

of it; he enforces his prayer with this consideration, that his sins are very heinous. But how could he make this a plea for pardon? I answer, Because the greater his iniquity was, the more need he had of pardon. It is as much as if he had said, Pardon mine iniquity, for it is so great that I cannot bear the punishment; my sin is so great that I am in great need of pardon; my case will be exceedingly miserable, unless thou be pleased to pardon me.

He makes use of the greatness of his sin to enforce his plea for pardon, as a man would make use of the greatness of calamity in begging for relief. When a beggar begs for bread, he will plead the greatness of his poverty and necessity. When a man in distress cries for pity, what better plea can he use than the desperation of his case? And God allows such a plea as this; he is moved to mercy towards us by nothing in us but the miserableness of our case. He does not pity sinners because they are worthy, but because they need his pity.

Thus, the lesson to learn here is: If we truly come to God for mercy, the greatness of our sin will not hinder pardon. If it were a hindrance, David would never have used it as a plea for pardon. The following things are needful in order that we truly come to God for mercy:

(1) That we should see our misery, and be sensible of our need of mercy. Those who do not see their misery will never truly look to God for mercy. God's mercy is his goodness and grace to the miserable. Without misery in the object, there can be no exercise of mercy. To suppose mercy without supposing misery, or pity without calamity, is a contradiction. Therefore, men will not look upon themselves as proper objects of mercy, unless they first know themselves to be miserable; so, unless this be the case, they will not come to God for mercy.

They must see that they are the children of wrath (*Eph 2:3*); that the law is against them, and that they are exposed to the curse of it (*Gal 3:10*); that the wrath of God abideth on them (*John 3:36*); and that he is angry with them every day while they are under the guilt of sin (*Psalms 7:11*). They must see that it is a very dreadful thing to be the object of the

wrath of God; that it is a very awful thing to have him for their enemy.

They must know something of the guilt of sin that makes them miserable creatures. Whatever temporal enjoyments they have, they can only be miserable, undone creatures so long as God is angry with them; and they must perish, and that eternally, unless God help them. They must see that their case is utterly desperate, that they hang over the pit of eternal misery; and that they must necessarily drop into it, if God does not have mercy upon them.

(2) They must see that they are not worthy that God should have mercy upon them. They who truly come to God for mercy, come as beggars, and not as creditors. They come for mere mercy, for sovereign grace, and not for any thing that is due unto them. They must see that the misery under which they lie is justly brought upon them, and that the wrath to which they are exposed is justly threatened against them; and that they have deserved that God should be their enemy, and should continue to be their enemy. They must know that it would be just with God to do as he hath threatened, to make them the objects of his wrath and curse them in hell to all eternity. They who come to God for mercy in a right manner will find no fault with his severity; but they come in a sense of their own utter unworthiness, as with ropes about their necks, and lying in the dust at the foot of mercy (*Psalms 51:3-4*).

(3) They must come to God for mercy in and through Jesus Christ alone. All their hope of mercy must be from the consideration of what he is, what he hath done, and what he hath suffered; and that there is none other name given under heaven, among men, whereby we can be saved, but that of Christ (*John 14:6; Acts 4:12*); that he is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world; that his blood cleanses from all sin, and that he is so worthy, that all sinners who are in him may well be pardoned and accepted.

It is impossible that any should come to God for mercy, and at the same time have no hope of mercy. Their coming to God for mercy implies that they have some hope of obtaining it, or else they would not think it

worthwhile to come. But they that come in a right manner have all their hopes in Christ, through his redemption, and its sufficiency. If persons come this way to God for mercy, the greatness of their sins will be no hindrance to pardon. Let their sins be ever so many, ever so great, and aggravated, it will not make God in the least degree more backward to pardon them. This is evident from the following considerations:

(1) The mercy of God is as sufficient for pardon of the greatest sins, as for the least, because his mercy is infinite. That which is infinite is as much above what is great, as it is above what is small. Thus God being infinitely great, he is as much above kings as he is above beggars; he is as much above the highest angel, as he is above the lowest worm. One finite measure does not come any nearer to the extent of what is infinite than another. So the mercy of God being infinite, it must be as sufficient for the pardon of all sin, as of one. If one of the least sins be not beyond the mercy of God, so neither are the greatest, or ten thousand of them.

