

The Mission of Sorrow

by Gardiner Spring

The sermon 'The Mission of Sorrow' teaches that sorrow is a witness of God's existence and a reminder of our personal guilt and vileness, and that suffering is the sentence of justice, not an act of sovereignty.

Scripture: Job 4:12, Romans 5:1, Romans 8:28, Romans 8:35

Topics: "Suffering And Faith", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

Gardiner Spring preaches about the profound impact of sorrow on individuals, emphasizing the need for sympathy and fellowship in times of calamity. He highlights the role of afflictions in revealing God's character and the necessity of submitting to His will, acknowledging that trials often lead to a deeper understanding of God's love and mercy. Spring underscores the danger of idolatrous attachments and the importance of recognizing that afflictions serve as a test of Christian character, refining and strengthening faith. He encourages seeking comfort in God's presence and finding solace in the lessons learned through sorrow, drawing parallels to historical figures like Cicero to illustrate the limitations of human wisdom in times of deep distress.

Transcript

SORROW--GOD'S WITNESS

It must be a hard heart that is not touched with the sorrows of the bereaved. Our sympathy may give courage to the mourner, and relieve his solitude, even where it cannot alleviate his woes. Calamity in every form makes an appeal to every Christian mind for correspondent feeling, for fellowship, for counsel. The sorrows which for months past have inundated this land, and which now sweep over it like the waves of the sea, have been vividly present to the writer of these pages; and he would gladly give utterance to a few thoughts in which his own heart beats in unison with the afflicted. We weep with those who weep. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." We "remember those who are in adversity, as being ourselves also in the body." We have all much to be thankful for, and much to mourn over. Sorrow has its approved mission. If the Father of mercies "does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," there must be some reason for these afflictions- a "needs be" that is absolute and imperative. We should "hear the rod, and him who has appointed it."

Atheism is the great vice of the human mind. It is the nature of sin to be blindfold, especially to the existence and attributes and presence of the great Unseen. It is the element of sin to live at a distance from God. It is the refuge and triumph of sin, when "the fool has said in his heart, There is no God."

"The owlet Atheism,
Sailing on obscene wings across the noon,
Drops his blue-fringed lids, and shuts them close,
And hooting at the glorious sun in heaven,
Cries out, Where is it?"

There is no more emphatic or terse description of wicked men than that they are "without God in the world." This is their character, and leads to all their negligence, all their unbelief, and all the varied forms of their ungodliness. When once a man loses sight of the God of heaven, and has no abiding impressions of him "in whose hand is the soul of every living thing," who can measure or limit his roving, or tell where he will stop? Yet to this practical atheism men are everywhere exposed. The tendency to it is strong and seductive, and impelled by all the subtlety of him "who goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

Men live and go forth into the world, and look on its beauty and its bloom, every planet and star reflecting the image of the Deity, every stream and summer cloud and breathing fragrance all with one voice vocal with his praise; yet they are ignorant of God, estranged from God, alienated from God. What they are taught concerning him, they do not understand; what they understand, they misinterpret; what they do not misinterpret, they forget, and choose to forget, because they "do not like to retain God in their knowledge." The language of their hearts is, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of your ways." They have no notion of being controlled by "a Power above them," but rather shake off all impressions of religious obligation, that they may sin without restraint and without remorse.

It is a great thought to enter the mind that THERE IS A GOD. The knowledge of God lies at the foundation of all knowledge, of all truth, all morality, all religion, all real and permanent happiness. "This is life eternal, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Just as the whole frame of the universe would totter to its foundation if there were no God, so all sense of moral obligation and all true religion have nothing to rest upon where God is not known. Men must be made to think of God, to see him in some measure as he is, guiding, directing, and governing all things after the counsel of his own will. They may not stop their ears when he speaks, nor flee from his presence when he comes near; rather must they acquaint themselves with him as a God at hand, and not a God afar off, and as a very present help in the time of trouble. And this is THE MISSION OF SORROW. It is God's witness. It speaks for God to this thoughtless and suffering world.

Among the methods pursued in order to set this great and good Being before the minds of men, the Scriptures often advert to the afflictive dispensations of his providence. "The Lord is known by the judgments which he executes." This is one of the laws of his kingdom. Severe judgments indicate his being, his presence, his displeasure. They testify to his agency in all the affairs of men, and trace them to the great First Cause. A truly devout mind, one would judge, finds some repose here. It is cold comfort to be told that "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," and that it is the law of his being that he must be a sufferer. Yet so it is. It is not more a law of nature that bodies lighter than the atmosphere ascend, and those that are heavier descend towards the earth, than it is the law of his being that he must be a sufferer. Every man knows this; but he would know more. And he may know more. The laws of nature

are not fortuitous arrangements, but form the principles on which the God of nature conducts his wise and benevolent procedures throughout the physical creation.

It is our joy to know that there is no such thing as chance in the kingdom of nature. Everything is the result of design, and indicates the all-wise Designer. And is it less so in the moral world, and in the kingdom of grace? It would be a revolting thought that the sorrows, either of good or bad men, are uncaused, undirected, and that no all-seeing eye watches over them, and no unwearied arm restrains and controls them; and that while there is a wise and sovereign Arbiter, who balances the clouds and prepares rain for the earth, and makes the grass to grow upon the mountains, who silences the storm, and says to the invader, "hitherto shall you come, and no further," there is no such wise and benevolent supremacy over the thousand ills that flesh is heir to. Human life would be scarcely worth enjoying if blind fate were the controller. The more thoughtful and virtuous would reason as some of the wiser heathen reasoned, when, in their attempts to strike the balance between the good and the ill of man's existence, they were driven to the conclusion that it is a doubtful question whether existence is a blessing or a curse.

It is well that the Scriptures put this whole subject at rest, and explicitly instruct us, that whatever the form or degree of suffering in our world, it is the visitation of God. Sickness and poverty, drought and pestilence, disarrangement and perplexity, bereavement and death- no matter what the trial, "affliction comes not forth of the dust, neither does trouble spring out of the ground." "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord has not done it?" Be the means what they may, and the subordinate agents what they may- be they the sword of the enemy, or the sirocco of the desert; be they flood or fire; be they man's malignity or his envenomed tongue, the hand of God is in all.

