

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A SERMON FOR THE MOST MISERABLE OF MEN.

A Sermon

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"My soul refused to be comforted."—Psalm lxxvii. 2.

IN this refusal to be comforted, David is not to be imitated. His experience in this instance is recorded rather as a warning than as an example. Here is no justification for those professors who, when they suffer bereavements or temporal losses, repine bitterly, and reject every consoling thought. We have known persons who made mourning for departed ones the main business of life, years after the beloved relative had entered into rest. Like the heathen, they worship the spirits of the dead. The sufferer has a right to mourn, a right which Jesus Christ has sealed, for "Jesus wept," but that right is abused into a wrong, when protracted sorrow poisons the springs of the heart, and unfits the weeper for the duties of daily life. There is a "hitherto" beyond which the floods of grief may not lawfully advance. "What," said the Quaker, to one who wore the weeds of mourning many years after the death of her child, and declared that she had suffered a blow from which she should never rally—"What, friend, hast thou not forgiven God yet?" Much of unholy rebellion against the Most High will be found as a sediment at the bottom of most tear-bottles. Sullen repining and protracted lamentation indicate the existence of idolatry in the heart. Surely the beloved object must have that throne of the heart which is the Lord's alone, or else the taking away of the beloved object, though it caused poignant sorrow, it would not have excited such any unsubmitting spirit. Should it not be the endeavour of God's children to avoid excessive and continued grief, because it verges so closely upon the two deadly sins of rebellion and idolatry? Sorrow deserves sympathy, but when it springs from a want of resignation, it merits censure more. When believers refuse to be comforted, they act as mere worldlings might do with some excuse, for when unbelievers lose earthly comforts they lose their all; but for the Christian to pine and sigh in inconsolable anguish over the loss of a creature good, is to belie his profession and degrade his name. He believes of his trial that the Lord has done it, he calls God his Father, he knows that all things work together for good, he is persuaded that a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory is being wrought out for him, how then can he sit down in sullen silence, and say, "I will not be comforted!" Surely then the

truths which he professes to believe have never entered into his soul; he must be a mere speculative theoriser, and not a sincere believer. Beloved, shame on us, if with such a faith as ours we do not play the man. If the furnace be hot, let our faith be strong; if the burden be heavy, let our patience be enduring. Let us practically admit that he who lends has a right to reclaim his own; and as we blessed the giving, so let us bless the taking hand. At all times let us praise the Lord our God. Though he slay us, let us trust him; much more, let us bless him when he only uses the rod.

Our text, however, might very fittingly describe individuals who, although free from outward trial or bereavement, are subject to deep depression of spirits. There are times with the brightest eyed Christians when they can hardly brush the tears away. Strong faith and joyous hope at times subside into a fearfulness which is scarcely able to keep the spark of hope and faith alive in the soul; yea, I think the more rejoicing a man is at one time the more sorrowful he will be at others. They who mount highest descend lowest. There are cold-blooded individuals who neither rejoice with joy unspeakable nor groan with anguish unutterable; but others of a more excitable temperament, capable of lofty delights, are also liable to horrible sinkings of heart, and just because they have gazed in ecstasy within the gates of pearl, they are too apt to make a descent to the land of deathshade, and to stand shivering on the brink of hell. I know this, alas! too well. In the times of our gloom, when the soul is well nigh overwhelmed, it is our duty to grasp the promise and to rejoice in the Lord; but it is not easy to do so. The duty is indisputable, but the fulfilment of it impossible. In vain for us at such seasons the star of promise and the candle of experience: the darkness which may be felt seems to smother all cheering lights. Barnabas, the son of consolation, would be hard put to it to cheer the victims of depression when their fits are on them. The oil of joy is poured out in vain for those heads upon which the dust and ashes of melancholy are heaped up. Brethren, at such times the unhappy should wisely consider whether their disturbed minds ought not to have rest from labour. In these days, when everybody travels by express and works like a steam-engine, the mental wear and tear are terrible, and the advice of the Great Master to the disciples to go into the desert and rest awhile is full of wisdom, and ought to have our earnest attention. Rest is the best, if not the only medicine for men occupied in mental pursuits and subject to frequent depression of spirit. Get away, ye sons of sadness, from your ordinary avocations for a little season if you possibly can, and enjoy quiet and repose—above all, escape from your cares by casting them upon God: if you bear them yourself, they will distract you, so that your soul will refuse to be comforted; but if you will leave them to God, and endeavour to serve him without distraction, you will overcome the drooping tendency of your spirits, and you will yet compass the altar of God with songs of gladness. Let none of us give way to an irritable, complaining, mournful temperament. It is the giving way which is the master-mischief; for it is only as we resist this devil that it will flee from us. Let not your *heart* be troubled. If the troubles outside the soul toss your vessel and drive her to and fro, yet, at least, let us strain every nerve to keep the seas outside the bark, lest she sink altogether. Cry with David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?" Never mourn unreasonably. Question yourself about the causes of your tears; reason about the matter till you come to the same conclusion as the psalmist, "Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him." Depend upon it, if thou canst believe in God, thou hast, even in thy soul's midnight, ten times more cause to rejoice than to sorrow. If thou canst humbly

