

Exposition on Psalm 38

by St. Augustine

The speaker calls to mind the Sabbath, a time of rest and remembrance, and encourages others to mourn and repent of their sins, promising restoration to soundness and immortality.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:11, Isaiah 53:7, Matthew 5:4, Matthew 27:46, 1 Corinthians 3:15

Topics: "Sorrow And Suffering", "Eternal Redemption"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the deep sorrow and mourning of the Psalmist as he reflects on the Sabbath, symbolizing rest and peace. The Psalmist's groaning and tears reveal a longing for the Sabbath rest, representing a mourner seeking solace. Despite the Psalmist's suffering and the enemies' wrongful actions, he remains focused on confessing his sins and pursuing righteousness. The Psalmist's plea for God's presence and salvation reflects the ultimate hope for eternal rest and redemption in God.

Transcript

A psalm to David himself, on the remembrance of the Sabbath.

1. What does this recollection of the Sabbath mean? What is this Sabbath? For it is with groaning that he calls it to recollection. You have both heard already when the Psalm was read, and you will now hear it when we shall go over it, how great is his groaning, his mourning, his tears, his misery. But happy he who is wretched after this manner! Whence the Lord also in the Gospel Matthew 5:4 called some who mourn blessed. How should he be blessed if he is a mourner? How blessed, if he is miserable? Nay rather, he would be miserable, if he were not a mourner. Such an one then let us understand here too, calling the Sabbath to remembrance (viz.), some mourner or other: and would that we were ourselves that some one or other! For there is here some person sorrowing, groaning, mourning, calling the Sabbath to remembrance. The Sabbath is rest. Doubtless he was in some disquietude, who with groaning was calling the Sabbath to remembrance....

2. O Lord, rebuke me not in Your indignation; neither chasten me in Your hot displeasure Psalm 37:1. For it will be that some shall be chastened in God's hot displeasure, and rebuked in His indignation. And haply not all who are rebuked will be chastened; yet are there some that are to be saved in the chastening. So it is to be indeed, because it is called chastening, but yet it shall be so as by fire. But there are to be some who will be rebuked, and will not be corrected. For he will at all events rebuke those to whom He will say, I was an hungred, and you gave me no meat. Matthew 25:42 ... Neither chasten me in Your hot displeasure; so that You may cleanse me in this life, and make me such, that I may after that stand in no

need of the cleansing fire, for those who are to be saved, yet so as by fire. 1 Corinthians 3:15 Why? Why, but because they build upon the foundation, wood, stubble, and hay. Now they should build on it, gold, silver, and precious stones; 1 Corinthians 3:12 and should have nothing to fear from either fire: not only that which is to consume the ungodly for ever, but also that which is to purge those who are to escape through the fire. For it is said, he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire. And because it is said, he shall be saved, that fire is thought lightly of. For all that, though we should be saved by fire, yet will that fire be more grievous than anything that man can suffer in this life whatsoever.. ..

3. Now on what ground does this person pray that he may not be rebuked in indignation, nor chastened in hot displeasure? (He speaks) as if he would say unto God, Since the things which I already suffer are many in number, I pray You let them suffice; and he begins to enumerate them, by way of satisfying God; offering what he suffers now, that he may not have to suffer worse evils hereafter.

4. For Your arrows stick fast in me, and Your hand presses me sore Psalm 37:2. There is no soundness in my flesh, from the face of Your anger Psalm 37:3. He has now begun telling these evils, which he is suffering here: and yet even this already was from the wrath of the Lord, because it was of the vengeance of the Lord. Of what vengeance? That which He took upon Adam. For think not that punishment was not inflicted upon him, or that God had said to no purpose, You shall surely die; Genesis 2:17 or that we suffer anything in this life, except from that death which we earned by the original sin....Whence then do His arrows stick fast in him? The very punishment, the very vengeance, and haply the pains both of mind and of body, which it is necessary for us to suffer here, these he describes by these self-same arrows. For of these arrows holy Job also made mention, Job 6:4 and said that the arrows of the Lord stuck fast in him, while he was labouring under those pains. We are used, however, to call God's words also arrows; but could he grieve that he should be struck by these? The words of God are arrows, as it were, that inflame love, not pain....We may then understand the arrows sticking fast, thus: Your words are fixed fast in my heart; and by those words themselves is it come to pass, that I called the Sabbath to remembrance: and that very remembrance of the Sabbath, and the non-possession of it at present, prevents me from rejoicing at present; and causes me to acknowledge that there is neither health in my very flesh, neither ought it to be so called when I compare this sort of soundness to that soundness which I am to possess in the everlasting rest; where this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, 1 Corinthians 15:53 and see that in comparison with that soundness this present kind is but sickness.