It is not always that we realize this great truth. We stop at second causes; yet second causes are but his messengers and do his bidding. And though there are sufferings so fearful that we almost hesitate at attributing them to his providence, yet is the responsibility of directing them, one which he everywhere assumes, and which he well knows how to sustain and defend. We may never know all the reasons for these dark dispensations, until the curtain is drawn aside and lets in upon them the stronger light of eternity. It is enough to know that, though they are the darker expressions of his nature we here behold, and behold with mingled awe and reverence, behind the cloud is the pure Spirit of the full-orbed Deity.

The bereaved may indeed, under severe bereavements, lose sight of the Sovereign Dispenser. They may grieve the Holy Spirit, and take refuge in some comfortless error, and be submerged in darkness and doubt, and sink in despondency and gloom. But this is not the fitting tendency of their afflictions. When the Lord of heaven and earth thus comes out of his place to judge his enemies or chastise his friends, he sets himself directly before their minds. When he poured his wrath on Egypt, and overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea, it was that "his name might be declared throughout all the earth." When the Destroyer cut off one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the enemies of Israel in a single night, it was to teach Israel and their enemies, that God himself was in the midst of them. When the angel of the Lord smote Herod Agrippa, and he was eaten by worms; when the proud Roman boasted that there was no other God but his sword, and he and his were consumed by lightning from heaven; when the atheist monarch of Assyria affected divine honors, and in despair set fire to his palace and buried himself- in its ruins; when Nebuchadnezzar, for his presumptuous contempt of the Most High, was driven from among men to herd with the beasts of the field and eat grass like oxen; and when Judas went and hanged himself- these and events like these announce the judicial, the executive Deity.

Any one who reads the prophecy of Ezekiel with care, cannot but notice the reason there given for the desolating judgments spoken of in that prophecy. And what is it? More than seventy times, if I mistake not, it is given in the following words- "THAT MEN MAY KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD IN THE MIDST OF THE EARTH." It has been well said that "God is in history;" and what lesson does the history of the world and the church inculcate, if not this, that "verily there is a God who judges in the earth?"

Men are not apt to stop at second causes, and overlook the great First Cause, when a resistless providence throws them into the furnace. The foundations of their skepticism then give way. Atheism itself is constrained to confess that there is a God in heaven. It is no earthly voice that speaks then. And it falls in the admonitory tones, "See now, that I, even I am he, and there is no strange God with me. I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal- neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand."

This is a lesson the mourner needs to learn. It is God himself who has smitten you, my afflicted friend. It becomes you to say with one of old, "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because You did it." I repeat it, it was God himself, and not another, who struck the blow. And he meant to do it. "Behold, he takes away. Who can hinder him; who shall say unto him, What do you?"

'Tis God who lifts our comforts high,

Or sinks them in the grave:

He gives, and blessed be his name,

He takes but what he gave.

He had a higher claim upon the departed than your fond affection can urge. The beloved one was not yours, but his- his creature, his property, created by him, cared for by him. And has he not a right to do what he will with his own? He has not taken away more than belongs to him, nor anything which he encouraged you to believe you should long enjoy. Your rights are limited and overruled by his. It is not willingly that he afflicts, yet wisely. The season of affliction is one he employs for high and holy purposes, and for nothing more high and holy than that men may know that he exists and governs, and is the Rewarder. When he "bows his heavens and comes down, and darkness is under his feet," it is that men may know that "there is the hiding of his power."

And not infrequently, at such seasons, there are thoughts and views which so fill and absorb the mind, that God the Infinite One shuts out every other object. He has access to the mourners, and of set purpose places them in circumstances well fitted to lead them to see and acknowledge his hand. They are seasonable and well-timed instructions, and not infrequently more effective and profitable than all other teaching, and constrain them to exclaim, "Who teaches like him!"

From blank atheism I know the mind starts back with horror; yet what multitudes are satisfied with a cold and speculative belief of the Divine existence, until they feel the weight of his resistless and invisible hand. It is not the name of God merely that constitutes the Deity, but those attributes and prerogatives which are inseparable from his existence, and of which men have such faint impressions until he speaks from the thick darkness. God governs everywhere, but there are those who see him nowhere. His providence is concerned in everything, but they see it in nothing. They exclude God from his own creation. They have a God in name, but not in reality. They are "without God in the world." It is to this undutiful, ungrateful, presumptuous, and hopeless state of mind that sorrow comes to speak on God's behalf, and to remind

men how much he has to do with them, and they with him. As our views of God are, so is our religion. The mere thought of God, to a mind that feels it, has more weight than all other thoughts. It is with every man either everything or nothing. It is everything to the children of sorrow.

SORROW--DESERVED

One design of afflictions is to teach us that we deserve all that we suffer. No man who has a conscience will question that he is thus ill-deserving. So far from murmuring and cherishing the heart of a rebel, one would think that with the afflicted prophet he would say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord until he pleads my cause, because I have sinned against him."

Afflictions have a moral as well as an efficient cause. God never afflicts simply because he chooses to do so. Arbitrary choice and power have no place in his government. Suffering is the sentence of justice, and not an act of sovereignty. "The curse causeless cannot come." There is no suffering where there is no sin. The reason for all the suffering in this sinful and sinning world, is the mournful fact that it is a sinful and sinning world. "Who ever perished, being innocent; or where were the righteous cut off?" The unfallen angels are not sufferers. So long as the fallen remained sinless, they were not sufferers. When this planet on which we dwell came from the hands of its Maker, it was a happy, because it was a holy world. The Tempter's foot had not trodden it, nor had it been poisoned by the venom nor polluted by the slime of the old Serpent. Our first parents were created capable of sensation, thought, and volition; their every sense and faculty was but the inlet and avenue of joy. The image of him who created them had not been effaced from their pure minds, nor was it obscured or discolored. God himself was their supreme good, and they were happy. The heavens and the earth, every creature, and every object and event around them ministered to their enjoyment. The ground was not then cursed, nor was it smitten with barrenness. They were not thorns and thistles which it brought forth, nor did savage beasts roam its mountains or its plains. There was no poisonous atmosphere, nor burning sun, nor stormy wind, nor creeping pestilence, nor bloody sword. Men did not sicken and die upon it, nor had it yet entered upon its sad career of mourning and tears. Everything was fair, because it was unblemished- everything beautiful, tranquil, and joyous, until its beauty was marred, its tranquillity disturbed, and its joys infected by sin.

