

THE SICK MAN'S PRAYER AND THE SINNER'S CRY

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 8, 1849

"Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise." Jeremiah 17:14

Among the many features which distinguish the people of God, there is one which seems more particularly to shine forth; and that is, that however distressed their minds may be, however low they may be sunk, they can accept no help nor deliverance, but that which comes from God Himself. We find this spirit breathing all through the word. Take such passages as these, for instance; "Give us help from trouble; for vain is the help of man." **Ps 60:11** "In vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel." **Jer 3:23** "O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me." **Isa 38:14** The Psalms are full of this spirit. However exercised, however distressed, however deeply sunk the soul of the Psalmist was, you will always find this distinctive feature, that to God, and to God alone, he looked. "My soul"—he charges her—"my soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him." **Ps 62:5** And we find something of the same spirit breathing itself forth in the words of our text, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise."

Our text consists of three clauses. And these three clauses I shall, as the Lord may give me strength and ability, endeavour spiritually and experimentally now to open up.

I.—The **first** is, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed." What is this expressive of? A felt disease; a disease too

deeply felt for any but God to cure. Now when the Lord teaches His people to profit **and all His teachings are to profit**, He makes them sensible, deeply sensible of the malady of sin. Thus, without doubt, there is not a living soul upon the earth whom the Lord has not more or less taught to feel the malady.

There are, however, three things necessary in the work of grace upon the soul with respect to this malady of sin. There is, **first**, a knowledge of the **malady**; there is, **secondly**, a knowledge of the **remedy**; and there is, **thirdly**, the **application** of the remedy to the malady.

1. There is the knowledge of the deep and distressing **malady of sin**; and this lies at the root of all. At the foundation of every sigh, every cry, every prayer, every groan is an internal and experimental acquaintance with the deep and distressing disease of sin. Thus, if a man do not feel internally and experimentally the desperate disease with which he is infected from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, I am bold to say, that a spiritual groan, cry, or sigh, never came forth from his heart.

Let us, as the Lord may give us ability, look a little more closely at the various maladies that the Lord's people feel themselves to be infected by; for this disease of sin is not a single or solitary one. It has many, many distressing branches; and for the various distressing branches of this one disease, God has His own divinely appointed remedy.

i. There is the disease of **blindness**. Now this is what man does not feel by nature. When the Lord told the pharisees their state and condition, could they receive it? This was their answer, "We see;" therefore the Lord said, "your sin remaineth." They were not acquainted with the desperate

disease of blindness; they thought they saw; they were well persuaded they knew everything, which they ought to know. But the Lord's people are taught to feel how blind they are, and how unable to see anything except as the Lord is pleased to anoint their eyes with His divine eye-salve. Thus they cannot see what or where they are, nor the meaning of any portion of God's truth, nor the blessedness and beauty of Jesus; they cannot see His glorious Person, atoning blood, justifying righteousness, dying love, sweet suitability, nor the preciousness of all His covenant characters and divine offices, whilst labouring under this disease of blindness.

Now, when we feel at first what poor, blind, ignorant creatures we are, we often have recourse to human remedies. We think perhaps that **study** may remedy this disease of blindness; that if we get together a number of religious books, read the Bible very much, and hear the best preachers, we may heal that disease; but alas, alas, we soon find that all these fancied remedies only leave us blinder and darker, and more ignorant than before; till feeling how blind we are, how little we know, what a veil of ignorance is over our hearts, it makes us sigh and cry and beg and pray and look unto the Lord to open these blind eyes of ours; to bring light, and knowledge, and truth into our hearts. This is in fact a part of the breathing in our text, "Heal me, and I shall be healed." And when the Lord is pleased to open our blind eyes, and show us something of His own beauty, blessedness, and glory; when the blessed Spirit anoints our eyes with heavenly eye-salve to see something of the glorious Person of Christ, the riches of His grace, the efficacy of His blood, and the sweetness and suitability of all His covenant characters and offices—when He thus brings a measure of divine light, life, and power into our souls, He answers that prayer, and heals our blindness.