5. Neither is there any rest in my bones, from the face of my sin. It is commonly enquired, of what person this is the speech; and some understand it to be Christ's, on account of some things which are here said of the Passion of Christ; to which we shall shortly come; and which we ourselves shall acknowledge to be spoken of His Passion. But how could He who had no sin, say, There is no rest in my bones, from the face of my sin....For if we were to say that they are not the words of Christ, those words, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? will also not be the words of Christ.

For there too you have, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? The words of mine offenses are far from my health. Just as here you have, from the face of my sins, so there also you have, the words of my offenses. And if Christ is, for all that, without sin, and without offenses, we begin to think those words in the Psalm also not to be His. And it is exceedingly harsh and inconsistent that that Psalm should not relate to Christ, where we have His Passion as clearly laid open as if it were being read to us out of the Gospel.

For there we have, They parted My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture. Why should I mention that the first verse of that Psalm was pronounced by the Lord Himself while hanging on the Cross, with His own mouth, saying, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? What did He mean to be inferred from it, but that the whole of that Psalm relates to Him, seeing He Himself, the Head of His Body, pronounced it in His own Person? Now when it goes on to say, the words of mine offenses, it is beyond a doubt that they are the words of Christ.

Whence then come the sins, but from the Body, which is the Church? Because both the Head and the Body of Christ are speaking. Why do they speak as if one person only? Because they two, as He has said, shall be one flesh. Genesis 2:24 This (says the Apostle) is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church....For why should He not say, my sins, who said, I was an hungred, and you gave Me no meat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me not in.

I was sick and in prison, and you visited Me not. Matthew 25:42-43 Assuredly the Lord was not in prison. Why should He not say this, to whom when it was said, When saw we You a hungred, and thirsty, or in prison; and did not minister unto You? He replied, that He spoke thus in the person of His Body. Inasmuch as you did it not unto one of the least of Mine, you did it not unto Me. Matthew 25:44-45 Why should He not say, from the face of my sins, who said to Saul, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me, Acts 9:4 who, however, being in Heaven, now suffered from no persecutors?

But just as, in that passage, the Head spoke for the Body, so here too the Head speaks the words of the Body; while you hear at the same time the accents of the Head Itself also. Yet do not either, when you hear the voice of the Body, separate the Head from it; nor the Body, when you hear the voice of the Head: because they are no more two, but one flesh. Matthew 19:6

6. There is no soundness in my flesh from the face of your anger. But perhaps God is unjustly angry with you, O Adam; unjustly angry with you, O son of man; because now brought to acknowledge that your punishment, now that you are a man that has been placed in Christ's Body, you have said, There is no soundness in my flesh from the face of Your anger. Declare the justice of God's anger: lest you should seem to be excusing yourself, and accusing Him. Go on to tell whence the anger of the Lord proceeds. There is no soundness in my flesh from the face of Your anger; neither is there any rest in my bones. He repeats what he said before, There is no soundness in my flesh; for, There is no rest in my bones, is equivalent to this. He does not however repeat from the face of Your anger; but states the cause of the anger of God. There is no rest in my bones from the face of my sins.

7. For mine iniquities have lifted up my head; and are like a heavy burden too heavy for me to bear Psalm 37:4. Here too he has placed the cause first, and the effect afterwards. What consequence followed, and from what cause, he has told us. Mine iniquities have lift up mine head. For no one is proud but the unrighteous man, whose head is lifted up. He is lifted up, whose head is lifted up on high against God. You heard when the lesson of the Book of Ecclesiasticus was read: The beginning of pride is when a man departs from God. He who was the first to refuse to listen to the Commandment, his head iniquity lifted up against God. And because his iniquities have lifted up his head, what has God done unto him? They are like a heavy burden, too heavy for me to bear! It is the part of levity to lift up the head, just as if he who lifts up his head had nothing to carry. Since therefore that which admits of being lifted up is light, it receives a weight by which it may be weighed down. For his mischief returns upon his own head, and his violent dealing comes down upon his own pate. They are like a heavy burden, too heavy for me to bear.

8. My wounds stink and are corrupt Psalm 37:5. Now he who has wounds is not perfectly sound. Add to this, that the wounds stink and are corrupt. Wherefore do they stink? Because they are corrupt: now in what way this is explained in reference to human life, who does not understand? Let a man but have his soul's sense of smelling sound, he perceives how foully sins stink. The contrary to which stink of sin, is that savour of which the Apostle says, We are the sweet savour of Christ unto God, in every place, unto them which be saved. 2 Corinthians 2:15 But whence is this, except from hope? Whence is this, but from our calling the Sabbath to remembrance? For it is a different thing that we mourn over in this life, from that which we anticipate in the other. That which we mourn over is stench, that which we reckon upon is fragrance. Were there not therefore such a perfume as that to invite us, we should never call the Sabbath to remembrance. But since, by the Spirit, we have such a perfume, as to say to our Betrothed, Because of the savour of Your good ointments we will run after You; Song of Songs 1:3-4 we turn our senses away from our own unsavourinesses, and turning ourselves to Him, we gain some little breathing-time. But indeed, unless our evil deeds also did smell rank in our nostrils, we should never confess with those groans, My wounds stink and are corrupt. And wherefore? from the face of my foolishness. From the same cause that he said before, from the face of my sins; from that same cause he now says, from the face of my foolishness.

