

# Men Tried and Found Defective.

by Edward Payson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith, repentance, and a new heart for salvation, and warns against trusting in good works, moral duties, or natural disposition alone.*

**Scripture:** Daniel 5:1, Matthew 5:20, Matthew 22:37, Romans 3:23, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 3:8, James 2:10, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 3:17

**Topics:** "True Repentance", "Heart Transformation"

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## Description

Edward Payson preaches about the story of Belshazzar, warning that though we may not have committed the same sins as Belshazzar, we have all insulted our Creator in various ways. He emphasizes the importance of true repentance, acknowledging our shortcomings, and seeking God's mercy and forgiveness. Payson challenges the congregation to examine their hearts, actions, and motives, highlighting that mere external religious practices or moral deeds are insufficient for salvation. He stresses the need for a genuine transformation of the heart, complete reliance on the righteousness of Christ, and a humble acceptance of God's grace as the only means of salvation.

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## Transcript

In the preceding part of this chapter we are informed, that Belshazzar, king of Babylon, made a great feast to a thousand of his lords and drank wine before the thousand. And while he tasted the wine, he commanded his servants to bring forth the golden vessels, which were taken out of the house of God at Jerusalem; and he, with his guests, drank wine in them, and praised the gods of gold and silver, of brass and iron, of wood and of stone. But while they were thus insulting the Majesty of heaven and earth, by consuming his bounty upon their lusts, and profaning the vessels of his sanctuary, in the same hour there came forth the fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the palace, and the king saw the part of the hand, which wrote.

Though he knew not the awful import of the mysterious words thus written, his guilty conscience soon told him, that he had no reason to expect messages of mercy from the invisible world; and therefore his countenance was changed and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another. Nor were his terrors without foundation; for after the hand was withdrawn, the words, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN, were found written; words, which were thus interpreted by Daniel the prophet; MENE, God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it; TEKEL thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting; UPHARSIN, thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and

Persians.

The justness of this interpretation was confirmed by the event, for that same night was Belshazzar slain. My friends, this story affords an instructive, admonitory lesson to us all; for though we have not, like Belshazzar, profaned the consecrated vessels of the Lord, or praised the gods of the heathen, who are vanity and a lie, yet we have in various ways insulted our Creator and provoked him to jealousy. We have often consumed his bounty upon our lusts; we have perverted those faculties, which ought to have been consecrated to his service; we have loved and served and idolized the world, and the God, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways we have not glorified; and though the displeasure of offended heaven is not now suddenly and openly displayed, as it was in the days of Daniel; though no hand is now sent to write the sentence of condemnation on the walls of our houses, yet there is still an invisible witness, which continually records our actions; there is still a just and omniscient God, by whom these actions are weighed; it is still true that we shall receive of him a just recompense of reward, according to our works.

Our days are already numbered and will soon be finished; for God has set bounds to our lives which we cannot pass. Soon shall we be weighed in the balance of eternal truth and justice, and if we are found wanting, we shall be cut in sunder, and have a portion appointed us with hypocrites and unbelievers. And say, my friends, are you all prepared to pass this solemn test? Should the same hand, which wrote the doom of impious Belshazzar on the plaster of the wall of his palace, be now commissioned to write our names, our characters and our doom on the plaster of the walls of this house, are there none here present, whose thoughts would trouble them; none, whose countenances would be changed by conscious guilt; none, over against whose names the damning sentence, tekeli, would be seen inscribed?

This is a most interesting and important question to all of us; a question, which ought by no means to remain doubtful; a question, which it is perhaps as much as our immortal souls are worth, to leave for a single day undecided. And why should it remain undecided? Have we not, in our own hands, the balance in which our actions and characters will one day be weighed? Has not the Judge himself informed us, in the clearest manner, of the rules and maxims by which he will be guided in determining our irrevocable doom?

Let us then avail ourselves of the information, which he has given us, and resolve, before we leave this house, to know the worst of our situation, and ascertain what sentence we have reason to expect from the mouth of God. Let us this evening, anticipate the proceedings of the judgment day, and impartially weigh our characters, hopes and pretensions in the balance of the sanctuary, that we may discover, before discovery will be too late, whether we are prepared to meet our Judge in peace.

