

The Heart Wounded

by John MacDuff

The sermon explores the idea of being wounded and seeking God, and invites the listener to come to Jesus for salvation and comfort.

Scripture: Psalm 120:2

Topics: "Spiritual Affliction", "Godly Comfort"

Description

John MacDuff preaches on the deep longing of the soul for God, drawing parallels to a wounded deer seeking water in its distress. He discusses the various arrows that wound our spirits, whether from man or from God, leading us to seek solace in the Valley of humility. MacDuff emphasizes the importance of afflictions driving us closer to God rather than farther away, urging listeners to find comfort and healing in God's presence amidst life's trials.

Transcript

"As the deer pants for streams of water,

so my soul pants for you, O God." Psalm 42:1

Are we not warranted to infer that it was the 'wounded' stag which David now saw, or pictured he saw, seeking the brooks?--the deer hit by the archers, with blood-drops standing on its flanks, and its eye glazed with faintness, exhaustion, and death? But for these wounds it would never have come to the Valley. It would have been nestling still up in its native heath--the thick furze and cover of the mountain heights of Gilead. But the shaft of the archer had sped with unerring aim; and, with distended nostril and quivering limb, it hastens to allay the rage of its death-thirst.

Picture of David, ay, and of many who have been driven to drink of that "river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." They are wounded spirits; the arrow festering in their souls, and drawing their life-blood. Faint, trembling, forlorn, weary, they have left the world's high ground--the heights of vanity, and indifference, and self-righteousness, and sin--and have sought the lowly Valley of humiliation. What are some of these arrows? There are arrows from the quiver of MAN, and arrows from the quiver of GOD.

The arrows of man are often the cruellest of all. "Lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart." (Ps. 11:2.) Envy is an archer. His shaft is dipped in gall and wormwood. Jealousy is a Bowman, whose barbed weapons cannot stand the

prosperity of a rival. Revenge has his quiver filled with keen points of steel, that burn to retaliate the real or imagined injury. Malice is an archer that seeks his prey in ambush.

He lurks behind the rock. He inflicts his wanton mischief--irreparable injury--on the absent or innocent. Contempt is a Bowman of soaring aim. He looks down with haughty, supercilious scorn on others. The teeth of such "are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." (Ps. 57:4.) Deceit--he is, in these our days, a huntsman of repute--a modern Nimrod--with gilded arrows in his quiver, and a bugle, boasting great things, slung at his girdle. He makes his target the unsuspecting; decoys them, with siren look, within his toils, and leaves them, wounded and helpless, on "the mountains of prey."

Rescue me, O Lord, from liars and from all deceitful people. O deceptive tongue, what will God do to you? How will he increase your punishment? You will be pierced with sharp arrows and burned with glowing coals. Psalm 120:2-4 But there are arrows also from the quiver of GOD. "For the Almighty has struck me down with his arrows. He has sent his poisoned arrows deep within my spirit. All God's terrors are arrayed against me." Job 6:4. "He drew His bow and made me the target for His arrows.

He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver." Lament. 3:12-13. And who will not breathe the prayer of the Gilead Exile at another time?--"Let me fall into the hands of God, for great are His mercies!" "faithful are the wounds of this friend." (II Sam. 24:14; Prov. 27:6.) We need not stop to enumerate particularly these arrows. There is the blanched arrow of sickness, the rusted arrow of poverty, the lacerating arrow of bereavement, stained and saturated with tears, and feathered from our own bosoms.

There is the arrow, too, (though of a different kind,) of God's own blessed Word, "quick and powerful." "Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies.(Ps. 45:5.) Yet, blessed be God, these are often arrows which wound only to heal; or rather, which, from the wounds they create, send the bleeding, panting, thirsting soul to seek the waters of comfort in God himself. Suffering one! be thankful for your wounds. But for these shafts you might have been, at this moment, sleeping on the mountain heights of self-righteousness, or worldliness, or sin, with no thought of your soul; the streams of salvation disowned; forsaking, and continuing to forsake, the "Fountain of Living Waters."

