to receive such, as Moses did one of old when he said, “Go with us, and we will do you good, for the Lord has spoken good concerning Israel.” Then the Lord said, “You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry out at all unto me:” what a privilege not merely for the literal widow or orphan, but everyone in a state of affliction or trial! Just look at the words, “if they cry *at all unto me*,” if ever so feebly, and believe that I can find a remedy, that my resources are infinite, that I have all things at command: “if they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry.” And what the Lord said there belongs to every sinner that has a heart to cry to God, if that cry be ever so feeble, yet if the essence of it be, God be merciful to me a sinner, he will hear their cry. And as for those that would stop them, as for those that would injure them that are thus seeking the Lord, the Lord said to such, “My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall be widows. and your children fatherless.” Here is a pretty strong declaration, taken in the broad sense, against persecution.

But let us look at some of the circumstances wherein the Lord in such affliction as widowhood and orphanage, applying the idea to any affliction whatever, has stepped in providentially. One good woman, when she was brought into solitude, said, what no doubt she thought and felt some time before she said it, “Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty: why then call you me Naomi, seeing the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?” But if you had seen Naomi a little after this, and had said to her, what do you say to the hand of the Lord now? Well,

she would say, the bitterness is gone, and now I can see that the Lord sent me to Moab to fetch one of the objects of his everlasting love out of the state in which, as we all are by nature, she was and this one achievement that the Lord has made me the means of is worth more than all I have lost, for the loss of my husband is his infinite and his eternal gain. Ah, she would say, when I said the Lord had dealt bitterly with me, I did not see that he is very pitiful and of tender mercy. So, then, some of you, if the cloud still remain on your tabernacle, if the burden still remain, if the desert seem to be more and more solitary, do not hasten, do not be rash, do not be in a hurry, do not conclude that the Lord has forsaken you and forgotten you; no, he will step in by and by, and demonstrate to you the truth of our text, "In you the fatherless find mercy." So, I seem to grasp you each this morning; because fear what you may, my text is an answer to you. You say, Well, I not only have various trials, but I have got such a wicked heart of my own, I am such a vile wretch, I am such a monster, I am such a poor rebellious creature, I wonder the Lord has borne with me. Very well, here it is: "In you the fatherless find mercy." If you are guilty enough, and vile enough, and wretched enough, and poor enough, and miserable enough, to appreciate this eternal mercy, then you cannot very well get away from it. This is the very purpose of his dealings with us, to make known to us and to endear to us that mercy for which we are forever to glorify him. Then Ruth appears now to embody three of the characters in herself that I have just named, the poor, the stranger, and the widow; but she was not an orphan, and yet in one sense she was so if we make her an orphan, that will embody the whole four, the orphan, the stranger, the poor, and the widow. But, say you, she was not an orphan, because we read that she left her father and mother. Well, then, suppose we say she became an orphan for the truth's sake. And does not David allude to this? "When my father and my mother forsake me" if I am brought to know God's truth, and to receive that truth, and my parents, that know not the truth, persecute me or turn me out of doors on this account; if my father refuse to act as a father, and my mother refuse to act as a mother to me, and I thus become a kind of orphan, "the Lord will take me up," for "in you the fatherless find mercy." So, then, if in this sense, we take Ruth to be an orphan, how would she prize this paternity of heaven, how would she prize the finding out of the delightful truth that she had a Father in heaven, with whom was no variableness, neither shadow of turning. And was she poor? This mercy should enrich her. Was she a stranger? This mercy should give her an inheritance, as it did do, among the saints. Was she a Widow? God would become her husband.

