

## Biblical Self-Talk before Communion

*Dr. Maarten Kuivenhoven*

*As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.*

*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?*

*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

—Psalm 42

Communion with God in general, and the week of preparation leading up to communion at the Lord's Table can sometimes be a challenging week for believers as we deal with obstacles to communion. What are some of the greatest obstacles to communion with God? The most obvious answer is sin. Sin is the great disruptor of communion with God. Sin is one of the great

obstacles we face as we prepare our hearts for communion next week. Unbelief is another obstacle that believers face. This seems to be a contradiction in terms, doesn't it—believer and unbelief in the same sentence—and yet it can be a reality in a believer's life. There can be moments of unbelief fueled by doubts about our state before God. There is the reality of spiritual depression and an acute sense that the Lord is distant. There is the reality of a soul that has become disquieted, turbulent, striving to find God, and mourning this reality. How do you prepare in such a spiritual condition? How do you speak truth to yourself in such a condition? How does faith continue to lay hold of God and of Christ in such a condition? Psalm 42 gives us a very helpful way of doing those very things. Our theme is “Biblical Self-Talk Before Communion”: (1) speaking to my desiring soul; (2) speaking to my distanced soul; (3) speaking to my depressed soul; and (4) speaking to my deserted soul.

### **Speaking to My Desiring Soul**

Psalm 42 highlights some of the obstacles to spiritual communion with God. It is unclear what exactly the historical circumstances of this psalm are. This is the beauty of such a psalm, that it does not limit its application to specific believers in specific situations. Rather, the application is expanded in its generality so that believers can learn to speak to themselves biblically in overcoming obstacles to spiritual communion with God, no matter what your circumstances are.

The first *obstacle* that this psalm points out is thirst for God. In verses 1–2, the psalmist uses a picture from nature—a deer. Many of us are familiar with this picture. In fact, it's a deer that's being pursued, hunted. As it runs, it becomes thirsty. In the midst of the intensity and heat of the pursuit, the deer begins to pant and heave for water. Water is essential to maintain its vitality and strength to escape the hunter and slake its thirst. Those familiar with the Dutch musical rendition of Psalm 42 would know that the word “panteth” is rendered as “shrieking or screaming” for

water.<sup>1</sup> This is strong, intense language. The psalmist says, “As the hart [deer] panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God.” It indicates an intensity of desire for water. It indicates a sense of desperation, a craving that arises from the absence of that which gives life and strength. The obstacle is thirst; the object of that intense desire is water.

This can also be true for believers seeking communion with God. The hunter comes—sin and Satan—and pursues and tries to hunt us down for the kill. The chase is intense. The flight from sin is desperate. It creates spiritual thirst. It creates a longing, an intense desire to be safe and to draw in the life-giving water of the Spirit again. The chase can be intense, can’t it? All sorts of enemies hiding along the way, shooting their arrows, trying to bring down for the kill. In the meantime, the soul grows thirsty and parched. The soul yearns and cries out, even shrieks, in the midst of the chase and its thirst for God. The obstacle is spiritual thirst because of the heated chase. Our soul cries out, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God.” There can be spiritual dry spells that set in unnoticed and before you know it, you are walking in the desert of spiritual barrenness, wandering and thirsting and yearning for God again. How do we talk to ourselves in such a condition?

We talk to ourselves in the language of this psalm. We acknowledge the obstacle—spiritual thirst. But we also acknowledge the object for which we thirst and the only object that can ever satisfy—the living God. This implies the life-giving and enriching power of the Holy Spirit, who makes life to abound. This spiritual thirst should bring us to the living God. It should bring us to the powerful and life-giving promise of Isaiah 44:3. “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground.” We lay hold of that promise in the midst of the chase, and we rest there. We turn to the living God and hear His word, “Blessed

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1. 't Hijgend hert, der jacht ontkomen, schreeuwt niet sterker naar 't genot van de frisse waterstromen, dan mijn ziel verlangt naar God.

are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). We take encouragement from these words, that spiritual thirst does not have the final word, but it brings us back to the fountain of living waters—the LORD Himself (Jer. 2:13). The obstacle of spiritual thirst is overcome by returning to the object—the living God. We live in light of this question of verse 2, “When shall I come and appear before God?” The very tenor of this question implies that the desire will be fulfilled, even though it is not immediately on the horizon. We don’t say in hopelessness, “I’m never going to see God again.” No, but *when* will it happen again? This is how we speak to our desiring soul.

### **Speaking to My Distanced Soul**

But there may also be the obstacle of spiritual distance. This distance is implied in the words of verse 2b: “When shall I come and appear before God?” It’s implied again in the question put to the psalmist by his enemies, “My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, ‘Where is thy God?’” In verse 4, the distance is implied in the memory of the tabernacle and going up with the people of God to praise the LORD: “When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.” The great obstacle for the psalmist to spiritual communion is distance from God, distance from the place where the presence of God was in the midst of Israel, distance from the place of sacrifice at the altar.

This physical distance described by the psalmist is symptomatic of a loss of spiritual communion with God. The physical distance from the means of grace only exacerbates the spiritual distance that has now come between the believer and God. What does this spiritual distance look like in a believer’s life? First of all, this distance can come as a result of circumstances that are beyond our control, when the enemy gets the upper hand in our lives and, as the psalmist points out, tauntingly asks, when you are

down already, “Where is now your God?” There are circumstances of life that become so great that spiritual distance grows between us and God. Other times, this spiritual distance comes as a result of separation from the means of grace, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Spiritual distance comes when we leave off the reading of the Word of God, the place where God reveals Himself and where He speaks to our souls. Or we have checked out of the preaching of the Word because the cares of this life have become so consuming. Or we withhold ourselves from communion, not because of sin, but because of a lack of assurance, or thinking that we need some special experience first.

How do you speak to your distanced soul then? Learn from the psalmist that there were prior times of communion with God. In verse 4, there is the memory of that communion that we’ve enjoyed before. There was the joy and praise with the multitude. Do you remember that, my soul? Do you remember the times of sweet communion with Jesus? The remembrance of spiritual closeness in the past speaks about the possibility of spiritual closeness in the present and future. But then in verse 5, we have this self-talk: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.” Spiritual distance brings spiritual depression, restlessness, and turbulence. It gives the sense of the soul striving within itself, searching for God again. This is a question that a believer must pose in preparing for communion. It is a question that does not end in despair but ends in hope in God. And what does hope do for us? It anticipates the return of spiritual communion with God. It anticipates future praise for the help of God’s countenance and favor, literally the salvation of His presence. Our hope for communion does not lie in ourselves. It does not end in the obstacle of distance but lies in the salvation that God provides through His presence.

