

The Wonderful Compassion of Christ to the Greatest Sinners

by Samuel Davies

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, and stone those who are sent unto you; how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings—and you would not!" Matthew 23:37

There is not, perhaps, a chapter in the whole Bible so full of such repeated and dreadful denunciations of the most tremendous woes as this, Matthew 23. Certainly there is none like it, among all the discourses of Christ, left upon record. Here the gentle Jesus, the inoffensive Lamb of God, treats the unbelieving Scribes and Pharisees with the most pungent severity. "Woe! Woe! Woe!" breaks from his lips like repeated claps of thunder! He exposes them with an asperity and indignation not usual in his mild addresses. He repeatedly calls them hypocrites, fools, blind guides, whitened sepulchers, children of hell, serpents, a generation of vipers, who could not escape the damnation of hell.

But in my text he melts into tenderness, even in this vein of terror, and appears the same compassionate, gentle Savior we are accustomed to find him. His most dreadful denunciations were friendly warnings, calculated to reform, and not to destroy! And while denouncing the most dreadful woes against Jerusalem, in an abrupt flow of passion he breaks out in the most moving lamentation over her: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, and stone those who are sent unto you; how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings—and you would not!"

This is one of those tender cases which requires a familiar and moving, rather than a grand illustration; and that which Jesus has here chosen is one of the most tender, familiar, and moving that could be devised. "How often would I have gathered you, O Jerusalem, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings." As much as to say, "As the parent-bird, when she sees some bird of prey hovering over her helpless young, gives them the signal, which nature teaches them to understand, and spreads her wings to protect them, resolved to become a prey herself rather than her tender brood; or, as she shelters them from the rain and cold, and nourishes them under her friendly feathers, so, says the compassionate Redeemer; so, O Jerusalem, I see your children, like heedless chicks, in the most imminent danger; I see the judgments of God hovering over them; I see storms of vengeance ready to fall upon them; and how often have I invited them to fly to me for shelter, and gave them the signal of their danger! how often have I spread the wings of my protection to cover them, and keep them warm and safe as in my bosom! But, oh, lamentable! oh, astonishing! you would not! I was willing—but you would not! The silly chicks, taught by nature, understand the signal of approaching danger, and immediately fly for shelter; but you, more silly and presumptuous, would not regard my warnings; would not believe your danger, nor fly to me for protection, though often, oh how often, warned and invited!"

His compassion will appear the more surprising, if we consider the object of it. "Jerusalem! Jerusalem! you who kill the prophets, and stone those who are sent to you—though upon the kind design of reforming and saving you, and who will, in a few days, crucify that Savior who now laments your doom—how often would HE have gathered even your ungrateful children and received them under his protection, with an affection and tenderness, like the instinctive fondness and solicitude of the mother-hen for her brood! Here is divine compassion, indeed, that extends itself even to his enemies, to his murderers! Strange! that such sincere benevolence should meet with such an ungrateful repulse! that the provoked Sovereign should be willing to receive his rebellious subjects into protection—but that they should be unwilling to fly to him for it!

The important truths which my text suggests are such as these:

that sinners, while away from under the protection of Jesus Christ, are in a very dangerous situation;

that they may obtain safety by putting themselves under his protection;

that he is willing to receive the greatest sinners under his protection;

that he has often used means to prevail upon them to fly to him, that they may be safe;

that notwithstanding all this, multitudes are unwilling to fly to him, and put themselves under his protection;

that this unwillingness of theirs is the real cause of their destruction;

that this unwillingness is an instance of the most irrational and brutal stupidity—and that it is very affecting and lamentable.

1. The text implies, that sinners, while away from under the protection of Jesus Christ, are in a very dangerous situation. As the hen does not give the signal of danger, nor spread her wings to shelter her young, except when she sees danger approaching; so the Lord Jesus would not call sinners to fly to him for protection, were they not in real danger.

Sinners, you are in danger from the curse of the divine law, which is in full force against you, while you have no saving interest in the righteousness of Christ, which alone can answer its demands!