Then all was changed. The ground was cursed. The air was cursed. The streams were cursed. The very flowers and plants of Eden were cursed for man's sake. Man himself was cursed. The woman was cursed. And all their descendants are born under the curse. They inherit a fallen nature, are embryo sinners, and "go astray from the womb." The varied and complicated sorrows which now attend them from the cradle to the grave, whether they be individual domestic, social, or public, are God's visitation for their iniquity. From that hour to the present, every pang that shoots through the bosom, every tear that falls upon the pallid face of sorrow, is a token of God's displeasure against sin and against man the sinner. Sorrow teaches the lesson of unworthiness and ill desert, and conveys to the proud and haughty mind the resistless, indelible impression of personal guilt and vileness.

Such is the light in which the divine oracles represent human suffering. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." The terror by night and the arrow that flies by day, the restless bed of sickness and of pain, and the pestilence that walks in darkness, are faithful monitors "When you, O Lord, rebuke man for his iniquity, you make his beauty to consume away as the moth." The empire of suffering stands abreast with the empire of sin; there never was a sufferer who was not a sinner.

It is no cause of self-congratulation when we are sufferers, that we have brought the suffering upon ourselves. Yet WE cannot plead that we are guiltless. "Your way and your doings have procured these things unto you." See now that "it is an evil thing and bitter, that you have forsaken the Lord your God." If pain invades these senses, which were formed to be the avenues of pleasure, it is because we have sinned with our eyes and ears and hands, and these senses have been our tempters. If lover and friend are put far from us, and our acquaintance into darkness, it may be because they have seduced our hearts from God. If riches take to themselves wings and fly away as an eagle towards heaven, it may be because we have made our wealth our strong city, and "said to the gold, You are my trust, and to the fine gold, You are my confidence." If our fair name has been tainted by the breath of slander, or exposed to ridicule by indiscretions of our own, it is that we may be reminded how inordinately we have been "lovers of ourselves."

These are humbling thoughts, we know; yet is it no small satisfaction to know that God does not afflict us unjustly. It would be a fearful impression to struggle with, if we had the consciousness of not deserving rebuke, or if we were so deluded as to persuade ourselves that these painful dispensations are uncalled for. I have met with more instances than one of this sort in the course of my ministry, and have ever felt that while they called for faithful instruction and reproof, they also demanded compassion and sympathy. It is a perilous position which a creature thus assumes of contending with his Maker, and has no tendency to diminish or assuage his grief. Our very dreams might cure us of this presumption- "This truth was given me in secret, as though whispered in my ear. It came in a vision at night as others slept. Fear gripped me; I trembled and shook with terror. A spirit swept past my face. Its wind sent shivers up my spine. It stopped, but I couldn't see its shape. There was a form before my eyes, and a hushed voice said, 'Can a mortal be just and upright before God? Can a person be pure before the Creator?' If God cannot trust his own angels and has charged them with folly, how much less will he trust those made of clay! Their foundation is dust, and they are crushed as easily as moths. They are alive in the morning, but by evening they are dead, gone forever without a trace." Job 4:12-20

We all confess that these are just sentiments. And they soothe the troubled heart. They charm away his grief when the sufferer thus bows before the throne, accepts the punishment of his iniquity, and ascribes righteousness to his Maker.

"Almighty power, to you we bow;

How frail are we, how glorious Thou:

No more the sons of earth shall dare

With an ETERNAL GOD compare."

Man is the creature of appetite and passion; and though the creature of reflection and conscience, he often complains of the severity of God's judgments. he says within himself, Wherefore is the heat of this great anger? What have I done to deserve a blow like this? Come now, and let us reason together. Let such a one honestly attend to his own convictions, and inquire whether he is truly awake to a just sense of his obligations as God's creature. His conscience may not be so enlightened and sensitive as to lead him to feel the burden of his sins and the full weight of a self-condemning spirit. He may never have honestly made the divine law the rule of his duty, nor seen how broad it is. He may have congratulated himself on a decent exterior, not thinking that "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." He may have thought of his fellow-men more than he has thought of God; honored them more than he has

honored God, and sought their approbation and favor more than God's.

What though you do not condemn yourself for your immorality, have you no reason to reproach yourself for your ungodliness? You may have overlooked your high privileges, and lost sight of those ends of divine love in the many and discriminating favors of a kind and gracious Providence towards you from your youth up. When you contrast God's treatment of you, with your treatment of him, you may not feel so guiltless. You have been the child of his providence, the object of his care and bounty, and what return have you made to him who has thus loaded you with his benefits? Have you valued communion with him, and sought to enjoy his presence, or found in him and from him that peace and those joys which the world cannot give? Have you ever taken an honest retrospect of your own moral history? Whence is it, if you are not marvelously ignorant of your own character, that you thus flatter yourself that your own unworthiness and ill-desert are not so great as those whose sufferings are less than your own?

With such a state of mind as is often cherished by people in affliction, it is no marvel they complain of the rod. They do not feel that they deserve it. Oh it is a dark state of mind- dead, torpid, unfeeling state; sensitive to bereavement and sorrow, but insensitive to unworthiness and ill-desert.