But we will go a little farther, to another woman with a fatherless child. She had heard of the God of the Hebrews, and she thought within herself. What a happy people that must be to have such a God! Little did she think that the main body of the Israelites were ignorant of their God. "The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel" the national Israel, Israel after the flesh, "do not know, my people do not consider." Thanks to God for a better covenant, wherein all the true Israel shall know the Lord, and wisely consider of his doings. A famine sets in, and she is left with the responsibility of her son. You that are mothers can somewhat guess her feelings. Everything is gone; I will just go out and gather a stick or two and dress the last handful of meal we have; and we will eat it, and then yield ourselves up to death. Ah, but then she thought of God; she had a thought towards God. She thought within herself, Ah, if I had the God of this people to be my God, I should not feel like this; it would be all right then. Presently a venerable, serious, solemn, rather unusual looking man stands at the gate, dressed in a very plain sort of raiment, like John the Baptist, a hairy sort of dress, and a girdle around his loins; and he asked her for some water. Well, I will fetch some water. And a little cake. Ah, something else, a cake too! "As the Lord your God lives," these words prove that she had been thinking of the God of Israel, "I have

not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die.” There is no cake. Mysterious, this request. “Thus, says the Lord God of Israel.” Oh, is it possible? Is this a servant of the God of Israel? Is this a minister of the God of Israel? Is this a prophet of the God of Israel? That is just what I wanted. “Thus, says the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth;” and he is the only God that can send rain upon the earth. She went with a light heart, and before she or her son tasted a morsel, to show her faith in the blessed God, she brought Elijah the cake, and he did eat it; and it turned out just as he promised, “for the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail;” there was enough not only for her and her son, but for the prophet also; and no doubt but there were many godly and profitable times of solemn prayer, of solemn thanksgiving, of godly conversation. They lived upon it many days. Now there were many widows in Israel, but none of them had a desire to the true God, and therefore unto none of them was Elijah sent. And this woman would not have had this desire unto the God of the Hebrews, if the Lord himself had not opened her eyes, as he had done in the case of Rahab many years before, and thus sent the message and the mercy. So, then, I am sure Cowper’s words are true when he says:

“Mercy, encouraging thought, gives even affliction a grace,
And reconciles man to his lot.”

When we can see the end of the Lord's dealings, we shall then have to bless him for all the way he has led us. Would not this woman's son, then, say as he grew up in the knowledge of the truth, “In you the fatherless finds mercy”? I was in a state of destitution, but you did step in. Hence in Jeremiah 41:10, “Leave your fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; let them trust in me;” not only fatherless children and widows literally, but persons in any affliction, in any trouble, in any trial: “I will preserve them alive; let them trust in me.”

Presently we find these two conditions together again, widowhood and orphanage. The good man struggled, and struggled, and struggled along, and got into debt, and died in debt, could not help it. The Lord alone is the main Judge in these matters. There are some men and women too who struggle with all their might and keep clear they cannot. I am aware there are reckless persons, I am quite aware of that, but my text does not lead me to that subject. There are persons constantly striving, and yet everything seems to go against them. So, this good man died in debt; and his widow said to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant did fear the Lord.” You see he feared the Lord. Now if Elisha had been a modern, formal, hollow, piety man, he would have said, Your husband fear the Lord, and die in debt! That never could have been so. If there is one speck, or one spot, or one fault, why, he could not have feared the Lord. But Elisha was better taught. He knew that God was sovereign in his dealings, and that he did sometimes subject his people to many great mortifications before men. And now the creditor is come, kind-hearted man! tender-hearted man! sympathetic man! he was come only to take the poor widow’s two children away, that is all! to take them from her (of course he pitied her, and pitied them), and sell the poor little children in the first slave market at the best price that he could meet with; and if this infamous creditor died in his present state, he is now no doubt in hell, he has been there ever since he died, and will be there forever. Now it is a mysterious thing to be brought to. She secretly cried to the Lord, and the prophet was directed to her house. Well, your husband died in debt; how much have you got towards it? Not a penny. I have only a pot of oil; I expect that will

