

A Startling Statement

by J. Wilbur Chapman

The sermon emphasizes the consequences of sin and the importance of coming to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and cleansing.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:9, Psalm 90:8, Proverbs 11:21, Jeremiah 30:11, Ezekiel 18:4, Romans 14:23, Galatians 6:7, James 1:15, 1 John 3:4, 1 John 5:17

Topics: "Sin And Judgment", "Atonement And Forgiveness"

Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches on the consequences of sin, emphasizing that the wicked shall not go unpunished, as seen in various Bible passages. He highlights the certainty of reaping what one sows, the inescapable nature of God's judgment, and the impact of sin on individuals and generations. Chapman stresses the importance of understanding sin to grasp the need for atonement and forgiveness, pointing out that sin separates us from God, each other, and pollutes us. He presents the contrasting ways of man's futile attempts at reformation and God's offer of cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ, illustrating the hope and mercy available despite the consequences of sin.

Transcript

TEXT: "The wicked shall not be unpunished."--Prov. 11:21.

There are very many passages of Scripture which ought to be read in connection with this text; as for example, "Fools make a mock at sin" (Proverbs 14:9), for only a fool would. Better trifle with the pestilence and expose one's self to the plague than to discount the blighting effects of sin. And, again, "The soul that sinneth it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). From this clear statement of the word of God there is no escape. Or, again, "Our secret sins in the light of thy countenance" (Psalm 90:8). There is really nothing hidden from his sight. We may conceal our sinful thoughts from men and sometimes even our evil practices; but not from God. Or again, "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15). Here is unexampled progress indicated from which there never has been the slightest deviation. But one of the sharpest texts in all the Word of God, and one which men somehow in these days seem to ignore, is Paul's expression, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7), and if we compare this reference in the New Testament to the text in the Old Testament the harvest indeed seems to be sure, for "The wicked shall not be unpunished."

There is a note of truth in all of these statements for both saint and sinner. Jeremiah the thirtieth chapter and the eleventh verse, "For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all

nations whither I have scattered thee, yet I will not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished." The old Prophet is speaking to the people of Israel; and while he tells them that they are God's people, nevertheless they shall not altogether go unpunished, for if they sow to the flesh they must of the flesh reap corruption. In Deuteronomy the fifth chapter and the ninth verse, we read, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." It is a solemn fact that the sins of the fathers descend upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. It is more solemn that so blighting is the effect of sin that the fourth generation is the last. There is no fifth. Even though we be pardoned from sin forever, we shall not altogether go unpunished.

Certainly it is true that if one rejects Jesus Christ, punishment for him is absolutely certain. The other day in the city of Chicago the following appeared in the Inter-Ocean as an editorial under the title of "Preaching for Men."

"To those who look upon men as they are it is simply astounding that so many preachers should act as if the hope of reward alone could be efficient to move average mankind to leave sin and follow after righteousness. In every other relation of human life every man is constantly confronted with the alternative: Do right and be rewarded; do wrong and be punished. The pressure of fear as well as the pressure of hope is continually upon him. He knows that he may conceal his wrongdoing from the eye of man, but he is always under the fear of discovery and punishment. But he goes to church, and in nine cases out of ten the preacher, while insisting that he can hide nothing from the eye of God, yet says nothing to arouse in him that fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom. If he turn from religion to science he finds science more positive of the certainty of punishment than of the certainty of reward. Science cannot, for example, assure him of a long life, even though he scrupulously obey hygienic laws. But it can assure him of a speedy death if he wantonly violates those laws. Precisely this fact that the consequences of sin in punishment can be foretold more positively than the consequences of righteousness in reward is what makes fear the strongest influence dominating and directing human conduct. Yet many preachers deliberately abandon the appeal to fear and then wonder why their preaching does not move men to active righteousness. When more preachers recover from the delusion into which so many of them have fallen such complaints will diminish. For all human experience proves that the preaching that appeals to fear of punishment as well as to hope of reward is the preaching that is really effective--is the preaching of all the great preachers of the past and the present--is the preaching that moves."

The statement of the text is exceedingly plain and the teaching is unquestioned. It is a good thing for us to-day to understand what sin is, for if we have a wrong conception of sin it naturally follows that we shall have a wrong conception of the atonement. Without an understanding of sin there is no sense of guilt, and without the sense of guilt there is no cry for pardon. The best definitions that I have ever found for sin are written in the word of God.