9. I am troubled, I am bowed down even unto the end Psalm 37:6. Wherefore was he bowed down? Because he had been lifted up. If you are humble, you shall be exalted; if you exalt yourself, you shall be bowed down; for God will be at no loss to find a weight wherewith to bow you down....Let him groan on these things; that he may receive the other; let him call the Sabbath to remembrance, that he may deserve to arrive at it. For that which the Jews used to celebrate was but a sign. Of what thing was it the sign? Of that which he calls to remembrance, who says, I am troubled, and am bowed down even unto the end. What is meant by even unto the end? Even to death.

I go mourning all the day long. All day long, that is, without intermission. By all the day long, he means, all my life long. But from what time has he known it? From the time that he began to call the Sabbath to remembrance. For so long as he calls to remembrance what he no longer possesses, would you not have him go mourning? All the day long have I gone mourning.

10. For my soul is filled with illusions, and there is no soundness in my flesh Psalm 37:7. Where there is the whole man, there there is soul and flesh both. The soul is filled with illusions; the flesh has no soundness. What does there remain that can give joy? Is it not meet that one should go mourning? All the day long have I gone mourning. Let mourning be our portion, until our soul be divested of its illusions; and our body be clothed with soundness. For true soundness is no other than immortality.

How great however are the soul's illusions, were I even to attempt to express, when would the time suffice me? For whose soul is not subject to them? There is a brief particular that I will remind you of, to show how our soul is filled with illusions. The presence of those illusions sometimes scarcely permits us to pray. We know not how to think of material objects without images, and such as we do not wish, rush in upon the mind; and we wish to go from this one to that, and to quit that for another.

And sometimes you wish to return to that which you were thinking of before, and to quit that which you are now thinking of; and a fresh one presents itself to you; you wish to call up again what you had forgotten; and it does not occur to you; and another comes instead which you would not have wished for. Where meanwhile was the one that you had forgotten? For why did it afterwards occur to you, when it had ceased to be sought after; whereas, while it was being sought for, innumerable others, which were not desired,

presented themselves instead of it?

I have stated a fact briefly; I have thrown out a kind of hint or suggestion to you, brethren, taking up which, you may yourselves suggest the rest to yourselves, and discover what it is to mourn over the illusions of our soul. He has received therefore the punishment of illusion; he has forfeited Truth. For just as illusion is the soul's punishment, so is Truth its reward. But when we were set in the midst of these illusions, the Truth Itself came to us, and found us overwhelmed by illusions, took upon Itself our flesh, or rather took flesh from us; that is, from the human race.

He manifested himself to the eyes of the Flesh, that He might by faith heal those to whom He was going to reveal the Truth hereafter, that Truth might be manifested to the now healed eye. For He is Himself the Truth, John 14:6 which He promised unto us at that time, when His Flesh was to be seen by the eye, that the foundation might be laid of that Faith, of which the Truth was to be the reward. For it was not Himself that Christ showed forth on earth; but it was His Flesh that He showed.

For had He showed Himself, the Jews would have seen and known Him; but had they known Him, they would never have crucified the Lord of Glory. 1 Corinthians 2:10 But perhaps His disciples saw Him, when they said unto Him, Show us the Father, and it suffices us; John 14:8 and He, to show that it was not Himself that had been seen by them, added: Have I been so long with you, and have ye not known Me, Philip? He that sees Me, sees the Father also. John 14:9 If then they saw Christ, wherefore did they yet seek for the Father?

For if it were Christ whom they saw, they would have seen the Father also. They did not therefore yet see Christ, who desired that the Father should be shown unto them. To prove that they did not yet see Him, hear that, in another place, He promised it by way of reward, saying, He who loves Me, keeps My commandments; and whoso loves Me, shall be loved of My Father; and I will love Him and (as if it were said to Him, what will You give unto him, as You love him? He says), I will manifest Myself unto him.

John 14:21 If then He promises this by way of a reward unto them that love Him, it is manifest that the vision of the Truth, promised to us, is of such a nature, that, when we have seen it, we shall no longer say, My soul is filled with illusions.