ii. We are also afflicted, naturally, with the dreadful disease of **deafness**. We are deaf to all the admonitions of God's word, deaf to all His threatenings and judgments, deaf to all His gracious promises; and not all the preaching in the world can of itself heal this deafness of ours. But it is the Lord's office to unstop the deaf ears; and when we begin to feel how deaf we are, and to mourn over our inability to hear God's truth with life and feeling, it brings a cry up out of our hearts unto God that He will apply and bless His precious word with a divine power to our souls. Do you not sometimes come to chapel with this dreadful disease of deafness upon you? You may come time after time, Lord's day after Lord's day, and yet, through this disease of deafness, no power accompanies what you hear. You do not hear to your soul's satisfaction; there is no melting, no softening of your heart and spirit under the word. It seems as though, however you heard with your outward ear, there was another ear wanting—the ear of your heart; and until the Lord is pleased to open that ear, all that you hear with the outward ear is unavailing. Now, when we begin to cry to the Lord. that He would apply His word to our hearts, bring His precious truth into our soul, cause it to drop like rain upon our spirit—this is, in effect, to cry to the Lord to heal this disease of deafness.

iii. There is another disease that we are sadly afflicted with, and that is the disease of a **hard heart**; a heart that refuses to melt, a heart that can read of all the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and feel no compunction; no trickling tear, no godly sorrow, no softening experienced within. O this disease of a hard heart! For the people of God want to feel their hearts made soft, their souls watered, their spirits melted, laid low, and dissolved into tears of contrition. But through this dreadful disease of a hard heart, they cannot produce these gracious feelings in their souls. They cry, therefore,

'Lord take this hard heart away; Lord, do thou soften my soul. When I come to hear Thy word when I read of Thy sufferings, do Thou melt my heart; do Thou take away this heart of stone, do Thou give me a heart of flesh.' This is, in effect, breathing forth the words of the text, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed."

iv. We are afflicted also with another dreadful disease, that of **unbelief** So afflicted are we with this dreadful malady of unbelief that we cannot raise up a single grain of faith in our souls; we cannot believe a promise, however sweet or suitable; we cannot believe our interest except so far as it is made clear to our eyes; we cannot believe that "all things work together for our spiritual good;" we cannot believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, nor trust in His blood and love. Now when we feel this, and ask the Lord to take it away, to bless our souls with faith, what is this, in effect, but breathing forth the prayer, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed?" And when the Lord is pleased to give us faith to believe His word, to come to Him, to hang upon Him. to trust in His mercy, and rest in His love—this is the fulfilment of the prayer, the Lord hearing and answering it to heal this felt disease of unbelief.

v. There is **pride, worldly-mindedness, and carnality, self-glorying,** and a host of vile corruptions and dreadful lusts, continually bringing our souls into bondage; and these we cannot heal. We cannot clothe ourselves with humility; we cannot give ourselves repentance and godly sorrow for sin; we cannot sprinkle our own conscience with the precious blood of the Lamb; we cannot shed abroad the love of God in our hearts, cannot dispel doubt and fear, cannot deliver ourselves from temptation, nor subdue the evils of our hearts. Man may tell us to do so; but we have tried, and tried, and tried, and found we could do none of these things. And thus we are brought to fall low before the footstool of

mercy, and cry unto the Lord in the language of the text.
"Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed."

2. Now these are the three steps. We first of all feel the **malady**; then we see revealed in God's word the **remedy**; and when the Lord is pleased to bring the remedy into our hearts, then He fulfils the prayer of the text in **healing** our souls. When light comes, it heals our blindness; when power is felt in the heart, it heals our deafness; when we feel softness and humility, by a sense of God's goodness, it heals our hardness; when faith springs up in living exercise, it heals our unbelief; when contrition, humility, meekness, and godly sorrow are given to us, it heals the disease of hardness and coldness, deadness and barrenness.