I. Let us place in this balance the pretensions and characters of those, who hope for heaven because they were born in a Christian country, are descended from pious parents; and were by them in their infancy given up to God in the ordinance of baptism, and have enjoyed the advantages of a religious education. That there are persons, who build their eternal hopes on this foundation, daily experience but too plainly evinces; and perhaps there may be some such in this assembly.

If so, we must assure them, that they are building upon the sand, and that they will be found wanting, when weighed at the bar of God. For though the privileges, with which such persons are favored, afford them peculiar advantages for becoming religious; yet they do not render them so, but on the contrary, unless suitably improved, greatly aggravate their guilt and punishment. 'To whom much is given, of them

will much be required; and those who are thus early taught their Lord's will, unless they perform it, will be beaten with many stripes.

Think not, says John the Baptist to the Jews, who trusted in their religious privileges--think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father; that is, trust not in your descent from that pious patriarch, nor to your covenant relation to God; for I say unto you, that God is able, of these stones, to raise up children unto Abraham. To the same purpose St. Paul writes to the Philippian Christians. If any man, says he, thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I have more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee.

But, he adds, what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. II. Let us bring to the test of the law and the testimony, the characters and hopes of those, who are trusting for salvation to a good natural disposition, and a harmless, inoffensive life. It is possible, that some of you, my friends, may be trusting to these things. You can plead that your tempers are gentle, conciliating, mild and amiable; that your conduct and deportment are winning and prepossessing; that you are admired and beloved by your friends and acquaintance, and are not conscious of having, in a single instance, willfully injured your fellow creatures or offended your Creator.

But if you can plead nothing more than this, you will most certainly be found wanting in the sight of that God, by whom actions are weighed. He will not be satisfied with a bare negative goodness, if we may be allowed the expression. He will not think it sufficient, that you have abstained from outward offences, or avoided overt acts of sin, while you have failed to perform what he has commanded. Those who leave undone what they ought to do, will be as certainly, if not as severely punished, as those who do what they ought not to have done.

Not only those vines which produce the grapes of Sodom, and the clusters of Gomorrah, but those also which do not produce the fruits of holiness, will be cast into the fire; and though you are covered with leaves, and adorned with flowers; though you make a fair flourishing appearance in the sight of men, yet he must and will consider you as barren and unprofitable, because you are destitute of these fruits; he must condemn you as slothful and unfaithful servants, because you have neglected to improve the talents with which you were entrusted.

It was part of the heavy charge brought against the king of Babylon, that he had not glorified the God, in whose hands his life was, and whose were all his ways. To the same charge you must plead guilty, since you have never glorified, nor even sincerely aimed to glorify God. The amiable dispositions in which you trust, do not lead you to seek his glory, or to obey his commands. In fact, they have nothing in them of the nature of true religion; but are merely corporeal instincts, and are often found in perfection among irrational animals.

You are therefore found wanting. You want the one thing needful; and were our blessed Savior now on earth, he would say to each of you, as he did to the amiable young ruler, One thing thou lackest. Go, and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, take up thy cross and follow me. III. Another class, perhaps, will boldly come forward and say, though these characters are justly considered as deficient, yet we do not fear that we shall be found wanting; for we have something more than mere negative goodness to plead.

Instead of misimproving, or abusing our time and talents, we have improved them with diligence and faithfulness. In stead of injuring our fellow creatures, we have endeavored to promote their happiness by every means in our power. We have been sober, temperate, honest, and industrious; have carefully fulfilled all the social and relative duties of life; have provided for the support of our own families, and been kind and liberal to the poor and afflicted. In short, we have been useful members of society, and have faithfully discharged the various duties, which we owed to our parents, our children, our friends, and our country.

We do not, indeed, pretend to be perfect and confess that in the course of our lives, we have sometimes been induced by strong and sudden temptations to say or do things, which were perhaps improper and sinful. But we have always been sorry for these offences, and they are but few and trifling compared with our good actions. We therefore trust that a merciful God has forgiven them, and are ready to appear cheerfully at his tribunal, whenever he shall think proper to summon us away.

Such ever has been and ever will be the language of those, who are ignorant of their own hearts, and of the requirements of God's law; and such we have reason to fear, is the secret language of some in this assembly. But we must assure you, my friends, that if you can plead nothing more than this, you will certainly be found wanting at the bar of God, however safe and confident you may feel; nor can you possibly escape, unless the Judge should break his word, and act contrary to his own solemn declarations.