11. I have become feeble, and am bowed down greatly Psalm 37:8. He who calls to mind the transcendent height of the Sabbath, sees how greatly he is himself bowed down. For he who cannot conceive what is that height of rest, sees not where he is at present. Therefore another Psalm has said, I said in my trance, I am cast out of the sight of Your eyes. For his mind being taken up there, he beheld something sublime; and was not yet entirely there, where what he beheld was; and a kind of flash, as it were, if one may so speak, of the Eternal Light having glanced upon him, when he perceived that he was not yet arrived at this, which he was able after a sort to understand, he saw where he himself was, and how he was cramped and bowed down by human infirmities. And he says, I said in my trance, I am cast out of the sight of Your eyes. Such is that certain something which I saw in my trance, that thence I perceive how far off I am, who am not already there. He was already there who said that he was caught up into the third Heaven, and there heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. But he was recalled to us, in order that, as requiring to be made perfect, he might first mourn his infirmity, and afterwards be clothed with might. Yet encouraged for the ministration of his office by having seen somewhat of those things, he goes on saying, I heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 2 Corinthians 12:4 Now then what use is it for you to ask, either of me or of any one, the things which it is

not lawful for man to utter. If it was not lawful for him to utter them, to whom is it lawful to hear them? Let us however lament and groan in Confession; let us own where we are; let us call the Sabbath to remembrance, and wait with patience for what He has promised, who has, in His own Person also, showed forth an example of patience to us. I have become feeble, and bowed down greatly.

12. I have roared with the groaning of my heart. You observe the servants of God generally interceding with groaning; and the reason of it is asked, and there is nothing apparent, but the groaning of some servant of God, if indeed it does find its way at all to the ears of a person placed near him. For there is a secret groaning, which is not heard by man: yet if the thought of some strong desire has taken so strong hold of the heart, that the wound of the inner man finds expression in some uttered exclamation, the reason of it is asked; and a man says to himself, Perhaps this is the cause of his groaning; and, Perhaps this or that has befallen him. Who can determine, but He in whose Eyes and Ears he groaned? Therefore he says, I roared with the groaning of mine heart; because if men ever hear a man's groanings, they for the most part hear but the groaning of the flesh; they do not hear him who groans with the groaning of his heart. Some one has carried off his goods; he roars, but not with the groaning of his heart: another because he has buried his son, another his wife; another because his vineyard has been injured by a hailstorm; another because his cask has turned sour; another because some one has stolen his beast; another because he has suffered some loss; another because he fears some man who is his enemy: all these roar with the groaning of the flesh. The servant of God, however, because he roars from the recollection of the Sabbath, where the Kingdom of God is, which flesh and blood shall not possess, says, I have roared with the groaning of my heart.

13. And who observed and noticed the cause of his groaning? All my desire is before You Psalm 37:9. For it is not before men who cannot see the heart, but it is before You that all my desire is open! Let your desire be before Him; and the Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you. Matthew 6:6 For it is your heart's desire that is your prayer; and if your desire continues uninterrupted, your prayer continues also. For not without a meaning did the Apostle say, Pray without ceasing. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Are we to be without ceasing bending the knee, prostrating the body, or lifting up our hands, that he says, Pray without ceasing? Or if it is in this sense that we say that we pray, this, I believe, we cannot do without ceasing. There is another inward kind of prayer without ceasing, which is the desire of the heart. Whatever else you are doing, if you do but long for that Sabbath, you do not cease to pray. If you would never cease to pray, never cease to long after it. The continuance of your longing is the continuance of your prayer. You will be ceasing to speak, if you cease to long for it. Who are those who have ceased to speak? They of whom it is said, Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. Matthew 24:12 The freezing of charity is the silence of the heart; the burning of charity is the cry of the heart. If love continues still you are still lifting up your voice; if you are always lifting up your voice, you are always longing after something; if always longing for something absent, you are calling the Sabbath rest to remembrance. And it is important you should understand too before whom the roaring of your heart is open. Now then consider what sort of desires those should be, that are before the eyes of God. Should it be the desire for the death of our enemy? A thing which men flatter themselves they lawfully wish for? For sometimes we pray for what we ought not. Let us consider what they flatter themselves they pray for lawfully! For they pray that some person may die, and his inheritance come to them. But let those too, who pray for the death of their enemies, hear the Lord saying, Pray for your enemies. Matthew 5:44 Let them not pray for this, that their enemies may die; but rather pray for this, that they may be reclaimed; then will their enemies be dead; for from the time that they are reclaimed, henceforth they will be enemies no longer. And all my desire is before You. What if we suppose that our desire is before Him, and that yet that very groaning is not before

Him? How can that be, since our desire itself finds its expression in groaning? Therefore follows, And my groaning is not hid from You.

