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SERMON.

BY BISHOP SHERLOCK.

"Then were there two thieves crucified with Him; one on the right hand, and another on the left."—Matthew xxvii: 38.

What different effects the judgments of God have upon the minds of men, may be learned from these examples now before us. Here are two thieves crucified with our blessed Savior; two, who were probably guilty of the same crimes, and now under the same condemnation; both brought by the Providence of God to suffer in the company of His own Son, whose blood was shed for the sins of the whole world. But mark the end of these men: One died reproaching and blaspheming Christ, and breathed out his soul in the agonies of guilt and despair; the other saw, acknowledged, and openly confessed his Redeemer, and expired with the sound of those blessed words in his ears, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

How adorable is the wisdom of God, who has thus instructed us; and, by setting the examples of His justice and mercy so near together, has taught us to fear without despair, and to hope without presumption! Who would not tremble for himself, when he sees the man perish in his sins who died by his Savior's side; within reach of that blood which was poured out for his redemption, but wanting faith to stretch out his hand, and be saved?

What would the dying sinner give to have his Savior so near him in his last moments, that he might pour out his soul before Him, and seize by violence the hand which alone is able to save? Yet, he who had all these advantages enjoyed none of them; but died in his sins, void of hope and of comfort.

Must the sinner then despair, and has God forgot to be merciful? No. Cast your eyes on the other side of the cross, and there you may see the mercy of God displayed in the brightest colors. There hangs the penitent, surrounded with all the terrors of approaching death; yet, in the midst of all calm and serene, confessing his sins, glorifying the justice of God in his own punishment, rebuking the blasphemy of his companion, justifying the innocence of his Savior, and adoring him even in the lowest state of misery; and at last receiving the certain promise of a blessed immortality.

Thus the case stands with all the allowances made to it which seem most to favor a death-bed repentance: And yet, as if the scripture had said nothing of the wretch who died blaspheming and reproaching Christ, nor given us any cause to fear that a wicked life may end in an hardened and obdurate death; the case of the penitent only is drawn into example, and such hopes are built on it, as are neither consistent with the laws of God, nor the terms of man's salvation; for even of this example the most preposterous and absurd use is made. This penitent, as soon as he came to the knowledge of Christ, repented of his sins: If you are fond of the example, go and do likewise: If you delay, and pursue the pleasures of sin, upon the encouragement which this instance affords you, it is plain, that you like nothing in the repentance, but only the lateness of it; and that your inclinations are to imitate the thief, rather than the penitent Christian. Once he lived by violence, in defiance of the laws of God and man: When he was penitent, he abhorred and detested his iniquities: Which part would you imitate? If both, if like him you propose to enjoy the pleasures of sin, and like him to repent and enjoy the pleasures of heaven, you mightily impose on yourself; his case can never be yours, and therefore his example cannot be your security. Besides, were the case indeed parallel to that of the dying Christian, yet still it can afford no certain hope; since the proof is as strong from the case of the impenitent thief, that you shall die in your sins; as it can be from the other case, that you shall repent of them.

It would take up too much of your time to consider this case distinctly in all its views: I shall therefore only briefly hint to you the circumstances which distinguish it from that of the dying Christian, and then proceed to show what little hope this example affords, allowing the case to be what it is generally supposed to be.

First, then: In all this perhaps there may be nothing resembling a death-bed repentance. It is no uncommon thing for malefactors to lie in prison a long time before they are brought to trial and execution; and if that is the present case, there is room enough for the conversion of this criminal before he came to suffer. The circumstances incline this way. How came he to be so well acquainted with the innocence of Christ, if he never heard of Him till he met Him on the cross? How came it into his head to address to Him in the manner he does, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom?" What were the marks of royalty that were to be discovered on the cross? What the signs of dignity and power? What could lead him to think

that his fellow-sufferer had a title to any kingdom? What to imagine that He was Lord of the world that is to come? These circumstances make it probable that he had elsewhere learned the character and dignity of Christ, and came persuaded of the truth of His mission: And what is this to them who have no desire to lie down Christians upon their death-bed, though they would willingly go off penitents?

