

ZION'S SOLEMNITY

A SERMON

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“I will sing of mercy and judgment; unto you, O Lord, will I sing.” Psalm 101:1

SOME have thought that this Psalm contains the decision of David when he ascended the throne as to after what manner he should govern the kingdom, and after what manner he should manage his affairs; excluding from that kingdom all enemies and taking care of those who were his friends. But if we do take the Psalm in this light, David certainly did not carry out either personally or officially what this Psalm contains; for instead of his being all his lifetime and in all his practical movement what is here described, he failed very greatly in many things. I should therefore be disposed to think that we had better take the Psalm as the language of David's Lord; and if we take the Psalm as the language of David's Lord, we shall then see that there is a Person that was all that this Psalm describes; we shall then see there is a Person whose government is all that which is set forth in this Psalm. It is one of our comforts that when we meet with Scriptures that describe a perfection of character, and that perfection of character seems to be in the person himself; a perfection of abstract character, not a relative perfection; we can all understand that all idle people of God have a relative perfection, a perfection in Christ Jesus; but when we meet with those Scriptures that describe a person who is in himself perfect, free from fault naturally and free from fault practically; it is one of our comforts to know that while none of us answer to this description, for there is not a just man upon the earth that does good, and sins not, there is One that does answer to this description. And I am sure it will not be at all displeasing in the sight of the Lord for us to fall down at the footstool of his mercy, and confess before him that we ourselves do not answer to this character but that there is one that does; one that is glorious in the eyes of the Lord; one whom the Lord has appointed to be all this for us, as a pattern of what he will be to us, and what we are to be by him. Oh, gladly, gladly does the man that knows his own heart, gladly does he look under such circumstances to the Lord Jesus Christ. But nevertheless, though we view the Psalm thus, as the language of the Savior, there is much language that the Savior uses that his people can use as well; and I think that our text is a part of that language that may be adopted by the Christian as well as by the Savior himself; “I will sing of mercy and judgment; unto you O Lord, will I sing.” We have then this morning in our text, first, *the theme*; mercy and judgment; and secondly, *the joyfulness of that theme*, “I will sing of mercy and judgment; unto you, O Lord, will I sing.”

First: First then we have *the theme*; mercy and judgment. I will notice judgment first in contrast to mercy, and. then, secondly, judgment in union or oneness with mercy. First, I notice judgment in

contrast to mercy, or mercy in contrast to judgment. And here we are at once called again to notice the sovereignty of God, in having mercy upon whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens. When they sang of judgment, they had to say that the Lord had triumphed gloriously, that the horse and his rider he had cast into the sea; and that he had in mercy brought forth the people whom he had purchased, that he had guided them in his strength. Here then, when they saw the victory which God gave unto them, they could sing of mercy and of judgment. And so, we, when led to see something of the victory which the Lord Jesus Christ has wrought, we can also then sing of mercy and of judgment. I do feel there is a difficulty about this subject; because there is something in our natural feelings rather at war with it; when we look at the awfulness of being left to blindness and hardness, being left to the judgment of God, living in enmity to God, and dying in that state; and yet in time to come, when the people of God shall sing of the mercy that saved them, and of the judgment that is ministered unto the others; this is something we cannot, perhaps, in our present state very easily understand. But it will be so, that so completely will the people of God be on the Lord's side that as the Israelites sang of the judgment which he ministered to the Egyptians, so at the last great rising day, the judgment day, the final judgment, so entire will be the separation then of the Israelites from the Egyptians, of the wheat from the tares, of the sheep from the goats, and of the wise from the foolish, that when God shall minister judgment to those who are not his, even that part of the conduct of the Most High will be a theme of adoration with the saints; and they will sing of that judgment, they will acknowledge the righteousness of that judgment, in away solemn unto the last degree. "And again, they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever." So that just as the Israelites sang then of the judgment God ministered to the one, and the mercy he manifested unto them, so it will be ultimately; those who are saved shall sing of the judgment which God shall minister unto the lost. This, as I have already suggested, is indeed a fearful subject, an awful subject; and I cannot forbear stating here, though I must not go out of the circle of truth; but I cannot forbear here for one moment just saying that if the Lord has been pleased to open our eyes to that judgment which did await us, to that judgment which must have overtaken us, to that wrath which must have engulfed us, to that curse which must have encompassed us, to that hell which must have swallowed us up, and to that banishment from his presence which must have been our destiny; if he has opened our eyes to this, and brought us somewhat under the solemnity of his judgment; I am sure then we could not sing of judgment in that sense of the word; nor is it my intention to enlarge upon the idea of the saints singing of the judgment that shall be ministered to the lost; but suffice it to say, if our eyes are opened to see the judgment we were under, I am sure of one thing, that religion with us is not a plaything, that prayer with us is not a mere formal thing, that seeking the Lord with us is not a mere customary thing; that wishing to be found in Christ is not a mere temporary, ephemeral wish, here today and gone tomorrow; that our religion with us is of that solid and weighty kind that shall outweigh everything else; and if we have felt a little of the force of the Savior's questions, "what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" I know that my text speaks of joy; but it indicates at the same time something solemn; and something at the root, as it were, of the song of the saints that makes a reality of it. Ah my hearer, let me then this morning say that if you are still under God's judgment, you are hardened, and you are blinded; you do not see the state you are in; you have never trembled at his word; though the word of his judgment is as true and as sure as the word of his mercy; there is no difference. There stands the testimony; "He that believes not shall be damned he that believes shall be saved;" there stands the testimony, and that testimony can never, no, never be altered. It is therefore a solemn truth that the saved shall side with God in the final ministration of judgment; and while they sing