### **Speaking to My Depressed Soul**

But there's yet another obstacle that is inter-woven into the believer's search for communion with God. This obstacle is depression. This is how the psalmist describes his soul in verse 5: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" He continues to expand on this in verse 6, speaking to God, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." He picks up the refrain in verse 11 again: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" The word cast down has the idea of being dissolved. Children, what happens when you put sugar or salt or some other powder in water? It dissolves, doesn't it? It becomes one with the water and it becomes invisible. This is the spiritual depression that afflicts the psalmist. He has become dissolved. He has become one with the circumstances around himself. He is in a distant land. In verse 7 he writes, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." His troubles have dissolved his soul so that it becomes one with his troubles and circumstances and he loses sight of God in the midst of it all. The horizon has become dark with the frown of God's providence. Spiritual thirst and spiritual distance leads to spiritual depression and darkness.

This is a reality that believers can face in their lives—spiritual depression, a dissolving and becoming one with circumstances so that they cannot apprehend God anymore: Job in the furnace of affliction, Elijah in his post-Carmel depression, and Jeremiah grieving the day of his birth and calling for the day of his death. The psalmist here in Psalm 42 and again in Psalm 77 expresses this reality of spiritual depression, of being downcast and dissolved and losing sight of God. The circumstances of life can press down so hard, and darkness press in so hard, that the soul loses all sense of hope. The temptation is to give up and give in and let darkness and spiritual numbness be the norm. So how do we speak to ourselves when spiritual depression seems to block our

way to communion with God, and we can't make heads or tails of our spiritual life?

We heed the counsel from these words as the psalmist takes himself in hand and speaks to his own soul. Listen to what he says in verse 6: "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: *therefore* will I remember thee from land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." Bring God to mind in the fog of spiritual depression and the cycle of spiritual cynicism and questions. There is intentionality in this word "remember." The word *remember* in Scripture indicates that things turn around—when God remembered Noah, the flood waters receded (Gen. 8:1). For a believer, remembering is not simply thinking about the past and what God has done, though it certainly is that. But it is looking back with anticipation that God will change things and the clouds will begin to lift and we will enjoy spiritual communion again. In verse 8, we read these words of counsel that are a balm to the discouraged and depressed soul: "Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." There again are words of hope expressed in the darkness of the soul's night. The obstacle is depression; the object is God, the God of my life.

His lovingkindness is His covenant faithfulness, and this upholds us in the darkest moments of our lives and brings us back to God Himself. The Lord commands this lovingkindness. This is God's covenant love, an unbreakable love that God directs to sustain His own and bring them to the joy of spiritual communion again. This is the object of our faith in the midst of the circumstances of life that threaten to dissolve us. There is the future prospect of songs and praise again as a result of God's faithfulness and love. What will you say to yourself in this week of preparation? *It's all hopeless for me, or, God will command His lovingkindness?*

### **Speaking to My Deserted Soul**

The final obstacle to communion is the sense of desertion by God. The psalmist says in verse 9, "I will say unto God my rock,

Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of my enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?" The perception is that God has forgotten him, that God has left him over to his enemies. There is a perception of abandonment by God that can plague a believer and leave him facing this insurmountable obstacle. He thinks that God is ignoring him, while his enemies seem to give him all the unwanted attention. As a result, he is mourning. He is clothed, as it were, in the darkness of mourning clothes. He grieves over this sense of abandonment. The taunting of his enemies is like a sword in his bones as they ask him where God is, the sense of abandonment being confirmed and mocked by his enemies.

This can be the experience and perception of believers as they face spiritual depression—God has deserted me. Surely the One who is my Rock will protect me, won't He? But it doesn't seem like He hears me at all. It seems that He rather ignores me. It seems I'm all alone. There is intense grief and sorrow at the seeming loss of God's protection. It seems that everything is against a believer in such a condition, and it's only made worse by enemies.

How do you talk to yourself in such a condition? Listen to the words that come from the mouth of the psalmist. So often, our experience seems so stark, so dark, so solidified and with little hope of change. But listen to how the psalmist speaks here. There is a mixture of despondency and faith, isn't there? Not all is lost after all. God will not hide His face. There is a constant possession of God in the midst of all these obstacles. There is still a laying hold of God in the personal sense. A believer may, and indeed must, appropriate God for himself. "I will say." There is a commitment in these words. I will say unto God my rock. If the case were utterly lost there would not be such an expression of faith in the midst of the struggle. The psalmist gives us helpful counsel in dealing with the troubles of the soul.

But then, too, he picks up the refrain of the song that he has written in verse 11, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why

art thou disquieted within me?” The psalmist turns inward in the right sense of the action and questions himself to get to the root of the issue at hand. Why all the turmoil? Why the depression? Why the restlessness? Is there not rest for my soul? Yes, indeed there is—in God. And that’s what he counsels himself to do, even as believers are called to counsel themselves in this week of preparation to face the obstacles that war against us having communion. Say this to yourself and live in the reality of these words, “Hope thou in God.” Hope looks beyond, to what is coming. Hope is the opposite of despair and despondency. Hope is anchored in God in the midst of the storms and obstacles. Hope looks at Christ and sees in Him what you need—satisfaction for the desiring soul, communion for the distanced soul, joy for the depressed soul, and nearness for the deserted soul. He is the one who was hunted, and thirsted for God in our place. He was the one who was distanced from His Father on the cross. He was the one who experienced the darkness of hell and was dissolved, as it were, under His Father’s wrath. He was the one who experienced desertion as He cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Ps. 22:1; Matt. 27:46).

As we hope in God, there is a recognition that help will come. There is the sense that though we experience these obstacles, the Lord will intervene. And we can praise Him in the midst of these obstacles: “Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” Here again, there is the personal appropriation of God. He is my Savior and my God. He will save. He will draw again in communion. There are many obstacles. But He is the object of my faith and trust and hope. Hope in God, ye waiting saints, and He will well provide. Amen.



