

Christ's Special Tenderness Towards Penitent Disciples.

by Edward Payson

Christ treats mourning, penitent sinners with peculiar kindness because it is agreeable to his character, consistent with his offices and object, and necessary to remove their guilty fears and give them confidence and peace.

Scripture: Psalm 34:18, Isaiah 57:15, Matthew 5:4, Mark 16:7, Luke 15:7, Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:10, Hebrews 4:16, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Repentance And Forgiveness", "Divine Compassion"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on the message delivered by an angel to the women at Christ's tomb, emphasizing the special mention of Peter, a fallen disciple, to assure him of Christ's forgiveness and acceptance despite his denial. Payson explains that Christ's unchanging character and compassion towards repentant sinners, like Peter, reflect His nature as both man and God. He highlights the importance of repentance and mourning for sin, as Christ is ready to comfort and forgive those who acknowledge their unworthiness and seek His mercy.

Transcript

"Go your way, tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you"

Mark 16:7

words were spoken by an extraordinary messenger, in a most interesting place, on a memorable occasion. They were spoken by an angel, in the sepulchre of Christ, just after his resurrection. They were addressed to a company of women who, with a strange mixture of love to Christ, and disbelief, or forgetfulness of his prediction that he should rise from the dead, had come to embalm his remains. But instead of a dead Savior, they found in his tomb an angel, who soon removed the fears, which his appearance occasioned by saying, Fear not, for I know that ye seek Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here, he is risen. Go, tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. It must be recollected, that this angel was a messenger of Christ, and that from him he had doubtless received the message. A question naturally suggests itself, why our

Lord, in giving him this message, directed him to make this particular mention of Peter. The angel had said, Go tell his disciples; and did not the general term include Peter?

Was not he one of the disciples? He was; but he was, at this time, a fallen disciple. Three days before, he had denied his Master in the most shameful and criminal manner. And as he had then disowned his Master, he might well fear; he probably did fear, that his Master would disown him; and no longer consider or treat him as a disciple. But though Peter had fallen, he had also repented of his fall. No sooner was his sin committed, than, melted by a look from his much injured Master, he went out and wept bitterly.

And by making an early visit to his Master's tomb on the morning of the third day, he showed that he still loved him; that his fall was the effect of sudden and powerful temptation, rather than of deliberate wickedness. But though penitent, he could not be certain of pardon; and had the message in our text been addressed to the disciples only, he would probably have doubted, whether he might consider it as including himself. Such doubts, however, his kind and forgiving Master took care to banish by directing his messenger to mention Peter particularly by name; and to inform him that his Master was ready to admit him into his presence, and fulfil the promise which he had made before his death.

My hearers, our blessed Savior is, yesterday, to-day, and forever, the same. He is governed by principles and measures which are, like himself, unchangeable; and we may therefore conclude that, as he has acted once, he will always act in similar circumstances. If he formerly had a special regard for fallen disciples, who had been overtaken in a fault, and who, though truly penitent, were doubtful whether he would forgive them, he has the same regard for such characters still; and if he then directed his messenger, to remind them of his promises in a particular manner, he still directs his ministers to do the same.

His instructions are, Comfort ye, comfort ye, my mourning people; strengthen the weak hands, and say to them who are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not, your God will save you. In discoursing further on this subject, I propose to show why Christ has such a special regard to his mourning, penitent disciples, who, in consequence of their sins, doubt whether he will acknowledge or forgive them. I. That Christ should pay a special regard, and send particular invitations, to persons of this description, is perfectly agreeable to his character.

It is so, whether we view him as man, or as God, or as God and man united in the person of the Mediator. It is agreeable to his character considered as a man. Viewed in this light he possesses all the innocent dispositions and characteristics of our nature. Now I need not inform you, that men are disposed, almost perhaps without exception, to regard with peculiar favor, and to treat with special kindness those who appear humble, modest and diffident. Were you about to invite a number of persons to visit you; and were there one among them, who you had reason to believe would, in consequence of diffidence or conscious unworthiness, be scarcely persuaded to think himself welcome, you would send that person a peculiarly pressing invitation, and treat him on his arrival with perhaps more than ordinary kindness.