Sinners, you are in danger from the dread arrest of divine justice, which guards the sacred rights of the divine government, and will avenge itself upon you for all the insults you have offered it!

Sinners, you are in danger from the various judgments of God, who is angry with you every day, and whose judgments are hovering over you, and ready to seize you, like hungry birds of prey!

Sinners, you are in danger from your own vile corruption, which may hurry you into such courses as may be harmful, or, perhaps, ruinous to you in this world, may harden you in impenitence, and at length destroy you forever!

Sinners, you are in danger from your own conscience, which would be your best friend; but it is now ready to rise up in arms against you, and, like an insatiable vulture—prey upon your hearts forever!

Sinners, you are in danger from the arrest of death, which is ready every moment to stretch out its mortal hand, and seize you!

Sinners, you are in danger from the malice and power of devils, who, like hungry lions, are ready to snatch away your souls, as their helpless prey.

In short, you are surrounded with dangers on every hand, and dangers rise still more thick and dreadful before you. You are not sure of an hour's enjoyment of one comfort; nay, you are not sure there is so much as one moment between you and all the miseries of the damned! This minute you are upon earth, thoughtless, secure, and mirthful; but the next may be—I tremble to tell you where—in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, tormented in flames! Yes, sinners, one flying moment may strip you entirely naked of all the enjoyments of earth, cut you off from all hope of heaven, and engulf you in remediless despair!

Some of you, whose very case this is, will not, probably, believe me, nor take the alarm. But here, alas! lies your principal danger! If you would take warning in time—then you might escape! But you will not believe there is danger—until it becomes inevitable. Had Lot's sons-in-law taken warning from him—they might have escaped; but they saw no sensible appearance of the impending judgment, and, therefore, they continued blindly secure, regarded the good old man as a mocker, and therefore perished in Sodom. Had Jerusalem been apprehensive of its danger in time, it might have flourished to this day; but it would not be warned, and therefore became a ruinous heap! And this will be your doom, sinners, unless you be apprehensive of it before it breaks upon you like a whirlwind.

Indeed it may make one sad to think how common this danger is, and how little it is apprehended, to see crowds thoughtless and merry on the brink of ruin; secure and careless while hanging over the infernal pit by the frail thread of life! This is sad; but, alas! it is a common case in the world, and, I am afraid, it is too common among you, my hearers. And where shall you flee for safety? Is the danger inevitable? If so, where is the friendly arm that can guard you? where the wing that can shelter you from those judgments that are hovering over you, like ravenous birds, to make a prey of you? Blessed be God, I can show you a place of safety; for,

2. The text implies, that if sinners fly to Christ, and put themselves under his protection, they shall obtain safety.

The beautiful allusion to the protection a hen affords her young under the shelter of her wings, implies thus much, as we may learn from the meaning of the same allusion in other places. So in that beautiful passage, Psalm 91:1-4, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD: He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust. Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart." That is, he shall protect you in safety, and you shall trust in his guardian care. This is David's meaning, when he prays, "Lord, hide me under the shadow of your wings." Psalm 17:8. And when he resolves, "yes, in the shadow of your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities be over and past;" just as the hen's helpless brood hide under her wings until the storm is blown over, or the bird of prey has disappeared. Psalm 57:1. "I will trust," says he, "in the covert of your wings." Psalm 61:4. "Because you have been my help, therefore in the shadow of your wings will I rejoice." Psalm 63:7.

However great and seemingly inevitable your dangers; yet, if you place yourselves under the protection of Jesus Christ—you are safe forever! You are safe from the deluges of divine wrath, that are ready to rush down upon you! You are safe from the sword of justice, and the thunders of Sinai! You are safe from the internal insurrections of your own conscience, and from the power and malice of infernal demons! You are safe from the oppression of sin! You shall be gloriously triumphant over death itself, the king of terrors! These may disturb and alarm you, they may give you a slight wound, and put you in great terror; but none of them can do you a lasting, remediless injury; nay, the very injuries you may receive from them in this life, will, in the outcome, turn out to your advantage, and become real blessings to you.