## God Rescues from Dark Places

*Rev. David Lipsy*

*Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name.*

—Psalm 74:20–21

There are some sermons a minister would rather not have to preach. But when the Word of God touches on something, no matter how distasteful it might be to our sensibilities, that means God deems it important enough for us to think about and preach about. This sermon is about something almost no one wants to hear. We sometimes come across passages in Scripture we could wish weren't there, ones we find awkward explaining to our children. Yet if that which the Bible is describing is still happening today, and yes, also happening in God's church, then preaching about such things is not optional. Scripture must be allowed to speak.

In certain chapters of Scripture God includes catalogs of sins, passages like Leviticus 18 and 20, Romans 1, Galatians 5, and 2 Timothy 3. Why would God include them if these very sins didn't tempt and threaten His church, His people? These passages are warnings. Some of the sins in these lists would make many of us blush and that would be a good thing. What's *not* a good thing is the reality that some don't blush because they are living in these sins. And it is tempting for the others to think, "I would never do such things." But when God says the heart of man is deceitful above all things, He means it and includes your heart and mine, except by His grace.

God places these lists of sins before us, not only to warn us against committing them but also to alert us, including church leaders, so that we do not permit them to live in God's church so that suffering continues and sinners carry on with seeming impunity. Pray with me for the necessary wisdom, sensitivity, compassion, and faithfulness to write this sermon to God's glory and our edification.

Our text is a prayer, Psalm 74:20–21: "Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name."

1. God rescues from darkness
2. God rescues from shame
3. God rescues to freedom

### **Introduction**

Psalm 74 begins with a question: "O God, why hast thou cast us off forever?" The question itself is striking and instructive. Surely Asaph the psalmist knew that God would never cast away His people, and certainly not forever, so why ask such a question? The reason is more significant than might at first appear. Through verses and passages like this, God teaches us that there is a place, a legitimacy for raw, unpolished prayers like these, especially in times of great suffering and need. Yes, we should always address God with reverence and godly fear. Yet recall how Jesus cried out on the cross: "My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me," using language from Psalm 22:1. The writer of Psalm 74 laid before the Lord that which caused his distress. In verse 3 he writes of enemies doing wickedly in God's sanctuary (church). In verse 4 he writes about enemies roaring amidst God's people. In verse 7 he recounts in prayer the desecration and destruction of the temple, where, not content with that, the enemies proceeded to break down all the local places of worship in Israel called synagogues. In the face of this devastation, Asaph complains that there seems to be no answer

from God, neither through signs nor prophets, so that there's no end in sight of the pain and suffering they were enduring.

Let us pause beside what we've seen so far and consider. I will never forget the moment some time ago when someone said to me, "Did you ever consider that some to whom you preach have experienced or are experiencing abuse of one kind or another?" I knew such suffering took place, also in Reformed churches, but it never really occurred to me that it might be happening in the church I was pastoring at the time, that it would exist so close to home. I will also never forget when someone actually did report a case of abuse to the authorities only to hear them ask two follow-up questions, "Does the abuser attend a church?" "Is it a Reformed church?" When I heard that my heart sank. Is that the reputation Reformed churches have in the community in which we live?

So instead of churches being safe havens for the abused, a place of refuge for those who have been so horribly sinned against, far too often the church, sometimes in ignorance and sometimes knowingly, becomes a place where the sinners are protected or given a slap on the wrist and the ones sinned against have to continue to face their abuser or feel forced to leave due to an ongoing sense of shame. Beloved, if you've ever read through the Old Testament, you will realize God is entirely opposed to such a situation and expects more from His people. In passage after passage the Lord makes it very, very clear He would have us protect and comfort the vulnerable, the needy, those who have been taken advantage of—even those He calls "strangers" who either pass through or settle into God's covenant community. If God's heart is so caring toward the vulnerable, it should be evident that we His church ought to be instruments of His care toward such.

After recalling God's miraculous deliverances in the past, the psalmist pens the words of our text. "Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name." Let us begin to consider this further in our first thought:

### 1. God Rescues from Darkness

The psalmist writes about the dark places of the earth that are full of the habitations of cruelty. What a description! The Bible uses the theme of light and darkness often. Darkness often stands for sin, for disorder, for spiritually blind sinners, even for Satan himself, otherwise called the prince of darkness. *Light* however is used to describe God, spiritual life, and generally that which is good and pleasing to the Lord. Paul pulls these ideas together in his famous statement in 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

*The dark places of the earth.* *Dark places* is one word in the Hebrew and that word is associated with wickedness, a place where sin hides, where terror is found. Sin thrives in the darkness, the sinner thinking no one sees. How many are violated, abused, shamed, mistreated in darkness—if not literal darkness, then in the darkness of wicked secrecy? These are the dark places of the earth. How many suffer in the darkness, are taken advantage of by the darkness, robbed of their childhood innocence by the darkness, whether it’s physically beating someone, abusing someone sexually or through degrading language, harsh criticism, or angry outbursts? How many have suffered for years, too ashamed or afraid to say anything because of what they fear might happen?

Such wickedness is so selfish, so cowardly, preying on the weak, the vulnerable, not satisfied to use the means God provides. Such sinners don’t care about the abuse victim as a person but view him or her as an object to be used and eventually discarded. Such wicked sinners don’t care how what they do could affect the victim, even far into the future—trust, relationships, marriage, child-bearing, etc. No, such weak, wicked persons misuse victims whom they should be protecting, should be loving, should be respecting.

The psalmist continues: the dark places of the earth are *full of the habitations of cruelty*. *Habitations* means the dwelling place of

such evil, implying this evil is repeated, having found a place to hide. *Cruelty* here has the sense in the Hebrew of violence, wrong, whether it's embodied in a hard, strict, and severe person or in someone who seems pleasant and loving. In the dark, however, such are cruel and ungodly.

How much abuse is repeated over and over, making the abused person feel worthless, shameful, dirty, confused, disillusioned? "Where was God when this was happening? Didn't He see? Didn't He hear my cry? My plea? Why did He not intervene?" Or to use the words of Psalm 77, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?"

Often, the sufferer feels trapped, at least for a time, in those dark places of the earth, filled with the habitations of cruelty. At such times, the temptation comes: God can't be real or doesn't care or He cares for others but not someone as worthless as I am. Trying to comfort such sufferers, such victims, with trite answers, pat expressions, even Scripture verses taken out of context, doesn't help but can actually make the suffering worse.