be worth about three halfpence; that is all have got. Have you got no money? No. I have worked hard every day to sustain my poor little children here; and I have got a bit of bread for them somehow or another, I scarcely know how. You have got nothing towards it then. No, well, go and borrow, don't steal them, and you cannot buy them, so you must borrow (you must borrow sometimes); go and borrow all the vessels you can find. So, she borrowed, and borrowed, and borrowed; brought in one lot, and filled them from her pot of oil; then another lot, and then another; till at last, when they were all full, "she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel." What, has not your God done all he can do? No; if you can find vessels, he will find the oil. If you can find the vessels, he will find the mercy to fill them, vessels of mercy. If you can find the sinner, he will find the salvation; if you can find the hungry, he will find the meat; if you can find the thirst, he will find the drink. "And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more, the oil stayed. And she came and told the man of God; and he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay your debt, and live you and your children of the rest." And so, they did; a clear proof, you see, that "in you the fatherless find mercy." Ah, how the Lord appeared, then, for that good man's family when the man himself was no more! Some of you Christian parents that have secretly sighed before the Lord on behalf of your children, and have not seen the fruits yet, you have not seen them drawn nearer, but rather going further and further away, yet those sighs will be treasured up of the Lord; your tears will be put into his bottle, your longing will never be forgotten by him; and if he does not answer those prayers in your lifetime, mercy shall be rained down upon those that you shall leave solitary when your eyes are closed in death, and your soul is happy before the throne of the great Eternal, and celebrating there, with raptures indescribable, the mercy that is from everlasting to everlasting.

Time would fail me to bring in all the circumstances where the Lord has thus wonderfully appeared. In the New Testament, there is a poor widow, and she had a good son. He would not allow his mother to want anything while he was living. My mother took care of my life when I was young; she has paced the room with me when I was an infant; she had patience that none but a mother does possess; she has taken care of me, soothed me, loved me. Now she is old, and I am able to work, I will take care she shall fare as well as I do. But presently this excellent son is taken away, and the widow's heart is broken. She had at the same time a desire to God, a desire to Jesus, and the Savior took care to meet with her. Some people say it is very unlucky to meet a funeral; the Savior did not think so. Jesus touched the bier. Bless his dear name a touch does it. Ah, if he touches the soul, it springs into life at once. Difficulties do indeed vanish at his touch. "He touched the bier, and said young man, I say unto you, Arise. And he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother." Here again the widow and the fatherless found mercy. "In you the fatherless find mercy."

Then there are two more widows I will just name, because I rather like them both. One had been a widow fourscore and four years; so, if she were married at twenty, she must now have been one hundred and four years old. Well, what does she do in her widowhood? The temple was never opened but she was there; she departed not from the temple but served God with fasting and prayers day and night. When the dear Savior was brought into the temple, ah, she was overwhelmed; she knew him at once. This is the God I adore; this is the Child born, this is the Son given, this is the mighty God, this is the everlasting Father, this is the great Redeemer; and "she spoke concerning him unto all that looked for redemption in Israel." So, she was one hundred and four years old, and yet a preacher; "she spoke unto all that looked for redemption in Israel." One more widow I will mention, whom I ought to have kept till the last, because it so happens this is our collection day,