If you are Christ's, then, says the apostle, then "all things are yours, whether life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours!" 1 Corinthians 3:21. That is, you have a kind of property in all things that you have any connection with, so that they shall work together for your good—as if they were all your own, by a private right. Brethren, if we are covered with the righteousness of Christ—then the sword of divine justice cannot reach us! All its demands are answered, and justice itself becomes our friend. If we are sheltered under the wings of his guardian care—then the most threatening dangers of time or eternity cannot affect us with real injury. How happy, then, how safe are such of you as have put yourselves under his protection!

Now every blessing is yours, and nothing can do you a real injury. You shall never fall a prey to your various enemies—but shall at length obtain an illustrious victory over them all, through the blood of the Lamb. To you I may apply those sublime words of Moses, "As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young, spreads abroad her wings, takes them, bears them on her wings;" so the Lord does and will lead you, Deuteronomy 32:11, 12; defend you, cherish you, and bear you along to your eternal home!!

You have, therefore, reason, with David, amidst all the peculiar dangers of this life, to rejoice under the shadow of his wings. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, and you have fled to it, and are safe! Amidst all your fears and terrors, have you not some secure and delightful hours, when you, as it were, feel yourselves gathered under the wings of your Redeemer? In such hours, do not even such weaklings as you, dare to brave all your enemies, and bid defiance to earth and hell? Oh how happy, how secure is your situation!

But here a grand question arises in the minds of some of you: "How may I know whether I have fled to Jesus for protection? How may I know whether I have placed myself under his guardian wings?" This is a question of the utmost importance: and I must offer a word or two in answer to it.

Observe, then, if ever you have fled to Jesus for safety—then you have been made deeply sensible of your danger. If ever you have sought shelter under his wings—then you have seen your sins, the curses of the law, and the powers of hell, as it were, hovering over you, and ready to seize and devour you as their prey. You have also been made deeply sensible, that Jesus alone was able to save you. You found that you could not shelter yourselves under the covert of your own righteousness, and were constrained to give up all hopes of saving yourselves by anything you could do in your own strength. Hereupon, as perishing, helpless creatures, you have cast yourselves entirely upon the protection of Jesus Christ, and put your souls into his hands—to be saved by him in his own way. And you have also submitted freely to his authority, willing to be ruled and disposed of entirely according to his pleasure.

These few things must suffice to determine this grand inquiry; and I hope you will make use of them for that purpose. If they help you to discover that you have fled to Jesus for refuge, rejoice in your happy lot, and let your mouths be filled with praise. But alas! are there not some of you who have made the contrary discovery, and, consequently, that you are exposed to all the dreadful dangers of a sinner without Christ and His salvation? And is there no place of safety for you? Yes, under those wings where believers have sheltered themselves. In Jesus Christ there is safety—if you fly to him! But you may perhaps inquire, "What encouragement have I to fly to him? I, who am so vile a sinner; I, who have nothing at all to recommend me? Can I hope that he will stretch out the wings of his mercy, and receive me into protection?" Yes, poor, trembling creature, even you may venture; for remember what my text farther implies:

3. That the compassionate Jesus is willing to receive the very greatest sinner under his protection. Can you question this, after this moving lamentation of his over Jerusalem? Jerusalem, that killed the prophets, and stoned those who were sent unto her, though upon messages of grace! Jerusalem, upon whom should come all the righteous blood of the prophets, through a length of nearly four thousand years, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias! Jerusalem, the den of those murderers, who, he well knew, would in a few days imbrue their hands in his own blood! Jerusalem, that had abused so many mercies, been incorrigible under so many chastisements, deaf to so many invitations! Yet, of this very city, the compassionate Savior says,

How often would I have gathered your children under the wings of my protection: your children, obstinate and ungrateful as they are!

