

SERMON XXVI

THE LOATHSOMENESS OF SIN, AND THE IMMENSENESS OF LOVE DISCOVERED

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"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid {or, made to meet,} on him the iniquity of us all." {Is.53:6}

We have passed through many excellent things that this precious text affords us; we are come to consider the rock of our salvation, the mighty one, upon whom the Lord hath laid this help, who is set up as a corner stone, to bear up, without sinking, so heavy a weight as "the iniquity of us all."

I have showed you, that it was none but Christ; the main thing I have propounded, to be considered from the singling out of Christ himself, to bear our iniquities, is this, namely, to find out what the proportional ends of the Lord may be unto such an unparalleled action as this; as it is the greatest work that ever he did, so it hath the greatest ends that ever he aimed at. Expert workmen level their works, frame their materials, according to the business for which they are to serve; they make the molds fit for the vessels to be cast in them. If men therefore are so wise, as to order things in their weight and measure, how much more the great God of heaven and earth.

There are sundry admirable ends and purposes the Lord aims at, in laying iniquity upon Christ; and, as he aimed at such ends in the thing, so he excellently accomplishes them, to the great content of himself, and comfort of his people.

1. He laid iniquity upon Christ, "that he might lay help upon one that is mighty."

2. That he might be satisfied to his own content; all the world could never have contented God; no, not the dissolution and annihilation of it, only Christ bearing the iniquities of men; which otherwise should have brought the dissolution and destruction of themselves, and of the world. "As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of a sinner;" but as concerning Christ bearing of iniquity, the pleasure of the Lord prospered in that.

3. The Lord laid our iniquities upon Christ, to give Christ his own longing. "I was daily his delight, and my delights are with the sons of men." Take away the sons of men from Christ, and you take away his delight; take away that from a man, in which his delight is, and you take away all his comfort; if God should not give Christ the sons of men, he should cross his delight; now, rather than do this, seeing the sons of men cannot be given to Christ, but he must be made sin for them; iniquity shall be laid upon him. Christ hath a mighty strong heart, even to this very thing, when he saith, "Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God;" that is, that will which burnt offerings and sacrifices could not do, the taking away of sin; "I delight to do thy will, O God," saith he; that is, to bear the sins of men; to come in the room of those sacrifices, and do their business. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you;" that is, the paschal lamb, which was nothing but a type of his bearing the sins of men, being "the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world."

4. The Lord laid our iniquities upon Christ that he might represent to the life the hideousness and abominable loathsomeness of sin to the whole world. Of this I shall speak something more than the last time would permit. There is no way wherein sin will appear so out of measure hateful to God, as by laying it upon Christ. You know, beloved, that Haman, that great courtier, when he had received an affront from Mordecai, at once to make his own greatness known, and the heinousness of the crime, as he conceived in this affront, thought it was but too poor a satisfaction to have the life of that single man; and therefore he devises, and accordingly proceeds in his device, to have all the nation of the Jews cut off at once for such a fact. The greater the suffering is for a crime, the more it manifests

to the world the greatness and detestableness of it. You know there is none in the world, nay, all the world together, nothing so dear in the eyes of God, as his Son; and if it had been possible that sin could have been connived at, it would have been upon his Son, being his only by imputation. A fond father may possibly wink at a fault in a son, which he will not pass by in a slave; but when a father falls foul upon a dear child, upon whom a fault is found, and the fire of indignation restrains his affection, this argues the extremity of the rage of the father, and the heinousness of the crime that incenses it. When Jonathan had so transgressed the commandment of Saul, that he said, "though it be Jonathan my beloved Son, he shall surely die for it;" this showed the extreme rage in the heart of Saul, and the apprehension of a heinous fact not to be borne with. When the Lord will lay iniquity upon Christ, and, when he finds it upon him, if he himself shall not escape; nay, if there shall not so much as be a mitigation of wrath, though the crime be upon him, no otherwise than only as a surety; this shows that iniquity is of such a loathsome stench in the nostrils of God, that it is impossible he should have any partiality or remissness wherever it is to be found. The more easily a crime is passed over, the less it is in the eye of him by whom it is passed over; but when a fault shall not be spared, no, not on the back of an only son, this sin is out of measure sinful. I dare be bold to say, as I said before, that all the rhetorical aggravations of sin, whether in respect of the filthiness of it, or of the wrath that attends it, or the miseries that proceed from it, come short of this one aggravation of it; the Lord hath laid iniquity upon his own Son.