lie at Jesus' feet, there are more flowers than thorns ready to spring up in thy pathway; joys lie in ambush for thee; thou shalt be compassed about with songs of deliver\-\ance. Therefore, companions in tribulation, give not way to hopeless sorrow; write no bitter things against yourselves; salute with thankfulness the angel of hope, and say no more, "My soul refused to be comforted."

My main bent, this morning, to which I have set my whole soul, is to deal with these mourners who are seeking Christ, but up till now have sought him in vain. Convinced of sin, awakened and alarmed, these unhappy ones tarry long outside the gate of mercy, shivering in the cold, pining to enter into the banquet which invites them, but declining to pass through the gate which stands wide open for them. Sullenly—no, I will not use so hard a word—tremblingly they refuse to enter within mercy's open door, although infinite love itself cries to them, "Come, and welcome: enter, and be blessed."

I. Concerning so deplorable a state of heart, alas! still so common, we will remark in the first place that IT IS VERY WONDERFUL.

It is a most surprising thing that there should be in this world persons who have the richest consolation near to hand, and persistently refuse to partake of it. It seems so unnatural, that if we had not been con\-\vinced by abundant observation, we should deem it impossible that any miserable soul should refuse to be comforted. Doth the ox refuse its fodder? Will the lion turn from his meat? Or the eagle loathe its nest? The refusal of consolation is the more singular because *the most admirable comfort is within reach*. Sin can be forgiven; sin has been forgiven; Christ has made an atonement for it. God is graciously willing to accept any sinner that comes to him confessing his trans\-\gressions, and trusting in the blood of the Lord Jesus. God waiteth to be gracious. He is not hard nor harsh; he is full of mercy; he delights to pardon the penitent, and is never more revealed in the glory of his Godhead than when he is accepting the unworthy through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is so much comfort in the word of God that it were as easy to mete the heavens above, or set the limits of space, as to measure the grace revealed therein. You may seek, if you will, to comprehend all the sweetness of divine love, but you cannot, for it passeth knowledge. Like the vast expanse of the ocean is the abounding goodness of God made manifest in Jesus Christ. Wonderful is it, then, that men refuse to receive what is so lavishly provided. It is said that some years ago, a vessel sailing on the northern coast of the South American continent, was observed to make signals of distress. When hailed by another vessel, they reported themselves as "Dying for water!" "Dip it up then," was the response, "you are in the mouth of the Amazon river." There was fresh water all around them, they had nothing to do but to dip it up, and yet they were dying of thirst, because they thought themselves to be surrounded by the salt sea. How often are men ignorant of their mercies! How sad, that they should perish for lack of knowledge!

