



Sermons from Job

13. Job among the Ashes

By C. H. Spurgeon

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Job 42:5, 6.

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Jehovah had spoken, Job had trembled. The Lord had revealed himself, Job had seen him. Truly, God did but display the skirts of his robe, and unveil a part of his ways; but therein there was so much of ineffable glory, that Job laid his hand upon his mouth in token of his silent consent to the claims of the Everlasting One. God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind concerning the greatness of his power, the wonders of his workings, the splendour of his skill, the infinity of his wisdom. Carefully read that wonderful speech of the Most High to the trembling patriarch. I dare not call it poetry; for it rises as much above human poetry as the sublimest poetry stands above the poorest prose. It is simply a statement of facts, and these are mentioned in language of the simplest kind; but the overpowering glory of the utterance lies in the facts themselves. These sublime stanzas are spoken in the idiom of God. Those only know the peculiar style of the living God who have become familiar with the sacred Word in Spirit and in Truth, and such persons can at once distinguish the speech of Jehovah from that of men. Read the divine address, that you may see how Jehovah caused the afflicted patriarch to feel him near.

In the confession which now lies before us, Job acknowledges God’s boundless power; for he exclaims, “I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.” He felt that whatever the Lord chose to think or desire he could at once accomplish. Job had a glimpse of that omnipotence of which the height and depth no mind can ever measure.

Job sees his own folly. He speaks like a man in a maze or a muse, and he says, “Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?” Look at the second verse of chapter thirty-eight, and you will see that he is quoting what God had said to him. The

Lord's words are ringing in his ears, and in his anguish he repeats them, accepting them as justly applicable to himself. It is not far from being right with us when the words of God can fitly become our words. "The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" And now Job replies, "I am that foolish one—I uttered that I understood not—things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." Job felt that what he had spoken concerning the Lord was in the main true; and the Lord himself said to Job's three friends, "Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath;" but under a sense of the divine presence Job felt that even when he had spoken aright, he had spoken beyond his own proper knowledge, uttering speech whose depths of meaning he could not himself fathom. Many a holy prophet has done this, for inspired men are described as those who "enquired and searched diligently; searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." It is not the thoughts of the prophet which have been inspired of God so much as their words; for frequently they were moved to speak prophecies which were quite beyond their own understanding—in fact, my brethren, are not all the great mysteries of the faith above human thought? and may we not fearlessly assert that no inspired man has ever known all the depth of God's meaning treasured up in the words which he himself has been led by the Spirit of God to write? Hence I assert that there is a verbal inspiration, or no inspiration at all worthy of the name. Job, as he comes before us in the text, is impressed with his own folly. He had to a large degree spoken what he felt sure was true, but he now feels that he did not understand what he said; and he at the same time tacitly confesses that he may have said in his bitterness many an unwise and unseemly thing, and therefore he bows his head before the Lord his God, and confesses that he has darkened counsel by words without knowledge, and uttered things that he understood not.

Notwithstanding, the man of God proceeds to draw near unto the Lord, before whom he bows himself. Foolish as he confesses himself to be, he does not therefore fly from the supreme wisdom.

Although he knows that he has babbled ignorantly, he does not therefore seek to hide away from the Lord, as Adam did when he sought the shade of the trees of the garden. No, he takes up the Lord's words again, and is emboldened by them to approach. Read the thirty-eighth chapter, third verse; the Lord there says, "Gird up now thy loins like a man—for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me." Like a man in a dream, Job accepts the invitation, and answers, "Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me." This was brave and wise action. Whatever Job might be or might not be, he was a firm believer in his God, and in every word which the Lord was pleased to speak. He held even to discouraging words with desperate tenacity, and even learned to find honey in words which roared like lions upon him. Hence, when he is humbled in the dust, he recollects that God had bidden him draw nigh to him; and albeit to his fears that bidding may have sounded like a challenge, yet to his faith it becomes an encouragement, and he in effect replies, "My God, I will venture to take thee at thy word. Thou biddest me come, and come I will. Dust and ashes though I be, I will do as thou dost allow me, and make my humble appeal to thee." Dear friends, it is altogether wrong to allow our sense of folly or of sin to drive us away from God; but it is altogether right when our humiliation draws us to the Lord, and our conscious need drives us to the throne of grace. The more foolish and sinful we are, the more urgent is our need to come to God, who alone can make us clean, and instruct us in the way of heavenly wisdom. I commend to you, therefore, God's servant Job, of whom I may say, whatever fault we may perceive in him, none of us could have behaved so gloriously as he did—unless, indeed, the Lord should give us like grace. The Lord led Job to find fault with himself, yet God himself does not complain of him, but even commends him. The three carping friends are commanded to bring a costly sacrifice, but this was not demanded from Job; and even when they brought their seven bullocks the Lord did not accept them till Job, whom they had condemned, had made intercession for them. Job bore away the palm from the conflict. So let us do as Job did, and make our approach unto the Lord in childlike confidence even when he