The burden of sin is of all burdens the heaviest; but there is a state of mind that makes light of sin, even when the heart stoops and bleeds under the burden of sorrow. O son, O daughter of sorrow, look into your own heart, look into your closet and into your Bible, and then ask conscience whether your afflictions are not deserved.

Good men are not always faultless in this matter, but are sometimes like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. "Oh," says the venerable patriarch, "Oh that it were with me as in months past, when the Almighty was with me, and my children were about me; when his candle shone upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness. But now you have become cruel unto me; with your strong hand you oppose yourself against me." This was a bitter and unjustifiable complaint; yet was it from lips that had but a little before said, "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" Complaints like this were not the true index of Job's character; for not long after this, and in the issue of his trials, he makes that memorable confession, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you- therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

The children of God are not rebels. Even under the severest afflictions they have the consciousness of their sinful character, and of their indebtedness to his forbearing mercy; and the thought cools the febrile agitation of their heart, and bids it be still. "I am the man," says the weeping prophet in his mournful Lamentations, "that has seen afflictions by the rod of his wrath. He has led me, and brought me into darkness, and not into light. He turns his hand against me all the day; he has made my chain heavy. He has bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He has filled me with bitterness, and made me drunken with wormwood. He has broken my teeth with gravel stones; he has covered me with ashes." Language is not easily found more vividly expressive of grief and despondency. He quailed beneath beneath the rod.

But did his pensive harp echo no cheering strain? Listen while God his Maker gave him "songs in the night." He had time for reflection, for self-inspection and prayer; and in these retrospective and introverted thoughts, mourning and gratitude, the pensiveness and confidence of piety are sweetly combined. "Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall, my soul has them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." Nor does the

triumph end here. There is the song of joy from the midst of the furnace. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed; because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness." It was the light of heaven illuminating his darkness. And when he subjoins, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth; he puts his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope;" and then adds, "For the Lord will not cast off forever, for though he causes grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies;" and at last affirms the great and precious truth, "for he does not afflict wittingly, nor grieve the children of men"- it is the strength of heaven, making him strong in weakness; it is the smile of heaven, chasing all gloom from his solitude and depression; it is the faithfulness of heaven, leaving upon the receding cloud "a rainbow round about the throne."

Few thoughts have a more salutary influence upon the afflicted than a sense of their own unworthiness and ill-desert, especially when they contrast their afflictions with the abounding mercies of a munificent Providence. Think of your ill-desert; count your trials, and set them side by side with your enjoyments; and then ask yourself if you have nothing left to be thankful for.

"If smiling mercy crown our lives,

Its praises shall be spread;

And we'll adore the justice too

That strikes our comforts dead."

SUBMISSION UNDER SORROW

"At the funeral of President Davies, just as the people were about to take up the coffin, his mother, an aged widow, came to take the last look of her son. She gazed intently upon him; the tears fell upon the face of the corpse as she bent over it; and then, retiring a single step as she still gazed upon him, she exclaimed, 'There lies my only son, my only earthly comfort and earthly support. But there lies the will of God, and I am satisfied.'" This was Christian submission.

Afflictions are sent as a test of this great trait of the Christian character. Rightly employed, they serve not only to bring out that character, but to produce and cultivate a satisfied state of mind. It does not consist in a stoical insensibility to trials; far from it. Natural affections were given us that we might weep ourselves, and weep with those who weep. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. It does not consist in having no will of our own; but in that chastened and subdued spirit which consents that the will of God should be done rather than our own will. There is no greater conquest over a supremely selfish heart than this. Many a man submits to God's will because he cannot help it; but 'forced submission' is a contradiction. There is no acquiescence when he rebels as long as he can, and yields only because he must yield, and because God is stronger than he.

There are those also who flatter themselves that they have a submissive spirit, when they have nothing to submit to. They are satisfied with the dispensations of Providence, because everything smiles about them, and all their wishes are gratified. There is no submission in this, and no subjugation of our will to the will of God, but rather a self-complacency, and a proud gratification of our own desires. Who ever thought of submitting to that which is good? There may be thankfulness for it; there ought to be; but there is no place for submission. It is only when the plan of divine Providence countervails our own desires, arrangements, and hopes, and the bitter cup is put into our hands, that we can say, "Not my will, but Yours be done." This

was the spirit of our adorable and ever blessed Master, in view of such an aggregate and combination of suffering as the world never before saw, and will never see again; and it furnishes the highest exemplification of a submissive spirit.

The only difficulty in exercising a submissive spirit is, that men naturally love themselves more than God. When the carnal mind that is enmity against God is subdued, and they love God more than themselves and more than all others, this very love to him, if in due exercise, will give the preference to his will above their own. If our wishes and our will are not so dear to us as God's, we shall have no desire to oppose his will in anything. "What pleases him pleases us." If, on the other hand, we love ourselves better than God; if we love our treasures, our fame, our power, our children, our friends more than God, we cannot say, when he smites our idols, "It is well," because we have no such attachment to the divine will as leads us to subject our will to his.

Where there is no submission to God's will, afflictions give rise to morbid insensibility, discontent, murmuring, rebellion. Where it does exist, they prove its reality and its value. When the rod of God is upon our habitation, and we can say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems him good;" when the bitter cup passes round, and we can say, "The cup which my Father gives me, shall I not drink it?" when the burdened and afflicted soul "delights more in the will of God than in anything that will can take away," who will say that afflictions are appointed in vain? One such thought, one such holy emotion, one such act of sweet submission to the divine will, called into exercise and cultivated by trials, is worth all the bereavements it costs. It will live and grow and be perpetuated when this world and its idols and idolatrous attachments have passed away.

When Shimei cursed David, he could say, "Let him curse, for the Lord has bidden him." When the enemy fell upon the family of Job, and slew his children and servants; when the fire burnt up his possessions, and a great wind from the wilderness smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, "Job arose and tore his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground and worshiped, and said, The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." When the two sons of Aaron were suddenly made the victims of God's displeasure, "Aaron held his peace." Amid all the bitterness of their bereavements, they were happy men. They had no distrust of God. Unlike the troubled sea, their minds were tranquil. It was enough to be able to say, "The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice." The Holy One of Israel delights in such a state of mind as this. It is of itself bright evidence of the reality of spiritual character. It is a foretaste of the river of life which flows from under the throne of God and the Lamb. It is a blessed state of mind, and tinges with "its silver lining" the dark cloud of adversity.