and I ought to have brought her in to help us at the last; but then you have good memories and will not forget. She cast into the treasury two mites, which was all her living. And that did not escape the Savior's notice. "I say unto you, These have given of their abundance;" they have a great deal more left than what they have given; "but this woman has cast in all that she had, even all her living." And what, after all, is the gospel of the blessed God but an economy of providential, of saving, and of eternal mercy to all, let their afflictions or troubles be what they may, Whose eyes are opened to see their need, and who are led to look to Jesus Christ as the way in which that mercy shall come. I think these things are encouraging. For if some of you have not many troubles now, you will have them by and by, very likely; not that I desire you should; the Lord is the best judge of the matter. He knows who to put into Jonah's hell, and who not; he knows who to put into the furnace, and who not; he knows which of his disciples and which of his people it is needful most to try. He does not try all as he did Job. Therefore, let us leave these things with the Lord. Ah, but, says one, I have prospered and got on well. Then I have a word for you. I will tell you a question you should ask. The Lord has prospered me. I see the Lord honor's affliction; I see he takes wonderful advantage of losses, and crosses, and trials. I wonder if he has honored my prosperity. Now I will give you three signs, and if you possess those three signs, then your prosperity is a blessing to you; If you do not possess those three signs, your prosperity, which now seems to be a blessing, will in the end be a curse. First, it will increase your zeal to serve and to honor God. Do you say of a cold morning, I have a very comfortable house, everything very comfortable; a blazing fire, and every comfort possible; I cannot go out of such a house such a morning as this to the house of God; I shall take cold, or be cold there, or be cold when I come out; so, I will stop at home. Then, if so, that is a very bad sign. But, if on the other hand, you say, Shall I make my comfortable home an argument why I should not go to God's house? Shall I make my home a reason why should not join with his saints? Shall I make the bounties that he has heaped upon me so abundantly a reason why I should not assemble together with the saints? Ah, this is Satanic work, whereas if your prosperity is blessed it will keep you zealous to serve the Lord.

Secondly, it will give you a sympathizing heart towards the poor; that is, in a prudent and a proper way. Perhaps there is not anything that requires more wisdom or more prudence than distributing to the poor, considering the wonderful advantages that some people take of it. Now in this place you have fully given this sign that your prosperity is blessed. Yes, were I to speak to the contrary, the stone would cry out of the wall and the beam out of the timber would answer it and contradict me. If then, your prosperity be blessed, it will give you a heart to sympathize with the poor, and especially the poor of the Lord's people. Then thirdly, it will make you deeply interested in the cause of God; it is sure to do that. David said, "I have set my affection to the house of my God." Where is your proof, David? Look at that great heap of silver; look at that great heap of gold; look at that great heap of brass; look at that great heap of iron; look at all the provision I have made. "In my trouble I did not forget the house of the Lord; I have set my affection toward the house of my God." Now, then, if your prosperity has these effects, then it is a blessing; but if not, then your prosperity is a curse to you. "Faith without works is dead." Is anyone going to try to persuade me that the living Spirit of the living God is the author of a dead faith; that the risen, living Savior is the author of a dead faith; that the living God, that ever lives, is the author of a dead faith? No; "he is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Where there is life there will be action. I do desire to bless the name of the Lord that in the great majority of cases among yourselves your prosperity has been spiritually as well as circumstantially a great blessing to you. There is no canker in it,

there is no worm at the root of it, and therefore it is that your leaf shall be always green, nor shall you cease from bearing fruit.