But suppose after the sailors had received the joyful information, they had still refused to draw up the water which was in boundless plenty all around them, would it not have been a marvel? Would you not at once conclude that madness had taken hold upon the cap\-\tain and his crew? Yet, so great, dear friends, is the madness of many who hear the gospel, and know that there is mercy provided for sinners, that unless the Holy Spirit interferes they will perish, not through ignorance, but because, for some cause or other, like the Jews of old, they judge themselves "unworthy of everlasting life," and exclude

themselves from the gospel, refusing to be comforted. This is the more remarkable because *the comfort provided is so safe*. Were there suspicions that the comforts of the gospel would prove delusive, that they would only foster presumption, and so destroy the soul, men would be wise to start back as from a poison-cup; but many have satisfied themselves at this life-giving stream, not one has been injured, but all who have partaken have been eternally blessed. Why, then, doth the thirsty soul hesitate, while the river, clear as crystal, flows at his feet? Moreover, *the comfort of the gospel is most suitable*, it is *fully adapted* to the sinful, the weak, and the broken-hearted, adapted to those who are crushed by their need of mercy, and adapted equally as much to those who are least sensible of their want of it. The gospel bears a balm in its hand suited to the sinner in his worst estate, when he has no good thing about him, and nothing within which can, by possibility, be a ground of hope. Does not the gospel declare that Christ died for the ungodly? Is it not a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom, said the apostle, "I am chief"? Is not the gospel intended even for those who are dead in sin? Read we not such words as these, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ (by grace are ye saved)"? Are not the invitations of the gospel, so far as we can judge, just the kindest, tenderest, and most attractive that could be penned and addressed at the worst emergency in which a sinner can be placed? "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." No qualifying adjectives are used to set forth a degree of goodness in the person invited, but the wicked are bidden to come and the unrighteous are commanded to turn to God. The invitation deals with base, naked, unimproved sinnership. Grace seeks for misery, unworthiness, guilt, helplessness, and nothing else. Not because we are good, but because the Lord is gracious, we are bidden to believe in the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and so to receive comfort. Strange that where consolation is so plentiful where comfort is so safe, where the heart-cheer is so suitable, souls should be found by thousands who refuse to be comforted.

This fact grows the more remarkable because *these persons greatly need comfort*, and from what they say, and I trust also from what they feel, you might infer that comfort was the very thing they would clutch at as a drowning man at a rope. Why, they scarcely sleep at night by reason of their fears. By day their faces betray the sorrow, which, like a tumultuous sea rages within. They can scarcely speak a cheerful sentence. They make their household miserable; the infection of their sorrow is caught by others. You would think that the very moment the word "hope" was whispered in their ears, they would leap towards it at once; but it is not so. You may put the gospel into what shape you please, and yet these poor souls who need your pity, though, I fear, they must also have your blame, refuse to be comforted. Though the food be placed before them, their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw near unto the gates of death; yea, you may even put the heavenly cordial into their very mouths, but they will not receive the spiritual nutriment; they pine in hunger rather than partake in what divine love provides.

Need I enlarge on this strange infatuation? It is a monstrosity unparalleled in nature.

When the dove was weary, she recollects the ark, and flew into Noah's hand at once;

these are weary and they know the ark, but they will not fly to it. When an Israelite had slain, inadvertently, his fellow, he knew the city of refuge, he feared the avenger of blood, and he fled along the road to the place of safety; but these know the refuge, and every Sabbath we set up the sign-posts along the road, but yet they come not to find salvation. The destitute waifs and strays of the streets of London find out the night refuge and ask for shelter; they cluster round our workhouse doors, like sparrows under the eaves of a building on a rainy day; they piteously crave for lodging and a crust of bread; yet crowds of poor benighted spirits, when the house of mercy is lighted up and the invitation is plainly written in bold letters, "Whosoever will, let him turn in hither," will not come, but prove the truth of Watts' verse

" Thousands make a wretched choice
And rather starve than come."