seems to frown. Let us get where Job was when he said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” When we bow lowest before his throne, let not our humble bending have anything of distance in it. Lowlier before thee, O Lord, would we be; but at the same time our cry is, “Nearer to thee.” Thus we come to the text, having used the connection as a step to its door. On the text I make three observations—first, we have sometimes very vivid impressions of God. Job said, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.” In the second place, when we are favoured with these clearer views of God, we have lowlier thoughts of ourselves—“wherefore I abhor myself;” and thirdly, whenever we are thus made lowly, our heart is filled with repentance: “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” May the Holy Spirit aid us in this experimental meditation!

First, then, WE HAVE SOMETIMES VERY VIVID IMPRESSIONS OF GOD. Job had long before heard of God, and that is a great matter. I do not think he meant merely that he had heard men speak of God, but that he had really, for himself, heard God’s voice. He had been a reverent believer in the teachings of God, and an obedient servant to his commands—thus he had really heard God. The man who can say this can say a great deal. If God has ever been on speaking terms with you, you have much cause for gratitude. It is clear that you are not dead in sin, or if you were so when the Lord spoke to you, you are now alive; for his voice causes the dead to live. If you have heard God in the secret of your soul, you are a spiritual man—for only a spirit can hear the Spirit of God—none can discern the Lord but the man to whom he has given spiritual life. Job had heard God, but now he has a more vivid apprehension of him. It is sometimes said that one eyewitness is better than ten ear-witnesses, and there is much truth in the saying—certainly, facts perceived by the eye make a far more vivid impression upon the mind than the same facts heard by the ear. If we witness a sad scene of poverty it has far more effect upon our heart than the most graphic description. Word painting can never bring out the reality of a thing so well as the actual sight of it. Of course, Job could not literally see God—he does not mean to assert that he did; for “no man hath seen God at any time;” but

Job means that he now had a view of God very much more clear than any which he had obtained before; in fact, as much clearer as eyesight is more clear than hearing.

Notice, that in order to this close vision of God affliction had overtaken him. It was not till after he had scraped himself with the potsherd, nor till his friends had scraped him with something worse than potsherds, that Job could say, "Mine eye seeth thee." Not till every camel and every sheep had been stolen, and every child was dead, could the afflicted patriarch cry, "Now mine eye seeth thee." Happy is that man who in prosperity can hear the voice of God in the tinkling of the sheep-bells of his abundant flocks, can hear him in the lowing of the oxen which cover his fields, and in the loving voices of dear children around him. But, mark—prosperity is a painted window which shuts out much of the clear light of God, and only when the blue, and the crimson, and the golden tinge are removed, is the glass restored to its full transparency. Adversity thus takes away tinge, and colour, and dimness, and we see our God far better than before—if our eyes are prepared for the light. The Lord had taken everything away from Job, and this paved the way to his giving him more of himself. In the absence of other goods the good God is the better seen. In prosperity God is heard, and that is a blessing; but in adversity God is seen, and that is a greater blessing. Sanctified adversity quickens our spiritual sensitiveness. Sorrow after sorrow will wake up the spirit, and it will infuse into it a delicacy of perception which, perhaps, does not often come to us in any other way. I purposely say, "perhaps;" for I believe that some choice saints are favoured to reach it by smoother ways; but I think they are very few. The most of us are of such coarse material that we need melting, ay, and braying as in a mortar before we attain to that sacred softness by which the Lord God is joyfully perceived. O child of God, if thou art to suffer as much as Job suffered, if thou gettest to see the Lord with a spiritually enlightened eye, thou mayest be thankful for the sorrowful process! Who would not, go to Patmos if he might see the visions of John, and who would not sit on the dunghill with Job to cry with him, "Now mine eye seeth thee?"