of mercy they shall also sing of judgment; I think this perhaps is the most solemn part of our text; because we have to show some senses in which mercy united with judgment, and judgment with mercy, where the Lord's people shall indeed sing of it; and that, I believe, which I am presently going to advance, is the chief meaning of our text. But I do not feel that I can pass away from this first part lightly. Oh, it is such an infinite mercy to have a heart religion; to feel for our own souls, to feel what we are and where we are; and to read the Bible not as a matter of form, but to see if there is anything there that suits us; if we can meet with the Lord there; whether the Lord may be pleased to meet with us there. I love cheerfulness; it is natural to me; I love natural cheerfulness in its place; and I am sure I love cheerfulness in godliness; but at the same time, religion that has no solemnity in it, religion that has no weight in it, secret trembling and sighing before God in it, is a religion that will never endure the storm; it is a religion that will never wear well ultimately; it is a religion at which Jordan will not be at all alarmed; Jordan would never be driven back by a religion that has no real root in the heart; there will be no going through the swelling of Jordan with safety without this heart work. "Of mercy and of judgment;" as though the Psalmist should say, if we take it as his language. Here I am, a poor sinner, lost and ruined, but mercy has saved me; judgment will overtake all those who are not brought before they die to feel their need of this mercy, and to seek this mercy; and as that judgment will be a righteous judgment, while I will sing of mercy, I will also sing of judgment; unto you, O Lord, will I sing.

But passing from this, I go on to where the people of God in a higher, I was going to say, a more pleasing sense of the word, sing of mercy and judgment; and that is where mercy and judgment met together, and that is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us take the words there and let us look at the delightful truth that the Lord has taken away your judgment. The law, that ministered the curse, that ministered to us the wrath, that ministered to us the terror, that ministered to us the trembling, that ministered to us the awful state, that ministered to us that when it were morning would to God it were evening, and when it were evening would to God it were morning; the sorrows, the griefs, the wounds, the bruises, the stripes, the terrible judgments, the bitter cup, the tempest of fire, the brimstone that belonged to us; all this met upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, my hearer, how you must love him; you must look at him and say, Ah, I never knew when I was in that state of nature that there was that accuracy and exactitude in the law of God that required actual suffering to the amount of the sin committed; that required actual obedience in accordance with the perfection and eternity of his law. And when you are brought to know that the Lord Jesus Christ has endured all, put it all away, and that in him judgment and mercy met together; here you may sing of what he endured; here you may sing of his wondrous death, of his deep sufferings, of his amazing love! Here everything is settled; think not there is a particle of the curse left, or a particle of wrath left, or a particle of the penalty left; all is completed; here mercy and truth meet together, here righteousness and peace embrace each other. And so, then, here we will sing of mercy and judgment; because mercy and judgment have so met together as to make, as I shall presently observe, our eternal salvation a matter of righteousness as well as a matter of mercy. Ah, when we look at the first part of our subject, namely, the awful judgments that await all that live and die dead in trespasses and in sins; and then look at the mercy of the Lord in opening our eyes, and bringing us to know where this mercy is, and to seek that mercy what gratitude! what gratitude this must produce in our minds, and hearts and souls, when the Lord blesses us with a sense thereof! And then we are led from the discriminating character of this mercy into the mediation of the Savior; and there, as I have said, see mercy and truth, mercy, and judgment, meet together; here we may sing of the mercy and sing of the judgment! "He has taken away your judgments; he has