Oh what gracious encouragement is here to the greatest sinners among us! Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever; the same compassionate, all-sufficient Savior. He did not lose his pity for Jerusalem after he had suffered death by her bloody hands; but after his resurrection he orders his apostles to make one trial more with her obstinate children: "Go," says he, "and preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Luke 24:47. As much as to say, "Though Jerusalem is the ungrateful city, where so much pains have been taken in vain, and where I have just been crucified with cruel hands—yet do not give them up; try once more to gather them under my wings; yes, let them have the very first offer of grace under this new dispensation: make the first offer of pardon through my blood to the wretches who shed my blood! Invite those to me as a Savior—who nailed me to the cross as a malefactor and a slave!"

Oh what melting, overpowering mercy! What an overflowing and free grace is here! This exemplifies his own declaration, that "he came not to call the righteous—but sinners to repentance;" and sinners of the vilest characters are welcome to him. He took care, at the first introduction of the gospel, to select some of the most vile sinners, and make them the monuments of his grace to all ages, that their history might give the strongest assurance of his grace to sinners of the like character, from that time to the end of the world. Such an instance was the famous Paul. This is a faithful saying, says he; a saying that may be depended upon, and worthy of all acceptance; worthy to be received as true, and embraced with joy by all: "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am the chief!" 1 Timothy 1:15. This chieftain, this king of sinners—was made a happy subject of Jesus Christ. And "for this cause," says he, "I obtained mercy, that in me first, or in me the chief, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to those who should hereafter believe on him."

Blessed be God, there are many such instances now in heaven, in the glorious company of angels! "There," as one observes, "is murderous and idolatrous Manasseh among the true worshipers of God; there is oppressing Zaccheus among the spirits of just men made perfect; there is Mary Magdalen, possessed by seven devils, among the saints of the Most High, filled with the Holy Spirit of God. In a word, there are the betrayers and murderers of our blessed Lord and Savior, receiving eternal life and happiness from that precious blood which their own guilty hands had shed."

Dr. Grosvenor, in a sermon entitled "The Temper of Jesus Christ towards his Enemies, and his Grace to the Chief of Sinners," has the following very lively and striking passage:

"It is very affecting that the first offers of grace should be made to those who, of all people in the world, had done it the most despite! That the heavenly gift should be offered to those first who least deserved it: not that any can deserve it at all, for then it were not grace; but they of all people—had most deserved the contrary! That those who had abused Christ to a degree beyond

the most pitiful description, should yet be uppermost in his care, and stand foremost in his pity, and find so much mercy from one to whom they showed none at all!

"One would rather have expected the apostles should have received another kind of charge, and that Christ should have said: Let repentance and remission of sins be preached—but do NOT carry it to Jerusalem, that wicked city, that has been the slaughter-house of my prophets, whom I have often sent. After them I sent John the Baptist, a burning and a shining light; whom they murdered in prison. Last of all, I myself, the Son, came also—and with wicked hands, they have crucified and murdered Me! They may do the same by you; the disciple is not like to be treated better than his Lord: let not the gospel enter those wicked gates, through which they led me, its Author, to crucifixion.

"I have been preaching there myself these three years, I have mingled my tears with my sermons, I have supported my pretensions and character from the Scripture of Moses and the prophets, I have confirmed them by divine miracles, and sealed all with my blood—yet they would not give ear! O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! all that I have left for you now is, what I have before dropped over you, namely, a compassionate tear and wish, that you had known in this your day, the things that belonged to your peace! but now they are hid from your eyes; and so let them remain; for I charge you, my apostles, to preach repentance and remission of sins to all other nations—but do not go near that wicked city!

"But God's thoughts are not as ours, neither are his ways as our ways; but as far as the heavens are above the earth, so are his thoughts and ways above ours. Our way is, to make the chief offenders, examples of justice; to avenge ourselves upon those who have done us personal injury and wrong. But Christ chooses out exactly these—to make monuments of His mercy, and commands the first offer of eternal life to be made to them—and all the world are to wait until they have had the first refusal of the gospel salvation.