'Tis strange, 'tis passing strange, 'tis wonderful!

II. Secondly, this wonderful madness has a method in it, and MAY BE VARIOUSLY ACCOUNTED FOR.

In many, their refusal to be comforted arises from *bodily and mental disease*. It is in vain to ply with scriptural arguments those who are in more urgent need of healing medicine, or generous diet, or a change of air. There is so close a connection between the sphere of the physician and the divine, that they do well to hunt in couples when chasing the delusions of morbid humanity; and I am persuaded there are not a few cases in which the minister's presence is of small account until the physician shall first of all wisely have discharged his part. I shall not, this morning, therefore, further allude to characters out of my line of practice, but I shall speak of those whose refusal to accept comfort arises from moral rather than physical disease.

In some the monstrous refusal is suggested by a *proud dislike to the plan of salvation*. They would be comforted, ay, that they would, but may they not do something to earn eternal life? May they not at least contribute a feeling or emotion? May they not prepare themselves for Christ? Must salvation be all gratis? Must they be received into the house of mercy as paupers? Must they come with no other cry but "God be merciful to me a sinner"? Must it come to this—to be stripped, to have every rag of one's own righteousness torn away, as well righteousness of feeling as righteousness of doing? Must the whole head be confessedly sick, and the whole heart faint, and the man lie before Jesus as utterly undone and ruined, to take everything from the hand of the crucified Saviour? Ah! then, saith flesh and blood, I will not have it. The crest is not easy to cleave in twain; the banner of self is upheld by a giant standard-bearer; it floats on high long after the battle has been lost. But what folly! Forsooth, for the sake of indulging a foolish dignity we will not be comforted. O sir, down with you and your dignity: I beseech you, bow down now before the feet of Jesus, and kiss the feet which were nailed for your sins. Roll yourself and your glory in the dust. What are you but an unclean thing, and what are your righteousnesses but filthy rags? O take Christ to be your all-in-all, and you shall have comfort this very morning; let not pride prompt a fresh refusal, but be wise and submit to sovereign grace.

In others it is not pride, but *an unholy resolve to retain some favourite sin*. In most cases when the Christian minister tries to heal a wound that has long been bleeding, he probes and probes again with his lancet, wondering why the wound will not heal. It seems to him that all the circumstances augur a successful healing of the wound. He cannot imagine why it still continues to bleed, but at last he finds out the secret, "Ah, here I have it; here is an extraneous substance which continually frets and aggravates the wound. It cannot heal while this grit of sin lies within it." In some cases we have found out that the sorrowing person indulged still in a secret vice, or kept the society of the ungodly, or was undutiful to parents, or unforgiving, or slothful, or practised that hideous sin, secret drunkenness. In any such case, if the man resolves, "I will not give up this sin," do you wonder if he is not comforted? Would not it be an awful thing if he were? When a man carries a corroding substance within his soul, if his wound is filmed over, an internal disease will come of it and prove deadly. I pray God none of you may ever get comfort till you get rid of every known sin and are able to say

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from its throne,
And worship only thee."

There must be a plucking out of the right eye and a losing of the right arm, if we are to inherit eternal life: foolish indeed is he, who for the sake of some paltry sin—a sin which he himself despises, a sin which he would not dare to confess into the ears of another—continues to reject Christ. Might I take such a one by the hand and say, "My brother, my sister, give it up. Oh, for God's sake, hate the accursed thing, and come now with me! Confess to Jesus, who will forgive all your foolishness and accept you this morning, so that no longer you shall refuse to be comforted."