cast out your enemy; you shall not see evil anymore,” “I will sing,” then, “of mercy this mercy which is from everlasting; and it is our mercy also that the mercy is to everlasting. The declaration is as positively future as it is in relation to the past; not only is the mercy from everlasting, but the mercy is also to everlasting. Here, then, my hearer, if our eyes are open to see or to know something of the things not seen by men as yet, and we are moved with fear towards Jesus Christ, there judgment is ended, there mercy and truth unite; there we want precious faith to believe it, and there we want the power of the Holy Spirit to so endear the Savior as to assure us of our interest in him. It is astonishing, but so it is, that the Lord leads his people just contrary to their natural feelings in ten thousand respects; and all to bring them off from all creature confidences, that their confidence may be in the Lord Jesus Christ, And then, in order to keep them from presumption, in order to keep them from an unhallowed spirit, in order to keep them from Antinomianism, for there is such a thing as real Antinomianism, no doubt about that, and there are such persons as real Antinomians, who are destitute of any godly fear; they make a great profession; and they are as sound in their heads in doctrine as a bell; as clear in their heads upon the theory of salvation as the sun at noon-day; and will hear no minister but is clear; and can split hairs to a nicety; and far, in mere letter argument, surpass many of the people of God; and yet such persons know nothing of real soul-trembling before God. Such persons are always comfortable; the strong man keeps the palace; the goods are in peace. They have a religious head, but an ungodly heart, a devilish heart, a heart inhabited by the devil; and such persons are always comfortable; no castings down; they have no changes; and therefore, they fear not God. Now the Lord, in order that his people should not get into this presumptuous, this unhallowed, daring, impudent way of speaking of eternal things; the Lord in order to keep his people from this, causes them under the hiding of his face to be very miserable. “You hid your face; and I was troubled.” So that if they go into the house of God, and the God of the house be not manifestly there, they hang their heads down; if they go to the Bible, and the God of the Bible be not seen, or any sweetness felt, they are discouraged; they go to the throne of grace, and they find no access to God; they are discouraged; and if they are at Babylon, they cannot say they are as happy as though they were at Zion; no, they hang their harps upon the willows; they sit down by the rivers of Babylon, and they weep when they remember Zion. “If I forget you, O Jerusalem let my right hand forget her cunning.” No! the soul that is born of God; the soul that has once had fellowship with Christ; when He hides his face; though that Christian man may, and often does under the hidings of the Lord’s face, that Christian man may rebel, very much rebel, against many of the Lord’s dealings with him; but nevertheless, being born of God there is the mourning of the dove; there is the chattering, as it were of the swallow; and there is the secret prayer, perhaps very faint, perhaps very low, but there is the secret prayer, O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me. Thus then, the Lord, while he brings a sinner to see the state he in as a sinner, and teaches that sinner that his judgments are righteous that his mercy is free; he then leads that sinner to the knowledge of Christ where judgment and mercy meet together, where everything is settled, where the soul is eternally free; but at the same time, the soul being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, can never be really happy without him. Oh, I do like it; I think that is a good sign for a living man, when he cannot get at anything spiritual, to be in trouble about it. As naturally, if I could get no food, if I were in the desert naturally; if I were parched, and there were no waters for me to drink; as I should have naturally, if I could get no clothes to wear; as I should have naturally, if there were no place where I could lay my head; as I should have naturally, if there were no place I could call my home; if this were the case naturally, we should feel it. And if we are born of God, we shall see some little analogy at least between our feelings spiritually and our feelings naturally. And hence David’s prayer was a wise prayer, and a reality