The psalmist, seeing these atrocities, these indignities, these injustices, cries out, "Have respect unto the covenant!" We would say today, "Lord, think upon these baptized victims. Rescue those whom Thou hast separated for Thyself at birth, who were meant to be brought up in a godly family and church family. Many psalms include cries of despair where those sinned against feel as if the Lord has forsaken them and forgotten them, that He turned His back on them or does not hear them. And how often physical abuse becomes spiritual abuse! How many evildoers try to mix religion in with their wickedness, seeking to suppress or otherwise manipulate their victims with God-speak. The Pharisees were such wicked ones, and their counterparts today are no better.

For you who have been victimized, how great the spiritual darkness can be for you, too, as your mind and heart reel between shame and pain and even misplaced guilt, blaming yourself for the evil that another has done or is doing to you. The "dark place" can also be your soul, another habitation of cruelty as the evil one tries

to destroy you and any hope in God you might have otherwise had, tempting you to give up everything.

If you have been or still are such a sufferer or know someone who is trapped in such dark places, such habitations of cruelty, know that God is real, God does care. But we need to consider carefully and thoughtfully just how He shows His care, His love, that He is present, just how He rescues the downtrodden from the darkness. May the Lord bless these next few words to at least begin your deliverance, your healing, your way out of the darkness and pain and despair.

### *God's Answer to Darkness—Light*

Speaking broadly at first, Scripture's answer to darkness is light. When we think of God Himself, Scripture describes Him as light. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). He is also called "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). Darkness has no place in Him or with Him. And thanks be to God, the Lord doesn't keep the light to Himself but sheds light abroad in the hearts of people. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts." Jesus said, "Every one that doeth evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." Such wicked ones, oppressors, want to live in darkness, thinking this hides them and their evil deeds. But Scripture says they cannot hide, for all things are uncovered and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. So God is light and will not allow darkness to ultimately prevail.

At the very beginning of time we read, "And the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Maybe that is what your life feels like—without form, void, darkness. But we then read this, "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness." God shines light into the darkness to dispel the darkness, to separate the light from the darkness, also in the lives of the vulnerable. The Lord Jesus came

into this world to dispel the darkness, to set free the prisoners of darkness and turn them into those that hope in Him. In this respect, hear this beautiful promise from Zechariah 9:11–12: “As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee.”

But now the question. How does God bring sufferers this light, such hope?

The first battle against the darkness needs to take place within your soul and in your mind. What do I mean? Satan and the wicked abuser weave webs of lies to suppress and confuse you, in which case the light of God and His Word must shine clearly so that you have direction as to how to even think about your situation rightly. Know that God, as we said earlier, is very, very focused on helping those that are oppressed, those who are vulnerable to hurt by others. Having said that, however, He employs means, persons to help the vulnerable escape. What means? Which persons? Obviously, the first is His Word. Why that? You are to use it to expose each of the lies of the wicked for what they are.

### *Light Exposes Lies*

The first lie? “If you say anything, it will ruin your marriage or family or relationship,” etc. The truth is, the abuser who is doing wicked things against you is the one destroying the marriage, family, relationships, etc.—not you! It is his or her sin, not your exposing their sin, that destroys relationships. Ezekiel 18:20 reads, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son...the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.” You must not feel guilty because you expose such sins to light, for it is not your guilt but it is the wicked person’s sin that needs light shed upon it.

The second lie? “The church will take care of it.” The church indeed has a place in the violation of the vulnerable. But the

church is not the only one with a duty to deal with sin. When sins are also crimes—crimes identified in Scripture as well as in the civil laws—God provides another ministry that is called to address such sins. Romans 13:4 is clear about this, warning such sinners, “If thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” This means crimes are not to be dealt with using the so-called Matthew 18 principle where you are supposed to first go to the one sinning against you, then bring witnesses, etc. Crimes are sins against God, the church, and the state, and God has given the state the authority to deal with such lawbreakers. The reality is, the church brings the name of Christ into disgrace when it protects criminals from the instruments of justice God has ordained—in such cases as these, the civil authorities.

A third lie? “What good will it do to have a husband, wife, father, etc. arrested and potentially spend years in prison?” The answer to this lie is that the “good” that involving the civil authorities will do is threefold.

First, it stops the ongoing abuse or other destructive sinful behavior. Nowhere in Scripture is it anyone’s duty to endure such sin. Even if the abuser is an authority figure, that person’s authority is not unlimited, and they have no immunity against their well-deserved punishment for sinful, criminal acts. King David endured God’s judgement of the sword not departing out of his house on account of his heinous sins against Uriah and Bathsheba. If God held a “man after God’s own heart” accountable, then so must all who sin in a criminal manner.

The second “good” taking action does is it prevents potential abuse and destructive behavior against others. Ecclesiastes 8:11 warns, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” In other words, if action is not taken to stop such persons, they tend to go on in their sins, and against other victims.

And seldom are sins like this isolated from other sins, but often spill over to other vulnerable targets of the brazen sinner.

Third, using civil authorities is actually good for the eternal welfare of the person committing heinous sins. What would become of such a person if not stopped? God may well use this powerful medicine to work repentance!

A fourth lie? “But you led the person on by your attitude, clothing,” etc. We may well sin by means of such things but this never, ever gives license to another to commit atrocities against you. We repent of the sins we ourselves commit, but we must never blame ourselves for another who fails to do what his or her duty is. Scripture does not say “if Bathsheba could have been more careful not to expose herself to someone else’s gaze while bathing.” But the Bible is plainer than plain whose sin God judged. It was David’s sin who, instead of turning away his eyes, followed the lust that boiled up in his heart and went on to commit gross sin.

The fifth lie? The sinner threatens you with harm or other serious consequences. Such threats are all the more reason to put such a person in the hands of the police or other civil authorities. In Deuteronomy 22, God teaches us that when a person does not cry out for help in such situations, then he or she bears part of the blame for not doing so. Clearly God would have you cry for help! And if parents or others do not heed your cry or try to dissuade you from getting help, go immediately to the authorities, who are there to protect you. It is sin when someone tries to cover up or somehow enable an abusive sinner to continue in his or her ways.

A sixth lie? “You deserved it. You yourself are wicked. God is against you.” On one hand, it is true that all of us deserve hell no matter who we are or what we’ve done. But do not let the evil one ever tempt you to excuse the wicked behavior of another against you because of your own sins. If you have sinned, God’s way of dealing with it is for you to confess it to the Lord, repent of it to Him, trust Jesus Christ to forgive that sin for the sake of His all-atoning sacrifice, and seek grace to break with sin. But this in no wise gives another the right to sin against you. Never excuse

the heinous sins and crimes of others on account of your sin. Commit your way to the Lord and the abuser's way to the rightful authorities.