It is true, sin is aggravated much, as you see in Isaiah 1:11,12; "to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me; saith the LORD. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?" Here are expressions to aggravate sin in respect of the filthiness of it, exceedingly, that it makes all our prayers and sacrifices loathsome in his presence; but mark it, beloved, when all these expressions shall but only reflect upon the person of a mere creature; {God cannot away with it, his soul hateth it, in me and in thee, that are but men and women;} they are nothing so much as when these shall reflect upon his own Son; he cannot away with it in his Son, it is as abominable to him on Christ himself; this expression ariseth higher than all the aggravations in the world besides. Suppose that God forsakes all the sons of men for sin, this aggravates not so much the hatred of God against sin, as to forsake his own Son, as he complains; "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "My soul is heavy unto death." When God laid iniquity upon Christ, he forsakes not the world, but his own Son, for sin; therefore it must be an exceeding abominable thing. The truth is, God singled out Christ to bear the sins of men, for this purpose, because his back is strong enough to bear all the indignation of God at once, the creature is too weak to do, and vindicate divine justice against sin; the creatures cannot pay God but by piece-meal, and yet could never have made full payment; therefore the extremity of God's indignation against sin, cannot express itself in the latitude of it upon them; for it would have beat them to dust, and yet not be satisfied. A little fire today, and a little more tomorrow, burning continually, is something; but when all that fire, that would burn many years, should be set together to burn in a moment of time, it must needs have more of the fierceness of fire in it, than if it had burnt by several parts. The fierceness of God's indignation being all at once upon the back of Christ; I say, all that fierceness, that should have been protracted to eternity upon the offending creature, all that flame of wrath being contracted at once upon Christ for the sins of men, infinitely more expresses the greatness of the indignation of the Lord, than if it had lain upon all mankind to all eternity. The torments of hell we conceive infinite, have indeed a beginning, but they have no end, they are lengthened out to run in a parallel line with eternity itself; but now, suppose that all this torment should be contracted, and equivalently contained in the limits of one minute of time, and all this wrath to have broken out at one clap; had not there been more fierceness of wrath thus breaking out all at once, than being protracted to eternity? Even such were the sufferings of Christ for the elect upon the cross in that short time; they equivalently contained all that torment and wrath that should have lain upon them to all eternity. If he had not suffered for them at that instant upon the cross, they themselves had suffered for ever and ever. Oh beloved, this infinitely aggravates the most abominable

loathsomeness and hatefulness of sin; and therefore what the church complains of in Lam.1:12, is as true, nay, more true of Christ himself. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by; behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger?" It was the day of his fierce anger indeed; never was there such fierce anger, as that when Christ "bare our sins on his own body on the tree." Take notice therefore, I pray you, that, as I told you before, it is a most abominable slander that is now cast upon the gospel of free-grace, to say, that the preaching of this doctrine extenuates sin in the eyes of men, and causeth such an over-cast upon the filthiness of it, that it must needs appear less filthy to men than it otherwise would. I say, there is no minister in the world, that is able to set out the abominable filthiness of sin, and the bitterness of God's wrath expressed against it; nothing can set it out so much as this, that our iniquities are laid upon Christ.

It is true indeed, the Lord's laying of iniquity upon Christ gives rest to the hearts of poor believers; seeing their sins are transacted from them, and so consequently the desert of them, that they feel none of the smart of the rod, nor the mischief of sin, Christ bearing their sins, and thereby their punishment for them; yet, though sin be transacted from believers, and they freed from that wrath it, in its own nature, deserves; yet it doth, and will, appear far more in its ugly shape and own nature upon the back of Christ, than if it remained upon the person himself that hath committed it.

