

THE MISERY OF THE LOST

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The soul of man is susceptible of an intense degree of unhappiness. Even in this world much misery is endured; but in the world to come, hope is a stranger, and there are no alleviating circumstances.

The misery of the damned has by theologians been divided into that of *loss* and that of *sense*—the one produced by the **loss of good possessed or once attainable**, the other arising from the **positive infliction of punishment**. But though this distinction has a foundation as it relates to the cause of the sinner's misery, yet, as it regards the feeling itself, there is no reason for making any distinction. All misery is felt according to its nature and intensity, and therefore is pain of sense, or sensible pain, whatever may be its cause. So the question whether the fire of hell is a material fire, is of no importance; for if I feel a pang of misery at any moment, it matters nothing whether it is produced by a material or immaterial, by a privative or positive cause.

Under the general name of **misery**, many species of suffering are included; all, however, agreeing in this, that the sensation is painful. The feeling of fear is a very painful emotion, but in its nature very different from remorse. Excessive pain, in our present state, may be experienced through the nerves of sensation; but even here these sufferings differ, not only in degree, but in kind. The headache, toothache, and rheumatism, are all, severe pains, but they are not the same; and these bodily pains differ exceedingly from the feelings of remorse, or despair.

Our capacity of pain seems to bear an exact proportion to our susceptibility of pleasure. Indeed, the same faculties and affections which are the sources of our happiness when the objects suited to them are possessed, become the causes of our misery when deprived of those objects. By the same faculty we perceive the beauties and the deformities of objects; the same moral sense is the instrument of the most exalted and soul-satisfying pleasure, and of the most intolerable anguish of which the soul is capable. Every affection and appetite affords pleasure when duly exercised on its proper object; but deprived of this, becomes a source of intense pain.

Though the nature of future misery to all lost souls is the same, yet the degree may differ to an extent which no man can estimate. Some divines have maintained that the future happiness of the righteous will be equal, as eternal life is the free gift of God; but none, I believe, have ever held that the punishment of the lost will be equal. The Scriptures abundantly teach that every man will be judged according to the deeds done in the body; and as the sins of different individuals are immensely different in guilt, justice demands that their punishment should be proportioned to the demerit of the sinner. Our Savior most explicitly teaches this doctrine when he says, "That servant who knew his master's will, and prepared not himself, shall be beaten with **many** stripes; but he who knew not his master's will, and yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with **few** stripes."

The guilt of sin is not measured merely or principally by the external act, but by the light and advantages enjoyed by some above others. The difference between sins against light and sins of ignorance, is a matter concerning which common-sense gives a judgment consonant with the rule laid down by our Lord. It does not appear that the cities of Galilee, where Christ spent most of his time, and where he wrought most of his beneficent miracles, were remarkable for external acts of immorality; and yet their sins were greater than those of cities proverbial for their wickedness, and consequently their punishment would be greater. His words should never be forgotten: Then He proceeded to denounce the towns where most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago! But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to Hell. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you." (Matthew 11:20-24)

These are words of dreadful import, and are as applicable to neglectors of the gospel and impenitent sinners now, as to those devoted cities. Many, because their external conduct is decent and moral, persuade themselves that their punishment will be light; but in view of the words cited above, it will be far more tolerable for the vilest of the heathen than for them, if they continue in their impenitence and neglect of the great salvation. Certainly gospel-neglectors, however

decent in their external behavior, will sink very deep into the abyss of misery. Among these, however, there will be a great difference. Some, alas, who sinned malignantly against light, will sink to the lowest gulf in hell.

To describe the extreme misery of lost souls is painful, both to the writer and the reader. If we would give way to our sympathies and compassionate feelings, we would not only exclude this awful subject from our discourses, but from our creed. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that it occasions a conflict to reconcile our reason to the reality of such intense and interminable sufferings as are described in the word of God; and plausible arguments, derived from the goodness of God, might be constructed against the doctrine of so great future misery. But all such arguments would operate equally against the existence of sin and misery in this world, which, alas, are known too well to be facts which none can deny, and of which every individual is a witness.

When God speaks, human reason and sentimental feelings should be silent. He knows what justice demands, and what can be done consistently with his attributes; but man is of yesterday, and knows nothing. Suppose a child five or six years old should undertake to sit in judgment on the acts of government, and to decide whether its penal laws were just or unjust, and whether capital punishments ought to be inflicted on murderers, or whether a war was just and necessary; who would expect a correct judgment from an infant? But such a child is better qualified to decide on the most complicated schemes of human policy, than man to judge of the propriety of the divine administration.

Impenitent men are apt to harden themselves against the awful denunciations of divine wrath contained in the Bible, and to cherish unkind feelings towards the ministers who bring out plainly and authoritatively the doctrine of the New Testament on this subject. And it cannot be denied, that some preachers denounce the terrors of the law against transgressors in a style and manner adapted rather to irritate than to convince. They speak almost as if they took pleasure in these awful threatenings, and as if they had nothing to fear for themselves. No doubt many a zealous preacher has passed sentence on himself, and has actually suffered those torments which he denounced against others!

