

A SERMON,

WRITTEN BY

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AND PREACHED AT

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II. BOOK OF SAMUEL, CHAP. XII, VERSE VII:—

“And Nathan said unto David, thou art the man.”

Among the characters recorded in holy scripture for our instruction, there is one, and only one, that is absolutely perfect. Our blessed Lord and Saviour alone knew not sin—was alone without spot or blemish,—and is the single faultless pattern which we are, in all things, to imitate to the utmost of our power, though we can never hope to attain to that degree of purity and holiness which he exhibited during his abode in the flesh.

It is far different with regard to others. Even the best of God’s servants of old were men like ourselves,—stronger indeed to stand firm, and less liable to fall; but still subject to human frailty and infirmity,—still exposed to many and severe trials of their faith and obedience; and therefore, too often, for a time at least, falling into sin, and wandering from the paths of piety and virtue. While, therefore, in their obedience—in their faith—in their humility—in their patience—in the warmth of their devotion towards God—and in their upright and just dealings with their fellow men, they held up as examples for our imitation; their occasional yielding to temptation, and subjection to the power of evil, is recorded as an impressive warning to us and to our children.

That portion of the scripture which I now propose to consider, is a part of the melancholy account given to us of the grievous fall of one, whose history, as handed down for our learning, affords a lesson full of instruction for us all.

David, the King of Israel, the inspired Psalmist, the chosen of the Lord, the man after God's own heart, the forefather according to the flesh of the promised Messiah : even this man, departing from his innocency, "sinned before God," and "despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight." Do we want a proof that we are not sufficient of ourselves to keep ourselves—that we are unable, by our own strength alone, to act up to the righteous law of God ? We may find it here—In the frailty of the Son of Jesse, we may see our own, and thence learn the important lesson—"let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

In the chapter immediately preceding that from which the text is taken, there is a dreadful record of this highly favored but erring king's accumulated offences. He had been guilty of the complicated sins of adultery and murder,—sins in themselves, of the very deepest dye ; but aggravated, moreover, in his case, by the basest treachery, the most deliberate and unrelenting cruelty and oppression. Enjoying an especial share of divine favor, and blessed with a more than ordinary portion of divine knowledge ;—distinguished on other occasions for justice, temperance, and benevolence ;—for self-denial in his conduct towards men, and obedience to the law and will of God, he had at once thrown off every restraint of morality and religion, and daringly violated the first laws both of God and man. He had (to use the very words applied by himself as a reproach to others) "rewarded evil unto him that had dealt friendly with him ;" he had "laid snares for the innocent, and devised evil against the upright ;"—he had "plotted against the just, and sought occasion against him to slay him ;" he had "shed the innocent blood," and "become partaker with the adulterers."

The Almighty, who, even in his wrath, thinketh upon mercy, in order to testify, at once, his displeasure at such grievous transgressions of his holy law ; and also by awakening the transgressor to a due sense of his guilt, to lead him to a sincere contrition for the enormity of his crimes, sent

unto him Nathan, a holy and inspired prophet; giving to this, his chosen messenger, both authority to rebuke the offending King; and wisdom, through the means of parable, to make the unconscious criminal pronounce the sentence of his own condemnation. "And Nathan came unto him, and said unto him—There were two men in one city, the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up, and it grew up together with him and with his children;—it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, as the Lord liveth, the man that has done this thing shall surely die; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he hath done this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said unto David—Thou art the man."

In the verses which follow, we have an account of the just judgement of God pronounced on this self-convicted sinner, and the evils denounced against him, and his house after him. What, my brethren, must we suppose to have been the feelings of David, when the whole iniquity of his conduct was thus laid open to his conscience, by the authoritative rebuke and denunciation of the indignant prophet? He had pronounced sentence of death and confiscation against an imaginary culprit, and now stood self-condemned, and justly liable to the full penalty of his own more enormous and more aggravated guilt. The rich man had taken from his neighbour an ewe lamb—the object indeed of his care, but still one, the loss of which might be easily compensated. The wrong of David was of a deeper dye:—he had taken from him that which was dearer to him than all flocks and herds—