Let me ask, Has this been the result of your woundings? Have they led you from the "broken (leaky) cistern" to say, "All my springs are in YOU?" Remember affliction, worldly calamity, bereavement, have a twofold effect. It is a solemn alternative! They may drive you nearer, they may drive you farther from, your God. They may drive you down to the gushing stream, or farther up the cold, freezing mountain-side. The wounded deer of this Psalm, on receiving the sting of the arrow, might have plunged only deeper and deeper into the toils of the huntsmen, or the solitude of the forest.

It might have gone with its pining eye, and broken heart and bleeding wound, to bury itself amid the withered leaves. How many there are whose afflictions seem to lead to this sad consequence; who, when mercies and blessings are removed, abandon themselves to sullen and morbid fretfulness; who, instead of bowing submissive to the hand that wounds and is able to heal, seem to feel as if they were divested of their rights. Their language is the bitter reproach of Jonah--"I do well to be angry, even unto death."

Muffling themselves in hardened unbelief, their wretched solace is that of despair--"It is better for me to die than to live." "Blessed is the man that ENDURES temptation," not who rushes away to pine, and bleed, and die;--or to feed still on husks and the garbage of the wilderness, but who makes the nobler resolve, "I will arise go to my Father." Blessed is the man whose cry, like that of the child, is answered by his Heavenly Parent bending over the cradle of his sorrow--who feels, as the Psalmist did, that his gracious

Father and God is never so near him as in a time of trial.

"When my spirit was overwhelmed, then You knew my path." The bird of the desert is said to bury its head in the sand on the approach of its foes, and to abandon itself to destruction; but blessed is the man who rather is like the bird of the grove, the first twigs of whose nest have been ruthlessly pulled to pieces by the hand of violence. Hovering for a while over her pillaged home, she fills the wood with her plaintive lament, then soars away from the haunt of the destroyer to begin a fresh one, in a place of safety, on the top branch of some cedar of God!

Such was the case with David on the occasion of this Psalm. He had read to him the most touching homily the world could read on the precarious tenure of earthly blessings. His scepter, his crown, his family, were like the bubbles on that foaming stream on which he gazed, dancing their little moment on its surface, then gone, and gone forever. Is he to abandon himself to an ignoble despair? Is he to conclude that the Lord has made him a target on which to exhaust His quiver--that He has "forgotten to be gracious?"

Is he to join marauding chiefs beyond the Jordan, savage free-looters--become a mountain adventurer on these Gentile borders, and forget Zion and Zion's God? No! the earthly crown may fade, but the homeless, uncrowned, unscathed monarch has a better home and a better King above; invisible walls and battlements, better than all the trenches and moats of an earthly fortress, encompass the wanderer. With his eye on these, thus he weaves his warrior song--"I will say of the Lord, He is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." (Ps. 18:2.)

Reader! let me ask you, in closing this chapter, are you panting for God? This is not the way--this is not the history of most. They are panting, but not for God! They are panting up the hill, like Sisyphus, with their huge stone. Ambition is panting up the hill--no time to take a breath. Pleasure is panting up the hill--pursuing her butterfly existence--a phantom chase--rushing from flower to flower, extracting all the luscious sweets she can. Fame is panting up the hill, blowing her trumpet before her, eager to erect her own monument on the coveted apex.

Mammon is pushing up the hill with his panting team, to erect the temple of riches. Multitudes of hapless wayfarers in the same reckless scramble have tumbled into crevices, and are crying for help. Mammon's wheels are locked,--his treasure-chests have fallen into the mire;--and yet, on he goes, driving his jaded steeds over the poor, and weak, and helpless--ay, those that assisted him to load before he started at the mountain base. He must gain the top at all hazards as best he may; and he will be crowned a hero, too, and lauded for his feat!