"As if our Lord had said: It is true that my sufferings are a universal remedy, and I have given my life in ransom for many, that the Gentiles afar off might be brought near, and all the ends of the earth might see the salvation of God; and therefore go into all nations and offer this salvation as you go! But lest the poor house of Israel should think themselves abandoned to eternal despair—as cruel and vile as they have been—go, make the first offer of grace to them! Let those who spilled my blood, be welcome to its healing virtue. Tell them that there is repentance and forgiveness even for them!

"Tell them, that as I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, so, if they will be gathered, I will be their Shepherd still. Though they despised my tears, which I shed over them, and imprecated my blood to be upon them, tell them it was for their sakes I shed both, that by my tears I might soften their hearts towards God, and by my blood I might reconcile God to them.

"Tell them I live; and because I am alive again, my death shall not be their damnation; nor is my murder an unpardonable sin—but that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin, even the sin by which that blood was drawn!

"Tell them that you have seen the prints of the nails upon my hands and feet, and the wound of the spear in my side, and that those marks of their cruelty are so far from giving me vindictive thoughts, that every wound they have given me—speaks in their behalf, pleads with the Father for remission of their sins, and enables me to bestow it; and by those sufferings which they may be ready to think have exasperated me against them, by those very wounds—court and persuade them to receive the salvation they have procured.

"Nay, if you meet that poor wretch who thrust his spear into My side, tell him that there is another way, a better way of coming to My heart—even My heart's love! Tell him, that if he will repent, and look upon Me whom he has pierced, and will mourn—then I will cherish him in that very bosom which he has wounded! Tell him that he shall find the blood which he has shed—to be an ample atonement for the sin of shedding it! And tell him from Me, that he will put Me to more pain and displeasure by refusing this offer of My blood—than when he first drew it forth!" In short,

"Though they have gainsaid my doctrine, blasphemed my divinity, and abused and tormented my person, taken away my life, and, what is next valuable to every honest man, endeavored to murder my reputation too—by making me an impostor, and imputing my miracles to a collusion with Beelzebub; however, go to Jerusalem, and by beginning there, show them such a miracle of goodness and grace, that they themselves must confess too holy for the devil to have any hand in, too God-like for him to be assisting to; that may convince them of their sin, and at the same time that nothing can be greater than their sin, except this mercy and grace of mine, which, where their sin has abounded, does thus much more abound, beginning at Jerusalem."

And what farther arguments need I produce of the willingness of Jesus Christ to receive the vilest sinner among you, upon your coming to him? I might prove the same joyful truth from his repeated declarations, from his general invitations to all, and especially from that kind assurance which has kept many a soul from sinking: "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." John 6:37. But this argument from matters of fact is sufficient. Therefore come, sinners, fly to Jesus, however deep your guilt. Had you been murderers of fathers, or murderers of mothers; nay, had you come hither this day with hands reeking in the blood of the Son of God—yet if you repent and believe, he is willing to receive you under the shadow of his wings! I may therefore invite you in the language of the following lines:

Outcasts of men, to you I call,
Harlots, and publicans, and thieves;
He spreads his arms to embrace you all;
Sinners alone—his grace receives.

Come, all you Magdalens in lust:
You ruffians great, in murders old,
Repent and live; despair and trust!
Jesus for you to death was sold.

Come, O my guilty friends, come,
Groaning beneath your load of sin!
His bleeding heart shall make you room,
His wounded side shall take you in.

He calls you all, invites you home;
Come, O my guilty friends, come!

To encourage you the more, and even to constrain you, consider what my text implies farther, namely:

4. That the Lord Jesus has often used means to prevail upon you to fly to him for safety. What he says to Jerusalem, may be applied to you: "How often would I have gathered your children together!" How often has he given you the signal of danger, that you might fly from it! how often has he spread out a friendly wing to shelter you! As often as the law has denounced his curses against you; as often as the gospel has invited and allured you: as often as conscience has checked and warned you, or prompted you to your duty: as often as the Holy Spirit has moved upon your hearts, and excited some serious thoughts and good purposes and inclinations: as often as Providence has allured you with its profusion of blessings, or chastened you with its afflictive rod; as often as you have seen a godly example, or heard a pious word dropped in conversation; in short, as often as any means of any kind have been used with you, which had a tendency to make you sensible of your danger, or your need of Jesus Christ—so often has he used means with you to engage you to fly to the shelter of his wings for protection.