Thus, when the Lord is pleased to apply His precious word with divine power to our hearts, and to work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, it is a fulfilling in our soul's experience of the words of the text; it is not only a cry to the Lord that He would heal, but it is a healing of our diseases. "Heal me, O LORD," the church cries, "and I shall be healed." I want no more. It is not man that can do it. I cannot do it. It is not my promises, nor my resolution; it is not my prayers, nor my desires; it is not my sighs, my cries, my groans, nor breathings, nor wishes. All these are physicians of no value. But Thy precious blood sprinkled upon my conscience, Thy glorious robe of righteousness put upon me by Thine own hand. Thy dying love shed abroad in my soul by the Holy Ghost,—there is healing efficacy, blessed virtue in these things, O Lord. And if Thou do but apply these things with a divine power to my heart, then I am healed. One look can do it; one word can do it; one smile, one touch can do it. Thou, Lord, hast only but to speak, to bring one word, to bestow one look, to give one promise, to drop but one drop of Thy precious love, blood and grace into my heart—it is done in

the twinkling of an eye. This is the substance of the cry that comes up from time to time out of a living soul, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed."

Now if this be not the substance of your prayers, why do you go to a throne of grace? What else is the real subject of your petitions? What else is the language of your groans? What else is the import of all your desires? "Heal me, and I shall be healed" this is the language of all prayer; this is the import of all supplication; this is the breath of every praying soul; this speaks in itself volumes of anxious desires, earnest longings, fervent prayers, hungerings and thirstings—all the wants and wishes of really contrite hearts.

II.—We pass on to the **second** clause. "Save me, and I shall be saved." Now what after all is the great concern of every living soul? Is it not salvation? If his soul be saved, what can hurt him? and if his soul be not saved, what can profit him? "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall he give in exchange for his soul?" Whatever trial, whatever temptation, whatever difficulties, whatever exercises beset me by the way, if I reach heaven at last, what do all these anxious troubles concern me? If I bathe at last in streams of endless bliss, what are all the cares, sorrows, troubles, perplexities, trials, and griefs of this life? "Save me," then the church cries, "and I shall be saved."

Do not the words imply despair of self salvation? If I can do anything whatever to save my soul; if I can by a desire, if I can by a prayer, if I can by a wish. if I can by any exertion of my own free-will do anything whatever to save my own soul. I cannot, with an honest heart utter the words of the text. But if I am brought to this inward feeling, that do what I can, do what I may, I cannot in the matter of salvation bring my

soul a step nearer heaven, and that I am absolutely helpless as regards all divine matters; then, as the Lord is pleased to quicken and revive my soul by the blessed operations of His Spirit, how the substance at least, if not the words of the text, comes forth, "Save me, O Lord, and I shall be saved!"

I. Now **salvation** implies several things. First of all, it implies a salvation from the **guilt of sin**. This is what the souls of God's people are first chiefly exercised by—the guilt of sin, and the troubles and sorrows that it brings; as well as the distressing doubts, fears, bondage, and hard labour that a sense of sin laid upon the conscience is always accompanied with; so that in crying, "Save me, and I shall be saved." they cry to be saved from the **guilt** of sin felt in the conscience.

2. There is the **filth of sin**. which pollutes the mind. When we see what sin is in the light of God's countenance, it stains our conscience, and brings a distressing sense of self-
abhorrence and self-loathing. Now from this filth of sin polluting and defiling the mind, do we desire to be saved and delivered by the mighty power of God.

3. There is the **power of sin**—the secret dominion sin possesses in the heart; and O, what a tyrannical rule does sin sometimes exercise in our carnal minds! How soon are we entangled in flesh-pleasing snares! How easily brought under the secret dominion of some hidden corruption! and how we struggle in vain to deliver ourselves when we are caught in the snares of the devil, or are under the power of any one lust, besetment, or temptation!

The Lord, and the Lord alone can save us from all these things. He saves from the **guilt** of sin by sprinkling the conscience with the precious blood of the Lamb; when that is felt in the soul, it delivers us from its guilt. He saves us from

the **filth** of sin by the washing of regeneration, renewing us in the spirit of our mind, and giving us a solemn plunge in the fountain once opened for all sin and uncleanness. He saves us from the **power** of sin by bringing a sense of His dying love into our hearts, delivering us from our idols, raising our affections to things above, breaking to pieces our snares, subduing our lusts, taming our corruptions, and overmastering the inward evils of our dreadfully fallen nature.