Some refuse to be comforted because of *an obstinate determination only to be comforted in a way of their own selecting*. They have read the life of a certain good man who was saved with a particular kind of ex\perience. "Now," say they, "if I feel like that man, then I shall conclude I am saved." Many have hit upon the experience of Mr. Bunyan, in "Grace Abounding;" they have said, "Now, I must be brought just as John Bunyan was, or else I will not believe." Another has said, "I must tread the path which John Newton trod—my feet must be placed in the very marks where his feet went down, or else I cannot believe in Jesus Christ." But, my dear friend, what reason have you for expecting that God will yield to your self-will, and what justification have you for prescribing to the Great Physician the methods of his cure? Oh, if he do but bring me to heaven, I will bless him, though he conduct me by the gates of hell. If I be but brought to see the King in his beauty, in the land which is very far off, it shall make no trouble to my heart by what method of experience he brings me there. Come, lay aside this foolish choosing of yours, and say, "Lord, do but have mercy on me, do but give me to trust thy dear Son, and my whims and my fancies shall be given up."

I fear, in a great many, there is another reason for this refusing to be comforted, namely, *a dishonouring disbelief in the love and goodness and truthfulness of God*. They do not believe God to be gracious; they think him a tyrant, or if not quite that, yet one so stern

that a sinner had need plead and beg full many a day before the stern heart of God will be touched. Oh, but you do not know my God! What is he? He is love. I tell you he wants no persuading to have mercy any more than the sun needs to be persuaded to shine, or a fountain to pour out its streams. It is the nature of God to be gracious. He is never so godlike as when he is bestowing mercy. "Judgment is his strange work;" it is his lefthanded work; but mercy, the last manifested of his attributes, is his Benjamin, the child of his right hand. He delights to exercise it. Is it not so written, "He delighteth in mercy"? Alas! alas! that God should be slandered by those to whom he speaks so lovingly! "As I live, saith the Lord," here he takes an oath, and will you not believe him? "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked should turn from his way and live." "Turn ye, turn ye! Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" He even seems to turn beggar to his own creatures, and to plead with them to come to him. His bowels yearn as he cries, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man." O do not, I pray you, be unbelieving any longer, but believe God's word and oath, and accept the comfort which he freely offers to you this morning in the words of his gospel.

Some, however, have refused comfort so long, that they have grown into *the habit of despair*. Ah! it is a dangerous habit, and trembles on the brink of hell. Every moment in which it is indulged a man grows inured to it. It is like the cold of the frigid zone, which benumbs the traveller after awhile, till he feels nothing, and drops into slumber, and from that into death. Some have despaired and despaired until they had reason for despair, and until despair brought them into hell. Despair has hardened some men's hearts till they have been ready to commit sins which hope would have rendered impossible to them. Beware of nursing despondency. Does it creep upon you to-day through unbelief? O shake it off if possible! Cry to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to loose you from this snare of the fowler; for, depend upon it, doubting God is a net of Satan, and blessed is he who escapes its toils. Believing in God strengthens the soul and brings us both holiness and happiness, but distrusting, and suspecting, and surmising, and fearing, hardens the heart, and renders us less likely ever to come to God. Beware of despair; and may you, if you have fallen into this evil habit, be snatched from it as the brand from the burning, and delivered by the Lord, who looseth his prisoner.

III. Thirdly, this remarkable piece of folly ASSUMES DIVERS FORMS.

If I were to give a catalogue of the symptoms of this disease which I have met with, and have jotted down in my memory, I should need not an hour, but a month; for as each man hath something peculiar to himself, so each form of this melancholy bears about it a measure of distinctness. I can scarcely put them under divers heads and species: they are too many and too mixed. I think they say a sheep has so many diseases that you cannot count them; and I am sure men have a great many more mental maladies than I can tell.