Ah! strange that men should still be pursuing that phantom-chase. Or, rather, strange that they should live so immeasurably beneath the grandeur of their own destiny; grasping the shallows when they should be out in the deep sea; furling and warping the sails of immortality, instead of having every available yard of canvas spread to the breeze of heaven. These objects of earthly, perishable pursuit, may do when the world is bright, the heart unwounded, the eye undimmed. These may do when the sun shines unclouded in our firmament, when our fields are waving, when fortune is weaving her golden web, and the bark of existence with its white sails is holding its way through summer seas.

These may do when the home circle is unbroken; when we miss no loved face, when we mark no silent voice, no vacant chair. But when the muffled drum takes the place of life's joyous music;--when our skies are robed in sackcloth, when Nature takes on its line of ashen paleness; when every flower, seared and

frostbitten, seems to droop its head in sadness and sorrow, and hide its tears amid withered leaves and blighted stems, exuding only the fragrance of decay!--what then? The prophet's voice takes up the lesson--"The voice said, Cry; and he said, What shall I cry?

All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass!" Poor trifler that you are to be so long mocked and deceived by a dead and dying world; desolate, friendless, hopeless, portionless; a vessel driven from its moorings, out unpiloted on a tempestuous sea! But there is a haven for the tempest-tossed. The Savior you have long despised and rejected, is a provided harbor for such as you. "A man shall be an hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." (Isaiah 32:2.)

Are you panting after the streams of salvation? The Shepherd who feeds His flock by these "still waters" thus addresses you-- "Let him that is athirst, come." Athirst! who is not athirst? It is the attribute of universal humanity! Who does not feel that this world is presenting us with muddy streams and broken, leaky cisterns? Who does not feel, in their moments of deep and calm reflection, when we are brought face to face with the great enigma of existence, that the world is serving up faded flowers instead of those redolent with imperishable fragrance, and glowing with unfading bloom?

Friendless one!--you who are standing alone like a solitary tree in the forest whom the woodman's axe has spared-- your peers cut down at your side. Come child of calamity!--the chill hand of privation laid on your earthly comforts--the widow's cruise fast failing, her staff of bread diminishing--Come child of bereavement!--the pillars in your heart-shrine crumbling to decay, your head bowed like a bulrush--you who know that fortune may again replace and replenish her dismantled walls but that nothing can reanimate your still marble or refill the vacant niche in your heart of hearts--Come!

Prodigal!--wanderer from God, exile from peace, roaming the forest-haunts of sin, plunging deeper and deeper into their midnight of ruin and despair--has an arrow, either from the quiver of man, or of God, wounded your heart? Are you, in your agony, seeking rest and finding none,--having the gnawing feeling of dissatisfaction with all created things, and an undefined longing for a solace they cannot give? Yes for you, too, for your gaping, bleeding wound there is "balm in Gilead, and a Physician there."

I repeat, Jesus this day stands by the glorious streams of his own purchased salvation, and cries, saying--"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink!" "Yes Lord" be it yours to reply--"Lord, I come! thirsty, faint, forlorn, wounded, weary I come, 'just as I am, without one plea.' You are all I need, all I require, in sickness and health, in joy and in sorrow, in life and in death, in time and through eternity. The snow-clad hills may cease to feed the brooks;--that sun may cease to shine, or nature grow weary of his loving beams;--that moon may cease on her silver lyre, night by night, to discourse to the listening earth;--the birds may become mute at the voice of the morning;--flowers may droop, instead of ringing their thousand bells at the jubilant step of summer;--the gasping pilgrim may rush from the stream, and prefer the fiery furnace-glow of the desert sands,--but "this God shall be my God forever and ever;" and, even when death is sealing my eyes, and the rush of darkness is coming over my spirit, even then will I take up the old exile strain--the great sigh of weary humanity--and blend its notes with the song of heaven-- "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God." Psalm 42:1

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