None but the Lord can do these things for us. If we have backslidden from God, **and who among us has not backslidden from Him?**; if we have been entangled in Satan's snares, and the corruption of our own hearts, **and who has not been entangled in these evils?**, nothing but a sweet application of the precious blood of Christ can cleanse us from the guilt of sin. If we have defiled our conscience by our crooked and perverse ways, nothing but the sanctifying operations of the blessed Spirit, washing us in the fountain of Christ's blood, can cleanse away and remove this inward defilement. And if we are under the power of evil; if sin be working in us and bringing our souls under this dreadful tyranny, nothing but the felt power of God, nothing but the putting forth of His mighty arm, nothing but the shedding abroad of dying love, nothing but the operations of His grace upon our soul, can deliver us from the secret power of evil.

If we never felt the guilt of sin, we should never want to have our consciences sprinkled with the precious blood of the Lamb; if we never felt how we are defiled from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, we should never want to be washed in the fountain for sin and uncleanness. If we never felt the secret power of sin, how it entangles our thoughts, carries away our affections from the right path wherein we

should walk; if we never sighed, cried, or groaned beneath the power of evil, we should want no mighty miracle to be wrought in us, we should want no outstretched hand of God, we should not want to feel the power or taste the sweetness of dying love. Thus, would we enter into the freeness, the suitability, the beauty, the riches of God's great salvation, we must descend into the felt depths of our malady, into our distressing disease—the hidden workings of the evil within—into the abominations that lurk, work, and fester in our fallen nature; for the knowledge of the malady is so deeply connected with a knowledge of the remedy, that if we know not the one we never can know the other.

When the Lord is pleased in any measure to bow down His ear to hear our prayer; when He is pleased to make His word sweet and powerful in any degree to our souls; to give us a sight and sense of our interest in the precious blood of the Lamb; and to deliver our souls from the hand of the enemy—then we can see and feel and know what a great salvation the Lord Jesus Christ has wrought out; and we are brought to see and feel that nothing but such a salvation as He has accomplished, and none but such a Saviour as the Lord Jesus Christ is, can really suit and save our souls. So that the foundation of all true religion—the foundation of every sigh, of every cry, of every groan, of every wish, of every desire, of every true breath of prayer is, an experimental acquaintance with the disease in its various branches, and a knowledge, an internal knowledge of the depth of the fall, as made manifest in our wretched heart. Thus, when the Lord is pleased in any measure to stretch forth His hand, and to work powerfully for our deliverance; when the Lord blesses our souls, and visits us with the discovery of His goodness and love,—then, comparing what we are, and what we have been, with the riches of His mercy and grace, how it exalts

His salvation and sacrifice, and the love, blood, and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in our eyes!

These two things will always go together. When I feel no malady, I want no remedy; when I feel no condemnation, I want no salvation; when I am not exercised with a sense of inward guilt and distress, I want no precious blood sprinkled upon my conscience; I want no love shed abroad in my heart; I want no blessed visit from the Lord of life and glory; I want no sweet promise to bring its dew into my soul; I want nothing that the Lord has to bestow; I can occupy my mind in the things of time and sense, and be carnal, sensual, and earthly. But when various exercises recommence in the soul, and the Lord sets to His hand, and begins to revive the work of grace in the heart, then I want something divine, something experimental, something applied, something done in my soul that He alone can do for me. Without, then, these exercises, without a knowledge of the dreadful malady, without strong temptations, without daily conflicts, what is internal religion to me? If unexercised, I can do without internal, experimental religion; without the felt power of God; without Christ, without the blessed Spirit, without the Bible. But place me in circumstances of guilt, of exercise, of distress, of sorrow, of trouble, and the various perplexities that encompass the child of God, and let the Lord work by these things to kindle in my breast the spirit of supplication, then my soul will be wanting every blessing that God has to bestow; it will be separate from the world, and living a life of faith and prayer; it will be dealing with God; it will be coming out of the creature in all its shapes and forms, looking simply and solely to the Lord Jesus Christ. So that as we have the knowledge of the malady in its various branches, and an acquaintance with temptation, guilt, sin, shame, and sorrow—as these things are opening a way for the precious truths of God, and giving a place in our hearts for their

heavenly influence, we are arriving at the knowledge of the remedy.