He has summed up the law, by which you will be tried, in the two great commands which enjoin it upon us to love God with all our hearts, and our neighbor as ourselves. Now even though we should allow what we presume none of you will pretend, that you have through life perfectly obeyed this latter command, and loved your neighbor as yourselves; yet you would still be condemned for neglecting to love God with all your hearts. The performance of all the duties, which you owe your fellow creatures, can make no atonement for neglecting the far more important duties, which you owe to your God; for as our Savior has said, in a similar case, these ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone.

If therefore, we should even allow the truth of all your pleas, you would still be found guilty, when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, of wanting that perfect love to God, which the divine law inflexibly requires of all, who seek to be justified by its works. But we cannot allow the truth of these pleas. We cannot allow that any of you have perfectly discharged the duties, which you owe your fellow creatures. You know, you must know, that you have not loved your neighbors as yourselves and that therefore in this respect also, you will be found wanting.

But you will perhaps object, that it is impossible for any to love his neighbor as himself; it is contrary to nature; it is morally impossible; and since God is a merciful being, he certainly will not judge us by this severe law, but will make some allowance for the imperfections and infirmities of his creatures. If such are your hopes, listen to our Savior and his apostle, and they will vanish at once. Says the apostle, As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in, or under the law, shall be judged by the law.

But will not the rigor of this law be mitigated? No; for, says the Judge, though heaven and earth should pass away, yet one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of the least of these commandments and shall teach men so; the same shall he called least in the kingdom of heaven; that is, shall never enter it; for I say unto you, that except your

righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall, in no wise, enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Yet the pharisees had at least as much righteousness, as any moralist at the present day. Some of them could say, we are not as other men are, unjust, extortioners, or adulterers. We fast twice in a week, and give tithes of all we possess. But it is evident from our Savior's own declarations, that those who can say nothing more than this, will be found wanting, and never be admitted into the kingdom of God. IV. Perhaps another class will come forward and say, we allow that those who trust to their own moral duties for salvation, will be justly condemned; but we have carefully obeyed the commands of the first table; we do not trust to our moral duties, and therefore hope to escape.

We have never worshipped false gods; we have made no graven images; we have never taken God's name in vain, nor do we profane his holy sabbath. On the contrary we entertain a great degree of veneration and love for God, we worship him daily in our families and closets; we study his word, honor his institutions, and diligently attend to the preaching of the gospel, in season, and out of season. But permit me to ask, --are you equally careful to perform all the duties, which you owe to your fellow creatures?

Does not your whole religion consist in the observances of external forms, prayer, reading and hearing the word? Are you not among the number of forgetful hearers, rather than the doers of the word; and do you not hope, by your religious duties, to atone for your moral deficiencies? Are you not hard and unmerciful in your dealings; peevish, fretful and morose in your families, or indolent in performing the proper duties of the station in which you are placed? Are you not harsh and severe in censuring the conduct, or condemning the character of your neighbors?

Above all, are you not deficient in the great duty of liberality to the poor, and of doing to others, as you would wish that they should do to you? If so, vain are all your religious duties; vain your pretensions of love to God. In vain do you pretend to obey the commands of the first table, while you neglect those of the second; for piety, without morality, is even worse than morality without piety. You will be found guilty of wanting love to man; and consequently, of being destitute of all true love to God, whatever you may pretend; for, says the apostle, he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?

And again, whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? And again, if any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain. V. Perhaps some may be found, who will say notwithstanding these observations, still our hope remains unshaken; for we have both piety and morality. We not only deal justly and love mercy, as it respects our fellow creatures, but also walk humbly with our God.

We do not make the performance of our duties to men an excuse for neglecting our duties to God; nor, on the other hand, do we consider the discharging of our duty to God as an excuse for neglecting our duties to men; but we carefully attend to both. We keep up the worship of God in our families and closets; we bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; we reverence the Sabbath and other institutions of religion, and diligently attend to the word read and preached.

In addition to this, we are sober, moral and exemplary in our conduct; careful to promote the welfare and happiness of our families, and kind to the poor, the sick and distressed. In what respect then, can we be said to be wanting? I answer, if you have nothing more than this, you want many things. You want that

new heart, without which no man can see the kingdom of God. You want that faith without which you must be condemned. You want that repentance, without which you must inevitably perish.