I am therefore disposed to present this subject in a light which cannot give offence. Instead of representing the danger to which others are exposed, I will make the case my own. It behoves me to "tremble at

the word of the Lord," as much as others; and as I am a sinner, and therefore naturally subject to the penalty of the law, and liable to be misled by the deceitfulness of my heart to cherish false hopes, I will endeavor to realize to myself the feelings which I shall experience, if it should be my unhappy lot to die out of the favor of God.

It would seem that **THE FIRST MOMENT AFTER DEATH** must be one of unparalleled misery. My first reflection would be,

"I am lost forever—all hope of happiness or relief is gone from my miserable soul! The blackness of darkness is round about me! No ray of light dawns on my wretched soul! Despair, terrible despair has now seized upon me, and must blacken every prospect to all eternity! While in the world, I could contrive to turn away my thoughts from the disagreeable subject; but now, my misery, like a heavy burden, presses on me, and is ever present—go where I will, do what I will.

"While in the body, and engaged in secular pursuits, I entertained a secret hope that there might be some mistake respecting the extreme misery of the damned, or that there might possibly be some way of escape not revealed; but now all these idle notions have fled like a dream when one awakes. I find hell to be no fable, but a dreadful reality. I find that the preachers, so far from exaggerating the misery of the lost, had no adequate conception of the wretchedness of a soul cast off from God forever, and doomed to dwell in everlasting burnings! Oh horrible! Horrible! I am then undone—forever undone! In all former distresses I could cry for mercy; but now I have passed beyond the reach of mercy!

"For the sake of momentary enjoyments, and worthless riches and honors, I have bartered away my soul. Accursed folly! What benefit can I now derive from those earthly pleasures and possessions? They only serve as fuel to the flames which consume me. O for one drop of water to cool my tongue! But for this I beg in vain. The time for prayer and for mercy has gone by, and my soul is lost, lost, lost! And through eternity I must expect no deliverance, no relief, nor even the slightest mitigation of my misery! Woe, woe, woe is me! It had been infinitely better for me never to have been born!

"If I had not enjoyed the offers of the gospel, if pardon and reconciliation had not been within my reach, and often urged upon me, my anguish would not be so excruciating. But this it is which wrings my heart with unspeakable anguish—that I might have escaped all this

misery! Had it not been for my own sin and folly, I might before now have been in heaven. Others who heard the same sermons, and belonged to the same family, are now in eternal glory—while I am tormented in this flame! Oh that I could cease to be; but to fly from existence is impossible.

"Here I am surrounded by wretches as miserable as myself, but their company rather aggravates than mitigates my soul's anguish. I am reproached and cursed by all who were ever led by my counsel or example into the ways of iniquity. They dreadfully scowl upon me.

"And the fiends of the pit, who were my seducers, now combine to taunt me with my folly. They never had the offers of mercy. The merits of a dying Savior were never offered to them. They seem to entertain a malignant pleasure—if pleasure it can be called—in witnessing my extreme misery. O wretched man, where can I flee? Is there no possible escape from this prison of despair? Can no one ever pass the gulf which separates this dismal abode from the regions of the blessed? None! None!

"Oh, if there could be a suicide of the soul, how happy would I be to escape from existence, and to plunge into the gulf of 'annihilation', which once seemed horrible to my apprehension, but now desirable. This would be an oblivion of all my misery. But in vain do I seek to die. Death flies from me. And here I see those deluded souls who, by doing violence to their own lives, vainly dreamed that they were escaping from misery; but alas, from a burden which with faith and patience might have been borne—they have leaped into a fiery furnace! They are now convinced of the dreadful sin and folly of suicide, but they cannot repeat the act here!

"May I hope that time will lessen the horrors and anguish of my wretched soul? Will my heart, so susceptible of the emotions of bitter anguish, by degrees become less sensible to these piercing pains, and be more able to bear up under this overwhelming weight of misery? This question can only be solved by experience: let me ask someone who has been suffering for thousands of years.

"Here comes Cain the first murderer, who is known still by having upon him the stain of a brother's blood. Suppose I speak to him—'Tell me, fellow-prisoner, who have long endured the pains of this infernal prison, whether by long continuance these miseries become more tolerable?' But why do I ask? the wretched fratricide is evidently writhing in keenest anguish. He is too miserable to speak, and too full

of malignity to gratify anyone. His guilty stain—the blood-spot—has not been burnt out by the fiercest fires of hell. No! see, he defies the Almighty. He blasphemes the God of heaven. He asks for no mitigation of his punishment now. His malignant, fiery spirit feeds on despair, and challenges his Avenger to do his worst.

"Oh, then, I see there is a **progression in wickedness** even in hell. This is the most appalling prospect of all—an endless progression in sin, and consequently an increase, instead of a diminution of misery, through the endless ages of eternity!"

Another dreadful point in the existence of the damned, will be **THE DAY OF JUDGMENT**. Great as is the misery of a lost soul when separated from the body, this is probably small when compared with the exceeding weight of misery which shall overtake it at the day of judgment. I must then endeavor to imagine what will be my feelings if I should be found on the left hand on that dreadful day.