From You indeed it is not hid; but from many men it is hid. The servant of God sometimes seems to be saying in humility, And my groaning is not hid from You. Sometimes also he seems to smile. Is then that longing dead in his heart? If however there is the desire within, there is the groaning also. It does not always find its way to the ears of man; but it never ceases to sound in the ears of God.

14. My heart is troubled Psalm 37:10. Wherefore is it troubled? And my courage has failed me. Generally something comes upon us on a sudden; the heart is troubled; the earth quakes; thunder is sent from Heaven; a formidable attack is made upon us, or a horrible sound heard. Perhaps a lion is seen on the road; the heart is troubled. Perhaps robbers lie in wait for us; the heart is troubled: we are filled with a panic fear; from every quarter something excites anxiety. Wherefore? Because my courage has failed me. For what would be feared, did that courage still remain unmoved? Whatever bad tidings were brought, whatever threatened us, whatever sound was heard, whatever were to fall, whatever appeared horrible, would inspire no terror. But whence that trouble? My courage fails me. Wherefore has my courage failed me? The light of my eyes also is gone from me. Thus Adam also could not see the light of his eyes. For the light of his eyes was God Himself, whom when he had offended, he fled to the shade, and hid himself among the trees of Paradise. Genesis 3:8 He shrunk in alarm from the face of God: and sought the shelter of the trees; thenceforth among the trees he had no more the light of his eyes, at which he had been wont to rejoice....

15. My lovers; why should I henceforth speak of my enemies? My lovers and my neighbours drew near, and stood over against me Psalm 37:11. Understand this that he says, Stood over against me. For if they stood over against me, they fell against themselves. My lovers and my neighbours drew near and stood over against me. Let us now recognise the words of the Head speaking; now let our Head in His Passion begin to dawn upon us. Yet again when the Head begins to speak, do not sever the Body from it. If the Head would not separate itself from the words of the Body, should the Body dare to separate itself from the sufferings of the Head? Do thou suffer in Christ's suffering: for Christ, as it were, sinned in your infirmity. For just now He spoke of your sins, as if speaking in His own Person, and called them His own....To those who wished to be near His exaltation, yet thought not of His humility, He answered and said to them, Can ye drink of the cup that I shall drink of? Matthew 20:22 Those sufferings of the Lord then are our sufferings also: and were each individual to serve God well, to keep faith truly, to render to each their dues, and to conduct himself honestly among men, I should like to see if he does not suffer even that which Christ here details in the account of His Passion. My lovers and my neighbours drew near, and stood over against me.

16. And my neighbours stood afar off. Who were the neighbours that drew near, and who were those who stood afar off? The Jews were neighbours because near kinsmen, they drew near even when they crucified Him: the Apostles also were His neighbours; and they also stood afar off, that they might not have to suffer with Him. This may also be understood thus: My friends, that is, those who feigned themselves My friends: for they feigned themselves His friends, when they said, We know that Thou teachest the way of God in truth; Matthew 22:16 when they wished to try Him, whether tribute ought to be paid to Cæsar; when He convinced them out of their own mouth, they wished to seem to be His friends. But He needed not that any should testify of man, for He Himself knew what was in man; John 2:25 so that when they spoke unto Him words of friendship, He answered them, Why do you tempt Me, you hypocrites? Matthew 22:18 My friends and my neighbours then drew near and stood over against me, and

my neighbours stood afar off. You understand what I said. I called those neighbours who drew near, and at the same time stood afar off. For they drew near in the body, but stood afar off in their heart. Who were in the body so near to Him as those who lifted Him on the Cross? Who in heart so as those who blasphemed Him? Hear this sort of distance described by the Prophet Isaiah; observe this nearness and distance at one and the same time. This people honours Me with their lips: behold, with their body they draw near; but their heart is far from Me. Isaiah 29:13 The same persons are at the same time near and afar off also: with their lips they are near, in heart afar off. However, because the Apostles also stood afar off, through fear, we understand it more simply and properly of them; so that we mean by it, that some drew near, and others stood afar off; since even Peter, who had followed more boldly than the rest, was still so far off, that being questioned and alarmed, he thrice denied the Lord, with whom he had promised to be ready to die. Who afterwards that, from being afar off, he might be made to draw near, heard after the resurrection the question, Lovest thou Me? and said, I love You; John 21:15 and by so saying was brought near, even as by denying Him, he had become far off; till with the threefold confession of love, he had put away from him his threefold denial. And my neighbours stood afar off.