Secondly: Suppose this great work were begun and finished on the cross; yet it cannot be drawn into example by Christian sinners; because the conversion of a Jew or an heathen is one thing, and the repentance of a Christian is another. The promises of God, through Christ, are so far certain, that whenever an unbeliever repents and is converted, his sins shall be forgiven. This was the penitent's case; and therefore the pardon granted to him answers directly to baptismal regeneration, and has nothing to do with a death-bed repentance; nor can at all affect them who have fallen from grace once received. For,

Thirdly, The profligate life of this unconverted sinner was not attended with such aggravating circumstances as the sins of Christians are. He sinned against the light of nature, and the common rules of reason and morality: But it might at least be said for him, that he was the unhappy son of an unhappy father, conceived in the degenerate and corrupted state of nature; that he wanted both the sense and knowledge, the hopes and fears, and the helps and assistances, which the gospel affords for destroying the power and dominion of sin: And the greater his weakness was, the fitter object of mercy was he; and because he had not been freed by grace from the power of sin, he had the better plea to be freed by mercy from punishment. But are there the same excuses, or the same hopes of pardon for Christians, who sin against knowledge, against the powerful motives of hope and fear, and in despite of the Holy Spirit, with which they were sealed? To sin in hopes of pardon, and upon the prospect of future repentance, is itself a great aggravation of sin, and a sad abuse of the mercy of God.

If the heathen sinner, he sins under those infirmities of nature for which Christ died; but the Christian sinner under the use of all the remedies which the gospel has provided, and which were purchased for him by his dying Savior. The condition of mankind after the fall afforded, without doubt, many arguments of pity and compassion; and such arguments as moved the Son of God to undertake their redemption. The ignorant, the unenlightened sinner has a right to plead all these arguments in his own behalf: His is the common cause of mankind; and nature, with innumerable groans, cries for him and all her children before her great Creator.

If the penitent received the first knowledge of Christ upon the cross; yet, how much more had he to say for himself, than the Christian, who comes to make his peace at the hour of death? He might thus plead his unhappy cause: "Lord, I am one of those sinners, for whom thy son now expires upon the cross; I was conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity; I have wandered in ignorance and darkness, without the light of thy gospel to direct me, without the help of thy Spirit to protect me: Why was all my life so dark, and these few last minutes only blessed with the knowledge of thy Son? Lord, accept the poor remains of life, since it is all I have left to offer: My latest breath shall confess my own guilt, and my Savior's innocence: And since thy wisdom has united me to Him in this cross, let me never more part from Him; but as I am joined with Him in His death, so let me be likewise in His life forever more." But what shall the dying Christian say, after an hardened life of sin and impenitence? What words shall we put in his mouth to appease the anger of his injured Redeemer? You may spend your time in lamenting your past folly; but with what language will you approach to God? You have neither ignorance nor weakness to plead; you were enlightened with His Word; and His Holy Spirit was ever ready to assist you, had you been ready to endeavor after holiness. What will you then say, when frightened and amazed you call for mercy at your last moments? May not the Lord then say, "How long have I waited in vain for these prayers, and these sighs? How have I spoken to you by your conscience within, and by the ministry of my Word from without; and how have my calls been despised? The gates of mercy were always open to you, but you shut them against yourself: But though you could fly from the mercy of God, yet His justice will overtake you." Consider this but calmly with yourselves, and you will find that the wicked Christian's case is so much worse than the penitent's upon the cross, that there can be no reason for you to encourage yourselves upon this example; or to hope for the same mercy, when your case will be greatly different. These are such circumstances as enter into the nature of the case, and will make it always unfit, and oftentimes impossible, to be imitated

by a Christian. But there are other circumstances fit to be observed, which render a death-bed repentance very insecure and dangerous, though we should allow it all the hopes which have been raised from the case before us.