You might as well count the sands on the sea-shore as enumerate the soul's diseases. But certain forms are very common. For instance, one is *a persistent misrepresentation of the gospel*, as though it claimed some hard thing of us. Persons have been sitting in these

seats now for years, who have heard us say, and who know the truth of it, from God's word, that all that is asked of the sinner is that he should trust in the work which Jesus Christ has wrought out—should trust Christ, in fact. We have in all manner of ways, as numerous and varied as our ingenuity could suggest, sought to show that there is nothing for the sinner to do, that he is to be nothing, but just get out of the way, and let Christ and the grace of God be everything; we have tried to show that to trust in Christ, which is the great saving act, is looking to him, resting on him, depending on him; we have multiplied figures and metaphors to make this plain, and yet as soon as ever we begin to talk to some of these who refuse to be comforted, they say, "But I am afraid, sir, that I have never been sufficiently made to feel the evil of sin." Now, did we ever say that feeling of sin was the great saving grace? Does not the word of God put it over and over again, that believing saves the soul, not feeling? Yet these people virtually deny the gospel, and set up another gospel; a gospel of feeling in the place of a gospel of trusting. "Oh! but," they will then say, "I have had these desires so many times before, and they have all gone, cannot expect that I should be accepted now." This is another denial of the gospel again. They make it out that God will only accept those who have not experienced good desires before, and repressed them. They reduce the gospel into this kind of thing: Ho, you who never had desires before, and never repressed them, you may come; whereas the gospel saith, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." I could not give you all the shapes and ways in which they will evade and mystify the gospel, but assuredly they use as much ingenuity to make themselves unhappy, as the most ardent spirit that ever lived ever used to discover a country or to win a crown.

Another shape of this malady is this: *many continually and persistently underestimate the power of the precious blood of Jesus*. Not, if you brought them to look, that they would dare affirm that Jesus could not save, or that his blood could not pardon sin, but, virtually, it comes to that. "Oh, I am such a sinner!" And what if you are? Did not Christ come to save sinners, even the very chief? What has the greatness of your sinfulness to do with it? Is not Christ a greater Saviour than you are a sinner; towering high the mountain of his mercy far outtops the hills of your guiltiness? Yes, but you do not think so. Ay, and herein you limit the efficacy of an infinite atonement, and so dishonour the blood of Jesus Christ. There are some who will then say, "But I have sinned such-and-such a sin." What, and cannot the blood of Jesus wash that away? "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." There is no sin which thou canst by any possibility have committed, which Jesus cannot pardon, if thou wilt come to him and trust him; for "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Why, believe me, sinner, though thy sin is such that of itself it will damn thee to all eternity, beyond all hope, though it is such that could thy tears for ever flow, not a particle of it could ever be washed out, yet in a moment it shall vanish if thou dost but now trust in that bleeding Saviour. There is nothing in thy sin that now can obstruct the power of the bleeding Saviour. God will at once forgive thee. But I know that thou wilt still slander my Lord Jesus, and refuse his comfort. I pray him therefore to forgive thee this wrong, and bring thee, by his Holy Spirit, into a saner mind, to believe that he is able and willing, and to doubt no more.

Many cast their doubts into the shape of *foolish inferences drawn from the doctrine of predestination*. I do not find that the doctrine of predestination impresses people in the

way of sadness in any way except that of religion. Everybody believes that there is a predesti\-\nation about the casting of lots, and yet the spirit of gambling is rife everywhere, and men in crowds subscribe to the public lotteries, which to our shame are still tolerated. They know that only two or three can win a large prize, yet away goes the money, and nobody stands at the officedoor and says, "I shall not invest my money, because if I am to get a prize I shall get a prize, and if I am not to win a prize I shall not do so." Men are not such fools when they come to things of common life as they are when they deal with religion. This predestin\-\ation sticks in the way of many as a huge stumbling-block when they come to the things of God. The fact is, there is nothing in predestin\-\ation to stumble a man; the evil lies in what he chooses to make of it. When a man wants to beat a dog, they say he can always find a stick to do it with; and when a man wants to find excuses for not believing in Christ, he can always discover one somewhere or other. For this cause so many run to this predestination doctrine, because it happens to be a handy place of resort. Now, God has a people whom he will save, a chosen and special people, redeemed by the blood of Christ; but there is no more in that doctrine to deny the other grand truth that whosoever believeth in Jesus Christ is not condemned, than there is in the fact that Abyssinia is in Africa, to contradict the doctrine that Hindostan is in Asia. They are two truths which stand to\-\gether, and though it may not always be easy for us to reconcile them, it would be more difficult to make them disagree. There never seems to me to be any need to reconcile the two truths, nor, indeed, any practical difficulty in the matter; the difficulty is metaphysical, and what have lost sinners to do with metaphysics? Fixed is everything, from the motion of a grain of dust in the summer's wind to the revolu\-\tion of a planet in its orbit, and yet man is as free as if there was no God, as independent an actor as if everything were left to chance. I see indelible marks both of predestination and free agency everywhere in God's universe.