In a similar manner you would treat an offending but penitent child, who, broken hearted on account of his fault, could scarcely think it possible that you would ever again love him as you had formerly done. Now this disposition our Savior, viewed as man, possesses in the highest degree; and this alone, were there no other reason, would induce him to treat mourning, penitent offenders with peculiar kindness. Nor is this mode of conduct less agreeable to his character considered as God.

As such he says, I dwell with him who is of a humble and contrite heart, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. To this man will I look, even to him that is of a contrite spirit and that trembleth at my word. Though the Lord be high, he hath respect unto the lowly, and giveth grace unto the humble. Still more agreeable, if possible, is this mode of proceeding to the character of Christ, viewed as God and Man united in the person of the Mediator.

In this character he combines all the disposition of man and all the readiness of God to treat with peculiar kindness the mourning penitent. In this character he said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; and he is sufficiently disposed to fulfil his own declaration. This too is the character in which it was said of him, The bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench; expressions, in which a weak, a penitent sinner, borne down with a weight of conscious guilt, is figuratively but very beautifully and strikingly described.

This leads us to observe, II. That to regard mourning, desponding penitents with peculiar favor perfectly corresponds with the offices which Christ sustains, and with the object for which he came into the world. He came to proclaim glad tidings to the meek, to comfort all that mourn, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness. He came as a shepherd to bring back those who had been driven away, to bind up those who are bruised, and to heal those who are sick; in a word, he came to seek and to save the lost, those who without him feel lost and undone.

He must therefore, in accomplishing the object for which he came, comfort all who mourn for sin and regard them with peculiar kindness. With such characters indeed his business principally is; for whom should the physician visit, but the sick; and whom should he visit first and most frequently, for whom should he feel most tenderly concerned, but those whose moral diseases are most painful, who view themselves as sick unto death? III. A third reason why our Savior treats such characters with peculiar tenderness is, that they are prepared to receive forgiveness and consolation in a proper manner.

He pities all. He is ready and disposed to impart his blessings to all. But he can impart his blessings only in a certain way, in a way consistent with the glory of God, and the honor of his law. Now in this way he can bestow pardon and consolation on those only, who truly repent and mourn for sin. Were he to pardon and save the impenitent, who feel no sorrow for sin, who scarcely perceive that they are sinners, who still persist in pursuing a sinful course, and even justify themselves in it, he would dishonor his Father, prostrate his authority and law, and become in effect the patron of rebels, the minister of sin.

In fact, he cannot pardon such characters; for they will not accept of pardon; they feel no need of it. Nor can he impart to them spiritual consolation; for they have no spiritual troubles to be removed. However much disposed you might be, my hearers, to pardon and befriend one who had injured you, yet if he refused to acknowledge that he had done you any injury; if he rejected every offer of pardon, if he still persisted in his injurious conduct, you evidently could not force him to receive your forgiveness; nor could you compel him to be your friend.

How then can Christ pardon those who will not accept of pardon how comfort those who are not distressed? Or, to allude to the case mentioned in our text, what would it have availed to send Peter the message under consideration, to inform him that Christ was ready to meet him in Galilee, if he had felt no love to Christ, no sorrow for having offended him, no wish to see him? As little would it now avail, to offer pardon and salvation through Christ, or to send messages and invitations of mercy to those who do not

mourn for sin, nor even feel that they are sinners.