*God's Means to Bring Light*

God gives several means to counter the common lies that are often used to keep the oppressed from escaping their circumstances. But we also thank Him for the means He has raised up for our defense. We are thankful for faithful parents and/or friends who may help us escape the clutches of the wicked and their wickedness. These failing us, there are the authorities in church and state. Woe to those authorities when they take the part of the wicked and forsake the cry of the needy, the destitute, and the afflicted! Though far from perfect in the day Paul wrote Romans 13, civil authorities, also today, are to be used when sins are also crimes.

But since our greatest need is spiritual, you and I need a refuge, a hiding place, a rock of defense, a shelter in the time of storm. The Lord Jesus is that and more, as He shows over and over in the gospels, delivering the needy in all their many distresses. He invites you to bring your burdens to Him, your misplaced sense of guilt, your fears, your dread, your broken dreams and broken trust. He is the Savior who knows first-hand what it is to be betrayed, to be abused both spiritually and physically. And though it sometimes seems impossible to trust Him because He didn't prevent the hurt and pain from happening, you will find Him instead bringing glory out of suffering, strength in the midst of weakness, and beauty in the place of ashes. Just like Nehemiah was the restorer of broken walls, so Jesus Christ is the restorer of broken hearts and lives.

Both in Old and New Testament times, you can read true histories of those who knew God's presence, help, and love in the midst of the fiery trials they faced. Jesus is real. Jesus knows. Jesus cares. He says you may cast all your cares upon Him for He does care for you! He is the light that came into the world to dispel spiritual darkness. Do not try to find meaning elsewhere. Do not think that

if you just ignore what's happened to you, just bury it long enough, it will all go away. It doesn't go away. It comes back to haunt us. But it can be taken away by the One with the pierced hands. You will be helped mightily by the One who in all our afflictions was Himself afflicted and whose presence will sustain us.

When Saul of Tarsus persecuted Christians, Jesus said that Saul persecuted Him. Jesus intimately identifies your suffering with His. Shelter in Him; He will help you. Trust in Him; He will strengthen you. Use the means of His Word, authority figures, prayer, etc. to escape the dark places of cruelty and come into His marvelous light. You can. We are here to help you, comfort you, and defend you.

## **2. God Rescues from Shame**

Shame often attends the nightmare as it happens to us. But there is also shame that remains even long afterward. The fear of others knowing, the self-doubt, disillusionment, etc. Do we dare confess our doubts, our anger, our shame? Who will listen? Will anyone listen? Who will believe me? Maybe your question is that of Tamar just before she was violated, "And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go?" She knew it would follow her, what happened to her. Who would want her? Who would accept her? Dare she tell anyone? But her actions betrayed what had happened. It couldn't be hid. And as so often is the case, the unfolding of events was ugly. The one who forced her was killed, and the avenger fled.

In Isaiah 50, Jesus would say prophetically, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." In Isaiah 53, referring again to Jesus, we read, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." Jesus died a painful but also shameful death. Think of the mockery, the ridicule, the taunting, the nakedness.

Jesus was put to shame so that those with shame could come to Him. He so cleanses, so transforms, so renews, that even your shame, the label you think everyone sees on your forehead—He can take it away. Do not carry another's shame, for the shame is

owned by the abuser, not his victims. Whatever shame you do carry for being so used in such sinful ways, Jesus is willing and able to take it from you so that your identity is safe with Him, your sense of wholeness restored. Sheltering in Him, you need not fear what others will say to you or about you. He will make you whole.

God set down the prayer in verse 21 of our chapter just for you: “O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name.” Will that prayer go unanswered, beloved, oppressed one? It will not. You must not allow another’s sin to persuade you you are worthless. The evil one must not triumph in convincing you no one cares for you. Do not throw yourself away into promiscuity, self-harm, etc. out of a sense of shame, despair, hopelessness, or desire for control. God has something far better for you, something lasting, *ever-lasting*.

### **3. God Rescues to Freedom**

The last three verses of this psalm are significant. “O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name. Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually.” God does not just comfort, though He does administer comfort in times of trouble. God does not only strengthen, though He does that too, mightily. God not only rescues from darkness and shame, but He rescues to something. God’s love is better than unconditional, leaving us better than it found us, always.

Those who use the means He gives and escape the darkness of sin can still feel haunted by the past for what seems like forever. We’ve already considered that it doesn’t just go away by itself, fade over time into a distant memory. Some imagine maybe marriage will help, or keeping busy will, or drinking or entertainment will, etc. But true freedom from darkness, guilt, shame, a lack of self-worth can only be experienced one way—not by accomplishments, not by accumulating things, but instead by the Lord filling you with a sense of worth greater than anyone or anything on

earth ever could. Consider His willing heart on display in the following verses of Scripture. “For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel” (Isa. 54:5). “I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies” (Hos. 2:19).

Jesus is not a placebo, friend, not a trite saying. He redeems from shame. His love has set millions free—the beaten, abused, trafficked, shamed. His giving you an identity will set you free from trying to find one. You will know strength that exceeds all earthly power. You will have security you could never create or buy. You will know a love that never betrays, never walks away. Here is One with whom you can be vulnerable and safe, who is not ashamed of what happened to you but is willing to bear your shame. He was willing to suffer unimaginable indignities of all kinds so that you might know the power of the freedom He gives.

You will need help on your journey, skill in how to know Him better, and how to benefit from a relationship with Him. That’s what we are here for—to help you. Don’t remain in darkness. Don’t carry shame years on end. Listen to His voice: “My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.” This is His promise: “They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.” This is His Word: “Thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.”

It is my longing, my prayer, that God’s church will truly be a haven for the oppressed, not a hiding place for oppressors; a place for the weary to find rest; a shelter for the battered; a place where light can be seen by those trapped in darkness and shame; a place where hope can spring up in the hopeless heart; a place where the bruised and broken can find Jesus; and in Him, more than they ever thought they could have or be. A church that is not these things is no church at all.

Jesus “shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” Let the hurt end, the healing begin; the darkness be dispelled, and the true light shine. May He give hope to the hopeless, meaning to the despairing, and a new identity to those who’ve lost theirs through sin. He is the One who will never, ever betray your trust. Amen.