Then why do you ask questions about your elec\-\tion when God says, "whosoever will"? It is foolish to stand and ask whether you are ordained to come when the invitation bids you come. Come, and you are ordained to come; stay away, and you deserve to perish. Yonder is the gate of the hospital for sick souls, and over it is written, "Whosoever will, let him come," and you stand outside that house of mercy, and say, "I do not know whether I am ordained to enter." There is the invitation, man! Why are you so mad?

Would you talk like that at Guy's or at Bartholomew's Hospital? Would you say to the kind persons who picked you up in the street, and carried you to the hospital, "Oh, for goodness' sake, do not take me in, I do not know whether I am ordained to go in or not"? You know the hospital was built for such as are sick and wounded, and when you are taken in you perceive that it was built for you. I do not know how you are to find whether you were ordained to enter the hospital or not, except by getting in; and I do not know how you are to find out your election to salvation, except by trusting Jesus Christ, who bids you trust, and pro\-\mises that if you do so you shall be saved. You may smile, but these things which to some of us are like spiders' nets, through which we break, are like nets of iron to those desponding ones whose soul re\-\fuseth to be comforted.

I have known others, and here I shall close this list, who have tried to find a hole in which to hide their eyes from the comforting light in the thought of *the unpardonable sin*. The greatest divines who have written on this subject have never been able to prove anything

about it, except that all the other divines are wrong. I have never yet read a book upon the subject which did not, one-half of it, consist in proving that all who had written before knew nothing at all on the subject, and I have come to the conclusion, when I have finished each treatise, that the writer was about as right as his predecessors, and no more. Whatever the unpardonable sin may be, and perhaps it is different in every person—perhaps it is a point of sin in each one, a filling up of his measure, beyond which there is no more hope of mercy—whatever it is, there is one thing that is sure, that no man who feels his need of Christ, and sincerely desires to be saved, can have committed that sin at all. If you had committed that sin, it would be to you death. "There is a sin which is unto death." Now, death puts an end to feeling. You would be given up to hardness and to incorrigible impenitence. The reason why you could not be saved would be because your will would become fast set against all good, and you never would will to be saved. For there is no difficulty in salvation when the will is made right; and if thou hast a will, and God has made thee willing to come to Christ and to be saved, thou hast no more committed the unpardonable sin than has the angel Gabriel who stands at God's right hand. If thy heart palpitates still with fear, if thy soul still trembles before the law of God, and dreads his wrath, then still art thou within the bounds of mercy; and the silver trumpet sounds this morning sweet and shrill, "Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

IV. We will not continue that dreary catalogue, but turn to a fourth consideration, namely, that this refusal to be comforted INVOLVES MUCH OF WRONG.

Much of it we can readily forgive; still we must mention it. When you hear the gospel and refuse to be comforted by it, there is a wrong done to the minister of God. He sympathises with you, he desires to comfort you, and it troubles him when he puts before you the cup of salvation, and you refuse to take it. Now, I do not say that we in our private persons claim any great respect from you, but I do say that to reject God's ambassador may not be a light sin, and to cause the man whom God sends to speak words of mercy to you to go with a heavy heart again and again to his knees, may be such a sin as will rankle in your soul in years to come, if it be not repented of.