You want that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. All these things are every where represented as indispensably necessary to salvation; and yet persons may do every thing which you profess to have done, without either regeneration, faith, repentance or holiness. You can plead nothing more than the Pharisee, who went up to the temple, could plead. He discharged his duties to men no less faithfully than you profess to have done; for he was not unjust, nor an extortioner, nor an adulterer; and he gave the tenth part of his goods to the poor.

In addition to this, he also attended to the duties, which he owed to God. He went to the temple, he prayed, he thanked God, and fasted twice in a week. Yet he was found wanting, and sent away empty. So the young ruler could say respecting the commandments, all these have I kept from my youth up; and St. Paul tells us, that before his conversion, as touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless. Yet he afterwards counted all his imaginary righteousness as loss for Christ.

But you will perhaps ask, if an unregenerate impenitent sinner can do all these things, what need is there of regeneration and repentance? As well may you ask, if an enemy can perform all the outward acts and services of a friend, what need is there of any real friendship? Would you be satisfied with your children, if they served and obeyed you merely from a selfish fear of punishment, or hope of reward? Would you be pleased with any of their attempts to promote your happiness, if you knew that a wish to obtain a portion of your estates was the only motive and governing principle of their conduct?

But the slightest self-examination must convince those of you, whom we are now addressing, that you are actuated merely by selfish motives in all the religious and moral duties which you perform. You are not sweetly drawn by the gentle, but powerful influences of love, to obey your Father in heaven. You do not serve him merely for the pleasure of serving him. You serve him as a master, and not as a father. You are actuated either by fear of his displeasure, by a desire of obtaining a share of the heavenly inheritance, or a wish to be freed from a burden of guilt which oppresses you.

Self-interest therefore, is really the god, whom you worship; you serve yourselves and not God, in all that you do; and therefore, your services are all sins; they are an abomination in his sight; because you want that principle of supreme love to God, which is found only in the renewed soul, and without which it is impossible to please him in the smallest degree. They who want this, want every thing. But though we should not insist upon this, though we should allow that all your duties were performed with proper views and motives; yet still you would be found wanting.

You would be found wanting with respect to the improvement of your time; for how much of this is misspent. How much is daily wasted in unnecessary sleep, in idle conversation, in foolish or useless pursuits, and in unproductive idleness. You would be found wanting in the government of your thoughts; for what an innumerable multitude of vain, trifling and sinful imaginations pass through your minds in the course of a single day? If your fellow creatures were acquainted with every thing that passes in your breasts, would they not consider you as wanting wisdom and goodness?

How then must you appear in the sight of God? You would be found wanting in the government of your tongues; for how many foolish, vain, unprofitable words escape from your lips in the course of a day. Yet says our Savior, for every idle word that men speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment. In a word, you would be found wanting in every respect; for the law of God requires perfect obedience, in

thought, word and deed, and pronounces a curse on every one, who does not thus obey it.

It requires that all your time, all your talents, all your possessions, all your thoughts and all your affections should be sincerely consecrated and devoted to God; that whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, should be done to his glory. It is in vain to pretend, that you obey this law more frequently than you transgress it; that your good actions are more numerous than your sins. As well might a thief or a murderer say, I have obeyed the laws of my country for many years, and have only broken them in a few instances, and therefore I ought to be forgiven, since my good actions are more numerous than my crimes.

Every one must, at once, be sensible of the folly of this plea. Every one must be sensible, that all laws, human and divine, do, and ought to, require perfect obedience, and to punish every willful transgression; and that it would be the height of absurdity to make a law which allowed persons to disobey its precepts. If the law of God allows men to sin in the smallest degree, then God has become the patron and protector of sin, and is no longer perfectly holy, just and true.

But the law of God does not allow men to sin in the smallest degree. It considers him who offends in one point as guilty of all, and condemns him accordingly. It considers imperfect obedience as no obedience; and therefore every one who has at any time transgressed in thought, word or deed, every one who cannot produce a perfect righteousness, will be found wanting, when weighed in this impartial balance. But you will say, if this be the case then all will be found wanting; for the scriptures assure us, that there is not a just man on earth, who doeth good and sinneth not.