# **The Glory of Christ**

## First Sermon in a Series on The Character of Christ

*Rev. Ian Macleod*

*Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

—Hebrews 1:3

Dear congregation, this evening we'd like to begin a short series of sermons that look at the character of Jesus Christ. We're asking the question, "What is Jesus like?" Of course, the moment we say that, we realize, as John tells us at the very end of his gospel, that the whole world could not contain the books that could have been written about Him (John 21:25). There are many, many things to say, but when you look at the character of Christ, especially as you see it in the gospels, there are certainly some characteristics that stand out as prominent and unmistakable. We hope, Lord willing, in the coming weeks, to look at several of these: His compassion, His power to save, His willingness to save, His obedience to His Father, His joy and sorrow.

Through this whole series, we are asking the question that Jesus Himself put to the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ?" (Matt. 22:42). We shouldn't want to just know more about Christ, but we should want to know *Him*, and we need to know *Him*, and to enter into a personal relationship with Him, or to enter more deeply into this personal relationship with Him by faith, so that when we study the character of Jesus, we don't think of this simply as though we were studying some great biography. When you read

the gospels, you are not reading a biography. You are not reading about some great figure of the past who was alive but is now dead. No, the person we are studying is alive, and as John also tells us in John 20:31, speaking about his gospel, but what equally applies to the whole Bible: “These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” That’s our prayer for this study.

As we begin this series, we want to firstly focus our minds on the glory of Christ. We are stepping back and looking, as best we can, at His glory. Really, that’s what Christ is doing when He asks the question of the Pharisees, “What think ye of Christ?” He goes on to ask them whether they really know who He is. “Whose Son is he?” They say, “He’s the Son of David,” and that was true. But then He asks them, “If He’s David’s son, how can He also be David’s Lord?” because Psalm 110:1 tells us of Christ that “The LORD said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand.” Jesus is making them reckon with the glory of Christ. He’s saying to them and to us, “If you think of Jesus simply in human terms, you cannot possibly know who He really is.” So, it seems that there is no better place for us to begin than Hebrews 1:3, a verse that speaks about the greatness and the glory of the person we hope to look at—as He walks about on Galilee’s shores, and the streets of Jerusalem, and wherever He goes about doing good. We want to look at the greatness and glory of this person so that we really understand who it is we are studying; and as we do so, we certainly feel, as Charles Spurgeon says in a sermon on this text, “Here again I shall have to say that I am quite out of my depth. I have waters to swim in, but I am not a good swimmer in such blessed deeps as these.”<sup>1</sup> And yet swim we must in these deeps!

There are two things we want to see here as we consider “The Glory of Christ.” In many ways, these points are two sides of the same coin, or looking at the same thing from different angles.

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1. Charles H. Spurgeon, “Depths and Heights,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 45:392.

1. All the glory of God is revealed in the man Christ Jesus.
2. Whatever you see in Christ perfectly reveals the glory of God.

### **1. All the glory of God is revealed in the man Christ Jesus**

Our text tells us several things about Christ. It tells us firstly that He is the Son of God in verse 2. God has spoken to us by His Son. It is telling us that He is God. As the ancient church counsel in Nicaea said, “He is God of God. He is Light of Light. He is very God of very God.” Christ Jesus is therefore co-equal with the Father. All the glory and the power of God the Father is there in God the Son. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit have the closest of relationships—*as close as it can be*. Jesus can say, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). What an encouragement to us, congregation, that when we study His character while He was here on earth, as we look at the man who puts His hand on lepers, who is asleep on the boat in the storm, and yes, the man who at last is crucified—that this man is the Son of God. He is God. Remember why God the Son is here on earth, and the reason is: *He is here to save His people from their sin*. The one who is born to Mary in Bethlehem is the eternal Son of God, so that when Mary holds Him, He is holding her. The one who is saving His people from their sins is the Son of God.

It goes on in verse 2 to say that He is “the heir of all things.” The idea of glory often has the idea of *what you possess*. The Queen of Sheba saw all that Solomon had—the meat at his table, his servants and ministers, their clothing, his cupbearers, the house he had made: all his *glory*—and she fainted in herself. What glory Solomon had! But the question here is: What does Christ have? What does the man Christ Jesus, as you see Him walking around—the one who is the Savior of His people—what does He have? What does He possess? What is His glory? Our text tells us that He is “heir of all things.” It tells us that everything we need for salvation, *He has*, He possesses, it is His by right. He is heir of all things.

Dear people, do you see what this means for you? Do you need pardon for sin? He has it. Do you need mercy and compassion and grace? He has it. Do you need sympathy and friendship

and help? He has it. Do you need grace to help you in your time of need? He has it. He has all. He is heir of all things. You will never be disappointed in Christ. So often in our lives we are disappointed, especially if we urgently need something important like some medicine or a piece of equipment, and yet when we go to buy it, we're told, "It's out of stock." Speaking reverently, Jesus Christ will never be out of stock. He is heir of all things. He always possesses everything you need.

Then it continues in verse 2, "By whom also he made the worlds." He is the Creator. We see this glory every day—the glory of God is seen in creation. The heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, the order, the design, the beauty, everything about it shows and preaches the glory of God. And our text tells us that this Son made it all. He made the worlds. All the glory of the created world shows forth something of the glory of Christ. It was all made by Him and for Him. What an encouragement that also is, isn't it? The person on whom we are to rely for the salvation of our souls is the One who made the worlds. Maybe you're here saying, "I need a new heart. I need to be a new creation." Oh, look here; here is the One who made the worlds. Spurgeon says, "I love to think that He who created all things is also our Savior, for then He can create in me a new heart and renew a right spirit within me, and if I need a complete new creation, as I certainly do, He is equal to the task."<sup>2</sup>

Next, you get these two wonderful expressions in verse 3: "Who being the brightness of his glory," and, "Who being the express image of his person." Even that phrase, "Who *being*," speaks of His eternity. It's not that He *was* the glory of God. It's not that He came to *be* the glory of God. It's not that He is *similar* to the glory of God. It's not that He *reflects in some way* the glory of God. No. Who *being*—who was, and is, and continues to be, without change, without alteration. Who *being* the glory of God. This is the same Being who said, "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14). The eternity of God belongs to Him.

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2. Spurgeon, "Depths and Heights," 45:388.