Possibly, also, helpful to this was Job's desertion by his friends. Job's three friends! Ah me, I know their kindred! They were most devotedly attached to him, no doubt; and how warmly they proved it! They had met together with him, and said soft and sweet things to him in those days when he moved like a prince among the nobles of his people, and every eye that saw him blessed him. But when they found him sitting "down among the ashes," they had altered thoughts of him. They suspected him; and though they knew nothing against him, yet they perceived that he was not in the same honour as before. Between a prince in ermine and the same man in sackcloth there is, to some minds, a great difference. Besides, the instinct of self-preservation leads men to hold off from one who is sinking, lest they sink with him. After sitting in silence for a week, these excellent men found it in their hearts to assail him with their judicious observations. Here and there they inserted nice little bits of cruelty, all meant for his good. Was he not covered with sores? Was there not a cause for all this? By this torture God delivered Job from men—he was not likely after that to incur the curse which comes through making flesh your arm. He was also strengthened in personal independence of mind; he could clearly see that his breath was in his own nostrils, and not in other people's, and that he could stand alone by God's help, ay, even stand against those eminent men who had contended with him. Friends are all too apt to block out our view of our best Friend. When gracious minds are driven from men, they are drawn to God, and learn to sing with David, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him." I do not doubt therefore that the desertion and upbraiding endured by Job from his friends, were a great help towards his being able to say to the Lord his God, "Now mine eye seeth thee." Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar might have interposed between Job and God, and their kindly help might have placed Job under lasting obligations to them—but now he looks alone to God, and honours him only.

Still, before Job could see the Lord, there was a special manifestation on God's part to him. "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind." God must really come and in a gracious way make a display of himself to his servants, or else they will not

see him. Your afflictions will not of themselves reveal God to you. If the Lord himself does not unveil his face, your sorrow may even blind and harden you, and make you rebellious. The desertion and unkindness of friends is, also, no help to grace—its tendency is to sour and imperil your piety, if it act out its natural influence—there must be a special revealing of the Lord to our own souls before we shall get such a clear apprehension of him as Job intended by the words, “Now mine eye seeth thee.” Read through the thirty-eighth chapter, and see how Jehovah declares his wisdom and his power—“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” “Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail?” “Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Areturus with his sons?” Here was a marvellous field for thought. The Lord speaks in nature, and it is done. His glory is seen in heaven and earth, in the sea, and all deep places. God is, and there is none beside him. Yea, Jehovah is God alone.

Nor did the Lord fail to show to Job his justice, defying him to emulate it. See the fortieth chapter, eleventh and twelfth verses—“Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath; and behold every one that is proud, and abase him. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place?” God is the supreme governor, and he beareth not the sword in vain; he is impartial and infallible, and none can disannul his judgment, or condemn his acts.

I need not tarry to say to you that all through that wonderful address of the Lord to his servant he is saying, in so many words, “I am God; but who art thou?” The Lord is proving that nothing is impossible to his power and his wisdom. He had, after all, not allowed his servant to sink out of his reach. He was always able to rescue him. You learn here, also, that God is not amenable to our

judgment. He giveth no account of his matters. He makes Job feel that he is God, and then there is an end of the matter. No apology is made to Job, and no explanation is given him—he must bow in unreserved submission, and surrender unconditionally; and he does so.

Notice how by the Lord's first words Job was silenced, and could only whisper, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." Thus far he worshipped; but he must yet go further, until he cries, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

We have now reached our second point—WHEN WE HAVE THESE VIVID APPREHENSIONS OF GOD, WE HAVE LOWLIER VIEWS OF OURSELVES.

Why are the wicked so proud? It is because they forget God. Why did Pharaoh dare to say, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" It was because he did not know Jehovah; but after those ten plagues, he altered his tone, and cried out, "Entreat the Lord (for it is enough)." Even his great pride was forced to bow before Jehovah when judgments were let loose upon him. If men knew God, how it would change their thoughts and talk! If they could have even an indistinct idea "by the hearing of the ear," many of them would never be so irreverent as they now are, nor so lofty in their ideas of their own wisdom; but if they could "see" him as Job did, and behold his inexpressible glory, they would become far more meek and lowly.

Here let me observe that God himself is the measure of rectitude, and hence, when we come to think of God, we soon discover our own shortcomings and transgressions. Too often we compare ourselves among ourselves, and are not wise. A man says, "I am not so bad as many, and I am quite as good as such a one, who is in high repute." What if it be so? Dost thou judge thyself by other erring ones? Thy measuring line is false; it is not the standard of the sanctuary. If thou wouldest be right, thou must measure thyself with the holiness of God—God himself is the standard of perfect holiness, truth, love, and justice; and if thou fallest short of his glory, thou hast fallen short of what thou

oughtest to be. When I think of this, self-righteousness seems to me to be a wretched insanity.