Oh! how frequently and by what great variety of means, has he called you in this congregation! This is the very business of one day in seven, when you are called away from the noise and bustle of the world to listen to the voice of his invitation. But this is not the only time when he calls you. While you are at home, or following your business through the rest of the week—you have a Bible, a Providence, a conscience, and the Holy Spirit still with you; and these are still urging you to fly to Jesus, though their voice may be disregarded, and lost in the din and confusion of the world around you. The gracious call of a compassionate Savior has followed you ever since you were capable of hearing it to this day. But, alas! does not the next remark hold true as to some of you, namely:

5. That notwithstanding all this—multitudes are unwilling to fly to him for protection!

It was not of Jerusalem alone, that he had reason to say, "I would have gathered you—but you would not! I was willing—but you were unwilling!" This is strange indeed, and might seem incredible, were it not a notorious fact. That the Judge should be willing to pardon—but the criminal unwilling to receive pardon! That the offended Sovereign should be ready to take a perishing rebel under his protection—but the rebel should stand off, and rather perish than fly to him—this is a most astonishing thing; and it is the hardest thing in the world to convince sinners that this is their conduct towards the Lord Jesus. They are generally more suspicious of his willingness to save them, than of their own to come to him. Were he but as willing to save them as they are to be saved by him, they think there would be no danger of their salvation; but the case is directly the reverse; the unwillingness lies entirely upon their side!

To convince them of this—let it be considered, that we are not truly willing to be saved by Christ at all, unless we are willing to be saved by him—in his own way, and upon his own terms. We are not willing to be saved, unless the nature of the salvation offered is agreeable to us. Now one principal part of the salvation which we need, and which Christ offers, is deliverance from sin: deliverance from the power, the pleasures, the profits of sin, as well as from the destructive consequences of it in the world to come. And are sinners willing to accept of such a salvation as this from Christ? No! this appears no salvation to them; this seems rather a confinement, a loss, a bereavement to them! They are willing to indulge themselves in sin, and therefore it is impossible they should, in the mean time, be willing to be restrained from it, or deprived of it. This is the thing they struggle against, and to which all the means used with them cannot bring them!

To tear their sins from them—is to rob them of their pleasures; and they rise up in arms against the attempt! And are these willing to be saved by Christ—who abhor the salvation which he offers them? The truth of the matter is, the conduct of sinners in this case is the greatest absurdity; they are willing to be happy—but they are not willing to be holy—in which alone their happiness consists! They are willing to be saved from hell—but they are not willing to be saved from those dispositions which would create a hell within them, even according to the nature of things! They are willing to go to heaven when they can live no longer in this, their favorite world; but they are unwilling to be prepared for it in their temper and disposition. An eternity spent in holy exercises would be an eternal drudgery to them, unless they have a relish for holiness. Freedom from sin would be a painful bereavement to them—while they take pleasure in sin! How then could they be happy, even in the very region of eternal happiness, since the sordid pleasures of sin never mingle with those pure rivers of living water?

In short, they act as absurdly as if they were willing to recover their health—and yet were unwilling to part with their sickness, or to be restrained from those things which are the causes of it. They are willing to go to heaven—but it is in their own way: that is, in the way that leads to hell! The only way of salvation according to the divine appointment, is the way of holiness. "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it!" Matthew 7:13-14

Indeed Christ came into the world to save sinners; but these sinners must be made saints before they can enter into his kingdom; and he makes them holy—in order to be happy. And this is not an arbitrary appointment—but necessary, in the very nature of things! For, as I observed, until they are made holy—it is impossible in the nature of things they should be happy in heaven, because the happiness of heaven consists in the perfection of holiness. To be saved without holiness is as impossible as to be healthy without health, or saved without salvation. Therefore, for God to gratify the sinner, and gratify him in his own way, that is, in his sins, is an impossibility; as impossible, as for a physician to heal an obstinate patient in his own way; that is, to heal him by letting him retain and nourish his disease; letting him drink poison to cure a headache! God is wise in all his constitution, and therefore the way of salvation through Christ is agreeable to the nature of things; it is in itself consistent and possible: and if sinners are not willing to be saved in this possible way, they are not willing, in reality, to be saved at all.