It also tells us, “Who being the brightness of His glory.” It’s not just saying that Jesus is bright. It’s saying that He is the brightness itself. It’s not saying He is like a ray of light that comes from the sun. No. Christ is the very light itself. “God is light” (1 John 1:5). This person is light. He is the brightness of His glory. This speaks to us of the perfect way in which Jesus represents God and His glory. He is the clear and the perfect exhibition of the glory of God. The divine glory is perfectly seen in Him. Think of the majesty of God. Think of the beauty of God. Think of the boundless perfection of God. Think of all His glorious attributes—His wisdom and knowledge and holiness and justice and goodness and truth. They’re all perfectly found in Jesus Christ. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ.

“Who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person.” Children, “express image” has the idea of a perfect stamp. A king would put his royal stamp on something and press it down so that the image on the stamp would go perfectly onto the paper. The *exact* same image. The *express* image. That’s the idea here. The Father and Christ are two distinct persons but they both have exactly the same nature. Everything that makes God, God, belongs to Christ in every single detail and in the most perfect way. He is the perfect likeness of God. He is identical in essence with God. The Old Testament prophets say that this is what Messiah would be like, this is what God is like, and they describe God in different ways, and all the pictures and the ceremonies and the types and the shadows were all saying, “This is what God is like.” He’s something like this. But Jesus Christ is different. He does not point somewhere else and say, “This is what God is like.” No, He points at Himself and says this is what God is like, because I am God. When you see Me, you see the Father also, because I am the express image of His character. Dear friends, if this is who Jesus Christ is, should we not come and trust and adore this person? If this is who the Good Shepherd is, should we not listen to His voice and follow Him? Should we not say, “O Lord, I am like a lost sheep, but seek and find Thy servant” (Ps. 119:176)? If this is

who is saying, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37), then ought we not come to Him and fall before Him and close in with Christ?

So, all the glory of God is perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. That's important as we go forward with this study, because is it not true that when you think of the glory of God and when you think of the man Christ Jesus, that at times you might be tempted to think that there is *something less* than the glory of God that you see? You agree, that as the second person, He has all the glory of God. He is God of God, He is Light of Light, He is very God of very God. But then you see Him at the incarnation, you see Him in the manger, you see Him without a place in the inn. You see Him as He takes on weak and frail flesh. You see Him as He is made, as Paul says, in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3). You see Him in His life, and you hear Him say, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20). And you ask, how that can be the creator of all things? He who made the birds of the air, and their nests, and the holes for the foxes, how does He not have a place to lay his head? Where is the glory here? And you look at His suffering in His life. You go to Gethsemane and you see the great drops of blood, and the suffering, and the cry saying, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39). You see the disciples running away and forsaking Him and fleeing from Him, and He's left all alone. You see Peter denying Him and the hurt and the pain when they all forsake Him and flee, and you ask, where is the glory here?

And then you go to Calvary. You see Him arrested, mocked, spat on, bearing the cross, made the song of the drunkards, numbered with the transgressors, bearing the sin of many, being made sin for us, being led like a lamb to the slaughter, and you ask, where is the glory there? Then you see Him lying lifeless in a tomb. You see the hands that did so much good, *motionless*. You see the feet that walked around doing good, *motionless*. The eyes that were so kind and full of pity and love; they are closed now. The heart that was so often moved with compassion has stopped

beating now. And you ask, where is the glory there? You might be tempted to think that you see something *less* than the glory of God, something less than the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person.

What we need to realize as we look at Jesus on earth, in His humiliation, is that this is *glory veiled*. Children, if you have a light, and you put a big blanket over it, you will see less of the shining light, but the light would still be there, it would still be shining. Putting a blanket over the light wouldn't actually take away anything from the light itself. You wouldn't have turned it off. The light itself would still be as bright as it always was, but it's now covered, it's now veiled. And that's what it's like at the incarnation. The incarnation, the flesh, is like the blanket that goes over and veils the glory of Christ—because we couldn't see the glory of God and live—but my dear friends, the glory is still there. The glory has not lessened one iota. The person who is born in the manger, the carpenter's son, the man of sorrows, the one who finally hangs between two thieves on a Roman cross, the one who is buried out of sight—that person is the Savior, and that person is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person; that is what we must see if we are to understand how absolutely amazing everything that Christ did was. He is the Son of God. What think ye of Christ?

## **2. Whatever you see in Christ perfectly reveals the glory of God.**

Let's move here, secondly, to look at this from the other direction, and to say that whatever you see in Christ perfectly reveals the glory of God. Here in this next part of verse 3, you have three of the key points in the ministry of Christ. And it's really a part of the whole: it's speaking of His whole life, but it's highlighting three major parts. It tells us firstly that He upholds all things by the word of His power. Second, it tells us that He, by Himself, purged our sins. And it tells us thirdly that He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. It's really taking us from the beginning to the end.

He upholds all things by the word of His power. What a revelation of the glory of God this is! The idea of upholding is the

idea of carrying or bearing, like a mother who carries a little child when it's just born. She holds it and protects it. If, for a moment, she lets it go, it will fall to the ground. Jesus Christ is upholding everything—this whole world, you, me, the universe, the stars, the galaxies, the nation, all of it. He's holding it up by His powerful word. If He would let it go for a moment, we would all collapse into nothingness.

And He does it by His powerful word. There's something here about how easily He does it. It's effortless. How difficult is it for you to speak a word? You don't even think about it. It's easy to speak. He upholds all things *by the word* of His power: speaking about how majestically effortless it is for Him to hold this whole universe together. Really, it is a stunning thought, that when He dies and breathes His last breath—when it appears that He has no strength left—that person who is hanging on the cross is the same person, right there and then, who is holding all things together, effortlessly, by the word of His power. And if He would let go, the very heartbeats of the Roman centurion, and those who are railing on Him, and the Jews who were crying, “Crucify Him!” would instantly stop. But for you, Christian friend, if He upholds all things effortlessly by the word of His power, will He let you go? He can uphold you, this is saying, in your difficulty that seems so big, and the grief that seems so intense, and the pain that seems so unmovable. He will hold His people fast. He upholds all things by the effortless word of His power.