However, while the mercy of God is just as sufficient for the pardon of great sins as others; yet there may be other obstacles, that is, other attributes of God, that may oppose the exercise of his mercy. Therefore, observe:

(2) That the satisfaction of Christ is as sufficient for the removal of the greatest guilt, as the least: "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin" (*1 John 1:7*); "By him all that believe are justified from all things" (*Acts 13:39*). All the sins of those who truly come to God for mercy, let them be what they will, are satisfied for by the death of Christ. And if they be satisfied for by the blood that was shed at Calvary, surely it is not incredible, that God should be ready to pardon them (*Neh 9:17*). Christ having fully satisfied God for sin, having made a satisfaction sufficient for all, it is now no way inconsistent with the glory of God's attributes to pardon the greatest sins of those who in a right manner come to him for it.

God may now pardon the greatest sinners without any dishonor to his holiness.

The holiness of God will not allow the least sin to go unpunished, but draws out his hatred of it. But Christ having satisfied for sin by suffering under God's wrath for sinners, God can now love the sinner, and pardon him "for Christ's sake" (*Eph 4:32*), however great the sinner.

God's hatred of sin is clearly seen in that he poured out his wrath upon his own Son, when Christ took the guilt of it upon himself (*Isaiah 53:10; 2 Cor 5:21*). Nothing can show more plainly God's hatred of sin than this. If all mankind had been eternally damned, it would not have been so great a testimony of God's abhorrence of sin.

God may, through Christ, pardon the greatest sinner without any dishonor to his majesty. The honor of the divine majesty indeed requires satisfaction; but the sufferings of Christ fully repair the injury done by sin. Let the contempt be ever so great, yet if so honorable a person as Christ the Son of God undertakes to be a Mediator for the offender, and suffers so much for him, it fully repairs the injury done to the Majesty of heaven and earth. The sufferings of Christ fully satisfy justice.

The justice of God, as the supreme Governor and Judge of the world, must punish all sin: "He will by no means clear the guilty" (*Exod 34:7*). The supreme Judge must judge the world according to a rule of justice. God doth not show mercy as a judge, but as a sovereign; therefore, his exercise of mercy as a sovereign, and his justice as a judge, must be made consistent one with another. This is done by the sufferings of Christ, in which sin is fully punished, and justice answered: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood...to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (*Rom 3:25-26*).

The law is no hindrance for the pardon of the greatest sin, if men do but truly come to God for mercy; for Christ hath fulfilled the law, and borne the curse of it in his sufferings: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (*Gal 3:13*).

(3) Christ will not refuse to save the greatest sinners, who in a right manner come to God for mercy; for this is his work. It is his business to be a Saviour of sinners; this is why he came into the world (1 Tim 1:15); and therefore he will not object to it. He calls not the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matt 9:13). Sin is the very evil which he came into the world to remedy; therefore, he will not say of any man that he is too sinful. The more sinful he is, the more need of Christ the man has, and the more need he has of being delivered: "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Matt 9:12). If a physician of compassion comes among the sick and wounded, surely he will not refuse to heal those that stand in most need of healing, if he be able to heal them.

(4) Herein does the glory of grace by the redemption of Christ much consist, that is, in its sufficiency for the pardon of the greatest sinners. The whole plan of salvation is to this end: to glorify the free grace of God. God had it on his heart from all eternity to glorify and magnify his free grace; thus his purpose to save sinners by Christ was conceived. The greatness of divine grace appears very much in this, that God through Christ saves the greatest offenders. The greater the guilt of any sinner, the more glorious and wonderful is the grace manifested in his pardon: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom 5:20).

The apostle Paul, when telling how great a sinner he had been, takes notice of the grace abounding in his pardon, of which his great guilt was the occasion: "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious. But I obtained mercy; and the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 1:13). The Redeemer is glorified, in that he proves sufficient to redeem those who are exceeding sinful, in that his blood proves sufficient to wash away the greatest guilt, and in that he redeems even from the greatest misery.