he had robbed him of the wife of his bosom. The conduct of the rich man had been marked with cruelty and injustice; in that of David, the injustice was enhanced by treachery—the cruelty consummated by murder. The oppressive act of the rich man may be palliated, as being conceived without premeditation, and executed without time for reflection; the sin of David was premeditated and deliberate: he had planned and plotted for its success,—he had advanced cunningly and cautiously in the path of his crooked policy,—he was now even rejoicing in the accomplishment of his schemes, and revelling in the unhallowed fruits of his iniquity. He had gone on sinning with a high hand against God and man; and now, at last, his sin had found him out. Still grievous as had been his offences, his conscience was not yet utterly seared, nor his heart not entirely hardened against the voice of truth. Struck by the words of the prophet, he awoke to a sense of his own wickedness, and a dread of the indignation of his offended God. What shall he *now* do to appease the wrath of heaven? To the injured, the betrayed, the murdered Uriah, compensation was no longer in his power; he could neither restore in its innocence the lamb of which he had bereaved him, nor give back the life which he had caused to be taken from him. He did that which alone remained for him to do. He knew whom it was he had most grievously offended, and hastened to humble himself before God, and to confess, without reserve, the evil he had done in his sight. As a convicted sinner, he at once acknowledged his crime, and exclaims with a penitent heart, “I have sinned against the Lord.” In the course of the history, immediately follows a promise of divine forgiveness. “And Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.” But are we to suppose that David depended upon the mere confession of his sin to appease the anger of the Lord, or trusted that a transient show of sorrow would wash out the stain of blood guiltiness that was upon him? He not only repented in dust and ashes, but proved the sincerity of his repentance, by a long course

of the deepest humiliation, the most heartfelt contrition, the most fervent prayers for mercy, and restoration to the favour of God. In perusing the penitential Psalms composed, some of them, on this very occasion, we are struck with the deep self-abasement which they display. We see the intensity of his grief,—we witness the unreservedness with which he condemns himself,—we hear the daily and nightly groans of a troubled spirit,—and listen to the mournings of a broken and contrite heart. These are the sure marks—the unequivocal tokens of a sincere penitence; and we know, from the conduct of his after life, that the sorrow of David was indeed “that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation.” Let it not therefore be imagined that the supposed example of David affords any ground for trusting to a mere confession of our sins, or hoping that some brief and transitory sorrow for our offences will secure our pardon and acceptance with God. It is indeed true, yes, blessed be God, it is most assuredly and most happily true, that when the sinner does earnestly repent, and is heartily sorry for all his misdoings; whensoever he offers up in humility and sincerity the sacrifice of a contrite spirit, and turns from the evil of his ways, to walk in the law of the Lord God, for Christ’s sake, “will have mercy upon him after his goodness, and according to the multitude of his mercies, will do away his offences.” This is the blessed and cheering doctrine of christianity;—this is the message of the Redeemer—the gracious promise of the Son of God—the source of hope and comfort to the returning prodigal—the sure ground of confidence to the contrite believer. But, my brethren, if the confession of the lips has no influence upon the conduct,—if by the sorrow of the countenance, the heart is not made better,—if no sincere resolutions of amendment are formed, or, being formed, are forgotten and quickly passed away, the sinner may *say* indeed, and may *persuade himself*, that he has repented; but such a repentance as this will neither obtain the forgiveness of his past sins, nor call down the aid of God’s holy spirit to support him under future temptations.

My brethren, the fall and restoration of the man after God's own heart, are recorded for our learning. To every individual among us, though we may be placed in situations, or live under circumstances, apparently very different from those of the King of Israel, the sacred historian this day addresses himself, and says to every one of us, as Nathan said unto David "Thou art the man." Let us then attentively consider how we may draw from the narrative before us, such reflections as may be profitable to us for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

And first, the history under our consideration may lead us to reflect how prone is the heart of every one of us to remain ignorant of its real state,—how eager we are to discover sin and error in others, while we continue blind to our own more grievous and more numerous offences. We are, all of us, and at all times but too ready, like the King of Israel before Nathan, to condemn every supposed departure from our standard of piety and holiness in those around us, while we seem to overlook or forget our own, not less blameable, though, perhaps, opposite deviations from the path of virtue. But let us seriously consider the danger of passing sentence upon ourselves, while we are so severely condemning the conduct of others. David, it is probable, appeared to himself to be influenced solely by a love of justice, and a virtuous indignation, when he decreed the death of the oppressor, and a fourfold restitution of the lamb that had been taken away. A few short words from the messenger of God brought to him the painful consciousness, that *he*, the ready messenger of another's wrongs, was chargeable with the highest degree of cruelty and injustice;—that *he* who had passed so severe a sentence upon another, because he had shown no pity, had, in his own conduct, given tenfold greater evidence of a merciless temper and unfeeling heart. My brother, art thou wont to scan with severity the conduct of thy neighbour? art thou quick to discern, and ever ready to condemn the failings and transgressions of thy fellow sinner? Thou, then, art the

man : to thee speaketh the messenger of the Lord with a voice of reproof. He bids thee cast out the beam that is in thine own eye, before thou presumest to pluck out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. He warns thee—"Judge not that thou be not judged;" condemn not, as thou hopest not to be condemned. God indeed did not mete out punishment to David with that measure that *he* had meted with all; but if you would partake of the mercy shown to David, you must imitate the sincerity of David's repentance. Without this, you have too much reason to expect that you may be required to undergo that sentence which you have been so ready to pass;—to abide by that judgement, which on the pride of your self-deceit, you have so eagerly pronounced upon others.