I

1. "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). The word "transgression" means to go across. Does your life parallel God's law or cross it? Your answer to this question determines the measure of your sin. You have only to read the ten commandments and try to mold your life by them to find your answer. Better still, you have only to read

these commandments in the light of Jesus' interpretation, where the look of lust is adultery and anger without cause is murder, to see how far short you have come; and if this is true certainly you are a sinner, and the text is for you. "The wicked shall not be unpunished."

2. "All unrighteousness is sin; and there is a sin not unto death" (1 John 5:17). Righteousness means right relations with God. You may make ever so strong a claim to right living and speak ever so vehemently concerning the good that you are accomplishing in the world, but the first question for you to settle is this, What is your relation to God and what have you to say with reference to your acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ? It is a solemn thought that whatever we do counts for nothing if our relation to God be wrong, while the little that we may do may count for much if we have taken the right position before him.

3. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

Omission, according to this scripture, is sin; neglected opportunity is sin, shirking responsibility is sin, refusing to obey God is sin; and so when I ask you about being a Christian, if it is best and right and you acknowledge that it is, then if you are not a Christian, this very fact is in itself sin, for when one knows the right and refuses to do it he is a sinner, and the text is true--"The wicked shall not be unpunished."

4. "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Active doubt is sin. If you have a doubt concerning the sinfulness of certain things, then to do those things is sin. If I have the least doubt concerning the amusements which may be questionable, or the position which may be doubtful, so long as a doubt or a question remains these things are sin; and the Bible states the fact that "The wicked shall not be unpunished."

5. "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). Unbelief is the chiefest of sins. It is to reject Jesus Christ, it is to close in our own faces the door of hope, it is to trample the blood of the Son of God under our feet, and it means also to insult the spirit of grace.

One morning in the city of New York a man dashed down the street and past three men standing on the pier. They could not tell how old he was, nor how he was dressed, but they saw him jump upon the bulkhead near by, strip off his overcoat, coat and hat, and, before they could stir to save him, plunge off the end of the pier. There was a short rope lying near by, and seizing this a man ran with his companions to the point from which the man had jumped. They threw the rope toward the struggling figure that they could just make out below them. The rope fell a foot and a half too short. Then they ran back to the gas plant and got a longer rope. The ice was running so thick in the river that the man's head and shoulders were still to be seen above the water when they returned. Taking careful aim they threw the rope squarely across the struggling form, shouting, "Catch it and we'll pull you in." The unknown man, however, making a last effort, threw the rope aside and shouted back: "Oh, to h--- with it! I'm through!" Then he sank out of sight. That is a picture of the man who, having offered to him mercy and grace in Jesus Christ, spurns all that God offers, and is therefore hopeless.

Sin separates us from God.

Sin separates us from each other.

Sin pollutes us and we become impure.

Sin deceives us and we are in danger and know it not.

A friend of mine walking along the streets of Cincinnati early one morning saw a young girl standing upon the very edge of the roof of one of the highest office buildings. She was carefully balancing herself and every moment it seemed as if she would fall. The elevator was not running, but he made his way hurriedly to the roof of the building, walked carefully across it, seized her by the hand, drew her back and found that she had risen in her sleep and all unconsciously was standing on the very brink of eternity. This is what sin does for us, and it is a solemn thought that for all such the text is true, "The wicked shall not be unpunished."

II

I do not make my appeal, however, on the ground that the punishment is all for the future, for that is indeed sure. I ask you the question, Do you believe in heaven as a place of rewards? If so, the same argument will prove the existence of hell. Do you reject hell, because it seems to you to be inconceivable? Then the same argument will blot heaven out of existence. What it is that awaits the wicked, I am sure I do not know--only that it is to be away from God, with the door of hope shut forever, and the Bible tells me that there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, for the wicked shall not be unpunished. I lift my voice against the punishment here, for sin is so sure in its deadly work, it is so insidious in its influence, that before you know it it is upon you; just one day of trifling and you are gone.