As, first: He that sins in hopes of repenting at last, may sin so far, as to grow hardened and obdurate, and incapable of repentance when the time comes. This reflection is grounded upon the case of the impenitent thief; who was crucified with our Savior; who, though he had certainly all the outward advantages which the penitent had, yet he made no step toward repentance, but died reproaching Christ, and joining with those who crucified Him in that bitter jeer, "If thou be the Christ, come down from the cross." Or, if you want more evidence, this example may be backed by many more in our own time; it being no uncommon thing to see malefactors die stupid and senseless, and go out of the world as wickedly as they have lived in it: And what can this be attributed to, but to the desertion of God's Holy Spirit, which will not always strive with sinners, but sometimes leaves them to perish in the hardness of their hearts? So that the man who sins in hopes of repenting, can never be sure of this last retreat; because by pursuing the first part of his design, that is, to enjoy the pleasure of sin, he may soon grow incapable of the last, which is repenting. I question not but that those who reserve themselves to these last hopes of repenting, mean sincerely to do it when the time comes; for hardly can I think that any man means to suffer for his sins: But then those who enter upon sin with these tender regards to their own souls, soon grow above such mean thoughts, and would scorn to own themselves in the number of those who are candidates for repentance: They contract a familiarity with sin, and, with Solomon's fools, learn to make a mock of it, till by degrees their consciences are hardened, and not to be touched by those soft impressions which at the first setting out they felt from the languishing remains of grace. And from hence it comes to pass, that when these sinners lie down upon a sick bed, they often want both the will and the power to ask forgiveness; and, by an habitual neglect of all parts of religion, become unable to perform any, even that in which all their poor hopes are concluded, to repent of, and ask pardon for, their sins. Now is it in your own power to sin to what degree you please, or to preserve a sense of religion, amidst the pleasures of iniquity: If it were, possibly the danger in this respect might be less: But habit grows insensibly; there is a kind of mechanism in it, as in the growth of the body, and he that gives himself up to sin can no more resolve how great a sinner he will be, than he that is born a man can resolve how tall, or how short, of stature he will be. To the truth of this experience daily witnesses: Happy are those who want this fatal experience! With how much pain and uneasiness do men bring themselves to do the things which in a little time they glory and take pride in, or at least grow easy and contented under? And thus the man, who, with great tremblings of heart, and misgivings of mind, brings himself to taste the pleasures of sin, with resolutions of an after repentance, comes at last to be so well reconciled to his sins, as not to think repentance necessary for them. The moment you give yourself up to sin, you give yourself out of your own power; you lay the chains upon the neck of reason, and set the passions free: Conscience, which used to be your advance guard, and give you early notice of every approaching evil, falls into the power of lust and affection: And when reason and conscience are destroyed, the triple cord is broken, and religion must soon follow after; and how, in this general rout, one poor resolution, to repent of all this iniquity, should escape, is more than can be easily conceived; and yet when you lose that, you lose yourself: it is your last, your only hope. Upon the whole, there is much more reason to fear, that sin, if once you indulge it, should get the better of, and destroy, your resolution of repentance, than that your resolution to repent should ever conquer and destroy the confirmed powers and habits of sin. And I wish those who have not yet put it out of their own power to reason calmly upon these things, would enter into this debate with their own hearts, and consider what danger they are in: A few moments cannot be too much to spend in so weighty an affair; and whenever you retire to these cool thoughts, may the Father of mercies influence those moments of your life, upon which all eternity depends!