Again, the way of salvation by Christ is all through GRACE. It is adapted to stain the glory, and mortify the pride of all flesh, and to advance to the mercy of God, and the honor of Christ, without a rival. Now haughty, self-righteous sinners are unwilling to be saved in this humbling, mortifying way—and therefore they are unwilling to be saved by Christ. If they would be saved by him, they must be saved entirely upon the basis of his merit, and not their own; they must own that they lie at his mercy; they must feel themselves self-condemned; they must utterly renounce all dependence upon their own righteousness; and receive every blessing as the free, unmerited gift of grace! And it is the hardest thing imaginable, to bring a proud sinner so low as this! But until he is brought thus low—he cannot be saved upon the gospel plan.

Nor is this part of God's plan of salvation, any more arbitrary than the former. It would be inconsistent with the honor of the great God, the Supreme Magistrate of the universe, and with the dignity of his government, to receive a rebel into favor, on any other basis than that of mere grace. If after sinning so much—the sinner still has merit enough to procure a pardon, in whole or in part, or to render it cruel or unjust for God to condemn and punish him—then certainly HE must be a being of very great importance indeed; and SIN against God must be a very small evil.

To save a sinner in a way that would give any room for such insinuations as these, would be inconsistent with the honor of God and his government; and therefore the plan God has constituted, is a method of GRACE—of pure rich grace, in all and every part!

Now while sinners are not willing to be saved in this way—they are not willing to be saved at all. Here lies their grand mistake; because they have a general willingness that Christ should save them from hell, they, therefore, conclude they are really willing to come to him according to the gospel-constitution, whereas there is nothing in the world to which they are more averse! There are many that think, and perhaps declare, they would give ten thousand worlds for Christ; when, in reality, they are not willing to receive him as a free gift! They are not yet brought to that extremity as to fly to him. No, the sinner must be brought low indeed—before he is brought to this. He must be entirely cut off from all hope from every other quarter; particularly, he must see that he cannot shelter himself any longer under the covert of his own righteousness—but that he

will be overwhelmed with a deluge of divine vengeance, unless he hides himself under the saving wings of Jesus!

I beg you would examine yourselves impartially on this point, my friends, for here lies the grand delusion that ruins thousands. If you are really willing to fly to Jesus, and be saved by him in his own way—then you may be sure that he is infinitely more willing than you are; nay, your willingness is the effect of his, for he first made you so. But if, when you examine the matter to the bottom, you find, that notwithstanding all your pretensions, you are really unwilling to fly to him, consider your dangerous situation; for,

6. The text implies, that this unwillingness of sinners, is the real cause of their destruction.

Sinners complain of the lack of ability; but what is their inability—but their unwillingness? Coming to Christ is an act of the will, and, therefore, to will it heartily is to perform the act. To be unable to come to him is to be so perverse, so disaffected to Jesus Christ, as not to have power to will to come to him.

This, by the way, shows the vanity of that popular excuse, "I am not able to fly to Christ, and therefore it is not my fault if I do not!" That is, you are so wicked—that you can do no good thing! You so dislike Jesus Christ—that you have no will, no inclination, to choose him for your Savior! You are such an obstinate enemy to him—that you would rather perish than take him for your Friend!