But when a man feels that this is his character. When he cordially acknowledges that he has violated the divine law, and the precepts of the gospel, and that in consequence he deserves God's everlasting displeasure; when, like Peter, he weeps bitterly over his offences, and is ready to fear that one so vile and unworthy as himself can never be pardoned, or received as a disciple, then he is prepared to receive pardon and consolation in a proper manner; then Christ can impart to him these blessings; then he will receive them with humble, admiring gratitude; and, like pardoned Peter, will consecrate the remainder of his life to the service of his kind, condescending Savior, loving much, because much has been forgiven.

IV. Another reason why Christ treats persons whose character and situation resemble those of Peter with peculiar kindness, is, that they peculiarly need such treatment. St. Paul, after directing the Corinthian church to restore an offending, but penitent brother, adds as a reason why they should do it speedily, lest he be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Of this there is always danger in the case of persons whose situation resembles that of Peter. Their case will admit of no delay.

Their doubts and anxieties must be speedily removed, or despondency, if not complete despair, will be the consequence. Had Christ, after his resurrection treated Peter with harshness, or even with neglect, he might like Judas, have destroyed himself in sullen despair. And while it is thus necessary that such persons should be speedily comforted, it is by no means easy to comfort them. They seem to themselves so vile, so utterly undeserving of pardon, so worthy of everlasting punishment, that no general promises, no common invitations, are sufficient to remove their guilty fears, and give them confidence and peace.

Messages of kindness, addressed to Christ's disciples at large, afford them no consolation; for they doubt whether they are his disciples. Christ must therefore send them a particular assurance of pardon; he must address them as it were by name, and with an aspect of peculiar graciousness, before they will believe his readiness to receive and forgive them. All this our wise and compassionate Redeemer well knows; and he acts accordingly; displaying his kindness most clearly to those who feel most unworthy of it; and most speedily to those who immediately need it.

Lastly. Christ regards mourning penitents with peculiar favor, because he is himself the author of their repentance. He is exalted, we are told, as a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins to his people. Whenever they repent, it is because he has given them repentance. He had given it to Peter. He had given him a look which broke his heart, and caused him to go out and weep bitterly. In a similar manner he has looked at all who mourn for sin with godly sorrow.

He has fulfilled to them the promise which says, I will pour upon my people the spirit of grace and supplication, and they shall look on me whom they have pierced, and mourn, as one that mourneth for a first-born. Having thus begun a good work in them, he must finish it. Having given them repentance, he must give them pardon; for when he bestows the former, it is on purpose to prepare them for the latter. Such, my hearers, are some of the principal reasons why Christ regards mourning, penitent sinners with peculiar favor, and treats them with peculiar kindness.

A brief improvement of the subject will now conclude the discourse. 1. If all men possessed the character of Peter; if all, like him, saw and lamented their sins, how inexpressibly delightful would be the employment of the ministers of Christ Then our message would indeed be glad tidings; we should have nothing to do but to proclaim glad tidings to all. No more should we be constrained to perform the painful duty of setting your sins before you, and of proclaiming the terrors of the Lord; no more accusations, no

more threatenings, no mention of wrath to come, would you then hear from our lips.

We might sit as messengers of peace in our Savior's forsaken tomb, and say to all, Peace be unto you; be not afraid,--ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, and ye shall soon see him in heaven. O, it would be too much; happiness too great, too transporting, thus to proclaim pardon and salvation to all, and to see all joyfully receive these blessings; to address precious promises to every one by name, and to know that every one hears and believes these promises; to pour the water of life into the lips of the dying and of the dead, and see them start up to life and holy activity; to see tears of repentance mingled with smiles of heaven-descended joy, and hear the expressions of doubt, and fear, and anxiety, exchanged for the rapturous accents of wonder, and thankfulness, and peace, and love.

And why may we not see and hear all this? Why may we not always proclaim only glad tidings, and see them produce universal gladness? Why must our pained lips still give utterance to messages of divine wrath; and speak of a death without hope; of a judgment without mercy; of a hell without end; of a despairing eternity? Only, I answer, only because you will not all repent of and mourn for sin. Only do this, and you will never more hear of your sins, except as having been fully pardoned; of death, except as a messenger, who is to convey you to heaven; nor of the judgment day, except as of the day which is to witness your open acknowledgment by the Judge as his friend; nor of hell, except as a place, the danger of which you have forever escaped; nor of eternity, except as it measures the duration of your happiness.