If you would know what God is, he sets himself before us in the person of his dear Son. In every respect in which we fall short of the perfect character of Jesus, in that respect we sin. There is no better description of sin that I know of than this—"Sin is any want of conformity to the law of God," and God's law is the transcript of his own mind. Wherein in any moral or spiritual respect, we fall short of the divine character, we to that extent fall into sin. No, my brethren, we cannot hear the ceaseless cry of the cherubim, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth," without at once sinking, sinking, sinking, till we abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes. Permit me to suggest to each one here who has a high idea of himself, and has no sense of self-abhorrence, that such self-honour must arise from ignorance of God; for there is such an immeasurable distance between the perfection of God and our faultiness that our true position is that of penitent humility.

Our next reflection is this—God himself is the object of every transgression—and this sets sin in a terrible light. Sin frequently has our fellow-men as its object; but even then I am not incorrect in what I have said, for sins against our fellow-men are still sins against God. It would be well if we felt with David—"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." Think, then, of sin as an offense against God, committed in God's presence, committed while he is looking on. My beloved friends, in this light observe the wantonness of sin; for who could wish to offend against a perfectly holy and entirely loving God? If God is all he should be, why do we not agree with him? If in God we see every possible and conceivable good, why do we set up ourselves, our wills, our desires in opposition to him? He is so gracious towards man that he may be described by that one word "love;" and if it be so, why do we not love him with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our strength? Every shortcoming and every transgression, therefore, is a wanton offense against infinite goodness. If Jehovah were a tyrant, there might be some excuse for rebellion; but since he is infinitely just and loving, it is atrocious that his own creatures, ay, his own children, should

offend against him.

Note, next, the impertinence of sin. How dare we transgress against God? O man, who art thou that rebellest against God? How darest thou to do to his face that which he forbids thee? How darest thou to leave undone in his very presence that which thy Lord commands thee to do? This makes sin a piece of presumption, a daring and glaring provocation of the Lord God. Thus it is evident that in the immediate presence of God sin doth like itself appear.

The fact that sin is levelled at God makes us bow in lowliness. Although some of us can hold our heads high among our fellow-men, and we can say, "I am neither a drunkard, nor a thief, nor a liar, neither have I offended against the laws of integrity and charity;" yet when we come before God, we perceive that we have not dealt towards him as we ought to have done. To him we have been thieves, robbing him of his glory. "Will a man rob God?" To him we have been liars—we have dealt treacherously, and have broken our promises. To him we have been ingrates; to him we have been worse than brutes. Instead of equity, we have dealt towards God iniquity. Instead of love, we have dealt out enmity. The Lord has nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against him. Even our holy things have been defiled; our best tears need to be wept over, and our truest faith is spoiled with unbelief. Oh, when we think of this, we can understand why Job says, "Now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself."

Once more—when God is seen with admiration, then of necessity we are filled with self-loathing. The more you appreciate God, the more you will depreciate yourself. While the thought of God rises higher, and higher, and higher, you also will sink lower and lower in your own esteem. The word used by Job, "I abhor myself," is a strong one. It might be paraphrased thus, "I nauseate myself. I am disgusted with myself. I cast forth from my soul every proud thought of myself—cast it out from me as a sickening and intolerable thing." Ah, dear friends, you have not seen God aright if your abhorrence turns upon your fellow-men; but if the one man you abhor is yourself, you are not mistaken! A sight of God will make us regard our fellow-creatures with sympathy, as

involved in the same sin and misery as ourselves. As a common danger in a sinking ship makes every man a brother to his fellow, so a clear sense of our common guilt and ruin will make us feel the brotherhood of man—but, on the other hand, a sight of God will prevent our dreaming of personal excellence, and will compel us to take the lowest room. Since God is glorious in our eyes, we become ashamed. We adore God, and in contrast, we abhor self.