The history to which our attention has been called, affords also an awful warning of the danger of giving way to criminal desires, and yielding, in the first instance, to the suggestions of our passions. It has been said, that vice is on a declivity, and the remark is founded in truth. He who once enters upon the career of sensual indulgence, is little aware of the extent to which he may be carried. David, yielding to his intemperate desires, wilfully committed one sin, intending, no doubt, to stop at that one. Having gratified his criminal passion, he seemed to have no object to gain, by sinning further against his God. But who, when he had once passed the bounds of right—once entered into the ways of wickedness, and taken the first step in the path of the ungodly, could ever lay down rules for his own government, and say to himself "Thus far will I go, and no farther." Having commenced with adultery, one guilty action made ready way for another; he proceeded through a course of treachery and deceit, till he ended with deliberate murder. Art thou, my brother, beset by some favorite sin—devoted to some darling vice—addicted to some cherished indulgence—the willing slave of some imperious passion? thou art the man, to whom the Lord, in his mercy, this day addresses the parable. Thou art the man for whose reproof

and correction this narrative has been written. It teaches thee that one violation of the law of holiness ever leads to others,—that evil is ever the parent of evil; and that the deviation from the path of duty, is too surely a prelude to still further error. Hast thou allowed thyself the commission of some one sin? Look then narrowly into thine heart, and thou wilt see that others have been added to it, rendered necessary for the concealment of the first, or for the better enjoyment of the fruits of it.

Again, the fall of David is well calculated to put us upon our guard against the dangerous tendency of worldly prosperity. In his earlier life, and under persecution, distress, and affliction, he had been the man after God's own heart. As a reward for his obedience, his humility, his forbearance, and the other qualities which are well-pleasing in the sight of the Almighty, "The Lord God of Israel had anointed him King over Israel, and had delivered him out of the hand of Saul, and had given him the house of Israel, and of Judah; and if that had been too little, would have given him more-over such and such things." Corrupted by a long course of prosperity, he forgot the virtues of his youth, and turned aside from obeying the Lord his God, to work evil in his sight. My brother, have you been blessed with prosperity? Have you enjoyed abundance of this world's goods? Have you rejoiced in the success of your undertakings, and delighted to behold the increase of your riches? Thou art the man: to thee is a warning addressed by the example of David,—to thee the Lord speaketh by his holy scripture. He bids thee put not thy trust in uncertain riches; he warns thee—as thy riches increase, that thou set not thy heart upon them; he cautions thee to let not the perishable possessions of silver and gold turn away thy thoughts from him; nor suffer the enjoyment of wealth, honor, or rank, to lead thee to a forgetfulness of him who gave them. If it be indeed easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God, how cautiously ought we to guard our hearts against that

love of the world, which, naturally springing for the enjoyment of its good things, places such a difficulty in the way of our salvation; how earnestly should we endeavour, by a proper use and employment of our perishable possessions, to make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness.

There is again another point, and that a most important one, on which we may derive much useful instruction from the narrative before us. It teaches us, in the plainest and most convincing manner, that obedience to the moral law, is an essential part of the christian religion;—that a violation of our duty towards our neighbour, includes a transgression against our Maker;—that to contrive evil against our fellow men, is in effect to sin against God. It was for no act of direct impiety,—it was for no disregard of the ordinances of religion, that God sent his prophet to rebuke the King of Israel,—it was the violation of the laws of the second table, which provoked the anger of him who “will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” My brother, art thou one of those who imagine that a Pharisaical attention to the forms of religion will atone for the disregard of the moral law? If so, thou art the man for whose instruction these things have been recorded: to thee the prophet still speaketh in the language of admonition. He tells thee that he that doeth righteousness, is righteous;—that if you are an hearer only, and not doer of the word, you deceive yourself;—that it is the doers of the law that shall be justified;—that what the Lord requires of thee, is to do justice, and to love mercy, as well as to walk humbly with thy God. The offence of David, as we are apt to estimate offences, was committed against his own subjects,—it was reprov'd as an offence against the King of Kings.—“Thou hast killed Uriah, the Hittite, with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house, *because thou hast despised me*, and hast taken the wife of Uriah, the Hittite, to be thy wife.” The infrac-

tion of the moral law is here plainly declared to be in effect, a despising of him who gave it.