5. As God's laying of iniquity upon Christ sets forth the filthiness of sin, so it serves to commend to his church the most immense and incomprehensible love that ever he showed or expressed in all the world. The quintessence, as I may so speak, of God's love is mightily set forth in it.

Indeed, the Lord hath abundantly manifested his love to mankind in those privileges mentioned in Psalm 8:4, "What is man, {said David,} that thou art mindful of him; and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Here is a love David could not conclude how great it was, and therefore he expresses it by an expostulation, "what is man, that thou art mindful of him?" Now, wherein is this love manifested? "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour; thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." Here is love, to make man the Lord of the rest of the creatures; but yet there is a greater love than this, when man had most shamefully revolted, in all equity and reason as we conceive, God should have singled out other creatures, and not rebels, as men were, to be the objects of his love; but, though man, and only he, deserved wrath, yet he singled him out, and he must be his greatest delight, and more near and dear unto him, than he was before.

Now, if you do but consider what it cost God to make man partaker of all that goodness a creature can be made capable of; the love of God will be exceedingly aggravated, and the excellency of it shine with a more dazzling brightness. If God had given or parted with that for man that should cost him nothing, there had wanted that particular to aggravate his love, though otherwise it might be exceedingly great, and our happiness no less; but, beloved, when he shall be at so much charge, as to part with him that is so dear unto him, the Son of his love, in whom his soul delighteth; and when, to make man partaker of all that love, he was content to pay so dear, that his only Son should be made an offering for sin, and be made subject unto death, even the most accursed death of the cross, that they that be afar off might be made nigh; that God, I say, should part with his own Son, and that upon such hard terms of a bitter and an accursed death; this sets out his love in an inconceivable manner, beyond parallel, nay, beyond the reach of finite capacities.

The apostle, {endeavoring to set out this love of God to men} tells us, that no man can be found that hath laid down his life for a righteous man; for a good man, {saith he,} peradventure some men may dare to die; but herein hath God commended his love to us, that "while we were yet sinners; Christ died for us." {Rom.5:7,8} Here is a commendation of love indeed, beyond all that ever the world expressed; "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." {Jn.15:13} But, if you consider, what friend this is that Christ laid down his life for, you will say indeed, no greater love than this can there be, for that friend was an enemy, till that life was laid down; this, I say, is admirable love, upon which the apostle, in Rom.8:32, speaks excellently, "He that

spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" As if he had said, what simplicity is it for any man to think, that any should be so precious in the eyes of God, for the manifestation of his love, as his Son; or that anything should be too dear to bestow upon us, seeing he did not stick to give him? As other things are but toys in comparison of his Son, so the gift of his Son, especially to die for man, was a most high expression of love; yet it is a far higher expression of it, that Christ should bear the sins of man, than that he should be given to die for them; for, for Christ to die for them, comes far short of his bearing their sins. Affliction is not contrary to the nature of God; God can smile upon persons, when they are under the greatest contempt that may be; he can delight, and please himself with them in that condition; but where he charges any sin, he abhors. And some may think it strange, that such a poor sinful thing as man, should have such gladness of spirit in the midst of tribulations, as Paul and Silas, to sing for joy in prison. It is a wonderful thing that sinful men should have such gladness of heart when under afflictions; and yet that the innocent Son of God should be in such distress. What is the reason of it? Had not Christ more power to bear the rod, than poor weak man? Why then was not he as joyful under afflictions as weak frail man? He was so faint, as to sweat drops of blood, and to roar in the anguish of his soul, and cry out in the bitterness of his spirit; whereas poor sinning man leaps for joy, and sings for gladness of heart, as our martyrs have done in the fire. The reason is this, they that thus sang for joy, had the discharge of all their sins; they saw that God in Christ was reconciled, and imputed no transgressions unto them. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" {Prov.18:14} If sin lie as a sting wounding the spirit of a man, this is insupportable; none can go away under it lightly and merrily; but if it be taken away, the spirit of man may be sustained. They that had such joy and gladness, their sins were done away. "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." {Isa.35:10}

But you will say, while everyone that lives godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution, how shall they obtain such joy and gladness?