(5) Pardon is as much offered and promised to the greatest sinners as any, if they will come aright to God for mercy. The

invitations of the gospel are always in universal terms: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1); "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28); "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17); "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

It is the honor of Christ to save the greatest sinners when they come to him, as it is the honor of a physician to cure the most desperate diseases or wounds. Therefore, without any doubt, Christ will be willing to save the greatest sinners, if they come to him; for he will not hesitate to glorify himself, and to commend the value and virtue of his own blood. Seeing he hath so laid out himself to redeem sinners, he will not be unwilling to show that "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb 7:25). □

—Jonathan Edwards
(1703–1758)

TOMORROW

"Boast not thyself of TOMORROW; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth"
—Proverbs 27:1

He was going to be all that a mortal should be
TOMORROW.

No one should be kinder or braver than he
TOMORROW.

*A friend who was troubled and weary he knew,
Who'd be glad of a lift and who needed it too;
On him he would call and see what he could do*
TOMORROW.

Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write
TOMORROW.

And thought of the folks he would fill with delight
TOMORROW.

*It was too bad, indeed, he was busy today,
And hadn't a minute to stop on his way;
More time he'd have to give others, he'd say,*
TOMORROW.

The greatest of workers this man would have been
TOMORROW.

The world would have known him, had he ever seen
TOMORROW.

*But the fact is he died and faded from view,
And all that he left here when living was through
Was a mountain of things he intended to do*
TOMORROW.

CONDEMNED awaiting execution

A certain prince traveling through France visited the Arsenal of Toulon, where convicted criminals were held. The commandant, as a courtesy to the prince's rank, said he was welcome to set any of the prisoners free, whom he should choose. The prince, desiring to make the wisest use of this privilege, spoke to many of them in succession, inquiring why they were condemned to death. "Falsely accused," cried one. "Unfair trial," grumbled another. "Unjust laws," was the contention of another who had set himself against civil authority. Still another complained that he was a victim of a corrupt social system. They were all innocents who had been ill treated and oppressed.

At last he came to one who, when asked the same question, answered, "My lord, I have no reason to complain; I have been a very wicked and rebellious wretch. I account it a great mercy that I am still alive." The prince fixed his eyes upon him, and said, "You wicked wretch! It is a pity you should be placed among so many honest men; by your own confession you are bad enough to corrupt them all; but you shall not stay with them another day." Turning to the officer, the prince said, "This is the man, sir, I wish to see released."

The bitter remorse that filled the hearts of the other men as they saw their companion walk out a free man, while they themselves remained to face their doom, can better be imagined than told. Any other one of them might have been set free had he confessed his guilt.

But infinitely greater remorse awaits every reader of these lines who refuses to confess his guilt and righteous condemnation before God. There is "none righteous," "all have sinned" and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 3:10, 23; 6:23).

If you still see yourself as a "pretty good person," God's pardon is not for you. If you're still blaming circumstances or someone else for your sinful dilemma, God's pardon is not for you. Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt 9:13). Are you a sinner? Are you guilty? □

PARDON FOR THE GREATEST SINNERS

"For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great" (Psalm 25:11)

David penned this psalm in a time of affliction and danger: "Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord: for he shall pluck my feet out of the net" (vv 15). His distress makes him think of his sins, and leads him to confess them, and to cry to God for pardon, as is suitable in a time of affliction: "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions... Look upon mine affliction, and my pain, and forgive all my sins" (vv 7, 18). It would be wise for us to consider what arguments the psalmist makes use of in pleading for pardon.

(1) He pleads for pardon for God's name's sake. He has no expectation of pardon for the sake of any righteousness or worthiness of his own, or for any good deeds he had done, or any compensation he had made for his sins. But he begs that God would do it for his own name's sake, for his own glory, for the glory of his own free grace, and for the honor of his own covenant-faithfulness.

(2) The psalmist pleads the greatness of his sins as an argument for mercy. He not only does not plead his own righteousness, or the smallness of his sins; he not only does not say, Pardon mine iniquity, for I have done much good to counterbalance it; or, Pardon mine iniquity, for it is small, and Thou hast no great reason to be angry with me; but on the contrary, he says, "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." He pleads the greatness of his sin, and not the smallness