I can appeal to your consciences, you that have any **for there are very few that have consciences, there are very few really exercised about divine things, there are very few that the Lord is really teaching by His blessed Spirit, and leading down into the solemn depths of divine things** I say, you that have consciences, whose souls are kept alive by daily exercises, who know the evils of your hearts by their continually bubbling and springing forth; you that are not deceived by a name to live, or an empty profession of religion: I say, you whose souls are thus exercised, know that "in all these things you live and in all these things is the life of your spirit." Take away your exercises, your afflictions, your sorrows, your perplexities, and the working of God by these things, and where is your religion? It has made to itself wings, and flown away. But let your minds be well exercised in the things of God; let affliction befall; let the bonds and ties of this world be severed: let temptations come with overwhelming weight; let the corruptions of our fallen nature boil up; let your soul sink down into trouble; let eternity open before your eyes; let death come into sight; and let your souls be solemnly exercised on divine realities; then I will answer for it, you will want what God alone can bestow upon you; and in the silent watches of the night, you will be crying, to God to look down upon you, to visit and bless you, to speak words of mercy to you, to shed abroad His love in your hearts, and to comfort and cheer your troubled soul.

Take away a sense of the malady, you are taking away a sense of the remedy; take away the doubts and fears, the temptations, the trials, perplexities, the troubles and disappointments that God is exercising you by, and you are

taking away the promises, the sweet manifestations of God's love, and all the application of God's truth with divine power; in fact, you are taking away all prayer out of the soul, and removing that which lies at the foundations of every groan and every sigh that comes up out of the heart.

III.—This leads us to our **third** clause; "for thou art my praise." Why, when we can feel that the Lord has in mercy done anything for our souls, when we can believe that He has wrought a work of grace in us; that He has convinced us of our ruined state by nature; that He has led us to Himself. enabled us to rest on His promises, and made us to hate ourselves in our own sight; that He has kindled and stirred up in us a spirit of prayer, and at times made Jesus precious to our souls; that He has given us a view of the glory of His Person, the riches of His grace, the suitability of all His offices and characters, and thus endeared Him to our hearts—then we can say. "Thou art my praise." 'I can praise Thee for every trial, thank Thee for every sorrow, and bless Thy name for every exercise; for I feel that all these things have been for the good of my soul. There has not been one trial nor one sorrow too many; it has all issued in my good and Thy glory.' And therefore, in solemn moments, we can take up this language in our lips, because He is "our praise."

We have reason to praise Him for every discovery of our dreadful malady and every discovery of the suitability of His precious remedy; we have reason to praise Him for every view of self, and every view of Christ; for every view of guilt, and every view of atoning blood; for every view of sin and shame, and every view of the robe of righteousness that shields and shelters from it. We have reason to bless Him for every breath of prayer, for every desire, for every sigh, for every cry, and for every groan. We have reason to praise Him for every acting of grace in the soul, for every spark of

living hope in the breast, and every feeling of life and love in the conscience. We have to bless Him for looking down upon us in the depths of His mercy, convincing us of our ruined state by nature, leading us to the Lord Jesus Christ, making Him precious to our hearts, and giving us to see something of His beauty, blessedness, and glory; and all this connected with a sense of sin, and the exercises of the soul, with the cries and sighs of a burdened heart, as all having been effectual, preparations for the blessings that God, and God alone can bestow.