But, secondly, could you preserve your resolutions of repentance, yet still it is not in your own power to secure an opportunity to execute them. The thief upon the cross died a violent death by the hand of justice; happy in this at least, that he knew how long he had to live; and had no ground to flatter himself with the hopes of many years to come. He had no pretense to defer his repentance, in prospect of a further opportunity; nor was his heart to be al-

lured by the soft and entertaining pleasures of life, when life itself was so near expiring. From the like death God defend us all! and yet, without it, which of us can hope for such favorable circumstances for repentance? Whenever the sinner thinks of repentance, he will find that he has a work of great sorrow and trouble upon his hands; and this will make him unwilling to set about it. No man is so old but that he thinks he may last out one year more: And then, why will not to-morrow serve for repentance as well as to-day? And thus the great work is delayed, till sickness or natural infirmities render him incapable of it. It was the sight of this strange delusion in which men live, still promising themselves longer life, and upon those hopes deferring the necessary work of eternity, which made the holy psalmist break forth into that moving petition: "So teach us to number our days; that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." The way that men generally number their days, can produce nothing but folly and wickedness: The many years to come, which they rejoice in, serve only to make them careless and negligent, and thoughtless of the great concerns of immortality: And whether men are not deluded by these hopes, let any one judge. Do but suppose that you were in the thief's case, and certainly to die upon a fixed day: Do you not think that you should have other thoughts, other concerns about you? Could you then delay your repentance, and say, to-morrow will be time enough? If you would not do it then, why will you do it now? Only for this reason, that you think you have time enough in reserve to do this work hereafter. And so you may continue to think with as much reason, as you do now, till death, or the sickness which leads to it, surprises you. And hence it comes to pass that very few, who sin with resolutions of repentance, ever think of it till they are confined to a sick bed; because, as long as they are in health, they have always this answer ready, it will be time enough hereafter. So that the unfortunate end, to which justice brought this penitent upon the cross, was, with respect to his conversion, an advantage that few Christians will give themselves: The certainty of his death made his repentance certain, permitted him no delays, no vain excuses, no flattering hopes of better opportunities hereafter.

Thirdly, considering that Christians, who propose to themselves this example of the thief upon the cross, seldom repent till they are warned by sickness to prepare for death; they will evidently want another advantage, which this penitent had. His death not being the effect of any bodily pain, or distemper, but of the Judge's sentence, he brought with him to the cross, which, if you please, you may call his death bed, a sound body and mind. He had his senses perfect, his reason fresh and undisturbed; and was capable of performing such acts of faith and devotion, as were necessary to his repentance and conversion. But how different often is the case of the sick and languishing sinner? Perhaps he labors under such acute pains, as will give him no respite for thought or reflection; or perhaps he dozes, and lies stupid, without knowing his friends or relations, or even himself; or perhaps the distemper seizes his head, and he raves and is distracted; loses his sense and reason, and everything of the man, but the outward shape, before his death. And are not these hopeful circumstances for repentance? Is a man likely to know and find out his Savior, when he knows not even his own brother who stands by his bed side? These are very common circumstances, and such as render repentance impracticable. But should the sinner escape all these accidents, and go off gently without being forsaken by his sense or reason; yet still it may happen, and often it does, that his promised repentance produces nothing but horror and despair. In his life-time he flattered himself with unreasonable hopes of mercy, and now he begins to see how unreasonable they were: Now he can think of nothing, but that he is going to appear before his Judge, to receive the just rewards of wickedness: He sees Him already clothed with wrath and majesty; and forms within his own tormented breast the whole process of the last day. If he sleeps, he dreams of judgment and misery; and when he awakes, believes his dreams forebode his fate. Thus restless and uneasy, thus void of comfort and hope, without confidence to ask pardon, without faith to receive it, does the wretched sinner expire, and has the misfortune to see his hopes die before him. In a word then, put all the favorable circumstances together that you can imagine; bring the sinner by the gentlest decays of nature to his latter end; give him the fairest and the longest warning; yet still you give him no security: If he is not sensible of his sin and impenitence, he will die, like the wicked thief upon the cross, reproaching Christ, hardened and obdurate against the thoughts of judgment; Or, if he comes to a sense, and sees his own unworthiness, how shall he be preserved from despair, and such a