The people about Pittsburg will never forget the Cheswick mine horror in 1903, when one hundred and eighty-two dead men were taken from the mine. Under the direction of one of the mining engineers, a rescuing party started into the mine to see if there was any hope of saving the men who might be yet alive. The journey is described by one who volunteered to go with the engineer on his perilous journey. "When we got to the foot of the shaft, Mr. Taylor lighted a cigar. He blew out a great cloud of smoke and watched it drift into a passage. 'This way,' he said, 'The smoke will follow the pure air draught.' So we went on, Mr. Taylor blowing clouds of smoke, and we following them. Suddenly he wheeled and yelled; 'The black damp is coming!' The cigar smoke had stopped as though it had come to a stone wall, and was now drifting over our heads. We ran with death at our heels, ran with our tongues dry and swelling and our eyes smarting like balls of fire. It seemed only a minute until Mr. Taylor shrieked and fell forward on his face. He crawled along for a while on his hands and knees, and then fell again and lay still. I stopped for a second, with the idea of carrying him. Then I realized how hopeless that was. We were still a quarter of a mile from the mouth of the pit. He was a very heavy man, and I, as you see, am small and weak. Again I ran choking and beating my head with my hands. I fell, cut my face, called upon God, struggled to my feet and fell again. So I plunged on, falling and fighting forward. Black madness came upon me. The horrible, sickening after-damp was tearing my heart up through my dry throat. My brain was bursting through my temples. Then a stroke, as though by a sledge hammer, and I knew nothing more. They found me at ten minutes past one Tuesday morning. At first they thought I was dead. Then they saw my head rise and fall while I weakly pounded on a rock with a stick that I had caught in my delirium." This is to me a striking picture of what sin does for us. There is no one so strong but he may be overpowered by its awful influence. God save us from it, for "The wicked shall not be unpunished."

III

Oh, is there no hope? For it would seem from the message thus far as if nothing but despair was ahead of us. Two ways to escape from the power of sin have been suggested; one is man's way, the other is God's. Let us consider them both.

1. Man suggests reformation. But how about the sins of the past? They are still untouched. Man tells the sinner to do his best; but how about the will which has been weakened by sinful practices, and which seems unable to act? Man tells the depraved man to change his surroundings; but how about the heart that is unclean? The fact is, man's way will not reach us.

In January, 1904, the American Liner New York left Southampton and came into the New York harbor with a sad story to tell. A sailor was suspended over the side of the vessel making repairs when an enormous wave tore him away, and he was very soon under the forepart of the ship. The waves began to carry him away, and a life line was thrown to him with a buoy attached. The sailor, sometimes visible and then obscured by the rising of a swell, grasped the line, and a cheer went up. He took a half turn with the line around his waist, was rolling himself over into the bight of the line and it looked as if he would be saved. The sailors on deck were just about to haul in. The poor fellow's hands and fingers must have been numb, for he suddenly rolled out of the half-formed bight, losing his grip upon the line.

None of the passengers could help the man, none of the crew dared jump to his rescue, no boat could live in such a maelstrom. The sailor, who was struggling and being whirled around and bobbing like a cork, his oilskins partially spreading out and sustaining him, kept drifting further and further away.

Aroused by the commotion, the second officer came on deck just as the sailor lost his hold. Tossing aside his cap, overcoat and jacket, he bade the seamen take a bowline hitch around his body and lower him away. The volunteer life-saver was cheered by the passengers as he went over. It was bitter cold, the sleet sharp and the swells ugly. A strong swim in the trough of the seas and over the crests and the officer might reach the seaman. It was his only chance.

He had no more than touched the spume before the waves hurled him against the side of the steamer again and again, bruising his ankle and knee, but he struck out bravely and gradually drew nearer the sailor. For fifteen minutes the second officer struggled. During one of his brave spurts in the direction of the struggling man he looked up to the rail. The practiced eye of the seafaring man saw something that caused him suddenly to turn and breast his way back to the ship. The line was too short. The seaman holding the line attached to the officer had in his hands the mere end of it, and there was not another bit to pay out. It was a sixty fathom line, "all gone," and the officer yet only half way to the drowning man. It was too late to splice another. Had it been thought of in time the man might have been saved. A longer struggle was useless, and the officer allowed himself to be hauled aboard, leaving the helpless man to go to his last account. That is always the difficulty with man's effort to save the lost. It does not reach far enough and fails just when it ought to hold.

2. God's way. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin," that is God's message. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." This is God's invitation. "I even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." This is God's pledge, and he has never failed to keep it.

In the old days, when England and Scotland were at war, the English came up against Bruce. They drove him from his castle and as he fled away from them they let loose his own bloodhounds and set them upon his trail. His case seemed hopeless. He could hear the bay of the hounds in the distance, and those who were with him had just about given up in despair; but not so with Bruce. He came to a stream, flowing through the forest, he plunged in, waded three bow-shots up the stream and then out upon the other side.

The hounds came up to the stream, stopped and sniffed; they had lost the track. They turned back defeated, and Bruce in time won the day. Is it not like this with our sins? Like a pack of hounds they are after me; wherever I flee they are close upon me. "The wages of sin is death," I am told, but I have found the way of escape. Here flows a stream which runs red with the blood of Jesus Christ, and I plunge in and am free.

"There is a fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Immanuel's veins; And sinners plunged beneath that flood Lose all their guilty stains."

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