

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

### 31. MERCY REJOICING AGAINST JUDGMENT

The promises of God, which in Christ are yes, and in him amen, shine with resplendent luster in the pages of eternal truth. Nothing but unbelief can prevent the soul from enjoying the sweetness, or experiencing the purifying efficacy, of those exceeding great and precious promises of grace and mercy. The manner in which many of them are introduced by the prophets, must have filled the ancient believers with astonishment. When the prophet, in the name of Jehovah, had been declaring to his rebellious people their multiplied transgressions, we might naturally expect to find the catalogue of their crimes dosed by a denunciation of deserved vengeance and final abandonment. But, how great is our surprise, to behold mercy rejoicing against judgment; to find, that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

The following striking passages will fully verify this assertion. In the first chapter of Isaiah, the Jews are called "a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters." The Almighty declares his aversion to "their solemn meeting;" that when they spread forth their hands, he would hide his face from them; when they made many prayers, he would not hear. And then, instead of threatened destruction, the prophet adds, "Wash, make yourself clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well: seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

In the thirtieth chapter, the sinfulness of the Jews is proclaimed, in forsaking the Lord, and trusting in the shadows of Egypt. The awful consequences of this departure are declared; "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall you flee, until you be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on a hill. And therefore"—mark the surprising termination—"and therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment, blessed are all those who wait for him."

Thus we behold the lovely character of our God. Vengeance is his strange work, while mercy is his delight. "As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Again, in the thirty-second chapter, the prophet declares: "Many days and years shall you be troubled, you careless women; upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briars; the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture for flocks." How long shall this desolation continue? Is the prospect of misery boundless? Ah, no! for thus only shall it be, "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field; and the fruitful field be counted for a forest: then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field, and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever."

Mercy promised, forbids despair. Patience leads to repentance. How touchingly beautiful is the following display of judgment and mercy! "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he has poured upon him the fury of his anger and the strength of battle; and it has set him on fire round about, yet he knew it not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart. But now, thus says the Lord that created you, Oh Jacob, and he that formed you, Oh Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon you." (Isaiah xlii and xliii.)

The Almighty Creator, taking, as it were, a survey of his moral creatures, says of his chosen people, (Isaiah xliii.)

"I have made Israel for myself, and they will someday honor me before the whole world. But, my dear people, you refuse to ask for my help. You have grown tired of me! You have not brought me lambs for burnt offerings. You have not honored me with sacrifices, though I have not burdened and wearied you with my requests for grain offerings and incense. You have not brought me fragrant incense or pleased me with the fat from sacrifices. Instead, you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your faults." Isaiah 43:21-24. Surely now the deserved vengeance will be pronounced. Oh my soul! read with holy admiration these accents of mercy. "I—yes, I alone—am the one who blots out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again." Isaiah 43:25.

Must we not exclaim with David, "There is mercy with you, that you may be feared?" Must we not acknowledge the force of John's declaration, "We love him, because he first loved us?" Must we not confess with Paul, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he has saved us?" How precious are the Scriptures of truth! They are full of the loving-kindness of the Lord, of the goodness of our God.

The few specimens here given will serve to show the extraordinary manner in which the promises are often

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introduced. The prophet first declares the guilt of God's professing people, in order to humble their hearts, and convince them of sin. He then proclaims the divine mercy on their true faith and repentance, as is strikingly shown in the first chapter of Isaiah. Well may we join the holy prophet, and say, "Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done this wondrous thing. Shout, O earth! Break forth into song, O mountains and forests and every tree! For the Lord has redeemed Jacob and is glorified in Israel." Isaiah 44:23.

Surely mercy rejoices against judgment, while it exclaims, in accents of redeeming love, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom." (Job xxxiii, 24.) "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he has torn, and he will heal us; he has smitten, and he will bind us up. Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. Behold, we come unto you, for you are the Lord our God."

"Bless the Lord, Oh my soul! and all that is within me bless his holy name; for he is a just God and a Savior; just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus." "God is love." "Blessed is the man that trusts in him."

My soul, in grateful strains record  
The love of your redeeming Lord;  
To all around his praises tell,  
Who snatched you from the verge of hell.

Why should Jehovah condescend  
To call himself the sinner's friend?  
Or why in terms so sweet proclaim  
His mercy in a Father's name?

Blessed Savior, in your work I see  
Why God is merciful to me;  
How he a rebel can receive;  
How he can all my sins forgive.

'Tis faith in your atoning blood  
Averts of wrath the angry flood;  
'Tis faith in righteousness divine  
Makes all your saving merits mine.

Descend, blessed Spirit, from above,  
In all the energy of love;  
To me your heavenly gifts impart,  
And seal salvation to my heart.

Then, in those sweet abodes of peace,  
Where grateful accents never cease,  
A living monument of grace,  
I'll strive to sing your loudest praise.