Why then should the children of sorrow inwardly murmur or outwardly complain? God has taken your beloved one. And will you quarrel with God? Do you well to be angry? Oh bid this tumultuous heart be still.

"Peace all our angry passions then;

Let each rebellions sigh

Be silent at his sovereign will,

And every murmur die."

Has the God only wise acted hastily in this matter? Is it difficult for you to believe that perfect rectitude cannot do wrong, that infinite wisdom cannot err, and that infinite goodness never acts unkindly? If the

Sovereign Dispenser were ignorant and unwise, if he were unreasonable and unjust, or if he were merely indifferent to the sufferer's well-being, there might be ground for complaint. But there is no such God in the universe. A being of such attributes is no God.

We all feel our bereavements, and sometimes so keenly that our confidence in God is shaken, and breaks away from its strong foundations. This is all wrong. True piety is confiding, and gives its voice for God even when he "dwells in the thick darkness." Could we perceive the reasons and motives of his conduct as they lie in his own mind, unless we are rebels, we would be satisfied. God is a Rock; his work is perfect. These painful dispensations, as we have already seen, are designed to unfold his true character. In view of them, we may well say with the apostle, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

We shall know more hereafter, and see more clearly how bright his wisdom and goodness shine in these dark dispensations. We cannot grasp infinity. It is asking too much of infinite Wisdom, that he should condescend to our littleness and abjectness, and see everything as we see it.

"Lord, we are blind, poor mortals blind;

We can't behold your bright abode,

Oh, 'tis beyond a creature mind

To glance a thought half way to God."

Poor blind creatures of a day, to desire that we and ours should be in our own hands rather than in his! His hand reaches through all these checkered scenes of our earthly existence. It reaches to the chambers of sickness and the bed of death; it reaches down to the grave, and up from the grave through all the successive generations of men, and all the relations they bear to him and to one another, and to the eternity where he dwells. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. "It is high; we cannot attain unto it." Let us not then sit in judgment on what he does, but "be still, and know that he is God."

What if he had not sent these trials upon you and yours? What if he had let you alone? Are you sure your trials would have been fewer or lighter, and your condition every way better than it now is? I say, are you sure of this? Are you sure the time will never come when you will see that it was better for you that you have been visited with the very trials at which you mourn so bitterly? Are you sure the departed one would have been as well cared for as it now is, and that you could have done as well by that beloved child as God has done? It was rightly the object of your tenderest love and most cheering hopes. Are you sure that love would not have been grieved, and those hopes disappointed? Do you know that, foreseeing the dark shadows upon its pathway, love greater than yours, and purer, has not taken it from the evil to come, and housed it from the storm? Could you say, if it had lived, that "the days of its mourning are ended;" that it shall sin no more and weep no more? Could you have introduced it into "the general assembly and church of the first-born," where the spirits of just men are made perfect, where angels are its guardians and teachers, where "the glory of God enlightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof?"

Why, why look so intently into the grave, and never beyond it? The departed are not there. It is but the mouldering clay tenement that slumbers. The intelligent, moral, and immortal one is numbered among the millions of those ransomed ones, out of whose mouth God has perfected praise. A voice from that holy world repeats the injunction, "BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD." His arrangements in these

bereavements may excite an idolatrous heart to complaint, and an unyielding heart to rebellion; but none but a selfish heart will complain, none but idolatrous attachments will rebel.

SORROW DISTURBS IDOLATROUS ATTACHMENTS

In one form or another, all sin is idolatry. It is a violation of the command, "You shall have no other gods BEFORE ME." It sets the creature above the Creator. It ignores the Supreme Good; and sets up some created good in his place; forsaking the Fountain of living waters, and hewing out to itself cisterns, broken cisterns that hold no water.

Apostate man all the world over does this. Though formed with capacities which nothing but God can fill, he has lost his relish for the Unseen and Eternal, and seeks his highest good in the seen and temporal. This love of the creature, no longer kept in its proper place by the predominating love of the Creator, becomes an idolatrous attachment. And it is a ruinous attachment. It is the ruin of nations, the ruin of worldly men, and but for interposing grace, it would be the ruin of Christians. Nor is there anything that has a stronger tendency to weaken and break off this idolatrous attachment than afflictive dispensations.

It is altogether too favorable an opinion of human nature to suppose that men are apt to grow better under the smiles of prosperity. History teaches nothing more emphatically than that unmingled prosperity is one of the chief sources of national and individual degeneracy. "Pride and fullness of bread" embolden wickedness, inflate insolence, become the nourishment of angry dissension, collisions of interest, and pervading corruption. The Most High once said to the nation of Israel, "I spoke unto you in your prosperity, and you said, I will not hear; this has been your manner from your youth." It was the reproach of the Jew, that the apostle Paul was constrained to say to him, "Not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance." God gave this people their request, but sent leanness into their souls. It is an instructive and affecting record, that "when he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned and inquired early after God; and they remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer."

The nations that once figured so prominently on the page of history, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and their far-famed cities, where emperors and statesmen and philosophers and bards and merchants and bankers filled the world with fame and folly, were swept away from the pinnacle of their wealth, and from the pomp of their power. We could not live in a world so morally corrupt as this, were it not restrained and held in awe by the divine judgments. The church of God would not be safe. There would be no protection to liberty and law, no domestic and no public security, no Sabbath and no sanctuary, were it not for those "terrible things in righteousness" by which the God of our salvation has so often arisen to plead and maintain his own cause. The overthrow of Sodom and the cities of the plain, the plagues of Egypt, the destruction of the ancient and idolatrous Canaanites, the breaking up of the Hebrew state and monarchy, and the dispersion of the Jews, stand forth before the world not more certainly as judgments upon the enemies of truth and righteousness, than as blessings to the people of God. It is right that God should execute judgments. The world needs them. Public and punitive dispensations consult high interests, and terminate in the glory of his great name.