O then, my hearers, why will you not all repent of sin, all mourn for sin, all renounce your sins? Will it not most terribly aggravate your remorse, and your wretchedness in the future world, to reflect, that the pardon of your sins, the special regard and favor of Christ, and everlasting happiness might once have been secured, by renouncing and mourning for your sins; sins which only serve to render you unhappy even in the present life! Do any reply, we know not what are the sins which we must renounce, or for which we must mourn?

We have not, like Peter, denied Christ, and need not, therefore, repent as he did. Alas, my hearers, we have all denied Christ. I have done it; you have done it. He considers all as denying him, who do not confess him before men. He considers all, who do verbally confess him, as denying him, when they do not act agreeably to their professions. In one, or in both of these ways, we have all denied him, and crucified him afresh. We have denied him in a manner even more criminal than that of which Peter was guilty.

He denied him on a sudden surprise, when he saw him in the hands of his enemies, when to confess relation to him was to incur contempt, abuse, punishment, perhaps death itself. We have no dangers of this kind to tempt us to deny Christ, our Savior; nor have we denied him once only, or on a sudden surprisal, but we have denied him deliberately, repeatedly; have persisted in our denial of him for years. Even now many of you are about to go from this table, and thus to say, by your conduct, I am not a servant of Christ; I do not acknowledge him as my Master; I do not wish to remember him.

And you, my friends, who will remain and approach his table, --have not you formerly done this? and are not some of you still in various ways denying, offending, and grieving him, when you profess to come, in a manner no less criminal than the conduct of Peter? Now these are the sins which you are required to mourn over and confess. For these sins every one has reason to mourn apart. And will you, can you, do you mourn for these sins? Are any of you looking to him, whom you have pierced by your neglect, unkindness, and ingratitude; looking to him on the cross, where lifted up he draws the hearts of sinners to himself?

Do you there see him as it were looking at you with a reproving, expostulating, yet mild and forgiving look, and hear him saying, Did I suffer all this for thee, O sinner! and is this thy return? Dost thou not know thy Savior? Dost thou deny him who dies here for thee? and wilt thou, by persisting in thy denial, compel me to deny thee hereafter before my Father and the holy angels? My hearers, if this dying love leads any of you to repentance; if any of you are, like Peter, seeking a place where to weep; if your past treatment of the Savior appears most ungrateful, cruel, and monstrous; if in consequence you feel worthy of his everlasting displeasure; then, in his name I say, peace be unto you; your sins are forgiven, be not afraid.

Are there any whose guilt seems to them so great, who feel so unworthy, that they cannot be satisfied with general assurances of pardon, cannot yet believe that Christ acknowledges and loves them as his disciples? To such Christ directs us to speak as it were by name, to say to each of them, Christ loves thee, and gave himself for thee. He was delivered for thy sins, and raised again for thy justification. Come, see the place, where thy Lord, thy surety lay. See, he is released; thy surety is discharged, a sufficient proof that the debt is paid, that thy creditor is satisfied.

Christ is gone before thee into heaven, to appear for thee in the presence of God, as thy advocate and representative. There shalt thou see him, as he has said. There shalt thou be like him, there shalt thou behold his glory forever and ever. My professing friends, what encouragement does this subject afford all penitent, yet doubting, trembling characters to approach the table of our Lord. If any of you cannot take this encouragement, it is because you are not in a penitent frame. Remember the message in our text was sent, not to Peter falling, but to Peter mourning. Remember then from whence you are fallen, and repent, and this message shall be your consolation.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/edward-payson/christs-special-tenderness-towards-penitent-disciples/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net