dread of his righteous judge, as will make him neither fit to live, nor fit to die? Nothing but an extraordinary degree of grace can preserve him in a temper fit for repentance, free on one side from confidence and presumption, on the other from slavish fear which casts out love, which may produce sorrow, but not repentance. And whether those who have lived under the continual calls of grace to virtue and holiness, who have rejected the counsel of God whilst they had health and strength to serve, shall be thought worthy of such extraordinary mercy at last, let any reasonable man judge. It cannot be supposed that God intends to save Christians in this way; which would be at once to evacuate all the rules and duties of the gospel. Christ came to destroy sin and the works of the Devil; but were men promised forgiveness upon the account of a few sighs and tears at last, this would effectually establish and confirm the kingdom of Satan. Though God has promised pardon to penitent sinners, yet His promise must be expounded so as to be consistent with His design in sending Christ into the world; and then it can never be extended to those, who use the gospel as a protection to wickedness, and sin because God has promised to be merciful. In a word, you have the promises of the gospel set before you, you have the mercies of God in Christ offered to you; if you will accept them, and do your part, happy are you: But if you are for finding out new ways to salvation, if you seek to reconcile the pleasures and profits of sin with the hopes of the gospel, you do but deceive yourselves; for God is not mocked, nor will He regard those who make such perverse use of His mercy.

What then remains, but that all who love their own souls seek the Lord whilst happily He may be found; and work for their salvation whilst they have the light; for the night cometh, when no man can work. The night cometh on apace, and brings with it a change which every mortal must undergo. Then shall we be forsaken of all our pleasures and enjoyments, and deserted by those gay thoughts which now support our foolish hearts against the fears of religion. The time cometh, and who, O Lord, may abide its coming! when we must stand before the judgment seat of Christ; when the highest and the lowest shall be placed on the same level, expecting a new distribution of honors and rewards. In that day the stoutest heart will tremble, and the countenance of the proudest man will fall in the presence of his injured Lord. I speak not to you the suggestion of superstition or fear, but the words of soberness and of truth. May they sink into your hearts, and yield you the fruits of spiritual joy and comfort here, and of glory and immortality hereafter!

[For the Advocate.

AUTUMN.

The yellow leaf is on the tree,
The chilly winds are flying,
And soon the forest robe will be
Beneath the bare limbs lying;
For death is riding on the blast,
And summer's hues are fading fast;
Too fair to stay, too sweet to last—
The beautiful are dying.

O! in the early days of June
When lilies waved all greeting,
Who thought the green would fade so soon?
Who thought that glow so fleeting?
The tinted dress the landscape wore,
The cherished shade along the shore,
Will soon be seen, nor wanted more—
All earthly ties are cheating.

But lo! there comes a beam of light
From yonder high world given;
And 'on the falling leaf is bright,
When from the stem 'tis driven.
And though it mingle in the dust,
And sleep within this mundane crust,
It leaves above the bow of trust,
And points us thence to heaven.

Let wind or storm disturb my rest,
And strip this lovely shading,
But while hope burns within my breast,
I'll utter no upbraiding.
I'll look beyond the winter's gloom;
Beyond the storm—beyond the tomb,
Perchance there is a land of bloom
Where flowers are unfading.

J. F. KINDRICK.
Sullivan, Mo., October, 1866.

VERY WELL PUT.—Some one writes, both gracefully and forcibly: "I would be glad to see more parents understand that when they spend money judiciously to improve and adorn the house and the ground around it, they are paying their children a premium to stay at home, as much as possible to enjoy it; but that when they spend money unnecessarily in fine clothing and jewelry for their children, they are paying them a premium to spend their time away from home—that is, in those places where they can attract the most attention and make the most display."

Wise sayings often fall to the ground, but a kind word is never thrown away.