"You will not come to Me—that you might have life!" John 5:40. Yet you think that your not coming to him is no crime. Is this consistent reasoning? Is it not all one, as if a rebel should think to excuse himself by pleading, "I have such an inveterate hatred to my king—that I cannot love him!" Or a robber to plead in his defense, "I have such an aversion to honesty—that I cannot possibly help stealing!" Would not this be an aggravation of the crime—rather than an excuse? Is the invincible strength of your hatred to Christ—a vindication of it? Are you the more excusable—by how much the more you hate him? Sinners, give up this foolish reasoning, for the matter is too important to be trifled with! Your inability in this case—is nothing else but your unwillingness; and your unwillingness is the effect of nothing else but your hatred to Jesus Christ! Therefore own that this is the true cause of your destruction!

In short, whatever pleas and excuses you make, you will find at last that your destruction is entirely the effect of your own perverse desires and choice! You simply will not come unto Christ—that you might have life, John 5:40, and therefore you must perish without it. This reflection will forever torment you, that you willfully destroyed yourselves, and were guilty of the most unnatural self-murder! Jesus was willing—but you would not. God has even sworn that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked—but that you turn and live. To you, therefore, I may properly address that expostulation:

Why will you die? Why will you? Why do you most willfully destroy yourselves? Why do you ruin yourselves by your own free choice? Why will you die? You, whom Jesus is willing to save, whom he has so often invited—why will you, above all men in the world, causelessly eternally perish by your own act? Are you capable of so much stupidity? It is stupidity, which is a dreadful peculiarity of your own, for,

7. Unwillingness to fly to Jesus is the most irrational, and worse than brutal, stupidity.

This is implied in my text. No sooner does the hen give the signal of danger, than her little family, taught by instinct to understand the alarm, immediately fly under her wings. "So," says Christ, "I gave you the alarm—but you would not regard it! So I spread out the wing of my guardian care to defend you—but you would not shelter under it!" What can be greater stupidity than this!

In this light, the conduct of sinners is frequently exposed in the sacred writings. "The ox knows his owner," says Isaiah, "and the donkey his master's crib—but Israel does not know, my people does not consider!" Isaiah 1:3. "Every one turns to his course," says Jeremiah, "as the horse rushes into the battle! Yes, the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and the turtle-dove and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming; but my people," (more stupid than these brutes!) "know not the judgment of the Lord." Jer. 8:6, 7.

To refuse the offer of eternal salvation, when proposed upon the most reasonable terms—is to rush into hell, rather than be saved by the friendly hands of Jesus Christ! It is to suffer the most dreadful execution, rather than accept Christ's free pardon! It is to reject all the bliss of heaven, when freely proposed by Christ! It is to choose the pleasures of sin for a season, rather than an eternity of the most exalted happiness! It is to resist the calls of redeeming love, and all the friendly efforts of divine grace, to save a sinking soul!

Is this the conduct of a reasonable creature? No! Show me the brute, if you can, that would act so stupid a part—in things which come within the sphere of its capacity. Would it not be better for you to be a cat or dog—than that brute man, who is so proud of being rational—if you make so irrational a choice? Let me endeavor to make you sensible,

8. And lastly, that this conduct is extremely affecting and lamentable.

It is on this account, that Jesus laments over Jerusalem in such pathetic strains in my text. He knew the truth of the case; his all-seeing eye took it in all its extent, and viewed it in all its circumstances and consequences. And since he, who knew it best, deeply laments it—then we may be sure it is lamentable indeed, and it cannot but appear so even to us who know so little of it. An immortal soul lost! Lost forever! Lost by its own obstinacy! Lost amidst the means of salvation! How tragic a case is this! God dishonored! Jesus rejected! His love spurned! His blood trampled upon! His Spirit grieved! How lamentable is this!

And yet are there not some of you in this lamentable condition in this assembly? It was over such as you—that Jesus wept and mourned: and shall he weep alone? Shall not our tears keep time with his, since we are so much more nearly concerned? Oh that our heads were waters, and our eyes fountains of tears, that we might weep along with the Savior of sinners! But, alas! Our tears are too much reserved for dying friends, or some less affecting object—while immortal souls perish around us, unpitied, unlamented!