But then our text moves on, and it says, “When he had by himself purged our sins.” Speaking here of what He does on the cross of Calvary, speaking here of what no one else but He could do—no one else but the person we've been describing could do this! And here, friends, is a work that shows more of the glory of God than anywhere else. Have you seen that? Have you seen that in the work of taking away sin, more of the glory of God is seen than anywhere else? Angels sang for joy on the morning of creation. They could sing, “O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches”

(Ps. 104:24). But when the angels saw the Son of God before whom they had veiled their faces in the temple in heaven, when they saw Him take on human flesh, when they saw the Son of God in our nature, when they saw Him walking around, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and especially, we must say, when they saw Him made sin for us who knew no sin, when they saw the one whose holiness made them cover their faces, when they saw Him made a curse for His people's sin, when they saw the Just One in the place of the unjust, that He would bring us to God, when they saw the Son of God in our nature dying—*never* did the angels see such a display of the glory of God.

More glory was here than in all the work of creation and all the work of providence. Then the angels would sing, as Psalm 21:5 says, "His glory is great in thy salvation." Doesn't this tell us what a great work the work of purging sin is? Children, purging is the idea of *taking away*. It's an Old Testament idea. In the ceremonial law you have guilt that is *purged* or *taken away*. It's removed. But if the glory of God is seen more in this work than anywhere else, what does that tell you about sin? It tells you that sin is an evil and a dreadful thing, if more of the power and wisdom and glory of God is seen in the purging of it, than in the whole creation of the world.

Ah, friends, Christ effortlessly upholds all things by the word of His power. It is easy for Him. But there is nothing effortless, and there is nothing easy, about the removal of sin. Sin is that evil thing which God hates. Sin puts you away from God; it banishes you from God and His presence. God cannot look upon sin. Sin makes you say, like Peter, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Sin makes you say, like Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:5). To purge away the sin of God's people, it cost the blessed Son of God *agony*, sweat like great drops of blood. He is saying, "I found trouble and sorrow" (Ps. 116:3) because the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

But look what it says: “When he had by himself purged our sins.” He did it. It’s complete. He completed it before going back to heaven. And He did it *by Himself*. Not by His example. Not by His miracles. Not by His healings. Not by His teaching. But by Himself. It’s speaking about His sacrifice, as Hebrews 9:26 says: “Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” It is something that He did alone. Oh, how He reveals and shows the glory of God in the purging away of sin, because you know it, don’t you, Christian friend, that when sin is in your conscience and sin is real and you are convicted of sin, it has a crippling effect. You can’t sing, you can’t pray, you can’t read, you can’t worship, you can’t come near to God, you can’t trust. And you realize you cannot purge away your own sin by yourself. You can’t get rid of the guilt of sin yourself. Hugh Cartwright made this point: it is the guilt of sin that needs to be removed, not just the guilt of conscience. So often we want the guilt out of our conscience, but as I remember him saying, “There are many ways to get guilt out of your conscience.” You can drown a guilty conscience with pleasure, or with music, or with an easy gospel. You can get rid of the guilt of conscience. But the solemn reality is, you can have the guilt of conscience removed and you can still go to hell, because it’s not the guilt of *conscience*—that’s simply the effect of sin—it’s the guilt of *sin* itself that needs to be removed. And the blood of bulls and of goats cannot do that, and your own good works and best efforts cannot do that. Suppose you were to work yourself to death in religious, and moral, and otherwise good charitable activities; you’d be more a child of hell than when you began.

But this text gloriously tells us that He, by Himself, purged our sins. The blood of Christ made atonement for sin. The blood of Christ took the sins away. It purged them. Where did the sin go after it had been nailed to the tree? The Bible says that God has cast all the sins of His people behind His back (Isa. 38:17). But children, where is the back of God? Doesn’t God see everything? Aren’t all things before His face? So where is the back of God? The back of God does not exist. And that’s where all the sins of

God's people are: they don't exist anymore. You can search high and low for them. Satan can search high and low for them. Your conscience can search high and low for them. You can search your heart. You can search everywhere. But in terms of the court of heaven, they are gone, if washed in the blood of Christ. They don't exist. That's how wonderful, how full, how thorough, and how glorious this purging away of sin is.

And then lastly here, we see that Christ sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. It's not just saying that He did this next, as though this is just what happened afterwards. It's making an important connection. It is saying that He did this *because* He did that. Because He purged sins away so gloriously and effectively, *therefore* He sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Philippians 2:5-9 brings that out very clearly: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. *Wherefore* God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." *Because* He did that, God *therefore* sets Him now in the place of the highest honor at the right hand of God. He is on the throne of the universe. And it is saying that the work that He did is finished and it is perfect. And Jesus is now there making intercession and praying. But not like a beggar, not like someone who is down on his knees pleading like we might. He is there saying, "Father, *I will*. Because of what I have done, this is what *I will*." And He and his Father are one, and whatever Jesus asks for, He gets (Ps. 21:4). So now, as the poet says, "The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now."

So, whatever you see in Christ perfectly reveals the glory of God. When we look at Him in the gospels, whether you look at Him in His action or His emotion, what He says or what He does, whenever and wherever you look at Him, *He is never out of*

*character*. Sometimes we are. Sometimes you might look at a man who is very patient and you say he was out of character when he did this or that—it wasn't like him. Jesus Christ will never act out of character. He will never look back at something He said, did, or thought, and say He wished He acted differently. And the Father will never look at anything He thought, said, or did, and say that it didn't represent Him well.

When you put this all together, it means that when we look at Christ in His compassion for sinners, or His pronouncing woe on impenitent cities, or when you listen to His invitations, this is exactly the picture that God the Holy Spirit wants you to see. And what you see in everything that Jesus does is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. He is to be believed. As we begin this series on the character of Christ, my dear friend, He is to be believed. Remember the words we read at the beginning of Hebrews 2: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

This series will bring us to self-examination time and again: "What think ye of Christ?" And each time we learn more of who He is or what He has done, each time there is a ray of divine glory that shines in the face of Jesus Christ, the question comes again, "What think ye of Christ?" And the prayer for us all is, "Lord, show me Thy glory." It is for you children, too, because the Jesus of the Bible is a Jesus who takes children and who loves to hear from children, and who says to any who would stop them, "Suffer them to come unto me and forbid them not" (Luke 18:16). Psalm 102, tells us that when the Lord builds up Zion, He will appear in His glory. But what does it say next? "He shall appear in His glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer" (Ps. 102:16–17). Because that is His glory, too! He will not despise this prayer, so you take this prayer to this glorious person—"Lord, show me thy glory"—and see if He doesn't show you something of the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person as it shines in the face of the Jesus Christ. Amen.