Thus far may the example of David operate as a warning to the erring. But it may also be applied to the comfort and consolation of the true penitents. Hardened as had been his heart, and deadened his conscience, by an indulgence in sin, he was yet pierced and melted by the words of the messenger of God. To the voice of the inward monitor he had closed his ears; but the prophet spake, and he was aroused,—the minister of God proclaimed his message, and he sunk under the weight of his self-condemnation. The king was forgotten in the criminal,—the sinner was converted into a penitent. A deep sense of guilt penetrated his heart,—a godly sorrow took possession of his soul,—an instantaneous change was wrought—a change accompanied and attested by the ready and contrite admission, “I have sinned against the Lord.” God, who searcheth the heart, knew that his penitence was sincere, and authorized his prophet to speak to him the words of peace and comfort. “The Lord also hath put away thy sin—thou shalt not die.” My brother, thou also too surely art a sinner; but hast thou been happily brought to a knowledge of thy sin, and made acquainted with thy lost condition? Dost thou groan under the multitude and the magnitude of thine offences, and earnestly and heartily desire that the Lord should put away thy sin also? Thou, again, art the man: to thee speaketh the minister of the Lord, the bearer of his gracious message of pardon and acceptance. If, with a hearty repentance and true faith, you will turn to him—will sue to him for mercy for the past—and walk from henceforth in his holy laws, then, for the sake of that blessed Redeemer, who, having died for the sins of the whole world, still sitteth at the right hand of his father, to make intercession for you, and for all repenting sinners: for his sake he will “blot out as a cloud your transgressions” and “your sin and iniquity he will remember no more.” Be penitent, like David, and you shall partake of David’s forgiveness; like him, walk from henceforth in the

way of holiness ; and like him, you too shall experience the loving kindness of the Lord.

Such, my brethren, are some of the lessons taught by the parable of the Prophet, and the conduct of him to whom he was sent. Let us pray earnestly for God's grace, that we may understand them, and be enabled to apply them to our spiritual good. If, among us, who are present here, there be one, who, like David, is ignorant of his own real condition ;—if there be one who considers not that he is living in a state of sin, and regards not the ruin which he is preparing for himself ;—if there be one who is eager and quick-sighted to discover and condemn the faults of others, while he overlooks or extenuates his own ;—one, who indulging in some known sin, is in danger of being led to the commission of others ;—one, who being blessed with this world's goods, presumes upon his prosperity, to the neglect of him who is the giver of all good ;—one, who trusting to the outward forms and ordinances of religion, neglects those weighty matters of the law, justice, and judgement, and mercy ; if such there be, let them consider the full extent and meaning of that part of the holy scripture which has been now brought under our consideration : for to each, and all of these, it affords a lesson worthy of their learning. To David, an inspired prophet was sent to convince him of his sin ; to us, are sent the holy scriptures, the records of God's dealings with mankind ; by means of which, *we* may equally discover wherein we have each of us offended, and how we may again become reconciled to our heavenly Father. If David had disregarded the message of Nathan, and hardened himself against his reproof, we cannot doubt that God would have inflicted upon him some signal and exemplary punishment. If those to whom the same parable is now applicable, turn a deaf ear to the admonitions and warnings which it conveys, their condition cannot be free from danger. We know that we are all in one way or other, daily sinning against God ; and that if we do not repent, our sin must be our ruin. That gracious Being, who would have all men come to be saved, in the abundance of his pity

towards us, has given to us this narrative to awaken our consciences, and lead us to a knowledge of ourselves. It is, as it were, a messenger from the Holy One, to alarm us with the voice of truth. If we receive it, as David received the message sent to him, with humble self-condemnation, and hearty repentance, the Lord will put away our sins also, as he put away his; but if we resist his timely and repeated warnings, he will not always strive with our impenitence; he will withdraw his holy Spirit from us, and leave us to bear, as we may, the just penalty of our folly. But, my brethren, he has not yet given us over to punishment; he is still our heavenly father—he still waits to be gracious—still offers us full and ample pardon. Let us accept the proffered mercy while it is the time of mercy; let us go to that blessed Saviour, the descendant of David—the propitiation for our sins—the advocate with the Father, and he will assuredly receive us. If strict justice is compelled to say to each of us “Thou art the man” who hast offended against God, *He* is prepared to say to each, *I* am the son of man that will stand between thee and thy offended God. Let us then take him for our only Saviour, and acknowledging our offences before *him*, a far greater prophet than Nathan, let us seek, by our own fervent repentance, and his prevailing intercession, that reconciliation with God, which he alone is able to procure for us.