Do you know what self-loathing means? Some of you do, I know. And I am sure that in proportion as you truly love, reverence, and worship God, in that proportion you are full of abhorrence of self. You fine gentlemen, who hold your heads so high that you can scarcely get through common door-ways, you know nothing of this! You high and mighty ladies, who cannot condescend to associate with any who are not of your superior rank; and you purse-proud men, who expect all to worship the golden calf which you have set up, you know nothing about this. O you wonderfully wise men, you intellectual persons, who so modestly dub yourselves “thoughtful and cultured,” you snuff out a poor evangelical believer as if he were an idiot; may the Lord give you an hour of Job’s “I abhor myself,” and then you will be bearable; but as you now are, you are a trial! While the dunghill is your proper place, you covet the throne of the Almighty; but he will not yield it to you—you would improve upon divine revelation, and revise infallible inspiration; but your boasting is vain. Oh that you had a manifestation of God, and then you would know yourselves! God grant it to you for his mercy’s sake!

Thirdly, I have to show you that **SUCH A SIGHT FILLS THE HEART WITH TRUE REPENTANCE**. Job says, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” The word “myself” has been added by the translators; and they could hardly have done otherwise. Job’s expression, however, refers to all that had come out of himself, or had lurked within himself. He abhorred all that he had been doing and saying. He says, “I abhor, and repent in dust and ashes.” What did he, repent of? I think Job repented, first, of that tremendous curse which he had pronounced upon the day of his birth. It was terrific. See third chapter. “Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man

child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let it not be joined unto the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months.” He wished he had perished from the womb, that his birthcry had been his first and his last “For now should I have lain still and been quiet.” Before God Job has to eat his bitter words. It is always a pity to say too much in moments of agony, because we may have to unsay that which escapes us. He would not curse God, but he did curse the day of his birth, and it was unseemly. Of this he unfeignedly repents.

Next, Job heartily repented of his desire to die. In the sixth chapter he expresses it as he did several times—he says, “Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off!” Do you wonder that he said this? Was ever man so tried? I do not wonder at all, even at his cursing the day of his birth, considering all the bodily pain and mental irritation which he was enduring at the time. I wonder that he played the man as well as he did; but still he must have looked back with deep regret upon his impatience. The last verses of the book run thus—“After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons’ sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days.” This is the same man who begged to die. Elijah also said, “Let me die, I am not better than my fathers,” and yet he never died at all. What poor creatures we are! What haste impatience breeds!

Job had to repent, next, of all his complaints against God. These had been very many. In the seventh chapter he turns to God and says, “I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me? When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions—so that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live alway—let me alone; for my days are vanity. How long wilt thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?” Ah! poor Job had to swallow his murmuring as well as his spittle,

for he repents of every rebellious thought. He complains of his having complained, and with self abhorrence he repents in dust and ashes.

I do not doubt but what Job repented of his despair. The ninth and tenth chapters, and many other passages wherein Job speaks, are tinged with hopelessness. He felt as if God had left him a prey to the enemy; but this was not true. The Lord has never deserted any one of his people. There is not on record in all the history of the ages a case in which God has failed them that trust him. Has he not said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?" and he never has left nor forsaken any believer; yet Job evidently thought that he had done so, and he was greatly troubled, Job had uttered rash challenges of God—in the ninth chapter, at the thirty fourth verse, he says that there is no daysman between him and God, or else he would plead his cause—"Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me—then would I speak, and not fear him—but it is not so with me." This was wrong, and Job abhorred himself for having fallen into so ill a temper, and so little becoming in a man of God.

His critics goaded him by cruelly charging him with hypocrisy and wickedness, and Job vindicated himself with great earnestness, appealing to God, and saying, "Thou knowest that I am not wicked." This was true. The indignation of an honest heart cannot be blamed for speaking thus to men; but Job felt that he could not speak thus before the Lord. He could plead his innocence in the common courts of men, and there he could well enough defend himself; but when the matter came into the King's own court, he could not answer in the same strain, but felt compelled to plead guilty. Job has to retract all his pleadings and challenges. If the case is to be heard as "Jehovah versus Job," then Job yields the point unreservedly. Who is he that can contend with his Maker over a matter of holiness? We are wrong, God must be right!

Job had also to confess that his statements had been a darkening of wisdom by words without knowledge. Sometimes we say, "I perfectly understand that; I could clear up that mystery." We define this and define that to our brethren; but when we get into

the presence of God, we find that our definitions are the proofs of our ignorance. "Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt." Job drops his wisdom as well as his righteousness, although he was one of the wisest and holiest of men. While we see not God, we fancy that we can read all the riddles of his word; but when we behold him more nearly, we say with David, "So foolish was I, and ignorant—I was as a beast before thee." We are apt to judge the Lord by feeble sense instead of trusting him for his grace. This cometh of evil. In the presence of God Job bowed his head and repented of all his suspicions and mistrusts; and this is what we must do if, in the day of our sorrow, we have been petulant and unbelieving.