But worse than that, you wrong God's gospel. Every time you refuse to be comforted, you do as good as say, "The gospel is of no use to me; I do not esteem it; I will not have it." You put it away as though it were a thing of nought. You wrong this precious Bible. It is full of consoling promises, and you read it, and you seem to say, "It is all chaff." You act as if you had winnowed it and found no food in it. It is a barren wilderness to you. Oh, but the Bible does not deserve to have such a slur cast upon it.

You do wrong to the dear friends who try to comfort you. Why should they so often bring you with loving hands the words of comfort and you put them away?

Above all, you do wrong to your God, to Jesus, and to his Holy Spirit. The crucifixion of Christ is repeated by your rejection of Christ. That unkind, ungenerous thought, that he is unwilling to forgive, crucifies him afresh. Grieve not the Holy Spirit—

"He's waited long, is waiting still;
You use no other friend so ill."

He is the Spirit of consolation, and when you refuse the consolation, you virtually reject him, reject him to your shame.

Think, dear friends, wherever you may be this morning, your refusing to be comforted is very wrong, because it is depriving the church of what you might do for it. Oh, if you became a cheerful Christian, what a mother in Israel you might be! I think I hear you sing as the virgin did of old, "He hath remembered the low estate of his hand-maiden." How would you rejoice with Hannah that "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes." How would your exultant psalm go up to heaven, "He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away."

The world—what a wrong you are doing to it! Why, that part of the world which comes under your influence is led to say, "Religion makes that woman miserable: it is religion which makes that man so sad." You know it is not so. But they put it down to it—they say, "Religion drives people mad." I would sooner loose this right hand, and this right eye too, than have such a thing said of my religion. I cannot bear, when I do anything wrong that men should say, "That's your Christianity." If they lay the blame on me, who so well deserved it, then let me bear it; but to lay it on the cross of Christ—oh!this makes a man shudder.

V. I will close with this remark—that SUCH A REFUSAL SHOULD NOT BE PERSISTED IN.

It is unreasonable to be sad when you might rejoice; it is *unreasonable* to be wretched when mercy provides every cause for making you happy. Why art thou sad, and why is thy countenance fallen? If there were no Saviour, no Holy Spirit, no Father willing to forgive, you might go your way and put an end to your existence in despair; but while all this grace is ready for you, why not take it?One would think you were like Tantalus, placed up to his neck in water, which, when he tried to drink thereof, receded from his lips; but you are in no such condition. Instead of the water flowing away from you, it is rippling up to your lips; it is inviting you but to open your mouth and receive it.

While it is unreasonable to continue such a persistence, it is also *most weakening* to you. Every hour that you continue sad you spoil the possibilities of your getting out of that sadness. You are dissolving the strength even of your bodily frame; and, as for your soul, the pillars thereof are being shaken.

And, mark you, it is most dangerous, too; for may be—oh, I pray God it may not be!—it may be, that God, who gives you light, when he sees you shut your eyes again, will say, "Let his sun be darkened and his moon be turned into blood. The creature which I made for light rejects it, and no light shall ever come to it henceforth, even for ever." The King who kills the fatlings and makes ready the feast, and brings you to the table, if he sees you still refuse to partake, may swear in his wrath that you shall not eat of his supper. I have known parents,when their children cried for nothing, take care to give them something to cry for; and, may be, if you are miserable when there is no cause for it, you may have cause for it—cause that will never end. Oh! by the blood and wounds of Jesus, by the overflowing heart of God, by the eternal promises of grace, by the covenant which God hath made with sinners in the person of his Son, by the Holy Ghost the Comforter, put not from you the consolation which God provides; say no longer, "My soul refuseth

to be comforted;" but cast yourself at Jesus'feet, and trust in him, and you are saved. God bless you and grant this prayer for Jesus' sake. Amen.