Now just see whether we can lay down our exercises side by side with this text. This is the way that we are to deal with our experience if we have any. Have we, then, any hope that God has begun and is carrying on the work of grace in our soul? Have we anything that God has done, or is doing for us? Let us lay it down, and compare it with this part of God's word. Can we find this prayer in our hearts, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved." Has the Lord given to us any sight and sense of the distressing malady of sin? Have we felt what miseries we have brought upon our own heads? Have we seen too what a salvation there is in the Lord Jesus Christ? and how suitable it is to the state of our souls? And are we pleading with Him, and saying, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed? Thou hast but to speak the word; my case may be very desperate; my maladies very distressing; the evils of my heart very strong; my backslidings very numerous; my soul very far from Thee. But then, Lord, Thou hast all power; Thou has only to speak the word, Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed." Nothing else is wanting, I cannot wash the Ethiopian white; I cannot make the leopard change his spots; but Thou canst do all these things. Heal me, then, by Thy precious truth and grace, and let a sense of Thy pardoning love and mercy reach me. "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed;

save me, and I shall be saved" I want no other remedy but Thy precious blood applied to my conscience; no other love but Thy blessed love shed abroad in my heart.

If these are the exercises, desires, and feelings of our souls, they bring us to a throne of grace, they separate us from the world, exercise our minds to godliness, take away hypocrisy, deceit, lies, and falsehood, and make our hearts earnest and sincere, before the God of all truth.

If we feel that we have ruined our own souls, that no human arm can save us, that we cannot bring salvation into our own consciences, nor of ourselves see any beauty, glory, sweetness, or suitability in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet are striving with prayer and supplication to touch the hem of His garment, to taste the sweetness of His dying love, to feel the efficacy of His atoning blood, to be wrapped up in His glorious robe of righteousness, and to know Him in the sweet manifestations of His grace, why, then too we can say, "Save me, and I shall be saved." Here is this sin! save me from it: here is this snare! break it to pieces; here is this temptation! deliver me out of it; here is this lust! Lord, subdue it; here is my proud heart; Lord, humble it; my unbelieving heart! take it away, and give me faith; my rebellious heart! remove it, Lord, and give me submission to Thy mind and will; take me as I am with all my sin and shame, and work in me everything well-pleasing in Thy sight, for "Thou art my praise." If ever I have blessed Thee, it has been for Thy goodness to my soul; if ever my heart has been tuned to Thy praise; if ever my lips have thanked Thee, it has been for the riches of Thy grace, and the manifestations of Thy mercy, I am nothing and never shall be anything but a poor guilty sinner in Thy eyes; but I have to praise Thee for all that is past, and to hope in Thee for all that is to come; "for Thou," and Thou alone, O LORD, "art my praise."

May this be an encouragement for every child of God who can say, 'This is really what my soul is exercised with; these are really the feelings and breathings of my heart.' And if there be this voice in your soul corresponding to the word of God, is not that a testimony that the same Lord that wrote this experience in the heart of Jeremiah has written the same experience in your soul too! The very desire after these things is from God; the very sense of our misery, the very knowledge of our helplessness, the very cry for mercy, the very looking to Jesus, the very hoping in His blood, the very act of casting ourselves down in godly simplicity at the footstool of grace, and seeking the manifestations of His love to our souls—spring from grace, and manifest the work of the Spirit.

Nay, if you cannot rise up to the full height, and thoroughly say, "Thou art my praise," why, the time will come when you will be able to say so; when you will bless the Lord for showing you the malady and showing you the remedy, when you will thank Him for discovering to you your condemnation and your salvation, will give Him cheerfully all the praise and crown Him with all the honour. For I am well assured, we never can take a single atom of it to ourselves, but that this is and ever must be the language of our hearts, and, if sincere, the language of our lips, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed." I look to no other balm but Thy blood; sprinkle that precious blood upon my conscience, and I shall be healed. "Save me," in the sweet discoveries of Thy mercy and Thy grace, "and I shall be saved." I want no other Saviour, and no other salvation; and as that comes into my heart, I joyfully ascribe to Thee all the praise, and render to Thee all the blessing, honour, glory, and thanksgiving.