As with nations, so it is with individuals. They need to be taught, that in seeking their highest good on earth, they are seeking it where it is not to be found. The supreme love of the creature is the ruin of the soul. Not many years since, a military officer in our land exclaimed on his bed of death, "The world- the world has ruined me!" The experience of millions attests the truth and importance of those teachings of the divine oracles which instruct us that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God," and that "no man can

serve God and mammon." From the heavens and the earth, from the chambers of the dying and the graves of the dead, from the unsatisfying nature of all things beneath the sun, from the sin and pollution of a world that lies in wickedness, from hard-hearted hate and hard-handed oppression, from tribulation and distress in all their forms, the admonition reaches us, "Arise and depart; for this is not your rest, because it is polluted."

One of the most distinguished and successful preachers of the gospel in this land once said, "Until men have taken an everlasting leave of the world, and shut themselves up in a convent, or in hell, the love of the world is the principal way in which they stray from God- the principal affection which takes the place of love to him. It is the great road to perdition; or if the gate of hell is shut by the grace of God, it is the great road to darkness, temptation, and distress."

The psalmist understood the gracious design of affliction when he wrote the one hundred and nineteenth psalm. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept your word." Elsewhere he says, "I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me." It was when "he was in affliction" that the vile and bloody Manasseh "besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers." The afflicted patriarch had comfort in the thought when he said, "He knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." "In their affliction," says another prophet, "they will seek me early."

A principal element of this day of grace is, that it is a state of trial. Under this gracious arrangement everything is bringing the character of men to the test. Instruction tries it; prosperity tries it; adversity tries it. And for the most part, the great question to be decided is, whether God's creatures love the world more than him. This probationary process goes on with different and opposite results. Some there are who become worse under affliction. God said of a portion of his revolting people, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." He instructed the prophet Amos to say to backsliding Israel, "I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your palaces; yet have you not returned unto me, says the Lord. And I have withheld the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest; yet have you not returned unto me, says the Lord. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew; I have sent among you the pestilence, after the manner of Egypt; your young men have I slain with the sword; yet have you not returned unto me, says the Lord. I have overthrown some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet have you not returned unto me, says the Lord." This was fearful and stiff-necked obduracy; and where God means to subdue it, he sends other and greater judgments; and where these fail of breaking the hard heart, his patience becomes wearied, and his language is, "Why should they be stricken any more? they will revolt more and more." It is a fearful procedure when God does this, and leaves the worldling to his own heart's lusts.

But while some become worse under afflictions, some become better. Afflictions awaken the conscience of the most obdurate, restrain the wicked in their sinful courses, and in defiance of their own purposes and arrangements, arrest and detain and stop them in their downward career. Many is the man who has been kept from falling, who, without them, would have sunk deep into the eternal pit. Afflictions not only often reclaim men from courses of wickedness in which they have long indulged, but not infrequently produce the physical incapacity for pursuing them. Many a man has been laid upon a bed of sickness, or has lost a limb, or become blind or deaf or palsied, that he might be kept from wickedness which it was in his heart to perpetrate.

Could the religious history of the people of God be narrated in detail, how many of them, do you think, would attribute their first religious impressions to some sad and solemn call of divine Providence? The arrow that first pierced many an adamant heart would be traced to disappointments they little thought of- to the poverty they dreaded, to reproach and shame, or to the grave of those they loved. God accomplishes his purposes of mercy in his own way. The purpose comprises the means as well as the end; severed from the means, there is no purpose.

Affliction is often essential to the accomplishment of God's gracious design. Multitudes never would have become Christians but for pain and bereavement and losses; and after they became Christians, never would their backsliding have been healed but for the severity of their trials. But for these paternal chastisements, they would have wandered beyond the hope of recovery. God thought of them when they did not think of him, and restored their souls and led them in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

I have seen the benefit of afflictions, and have often wondered at the wisdom and the benevolent and gracious design which ordered and directed them.

The giddy have become thoughtful, because God smote their idols. The worldling has lost his interest in the things of time, because the hand of God has touched him. The man of congenial temperament, and social habits, and instructive and pleasant converse, loses his relish for society, and is shrouded in gloom and dumb with silence, because his heart and his hopes lie buried in the grave. Nor is this all. His conscience has been disturbed with inward pangs; and while the arrows of the Almighty stuck fast in him and were drinking up his spirit, God has turned his mourning into joy and his sad lamentations into praise.

Such is the history of many a thoughtless sinner. That young widow's heart had never found its rest in God, unless it had first been buried in her husband's grave. That daughter of mirth turned from her idols to the living God, not until she called to mind the last counsels and the parting kiss of a sainted mother, and learned that God "had chosen her in the furnace of affliction." Many a heart thus broken has thus been healed. Disciplined and discouraged by tribulation, it has found the God of heaven its refuge and strength, and reposed in him without whom the whole circle of human joys is vanity. Sorrow has driven them from the world to God. It has shown them the embittered streams, and led them to the pure Fountain. It has shown them their weakness, and taught them to take hold of him "who gives power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increases strength." And now, instead of sitting alone and keeping silence, their language is, "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." The mourner is then blessed, though he walks in the midst of trouble. The agitated and trembling heart has found a refuge from the storm, a strength to the needy in his distress, "a shadow from the heat when the blast of the terrible ones is as the storm against the wall."

When sorrow comes on such an errand, the house of mourning reads the lesson that there is something to rest upon besides this perishing world, and something more sacred than the attachments which terminate on earth. The soul then forgets its misery, and remembers it as the waters that pass away. She takes her harp from the willows, and sings, "Be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains- for the Lord has comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted." It is a new song when the child of sorrow is thus enabled to say with the apostle, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we are comforted of God."