As here in this present world, a large portion of our pleasures and pains are experienced through the body, I know no reason why it should not be so in the future world. Certainly the disembodied spirit is capable of none of these pains or pleasures. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that **the bodies of the damned will be so constructed as to be inlets to excruciating pains; just as the bodies of the saints will be instruments of refined, celestial pleasures**. The whole person is not complete without the body, and therefore the final sentence of condemnation will not be denounced until the body—the same body—is raised from the dead, and reunited to the soul; that having been partners in wickedness, they may be associated in enduring the deserved punishment of the deeds done in the body!

The state of the lost soul before the judgment, may be compared to that of a criminal confined in prison waiting for his trial. **Let me then imagine myself to have died unreconciled and impenitent**. At an unexpected time the sound of the last trumpet will be heard; and as it is the last trumpet, so it will be the loudest. The departed spirits confined in prison shall hear it, and their bodies, long crumbled to dust, shall hear it; and I shall certainly hear that awful, deeply penetrating sound, and I shall come forth—coerced by an irresistible power! I shall again be clothed with a body; but O, what sort of a body!

Among millions of millions I am forced to appear. O what solemn majesty in the Judge, now coming with all his holy angels—now seated on his great white throne. Solemn moment! The books are opened. There all my crimes of thought, word, and deed, are recorded—sins of omission as well as commission. O for a hiding-place under the rocks or caves! But no! I must appear—I must hear my sentence of condemnation and banishment. The misery of an age seems condensed into this moment. The tremendous sentence comes forth, "Depart, you cursed one, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Imagination fails—I can write no more! Experience must teach the rest.

The misery of those who are eternally lost, cannot be adequately conceived, much less expressed. It cannot be exaggerated by any description; and this will be manifest if we consider **WHAT THEY KNOW THEY HAVE LOST.**

All the good things which they enjoyed in this life they must leave behind. All their riches, honors, and sensual pleasures are left at death; and for these there will be no substitute in eternity. The wicked *cravings* of the immortal soul will continue, but there will be no longer any objects to gratify them; for lack of which, like some venomous creatures when wounded, they will turn and prey upon themselves.

A soul with its active powers and passions, must be miserable if deprived of all objects suited to its gratification. We know scarcely any misery on earth more intolerable than a human being perishing for lack of bread or water. Hunger and thirst, if not seasonably gratified, are the sources of most excruciating pain. And **the soul can never lose its desire of happiness.** How miserable, then, must it be when this insatiable desire meets with nothing to gratify it. It is strongly represented by our Savior in the case of the rich man in hell, who cried for one drop of water, and said, "I am tormented in this flame." The soul of the sinner will be its own chief tormentor. It is possible that all the torment experienced in hell, will be the natural consequence of sin.

Evil passions are in their very nature attended with misery; for as benevolent affections are pleasant—so malevolent feelings are accompanied with misery. Here in this present world, these evil passions are held under restraint; and while we are in the body, there are instinctive natural affections which counteract the wicked feelings which exist in the depraved heart; but in eternity all restraint will be removed, and the native wickedness of the heart will act itself out: there are no natural affections there—all will be **unmixed** malice,

envy, and wickedness. Let any person who is totally depraved be abandoned to himself—and he must be miserable! His own passions will become his everlasting tormentors. **He will carry a hell in his own bosom!**

But of all feelings of misery, none is so intolerable as *REMORSE*. The **conscience**, or moral faculty, as it is the principal source of the most pure and sublime enjoyment to the righteous; so it is, to the lost, *the scorpion which will forever sting the soul with inexpressible anguish!* The consciousness of having done wrong, of having sinned against God, and of being the cause of our own destruction—is a kind of hell as dreadful as any of which we can conceive. The lost soul will forever have the conviction clearly impressed—that it is its own destroyer—and that heaven with all its joys has been lost by its own sinful folly and neglect!

And the bitterest ingredient of all in the cup of misery is *despair*—black endless despair! Oh, if there was the most distant hope of release at some future period, it would mitigate the anguish of the suffering sinner. But hellish despair admits of no alleviation.

Men may here 'dream' of a deliverance from hell after a long time of suffering, but the delusion will vanish as soon as they enter eternity. They will then find that the word of God, which denounced eternal destruction on impenitent sinners, was not a vain threat; that God will not spare the guilty, but will punish them with everlasting destruction—just as He said He would.

O my soul, consider now how you will be able to endure such misery as must be experienced by all the lost, but especially by those who enjoyed the light of the gospel. Can you fortify yourself against all this misery? Will you be able to endure it with patience? Only imagine your condition millions of ages hence. Still writhing in anguish—still belching out horrid blasphemies—still covered with the blackness of darkness—still without a ray of hope! Not a moment's ease during this long period. O my soul, will you not make one vigorous effort to escape so great misery? Will you not strive to flee from the wrath to come? Life, eternal life, is still within your reach! Lay hold on the prize! Press on to the kingdom. Take refuge in the cross, and you will be safe!

"Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God!" (Romans 5:9)

"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Thessalonians 5:9)