17. They also that sought after my soul were preparing violence against me Psalm 37:12. It is now plain who sought after His soul; viz. those who had not His soul, in that they were not in His Body. They who were seeking after His soul, were far removed from His soul; but they were seeking it to destroy it. For His soul may be sought after in a right way also. For in another passage He finds fault with some persons, saying, There is no man to care for My soul. He finds fault with some for not seeking after His soul; and again, with others for seeking after it. Who is he that seeks after His soul in the right way? He who imitates His sufferings. Who are they that sought after His soul in the wrong way? Even those who prepared violence against Him, and crucified Him.

18. He goes on: Those who sought after My faults had spoken vanity. What is, sought after My faults? They sought after many things, and found them not. Perhaps He may have meant this: They sought for criminal charges against me. For they sought for somewhat to say against Him, and they found not. Matthew 26:60 For they were seeking to find evil things to say of the Good; crimes of the Innocent; When would they find such things in Him, who had no sin? But because they had to seek for sins in Him who had no sin, it remained for them to invent that which they could not find. Therefore, those who sought after My faults have spoken vanity, i.e., untruth, and imagined deceit all the day long; that is, they meditated treachery without intermission. You know how atrocious false-witness was borne against the Lord, before He suffered. You know how atrocious false-witness was borne against Him, even after His resurrection. For those soldiers who watched His sepulchre of whom Isaiah spoke, I will appoint the wicked for His burial (for they were wicked men, and would not speak the truth, and being bribed they disseminated a lie), consider what vanity they spoke. They also were examined, and they said, While we slept, His disciples came and stole Him away. Matthew 28:13 This it is, to speak vanity. For if they were sleeping, how could they know what had been done?

19. He says then, But I as a deaf man heard not Psalm 37:13. He who replied not to what He heard, did, as it were, not hear them. But I as a deaf man heard not. And I was as a dumb man that opens not his mouth. And he repeats the same things again.

And I became as a man that hears not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs Psalm 37:14. As if He had nothing to say unto them, as if He had nothing wherewith to reproach them. Had He not already reproached them for many things? Had He not said many things, and also said, Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, Matthew 23:13 and many things besides? Yet when He suffered, He said none of these

things; not that He had not what to say, but He waited for them to fulfil all things, and that all the prophecies might be fulfilled of Him, of whom it had been said, And as a sheep before her shearer is dumb, so opens He not His mouth. Isaiah 53:7 It behooved Him to be silent in His Passion, though not hereafter to be silent in Judgment. For He had come to be judged, then, who was hereafter coming to judge; and who was for this reason to come with great power to judge, that He had been judged in great humility.

20. For in You, O Lord, do I hope; You will hear, O Lord, my God Psalm 37:15. As if it were said to Him, Why did you not open your mouth? Why did You not say, 'Refrain'? Why did You not rebuke the unrighteous, while hanging on the Cross? He goes on and says, For in You, O Lord, do I hope; Thou, O Lord my God, wilt hear. He warns you what to do, should tribulation haply befall. For you seek to defend yourself, and perhaps your defence is not listened to by any one. Then are you confounded, as if you had lost your cause; because you have none to defend or to bear testimony in your favour. Keep but your innocence within, where no one can pervert your cause. False-witness has prevailed against you before men. Will it then prevail before God, where your cause has to be pleaded? When God shall be Judge, there shall be no other witness than your own conscience. In the presence of a just judge, and of your own conscience, fear nothing but your own cause. If you have not a bad cause, you will have no accuser to dread; no false-witness to confute, nor witness to the truth to look for. Do but bring into court a good conscience, that you may say, For in You, O Lord, do I hope; Thou, O Lord my God, wilt hear.

21. For I said, Let not mine enemies ever rejoice over me. And when my feet slip, they magnify themselves against me Psalm 37:16. Again He returns to the infirmity of His Body: and again the Head takes heed of Its feet. The Head is not in such a manner in Heaven, as to forsake what It has on earth; He evidently sees and observes us. For sometimes, as is the way of this life, our feet are turned aside, and they slip by falling into some sin; there the tongues of the enemy rise up with the bitterest malignity. From this then we discern what they really had in view, even while they kept silence. Then they speak with an unsparing harshness; rejoicing to have discovered what they ought to have grieved for. And I said, Lest at any time my adversaries should rejoice over me. I said this indeed; and yet it was perhaps for my correction that You have caused them to magnify themselves against me, when my feet slipped; that is to say, when I stumbled, they were elated, and said many things. For pity, not insult, was due from them to the weak; even as the Apostle speaks: Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; and he combines the reason why: considering yourself also, lest you also be tempted. Galatians 6:1 Not such as these were the persons of whom He speaks: And when my feet slipped, they rejoiced greatly against me; but they were such as those of whom He says elsewhere: They that hate me will rejoice if I fall.