True, my friends, by the law of God we are all found wanting. We have all sinned, and the whole world has become guilty before God. We are all children of wrath, and are already under condemnation. Do you ask, who then will be saved? who will not be found wanting? I answer, those, and those only, who can bring and place in the balance the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a perfect righteousness, without spot or blemish. He perfectly obeyed the whole law. He loved God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself; and he is declared to be the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

That is, he fulfils, or obeys the law in their behalf. Believers are united to Christ by faith in such a manner, that they are one with him in the sight of God, and what he has done is considered as having been done by them; and hence they are said to be complete, or perfect in him, and he is made of God unto them, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Hence believers, though they have neither wisdom, strength, nor righteousness of their own, are wise in Christ's wisdom, strong in his strength, and righteous in his righteousness; and therefore, when weighed in the balance they shall not be found wanting.

There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. But all, who are not united to Christ by faith, will be found wanting; all their righteousness will be proved light as nothing and vanity, and they will share in the doom of impious Belshazzar. But here an important question arises: How may an interest in the righteousness of Christ be obtained? I answer--it cannot be purchased, for it is infinitely above all price, nor will he sell his favors. It cannot be merited; for the best merit nothing but destruction.

It must come as a free gift. But to whom will it be given? I answer, it is freely and unconditionally offered to all who will accept it by faith. None however, will ever accept it but those, who see that they have no righteousness of their own to plead. None will accept it but those who are truly convinced, that they have never performed a good action, uttered a good word, or exercised one good affection. Hence our Savior

informs us, that publicans and harlots, the very refuse of society, will sooner enter the kingdom of heaven, than those, who like the pharisees, trust in themselves that they are righteous.

Hence also we find that the promises of the gospel are ever made to the poor in spirit, to the self-condemned sinner, to the mourners for sin, and to the penitent and contrite heart. Such characters see and feel that they have nothing of their own to plead; nothing which they dare place in the balance. They see, as did the apostle, that in them there dwells no good thing; they see that they are wholly unworthy of God's favor, and deserve nothing but death at his hands; they see that if they ever are saved, they must be saved by free, sovereign grace.

Hence they are willing to throw themselves at Christ's feet, and resign themselves entirely to his disposal. They are willing to receive him by faith, as he is freely offered in the gospel, and to depend on his righteousness, and intercession alone for salvation. But never will the self-righteous sinner do this; never will he submit to be saved in this humbling way. He may indeed be willing that Christ should supply the deficiencies of his own imaginary righteousness, and atone for the few trifling sins which he has committed; but he is resolved to have at least part of the glory of his salvation; he will not depend on Christ alone; and therefore in reality does not depend upon him at all, nor will he receive any benefit from him; for our Savior will have no partners in this work.

He will save us alone, or leave us to perish. He will have all the glory, or we never shall join in the song of the redeemed. Thus have I endeavored, in a plain, simple, unadorned manner, to set before you the sentence which you have reason to expect at the judgment day, and the manner in which you may escape the fate of those who will be weighed in the balance and be found wanting. I have avoided every thing which might tend only to amuse, or to render the subject obscure, and have only sought to render it intelligible to persons of every description.

And now permit me to ask, what is the result? Will you go to the judgment seat in your own righteousness, or in that of Christ? If you are still determined to depend on yourselves, or on the mercy of God out of Christ, I cannot help it. I would only remind you of what God has said, Cursed be the man, that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, whose heart departeth from the Lord. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled; this shall ye have at my hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.

But if there are any of you, who begin to fear that you shall be found wanting on that awful occasion; any, who feel that they are poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked, let them comply with the gracious counsel and invitation of Christ, and receive of him, a complete and perfect righteousness, without money and without price. He requires of you no other worthiness than a heartfelt conviction that you are utterly unworthy. He requires no other goodness, than a sincere acknowledgment, that you have in you no good thing.

He requires nothing else of you, in order to salvation, but a readiness to be saved in his own way and upon his own terms. Be not then discouraged to find that you are the chief of sinners; that you have no goodness, no worthiness, no righteousness of your own to plead. Did you possess any of these, he would not receive you; for he came to save, not the worthy, but the unworthy; not the righteous, but the sinful; not those who feel able to save themselves, but those, who feel utterly lost and undone without him.

So long as you imagine, that you have any good qualities to recommend you to his favor, you are separated from him by an impassable gulf; for sooner may a camel pass through the eye of a needle, than

one who is rich in his own opinion enter the kingdom of God.

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