

The Mental Agonies of Hell

by Robert Murray M'Cheyne

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking the kingdom of heaven with anxiety and care, lest one be a castaway, and highlights the complete misery of the unconverted who will be cast away by God, Christ, the Spirit, all God's holy creatures, and even by devils.

Scripture: Genesis 15:1, Psalm 73:26, Proverbs 15:11, Jeremiah 6:30, Matthew 25:41, 2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, 2 Timothy 4:8, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Urgency of Salvation", "Eternal Consequences"

Description

Robert Murray M'Cheyne emphasizes the urgency of seeking the kingdom of heaven, drawing from Paul's example of striving for spiritual assurance and discipline even after conversion. He warns of the dire consequences of being a 'castaway,' highlighting the mental agonies of hell, where the unrepentant will be eternally separated from God's presence, favor, and blessings. M'Cheyne illustrates that the wicked will face not only the absence of joy and comfort but also the torment of their own memories and conscience. He urges both believers to remain vigilant in their faith and the ungodly to turn to Christ before it is too late, reminding them of the love of Christ who bore the weight of being a castaway for their salvation.

Transcript

FIRST, OBSERVE, the manner in which Paul sought the kingdom of heaven. Verse 26, 'I therefore so run not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air.' Although that Paul wrote these words he had a full assurance of heavenly love. It was many years after his conversion on his way to Damascus; and I am sure, if any one had assurance of his conversion, it was the apostle Paul --'I am in a strait betwixt the two, having a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better' (Philippians 1:23); 'We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord'(2 Corinthians 5:28). And you remember that sweet saying: 'There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness' (2 Timothy 4:8). Yet for all that, Paul sought the kingdom of heaven as if he had been running a race; he was as anxious seeking it after his conversion as he had been before it. There are many people who, after conversion, sit down as if it were all over. They think they need do no more; but it was not so with Paul.

The second thing I desire you to notice from these words is, one important effort Paul made. It was this, 'I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection! Paul had noticed that in the Grecian games the men who ran and wrestled were temperate in all things. Now Paul said this is what I will do in running my race. There are some Christians, I fear, who will not do so much for an incorruptible crown as the Grecian racer did for a corruptible one: 'The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light'

(Luke 16:8). There is too much pampering the body, and then Satan gets the advantage.

There is a third truth I wish you to notice. It is, the reason of Paul's anxiety and care. 'Lest that, by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.' I have told you, brethren, already that Paul had a very clear sight of his conversion, he knew that he was in Christ, and that none could pluck him out of his hand; yet, for all that, Paul was afraid lest he should be a castaway. Paul knew that, though he was a minister, yet, if he gave way to the flesh, if he lived after the flesh, he would be a castaway. He knew that many who seemed Christ's had yet fallen away. Judas he knew was a castaway. Paul felt that which I have sometimes expressed to you; if he lived after the flesh he would die. Paul knew quite well that there is an indissoluble connection between a wicked life and hell. And, oh! it was this that made him temperate in all things.

At present, I mean to speak to you principally on the meaning of the word, 'castaway'. At some previous times I have spoken to you on the subject of an eternal hell -- on the worm that never dies, and the fire that is never quenched; but there is one part of the subject I have passed over, namely, the mental agonies of hell, and that is a castaway. The word 'castaway' is supposed to be taken from workers of metals; you know there is a part of the metal which comes out of the furnace which is called dross, which is of no manner of use and is cast away. The same word is sometimes translated 'reprobate'. Those of you in this congregation who will be cast away will be found to be but dross, 'reprobate silver shall men call them' (Jeremiah 6:30).

I would show you, first, that wicked men will be cast away from Christ.

It is written, 'Depart from me ye cursed' (Matthew 25:41) 'who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power'(2 Thessalonians 1:9). I say that those in this congregation who shall be found on that day to be impenitent shall be cast away; they shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.

Unconverted men in this world are often very near Christ Christ often comes to the door of unconverted men: 'Behold stand at the door and knock...' (Revelation 3:20). Yea, he some times comes so near that he stretches out his hands. 'All day long have I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and gain saying people' (Romans 10:2 1). Yea, I believe that sometimes you feel Christ is near; I believe that sometimes you feel that Christ is knocking on your door.

But oh! it will be a change in that day. Christ will say, depart from me; Christ will no more seek your soul; Christ will no more knock at your door; Christ will no more stretch out his hands all day long to you. You will never hear his voice more calling on you to turn; you will never get one offer more of Christ; you will be cast away. Christ is the way to the Father; but the door will then be shut against you for ever am ever, and the shutting of the door will echo through all the caverns of hell.