22. For I am prepared for the scourges Psalm 37:17. Quite a magnificent expression; as if He were saying, It was even for this that I was born; that I might suffer. For He was not to be born, but from Adam, to whom the scourge is due. But sinners are in this life sometimes not scourged at all, or are scourged less than their deserts: because the wickedness of their heart is given over as already desperate. Those, however, for whom eternal life is prepared, must needs be scourged in this life: for that sentence is true: My son, faint not under the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary when you are rebuked of Him. Proverbs 3:11 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. Hebrews 12:6 Let not mine enemies therefore insult over me; let them not magnify themselves; and if my Father scourges me, I am prepared for the scourge; because there is an inheritance in store for me. You will not submit to the scourge: the inheritance is not bestowed upon you. For every son must needs be scourged. So true it is

that every son is scourged, that He spared not even Him who had no sin. For I am prepared for the scourges.

23. And my sorrow is continually before me. What sorrow is that? Perhaps, a sorrow for my scourge. And, in good truth, my brethren, in good truth, let me say unto you, men do mourn for their scourges, not for the causes on account of which they are scourged. Not such was the person here. Listen, my brethren: If any person suffers any loss, he is more ready to say, I did not deserve to suffer it, than to consider why he suffered it, mourning the loss of money, not mourning over that of righteousness.

If you have sinned, mourn for the loss of your inward treasure. You have nothing in your house, but perhaps you are still more empty in heart; but if your heart is full of its Good, even your God, why do you not say, The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away; as it pleased the Lord was it done. Blessed be the Name of the Lord. Job 1:21 Whence then was it that He was grieving? Was it for the scourging wherewith He was scourged? God forbid. And my sorrow (says He) is continually before me.

And as if we were to say, What sorrow? Whence comes that sorrow? he says: For I declare mine iniquity; and I will have a care for my sin Psalm 37:18. See here the reason for the sorrow! It is not a sorrow occasioned by the scourge; not one for the remedy, not for the wound. For the scourge is a remedy against sins. Hear, brethren; We are Christians, and yet if any one's son dies, he mourns for him but does not mourn for him if he sins. It is then, when he sees him sinning, that he ought to make mourning for him, to lament over him.

It is then he should restrain him, and give him a rule to live by; should impose a discipline upon him: or if he has done so, and the other has not taken heed, then was the time when he ought to have been mourned over; then he was more fatally dead while living in luxury, than when, by death, he brought his luxury to its close: at that time, when he was doing such things in your house, he was not only dead, but he stank also. John 11:39 These things were worthy to be lamented, the others were such as might well be endured; those, I say, were tolerable, these worthy to be mourned over.

They were to be mourned over in the same way that you have heard this person mourn over them: For I declare mine iniquity. I will have a care for my sin. Be not free from anxiety when you have confessed your sin, as if always able to confess your sin, and to commit it again. Do thou declare your iniquity in such a manner, as to have a care for your sin. What is meant by having a care of your sin? To have a care of your wound. If you were to say, I will have a care of my wound, what would be meant by it, but I will do my endeavour to have it healed.

For this is to have a care for one's sin, to be ever struggling, ever endeavouring, ever exerting one's self, earnestly and zealously, to heal one's wound. Behold! You are from day to day mourning over your sins; but perhaps your tears indeed flow, but your hands are unemployed. Do alms, redeem your sins, let the poor rejoice of your bounty, that you also may rejoice of the Grace of God. He is in want; so are you in want also: he is in want at your hands; so are you also in want at God's hand.

Do you despise one who needs your aid; and shall God not despise you when you need His? Do thou therefore supply the needs of him who is in want of your aid; that God may supply your needs within. This is the meaning of, I will have a care for my sin. I will do all that ought to be done, to blot out and to heal my sin. And I will have a care for my sin.

24. But mine enemies live Psalm 37:19. They are well off: they rejoice in worldly prosperity, while I am suffering, and roaring with the groaning of my heart. In what way do His enemies live, in that He has said of them already, that they have spoken vanity? Hear in another Psalm also: Whose sons are as young plants; firmly rooted. But above He had said, Whose mouth speaks vanity. Their daughters polished after the similitude of a temple: their garners full bursting forth more and more; their cattle fat, their sheep fruitful, multiplying in their streets; no hedge falling into ruin; no cry in their streets. Mine enemies then live. This is their life; this life they praise; this they set their hearts upon: this they hold fast to their own ruin. For what follows? They pronounce the people that is in such a case blessed. But what do you say, who hast a care for your sin? What do you say, who confessest your iniquity? He says, Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord.