Let me pass on. According to our text, repentance puts man into the lowest place. He says, "I repent in dust and ashes." "Dust and ashes"—that signifies the dust-heap, or what in Scotland they call the "midden." Job had made dust and ashes his head-quarters. The dunghill, the refuse place, was now the spot which he felt to be fitted for him. Repentance puts us in a lowly seat. You have heard sometimes, I dare say, among the beautiful nothings of the modern school, the mention of "the dignity of human nature." Behold a throne for the "dignity of human nature." Yonder dust and ashes are for this proud royalty. The dust-heap is for human nature in its glory, when it has on its richest robes. When it takes its worst place, where is it? The lowest pit of hell, prepared for the devil and his angels, is the fit place for man when he has at last come to his true estate. I say that when man wears his best Sunday righteousness, he is even then only fit for the midden; and every man of God that has been brought to true repentance, owns that it is so. Alas! saith the man that sees his sinfulness, I should be a disgrace to any dust-heap; if I were cast away with the rotten refuse of the house, it might creep away from me, because my sin is a worse corruption than physical nature knows of—an insult even to the worm of decay—since in common putridity there is not the foul offense of moral evil. Repentance, you see, makes a man take the lowest place.

Next, note that all real repentance is joined with holy sorrow and self-loathing. I have read in the sermons of certain teachers

that “Repentance is only a change of mind.” That may be true; but what a change of mind it is! It is not such a change of mind as some of you underwent this morning when you said, “It is really too cold to go out,” but afterwards you braved the snow, and came to the Tabernacle. Oh, no! repentance is a thorough and radical change of mind, and it is accompanied with real sorrow for sin, and self-loathing. A repentance in which there is no sorrow for sin will ruin the soul. Repentance without sorrow for sin is not the repentance of God’s elect. If thou canst look upon sin without sorrow, then thou hast never looked on Christ. A faith-look at Jesus breaks the heart, both for sin and from sin. Try thyself by this test.

But, next, repentance has comfort in it. It is to my mind rather extraordinary that the Hebrew word, which is justly translated “repent,” is also used in two or three places at least in the Old Testament to express comfort. Isaac, it is said, took Rebekah to his mother’s tent, and was “comforted after his mother’s death.” Here the word is the same as that which is here rendered “repent.” Isaac’s mind was changed as to the death of his mother. As, then, there is in the Hebrew word just a tinge of comfort, so in repentance itself, with all its sorrow, there are traces of joy. Repentance is a bitter-sweet or a sweet-bitter. After thou hast tasted it in thy mouth as gall, it will go down into thy belly, and be sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.

The door of repentance opens into the halls of joy. Job’s repentance in dust and ashes was the sign of his deliverance. God turned his wrath upon the three critics, but justified Job, and gave him the honourable office of intercessor on their behalf. Then “the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends.” “The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning,” and the turning point was that sitting down in the dust and ashes. When you are brought as low as you can be, the next turn must be upward. Down with you, then! Off with the feathers of your pride, and the finery of your self-righteousness! Down with you among the useless and worthless things! From that point you will ascend. The more crushed, humbled, exhausted, and near to death you are, the more prepared you are for God to raise you up.

Job was an unrivalled saint—none of us can compare with him; and if that perfect and upright man had to say, “I abhor myself,” what will you and I say when we see God? We shall by-and-by behold him on the judgment seat—how shall we endure it? If you have no righteousness but your own, you will stand naked to your shame in the day when the Lord appeareth. You self-righteous men—dare you go before God in your own righteousness? If you dare, I marvel at your presumption. Job dared not. He could stand up boldly before his accusers, but when before God he was in another attitude. When it comes to dying and appearing before the Most High, you that have no righteousness but one of your own spinning, what will you do? If God should take away your soul at once, could you dare to go before him in that fine character of yours, that wonderful morality, that large generosity? If you have any sense left, you dare not attempt such a thing. What shall you and I do? Brethren, we are not afraid; for there is a righteousness of God which is given to us by faith through Jesus Christ. God himself cannot find any fault with his own righteousness; and if he gives me his own righteousness, even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ, which is to all and upon all them that believe, then I may hope to sit at last, not on the midden, but on the throne, rejoicing to find myself in Christ Jesus, crowned with a crown which I shall delight to cast at his feet. How happy are we if we can sing—

***“Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these array’d,
With joy shall I lift up my head!”***