The wicked and impenitent in this congregation will be cast away from God.

In one sense the wicked will never be away from God, because God fills heaven, earth and hell. Job says: 'Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering' (Job 2 6:6). And it is said in Proverbs 15: 1: 'Hell and destruction are before the LORD.' In one sense then, the wicked will never be away from God. It was he that kindled hell. 'The breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it' (Isaiah 10:33). But still, it is true, you will be cast away from God - you will be cast away from the relative enjoyments of God.

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. God says to believers, 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people' (2 Corinthians 6:16). He said to Abraham, 'I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward' (Genesis 15: 1). Asaph sings, 'God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever' (Psalm 73:26). Ah! this is the portion of believers; we can look up to heaven, and say, 'This God is our God, for ever and ever' (Psalm 48:14). And God said to the Levites, 'Thou shalt have no inheritance among them, I am thy inheritance' (Numbers 18:20).

But that will not be the case with those in this congregation who will be cast away. You will be cast away from the fruition of God. The attributes of God will minister no joy to you. It is true, you cannot get far enough away from God now, you could not bear to be left alone with God for five minutes; but, oh! it will be hell for all that, to be separated from him. It will be the hell of hells to be separated from God.

You will not only be cast away from God, but from the favour of God. It is said, 'In thy favour is life'. Ah! child of God, say what would you sell this favour of God for? Ah! the favour of God can lighten up the pale cheek of the dying saint with seraphic brightness, and can make him rejoice, even on the scaffold and at the stake. But, sinner, you will be cast away from the favour of God, God will send you nothing but the black cloud of his frown for ever and ever.

And you will be cast away from the blessing of God. God makes everything blessed to us. Our friends are blessed to us. Our food and our raiment are blessed by him. But he can make these things minister no blessedness, even though we be in possession of them, and this will be the case with those of you who will be cast away. God will take away all blessedness from you.

I come to show you, brethren, that the wicked will be cast away by the Spirit.

It is the Spirit that is the author of joy in the unconverted, and it is he that keeps them from sin. There are three ways by which God the Spirit keeps wicked men from sin.

He does so by ordinances. He makes them a band on their wickedness. Family worship is a great band on the wicked. The ordinance of the preached word is a great means of keeping men from open acts of wickedness. You have the terror of the law, and the sweet winning invitations of the gospel; these keep you from sin, though they may not save you.

And again, brethren, the Spirit works very much through providence. You may notice that a wicked man would go further into sin, were he not restrained by providence. God brings poverty, so that he is not able to go into those expensive vices that he would otherwise do. And God lays sickness on him, or on his child, which keeps him from sin. Now, these things are all owing to the restraining grace of God.

There is a third way, that is, by convictions. I believe there are none here who have not had some convictions of sin. Now, God makes use of these convictions in order to restrain you; he keeps you back from going into those fearful debaucheries into which you would otherwise fall. But, oh! brethren, do you remember the Scripture? 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man' (Genesis 6:3). He is striving with you now; but there is a time coming when he will no more strive with you; it may not be during your life, yet it will be immediately at death.

Ah! my friends, you will have no ordinances in hell; there will be no family worship in hell; there will be no singing praises in hell; there will be no preaching in hell. Some of you are weary of sermons now, but you will have none in hell; and there will be no more providences in hell; there will be no sickness in hell; and

there will be no more convictions in hell; the Spirit will not strive with you in hell. Oh then, brethren, what an awful state you will be in, when the Spirit casts you away!

Read the first chapter of Romans, and see what a man becomes when God the Spirit gives him over. Think what your families would become, if the Spirit were to give them over. What a town this would be, if the Spirit were to give it over, what murders, wickedness, etc., would you hear of before tomorrow. I know a godly man in London, who, every morning, thanks God for restraining the wicked, and often at the breakfast table I have heard him say, 'Where would we have been this morning, if God had not restrained the wicked? 'But, oh! when you go away from this world, the Spirit will give you over to your own heart's lusts. Then will you blaspheme God, then will you have no more any fear of losing your character. And oh! that will be misery.