Sorrow preaches as no pulpit ever preached. If "he who converts a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins," this forbidding messenger of mercy will have crowns of rejoicing not a few in the day of the Lord Jesus. If in taking away all the mourner has loved on earth, it has given him all that is more loved in heaven; if it has robbed him of time, to give him eternity; if it falsifies the expectations of the world, and verifies purer and brighter hopes; if when the soul had lost its way, and knew not how to return to its great object and end and chief good, sorrow comes commissioned from a world of joy "to seek and save that which is lost," it has a salutary and deserves a welcome mission.

SORROW--THE FRIEND OF CHRISTIAN GRACES

The children of God have much to struggle with. Their vocation, high and holy as it is, has a militaristic aspect. It is a protracted conflict, in which they find it necessary not only to act on the defensive, but to be the aggressors. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." To the peculiarity of the conflict in the first ages of the Christian church, there ever has been and is now superadded, the ordinary and never ceasing conflict with that spirit of the world which is enmity with God.

It is not only true, as has been already intimated, that the love of the world is the ruin of worldly men, it is the besetting sin of Christians. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," in some of their insinuating and multifaceted forms, are evermore ensnaring them. The best of men love the world far more than they ought. Nor are they always sensible of its depressing and secularizing power. It eclipses their faith, and limits and obscures their spiritual vision. It allures their affections from God, confuses their contemplations of the realities of eternity, and is not infrequently so entwined about their heartstrings, that they have lost the life and soul of religion, and for a time appear in no way different from other men.

In miserable and criminal concurrence with these outward exposures, there are strong tendencies, from "the sin that dwells in them," not only to insensible aberrations from the straight and narrow way, but to conscious and obvious backsliding. The enemy is subtle, and the conflict severe. "The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other." The under-current of inbred apostasy is strong, and so resists and mingles itself with the pure river of life, that the purer waters are like the troubled sea.

God does not mean that his own children should always remain thus undistinguished from the world that lies in wickedness. We know that "all are not Israel who are of Israel." There are tares among the wheat. And though it belongs not to men to sever the just from the unjust, and although they may grow together until the harvest, the difference between them is often disclosed before the harvest sets in. If any of those who profess to be the friends of God and followers of his Son are false to their profession, he is very apt to make their unfaithfulness and hypocrisy appear, and to place them in circumstances in which their deception shall vanish like shadows before the sun, and their deceitful profession shall stand out before the church and the world. Nor is it less true that the same dispensations of his providence which detect and bring out the hypocrisy of those who have a name that they live and are dead, disclose and discover the sincerity and truthfulness of those who have more than the form of godliness.

An intimate acquaintance with the biography of good men, among other wonders of his grace, shows that the Father of mercies usually places his true friends in circumstances which prove their Christian integrity, and invigorate and burnish their graces. By early covenant he gave them to his Son, and not one of them

shall be lost, nor allowed to remain undistinguished from his recognized foes. The promise is explicit- "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." He loves his Son too well to violate his covenant with him, and he loves his people too well to violate his covenant with them, and allow them to rest undisturbed in their idolatrous attachments.

He has a cure for their spiritual declension and their outward backsliding. He casts them into the furnace- he tries them as silver is tried. If the dross is massive and unyielding, he heats the furnace seven times more than it is used to be heated, until the mass melts away and is consumed. This he himself declares to be his object in these afflictive dispensations. "Behold," says he, "I will melt them and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?" When he does this, and they endure the trial, they come forth like gold seven times purified. They return to him from whom they have revolted; their graces are stronger and brighter, and shine in all the beauties of holiness. There is a meaning in their afflictions, and the more emphatic as there is a reality and depth in them when they thus give brightness to their spiritual armor, and crown their conflicts with progressive victories.

The burning arrows of temptation are ordinarily showered upon the soul of the believer during the seasons of thoughtless prosperity. These fiery darts do not often fly in the valley of Baca--desolation and sorrow quench them. Such is sorrow's mission, and such is the voice of experience, and it is but an echo from the divine oracles. "Blessed is the man," say they, "who endures trials; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life. Count it all joy when you fall into diverse trials; knowing this, that the trial of your faith works patience; but let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby." Afterward- the ploughshare struck deep; the seed requires time to ripen.

"The bud may have a bitter taste,

But sweet will be the flower."

It is not often that a truly Christian mind long languishes under the gloom of sorrow. Dejected it may be; but there is an exhilarating power in the truths on which God has caused him to hope. Languish it may; but there are graces within, which, like plants of righteousness shrouded in darkness, are perpetually tending towards the light, and eventually emerge into the sunlight of spiritual joy.

Not only do these spiritual consolations break up the settled gloom, but bring with them a deeper and stronger consciousness of adoption into the family of God. The mourner feels that the chastening is from the faithful hand of paternal love. Under the cheerful sunshine of prosperity, many a good man has been so absorbed and gratified in the objects of time and sense, that he had little or no religious enjoyment. His joys were elsewhere. He could not say with the rejoicing thousands of Israel, "Let those who love your name be joyful in you; shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King, and glory in the Holy One of Israel." Far from this. They sought him, but they could not find him. They "went forward, but he was not there; backward, but they could not see him; on the right hand where he does work, but he hid himself from them; on the left hand, but they did not behold him."

Now, since the waves of sorrow began to roll over them, they find that God alone is their refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. He is now their satisfying portion; and though everything else is

fading and dying around them, they can say with the psalmist, "The Lord lives; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted."