But mine enemies live, and are strengthened against me, and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. What is hate me wrongfully? They hate me, who wish their good, whereas were they simply requiting evil for evil, they would not be righteous; were they not to requite with good the good done to them, they would be ungrateful: they, however, who hate wrongfully, actually return evil for good. Such were the Jews; Christ came unto them with good things; they requited Him evil for good. Beware, brethren, of this evil; it soon steals upon us. Let no one of you think himself to be far removed from the danger, because we said, Such were the Jews. Should a brother, wishing your good, rebuke you, and you hate him, you are like them. And observe, how easily, how soon it is produced; and avoid an evil so great, a sin so easily committed.

25. They also that render evil for good, were speaking evil of me, because I have pursued the thing that is just Psalm 37:20. Therefore was it that I was requited evil for good. What is meant by pursued after the thing that is just? Not forsaken it. That you might not always understand persecutio in a bad sense, He means by persecutus pursued after, thoroughly followed. Because I have followed the thing that is just. Hear also our Head crying with a lamentable voice in His Passion: And they cast Me forth, Your Darling, even as a dead man in abomination. Was it not enough that He was dead? Wherefore in abomination also? Because He was crucified. For this death of the Cross was a great abomination in their eyes, as they did not perceive that it was spoken in prophecy, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree. Deuteronomy 21:23 For He did not Himself bring death; but He found it here, propagated from the curse of the first man; and this same death of ours, which had originated in sin, He had taken upon Himself, and hung on the Tree. Lest therefore some persons should think (as some of the Heretics think), that our Lord Jesus Christ had only a false body of flesh; and that the death by which He made satisfaction on the Cross was not a real death, the Prophet notices this, and says, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree. He shows then that the Son of God died a true death, the death which was due to mortal flesh: lest if He were not accursed, you should think that He had not truly died. But since that death was not an illusion, but had descended from that original stock, which had been derived from the curse, when He said, You shall surely die: Genesis 2:17 and since a true death assuredly extended even to Him, that a true life might extend itself to us, the curse of death also did extend to Him, that the blessing of life might extend even unto us. And they cast Me forth, Your Darling, even as a dead man in abomination.

26. Forsake me not, O Lord; O my God, depart not from me Psalm 37:21. Let us speak in Him, let us speak through Him (for He Himself intercedes for us), and let us say, Forsake me not, O Lord my God. And yet He had said, My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me? Matthew 27:46 and He now says, O My God, depart not from Me. If He does not forsake the body, did He forsake the Head? Whose words then are these but the First Man's? To show then that He carried about Him a true body of flesh derived

from him, He says, My God, My God why have You forsaken Me? God had not forsaken Him. If He does not forsake You, who believest in Him, could the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, One God, forsake Christ? But He had transferred to Himself the person of the First Man. We know by the words of an Apostle, that our old man is crucified with Him. Romans 6:6 We should not, however, be divested of our old nature, had He not been crucified in weakness. For it was to this end that He came that we may be renewed in Him, because it is by aspiration after Him, and by following the example of His suffering, that we are renewed. Therefore that was the cry of infirmity; that cry, I mean, in which it was said, Why have You forsaken Me? Thence was it said in that passage above, the words of mine offenses. As if He were saying, These words are transferred to My Person from that of the sinner.

27. Depart not from me. Make haste to help me, Lord of my salvation Psalm 37:22. This is that very salvation, Brethren, concerning which, as the Apostle Peter says, Prophets have enquired diligently, 1 Peter 1:10 and though they have enquired diligently, yet have not found it. But they searched into it, and foretold of it; while we have come and have found what they sought for. And see, we ourselves too have not as yet received it; and after us shall others also be born, and shall find, what they also shall not receive, and shall pass away, that we may, all of us together, receive the penny of salvation in the end of the day, with the Prophets, the Patriarchs, and the Apostles. For you know that the hired servants, or labourers, were taken into the vineyard at different times; yet did they all receive their wages on an equal footing. Matthew 20:9 Apostles, then, and Prophets, and Martyrs, and ourselves also, and those who will follow us to the end of the world, it is in the End itself that we are to receive everlasting salvation; that beholding the face of God, and contemplating His Glory, we may praise Him for ever, free from imperfection, free from any punishment of iniquity, free from every perversion of sin: praising Him; and no longer longing after Him, but now clinging to Him for whom we used to long to the very end, and in whom we did rejoice, in hope. For we shall be in that City, where God is our Bliss, God is our Light, God is our Bread, God is our Life; whatever good thing of ours there is, at being absent from which we now grieve, we shall find in Him. In Him will be that rest, which when we call to remembrance now, we cannot choose but grieve. For that is the Sabbath which we call to remembrance; in the recollection of which, so great things have been said already; and so great things ought to be said by us also, and ought never to cease being said by us, not with our lips indeed, but in our heart: for therefore do our lips cease to speak, that we may cry out with our hearts.

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