'It is an evil thing and a bitter to sin against God' (Jeremiah 2:19). It is not only 'evil' but 'bitter'. 'The way of transgressors is hard' (Proverbs 13:15). You say, 'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant' (Proverbs 9:17). But you will find out that sin is the hardest master; it is an evil thing and a bitter. Oh you will find that the very sin you roll beneath your tongue now as a sweet morsel will yet be your curse. The lust of drink and passion will rage within you, and that for ever. All your lusts that are now pent up in that little bosom will burst out like a volcano, and there will be nothing to subdue them. Were there no lake of fire, that would be hell enough.

To be a castaway, is to be cast away from all God's holy creatures.

Now, the state of wicked men is awful; but there are some pleasant ingredients in the cup. All God's holy creatures are anxious about you. The angels are anxious about you. If they are present here, it is to watch if a tear fall from your eye or a prayer falter on your lips; and all redeemed men take an interest in you. We know that we were once as you are. David says, 'Rivers of water run down mine eyes because they keep not thy law' (Psalm 119:136). And it is the same with God's children now. I believe there is not a child of God in this place that does not weep for you. And, my brethren, Christ has pity for men and women; and then, ministers pity you, and seek your conversion.

But, oh! how different it will be when the day of grace is over. You will be cast away by the angels, they will pity you no more; they will know that the number of the elect is sealed. The redeemed will no more pity you; they will see you enter into the eternal fire and they will not put up one prayer for you. And ministers will give up pleading for you; when Christ casts you away, we cannot hold you. When he casts you away, you will not have our invitation any more. Ah! brethren, I believe that even the devil will cast you away. Ah! it is true, he gives you now many a sweet word; he says, 'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.' But oh! then the devil himself will not bear your company. You will be cast away even by your friends, if you are beside them in hell, they will cast you from them. Oh! none in heaven or in hell will pity you. This is to be lost, this is to be 'a castaway'.

I have just one word more, it is the complete misery of the unconverted.

You will be cast away by yourself I believe this is what suicides try to do in this world; they try to cast themselves away from themselves; and therefore it is said of the damned, that they will seek death but it will flee from them.

You know, dear friends that unconverted men are often very complacent in this world. Your money gives you a great deal of pleasure; and your friends and acquaintances give you pleasure. But ah! that will not

always be the case; there is a day coming when every unconverted man in this congregation would rid himself of himself if he could.

You will then understand that the law of God is unalterable; you will then understand that God and you are enemies. Your understanding will be torment to you. You will eternally hate what God loves; and eternally love what God hates. And then your conscience will be like a hungry lioness in that day. God's vicegerent in the soul will cry out, and will not be quiet.

And, oh! my brethren, your affections that are now so pleasant to you, they will be your torment. I believe that even hell will not take affection out of your heart; but ah! that will be your torment. Often you hear a wicked man say, 'I am a good father, I love my children'; but ah! if they are in hell, it will be your torment that you brought them there; or if they are in heaven, it will be your torment that they will have no pity for you.

And, brethren, your memory that is now so sweet to you, will be the worst of all. You will remember your scenes of sin, you will remember your misspent Sabbath, you will remember your lying lips, you will remember your minister's voice warning and entreating you to be saved. Memory will sting like an adder.

Oh brethren, I believe you will loathe yourselves. You would try to tear that memory out of your bosom if it were possible. Oh! you will exclaim, 'Would that that whole soul would go out of being!' This is to be lost. You will be cast away by God. You will be cast away by Christ. You will be cast away by the Spirit. You will be cast away by all God's holy creatures, You will be cast away by devils. You will be cast away by yourself.

And now, my brethren, I would apply this to yourselves.

Those of you who are godly, learn to be as earnest as Paul was to keep under the body and bring it into subjection.

And those of you who are ungodly -- those of you who are ungodly men under my ministry - oh! if I had a voice that could reach your inmost soul, I would use it. You think I am exaggerating this; but ah! you little know. 'Who can endure the power of thy wrath?' I have not mentioned the furnace of fire; I have not spoken of God raining snares, fire and brimstone on the wicked; but, ah! if there were no bodily agonies, what will the mental agonies of hell be? But oh! when these two meet, what will it be? Oh! what will it be to have all the wrath of God poured out on your soul and body, and yet never to annihilate you? Ah! then you will know what it is to be a castaway. Oh if you would not be a castaway, cleave close to God!

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, learn from this the love of Christ to you and me. He bore all that is contained in being a castaway, in order that we might be saved. Ah! poor sinner, Jesus is willing to rescue you. Many of you are old, many of you will die before the year is done. Come, then, to Christ, for oh! soon it will be too late! Soon the door will be shut for ever.

May God bless his own Word. Amen.

Sabbath Forenoon. -- 15th January, 1842

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