God may be seen and enjoyed everywhere; but it is in the dark passages of our pilgrimage, in the depths of disappointed and fond expectations, on the bed of languishing, and in the death-chambers of those we love, that the light of his countenance most cheers us. They were days of fearful solemnity and sanguinary persecution when the apostle Paul wrote his rich epistle to the Christians in Rome. Nothing but the sharpest trials gave rise to such thoughts as these- "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." Romans 5:1-5

Who does not see the hallowed influence of abounding trials upon his abounding faith and heaven-imparted love? Who can read the eighth chapter of this epistle without perceiving that such noble thoughts and unwavering confidence were not the offspring of a tranquil age? What writer, except one from the cliffs of the overhanging storm, or the submerged cavern, or the lions den, or the "mountain of the leopards," ever uttered the triumphant language, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:35-39

Noble man! Sufferer signally favored! Thoughts and emotions cheaply purchased by his participation with the sufferings of his suffering Lord. How far above the 'sorrows of nature' are the 'consolations of grace'. How far superior to the depressions of nature is the triumph of faith. Afflictions are not useless when grace becomes victorious. It is a beautiful remark of Pascal's, in a letter occasioned by the death of his father, "There is no consolation but in truth. All trial is sweet in Jesus Christ. He suffered and died to sanctify death and suffering. See in the magnitude of our woes the greatness of our blessings, and let the excess of our grief be the measure of our joy."

We love to have the providence of God smile upon us, and we often murmur when it frowns, even though we have so often found that it is safer for us that it should not always smile. It is recorded of ancient Israel, that "God gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls." This is not what the Christian desires. When God frowns upon us, we should be less anxious for exemption from the suffering, than for grace to endure it. "Grace for grace," faithful grace, abundant grace- this is what the Christian needs, what he prays for, and that which follows in the footsteps of the Destroyer.

Better, unspeakably better is it to enjoy the Divine presence and the light of his countenance, without our idols, than to have our idols without his favor. Oh, what wanderers would we be, if God did not sometimes hedge up our way with thorns. Surely it is not for lack of love to his people that he severely chastises them. David could say, "My soul cleaves unto the dust; quicken me, according to your word." God heard his prayer, and sent him penitent and sorrowing to his knees. That sweet Christian poet William Cowper could "sing of mercies and of judgments," and in strains such as angels use, and rarely in sweeter tones than when he indited the hymn, "O for a closer walk with God." Sanctified trials had taught him to say,

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whatever that idol be,
Help me to tear it from your throne,
And worship only Thee.
So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb."

I have seen, I have felt the Christian graces wither under the burning sun of prosperity; and I have seen them "revive as the corn, and grow as the vine," when these scorching rays were intercepted by clouds. The love that prefers God to creatures; the penitence and humility that have learned to "go softly," because they have "heard the rod and him who has appointed it;" the peace that tranquilizes; the fear that fills the soul with holy reverence; the hope that looks for brighter days; the joy that "glories in tribulation," looms up under the darkest skies.

From the deepest valley of humiliation, the 'eye of faith' discovers streaks of light from the mountain of God's holiness; and though dark clouds hang over it, streams of mercy flow down through their selected and grief-worn channels, filling the soul from all the fullness of God. Well does the Father of mercies say to each of his mourners, "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction. For whom the Lord loves he corrects, even as a father the son in whom he delights." His own Son, his only Son, his well-beloved Son, was "made perfect through suffering." God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. Blind unbelief naturally errs in its interpretations of his providence. "What son is he whom the Father chastens not?"

"Those we call wretched are a chosen band.

Amid my list of blessings infinite,
Stands this the foremost, that my heart has bled.

For all I bless you; most for the severe."

SORROW--TAKING LESSONS FROM THE BIBLE

Sorrow finds no relief from the mere teachings of human reason. The lessons of pagan philosophy, even from some of the most accomplished minds the world has known, do but make it the more bitter. A celebrated orator and statesman, who flourished more than a century before the Christian era, furnishes us an instructive illustration of this thought-- Marcus Cicero was from an ancient and noble family in Italy, of superior talents and culture, of military as well as academic training, scarcely less distinguished for his philosophy than his eloquence, and rose to the highest dignities of the state with no other recommendation than his personal merits. No man in Rome enjoyed a higher degree of popular favor, and no one was more deservedly hailed as "the father and deliverer of his country." But he was a disappointed

man- a man of sorrow, driven into exile, a desponding wanderer in foreign lands, his property confiscated, his family persecuted, an 'idol daughter' torn from him by death, himself beheaded by a Roman centurion, and his head and hands carried to Rome. Pagan biography may be safely challenged to furnish a purer, brighter character than that of Cicero, or a more undeserved overthrow of earthly hopes, and sudden fall from the eminence of popular favor, wealth, and power, to the depths of poverty, dependence, dishonor, and death.

It may be instructive to inquire what were the resources and what the refuge of such a man in the season of adversity. He had no Bible for his teacher, and no God to go to. He was familiar with the teachings of the schools, and all the questions which relate to the academic philosophy. He himself had written a treatise in which he discusses the opinions of the sages of antiquity respecting the chief good and chief end of man; and also large treatises devoted to the consideration of topics most essential to human happiness. And now, in the hour of trial, what is his solace, and whence his consolation? His first severe affliction was his banishment from Rome. His enemies were triumphant, and in one respect he was like the king of Israel when driven from Jerusalem. He loved Rome, and would gladly have thrown some guardian shield around her. But alas, "The heathen in his blindness, bows down to wood and stone."

"A little before his exile, he took a small statue of Minerva, which had long been revered in his family as a kind of family deity, carried it to the capitol, and placed it in the temple of Jupiter, under the title of Minerva, the guardian of the city." He had nothing else to cheer him when he turned his back upon his beloved Rome. It was a dark hour; they were overwhelming sorrows that invaded him; but his only refuge was a marble statue in the temple of Jupiter! Such is paganism; such are the consolations of natural religion; such was the hope of the noblest man in Rome- without the Bible.

A lacerating bereavement awaited him on his return to Rome, in the death of that remarkable and accomplished woman, his daughter Tullia. His grief was inconsolable, and his lamentations most bitter. He had no comforter. Mind and body seemed to be sinking under the burden. Vain was all his philosophy to fortify himself against this overwhelming disaster. Philosophers came from all parts to comfort him; but they could not convince him that pain and misfortune and death, are no evils. They could not wipe away his tears

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/gardiner-spring/the-mission-of-sorrow/>

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