They are the ransomed of the Lord. What is that? they are ransomed from their sins; a Saviour is come that saves them from them; so that they may be full of joy, though they meet with tribulations; but, as for Christ, the Lord is pleased to lay iniquity upon him, though he take it from them. And as Christ did bear their iniquities, so he was fain to stoop; his spirit was wounded more than others, that did not suffer for sin as he did, and had nothing like the strength that he had.

This now must needs commend the love of God to men, that while they, who deserved wrath, are in rest and peace, Christ not only bears their afflictions, but their very sins; that God should not only expose his Son to the rod, but put him into a posture of wrath; for putting him into a posture of bearing sin, must needs put him into a posture of bearing wrath; this heightens the love. It is a great and high expression of love to adopt a stranger, and make him co-heir with an only son. If one that hath but one son, and that a beloved son, do this, he shall be a mirror to the world; if he take in a stranger, a thief and murderer, to divide the inheritance between his son and him. But beloved, for God not only to take in traitors and thieves, to be co-heirs with his own Son; but also lay the felony, murders, and treasons of such, upon him, and execute him for this, that they may be the sons of God; this, I say, is astonishing love, whereunto there is never a parallel in all the world. Had not the Lord laid iniquity upon his Son, making him, as it were, abhorred for a time, this love of his to men, in the utmost extent of it, had never been expressed.

The dearer the things are that a man will bestow upon his friend, the greater is his love to him. When David would express his love towards God, though Araunah the Jebusite, offered him all things gratis for sacrifice, yet he answered, I will not "offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing;" {II Sam.24:24;} hence he showed his love to God, in that he did not stick to be at charge for him; so the more the Lord is at cost, and charge for his people, the more his love appears unto them. Now, what charge could he be at greater, to show his love to them, than to lay iniquity itself upon Christ? If a man were able to convert his body and soul into the nature of a toad, or any vile thing, to save a galley-slave from hanging; he cannot express so much love in it, as

the Lord expressed in making his Son to be sin for us. Every creature of God is good; toads and poison, that make the heart of a man to rise and loath them so much, as they are creatures of God, are good; but sin, as it is no creature of God, so there is nothing ugly and loathsome but that in his eyes. Now that God should clothe his Son with that which is so abominable in his eye, to save sinners, that could not be saved but by his being made sin for them; this commends the love of God to be rare and admirable, that it cannot be fathomed, the depth thereof being bottomless and unsearchable.

The love of God in making his Son to be sin that you may be sons, as it is expressed to you in the word of grace, that you may the more easily behold the riches and excellency of it; so he is also pleased to set it out in his feast of fat things, the Lord's supper; there you may see the riches of it, and behold in this visible gospel, in breaking the bread, this Son broken for you, and in pouring out the wine, the shedding of his blood and life for you; all which is there held forth; and the Lord himself takes notice of such the apparent and proper excellency of his own love in giving Christ to be sin, that in the gospel, though there be no other feast, yet he would have this feast to be as a testimony of it; therefore he saith, "do it in remembrance of me;" and that "it shows the death of Christ till he come," saith the apostle. It is so great, that it never must be forgotten; this is the prime end of the Lord's supper, the Lord looked principally at this, in instituting this last supper, even the keeping in remembrance the death of his Son. You shall find it so, that seeing it is so great a love, that there is none like it, there should be a feasting to the commemoration of it; that so the greatness of it may be fastened in our hearts, and we may be so much the more to the glory of that grace that did not disdain to lay our iniquities upon his only Son, that we might be discharged from them. To him therefore be the praise.