Secondly (and it must be but briefly), *I notice our text spiritually*. “In you the fatherless find mercy.” Now we are all of us spiritly orphans by nature. It is a great thing to be able to set our seal to what the Lord says concerning Israel. “You were cast out in the open field, to the loathing of your person, in the day that you were born.” We were as much, apart from his grace considered, exposed to eternal condemnation as the infant cast into the open field is exposed to certain death. “I passed by you when you were in a loathsome state, and I said unto you, Live; and you did live.” Some cannot tell when that moment was, or when that day was, or when that month was, or even when that year was, when they began to think, and began to be wise, and began to discover the exposed condition in which they were, their need of a refuge, their need of God, their need of his mercy, their need of Christ. And when thoroughly taught their need, the Lord makes a second visit. “Now when I passed by you, and looked upon you, behold, your time was the time of love.” And in what form does that love appear? “I spread my skirt over you,” which of course means two things; first, I took you under my special protection; secondly, it seems to me to refer to justification, to the bringing in of Christ’s eternal righteousness, of Christ’s wondrous work. “And I swore unto you.” Now you that know the Lord, why, that testimony, “He could swear by no greater, he swore by himself,” is sunken down into the very bottom of your souls. You feel that to part with that would be to part with everything. Here is no uncertainty; here is not only mercy, but the sure mercy of Christ Jesus the Lord. “And I entered into a covenant with you;” and that covenant has hold of our best affections, has hold of our very souls; “and you became mine, said the Lord God.” I may say, concerning these words taken in the new covenant sense, that the matter was then settled, never again to be unsettled. You have been unsettled since that day as to your interest in it, but not as to the truth of it. It is a great mercy that though you may doubt, and fear, and tremble, lest at last you should not be saved, yet nothing can persuade you to look elsewhere for salvation. Thus, in this spiritual sense also, “in you the fatherless find mercy.” Now we have already had a sermon upon the latter part of the 16th of Ezekiel; I must therefore pass by many things connected with this subject and say just a word upon it. Towards the end of that chapter, how beautifully the Lord brings in the new covenant! “I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth;” that is, the youthfulness of the Jewish nation, in the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And this oath is often referred to. This is the new covenant, that in their seed, Christ Jesus, should all the families of the earth be blessed. “Then you shall remember your ways, and be ashamed, when you shall receive your sisters, you elder and your younger, and I will give them unto you for daughters, but not by your covenant.” Now the sermon we have had upon it shows that the elder sister meant the Jews, represented by Samaria; and the younger sister meant the Gentiles; and the Jews and Gentiles were given to the Church by the instrumentality of the apostles. “And I will give them unto you for daughters,” because the apostles were the means on the day of Pentecost, and Peter at Caesarea, as well as Paul among the Gentiles, of bringing Jew and Gentile to the knowledge of this mercy. “And I will establish my covenant with you” an everlasting covenant. While the former part of the chapter, then, represents us in our spiritual orphanage, the latter part represents us in this new covenant relationship wherein God is our Father by Christ Jesus the Lord. And what the Lord says is so expressive of our experience, too: “I will give them unto you for daughters, but not by your covenant;” that is, not by the old, the Jewish covenant. That was God’s covenant. The covenant God made with Adam was his covenant, and the covenant he made with the Jews was his covenant; but no covenant is God’s covenant in the

sense of the new covenant. The new covenant is God's covenant in its entirety. In the covenant, he made with Adam, Adam had to perform a part; in the covenant, he made with the Jews, the Jews had to perform a part; but in the covenant, that is in Christ Jesus we have to perform no part. It is God's covenant in its entirety; and he was no more engaged to send Christ into this world than he was at the same time engaged to gather in all for whom the Savior died and bring them to that eternal world where the Savior as our Forerunner has entered. There is no conditionality for you; all its advantages are for you, but not one thing is left for you to do. Oh yes, there is, says one; we are to believe and to pray. But, my good friend, that is God's work. Faith is the gift of God; the spirit of grace and supplication is of God; the standing fast is of God; all these things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ. Now in conclusion, "That you may remember, and be confounded, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I am pacified toward you for all that you have done, says the Lord God." How true that is! It is now nearly forty-three years ago, since the Lord brought me into this reconciliation and I have not opened my mouth from that day to this to say a single word in favor of free-will, duty-faith, creature holiness, or creature righteousness. My mouth is completely stopped. The apostle says "Wherein is boasting? By the law of works? No; but by the law of faith." "You shall never open your mouth anymore because of your shame when I am pacified toward you," to say a single word in favor of old fallen nature. You shall know that it is all of my mercy in its origin in mediation, operation, manifestation, and endless continuation. Thus, see how mercy over the poor and needy reigns! And of all the temporal deliverances of which I have spoken, none could equal in the pleasure of it that of the widow who was in debt, the wretchedness the honest conscience feels when in debt and unable to pay, embitters everything even existence itself; and how delightful when the hand of the Lord found her wherewith to pay her debt! This would be the very first thing she would leap with joy to do; and now that the debt is paid and provision made to go on with, she would feel a freedom, the sweetness of which none but such could understand. Let this kind of deliverance be a shadow of the greater redemption by a greater payment, and to show forth greater and more lasting mercy.

May the Lord increase our acquaintance with these things for his name sake.