in it too; “Be you my strong habitation; whereunto I may continually resort.” And thus, where there is life in the soul, where the soul is prepared to sing of the judgment being taken away by Jesus Christ, and mercy flowing in by Jesus Christ; where the soul is prepared for this, that soul has many very many heart-searching’s at times. Of course, they have their dead, carnal careless seasons; but they are not at home in that deadness; there are times when they have deep heart-searching’s; “for the divisions of Reuben there were great searching’s of heart.” And such an one will say, Well, if Jesus Christ forsake me, and I have no interest in him, whatever will become of me if the Lord God of heaven and earth be not my friend; if he has not loved me, whatever will become of me? And if the Holy Spirit of God does not guide me into the land of uprightness; and I have no place whatever in the new Jerusalem; whatever will become of me? this poor dying life filled with thorns, filled with briers, filled with daily unexpected calamities, trials, and events, and death stalking about and cutting one down and another; O God, if you are pleased in the deeps of your sovereignty to forsake me, miserable me; woe is me, wretched me, good for me had I never been born. These are some of the reflections that will be felt in the inmost soul of the man who is born of God. May the Holy Spirit of God lead us more and more into the vitality and reality of these things; that as we draw near our journeys’ end we may feel we are prepared for the end; that as we draw near to Jordan, we may feel we are prepared for Jordan; that as we draw near to eternity we may feel we are prepared for eternity; and if we lift up our eyes to the hills, or to Mount Zion, and see the number there that no man can number, clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands, and standing without fault before the throne of God; may it be our happy lot so to realize the savor of Christ as to know that we are washed in his blood, and that we have victory in hope, and by and bye we shall have victory in hand, when we shall stand upon the vantage ground of Mount Zion, and cry out in one eternal anthem the truth of our text; “I will sing of mercy and judgment.”

You observe in our text that mercy stands first. So, you cannot sing of judgment until mercy comes; when mercy comes and delivers you, then you can sing of the righteousness of God’s judgments. When mercy comes, and you see that mercy is on your side, then you can sing of that judgment which Christ endured. I think then the text means these two things; first discriminating mercy; connecting it in contrast to righteousness, or the penalties that God inflicts upon his enemies; and then secondly that mercy and judgment mean mercy and judgment meeting in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many more senses in which the word “judgment” may be understood; but I shall now take only two more in this part. Judgment will mean also wisdom of arrangement. If a man intended to build a tower, he would sit down first and count the cost; go to work with judgment, and consider whether if he lay the foundation, he will be able to finish it; lest men begin to mock, and say, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or if he mean to go to war, he should first begin to consider whether he is able with ten thousand, to meet the king with twenty thousand. Such are the representations of Scripture on going to work with judgment. Now the Lord Jesus Christ intended to build his church, and he sat down, I had almost said, he sat down in eternity, and consulted; for we read of the counsel of God; the Eternal three consulted from all eternity as to this church; the determination was that a church should be built; then the question was, what shall be the foundation; who shall be the material? how shall it be built? And everything was so arranged, so settled; that the Lord saw his way clear to the end; and he saw who the people should be; he knew them; he chose them; he loved them, he gave them to his dear Son; and Jesus Christ came; and he is the foundation; and he has said that “upon this rock will I build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it;” that the top stone shall be brought home with shouting’s of grace, grace unto it. Whatever war the Savior entered into, he always entered into a

righteous war; for it is in righteousness that he judges and makes war; he always was the conqueror, and he always will be; this church shall be finished, this people shall be completed; and as he has wrought the victory, he gives that victory to them. Well then, friends, apply this; I am merely quoting the subject: now apply it. Go all through the Bible and watch the promises; look at the circumstances that took place between the time the promise was made and the time it was fulfilled; and see with what judgment the Lord had made arrangement. One thing occurs, another thing occurs, in appearance as contradictory to the promise as anything can well be. I need not remind you of Joseph; the circumstances that occurred between the time the Lord made the promises to him and the time they were fulfilled. I need not remind you of the promise that was made to Moses, and he in the wilderness forty years before the Lord called him to Egypt to work out that salvation to which the promise referred. I need not remind you of the other cases; and the circumstances that occurred between the time the promise was given and the time it was fulfilled; but you will see in all the circumstances that the Lord had arranged the matters with such care that it never failed. Joseph came to all the Lord designed he should come to; and so shall you, if you are a lover of this God, brought to a knowledge of this Jesus Christ, and brought to hope in him; whatever may take place between the time that you are first brought to taste the Lord is gracious, and the time of your ultimate possession of eternal glory, you will at last be led to see that the Lord had so well arranged matters that he has even made your very sins subservient; he has taken the life out of your sins, has atoned for them, and has made your very sins subservient to your eternal welfare; he has made everything you have met with entirely subservient to the working out of his eternal counsels. Was Satan ever so defeated? Was the enemy ever so nonplussed? Was a defeat ever so universal, as that of the circumstance of crucifying Jesus Christ? Oh, with what pleasure, peradventure it may be, Satan looked upon the lifeless body of Christ in the grave! Oh, with what delight did they view the stone rolled to the mouth of the sepulcher, and the Roman guard there! Ah we have stopped this Jesus at last; we have put an end to this religion at last: we shall hear no more of him. Little did they think that while they were thus delighted, the dear Redeemer had made their ungodliness made their murderous operations, and made every one of their doings, even Judas betraying him, that he had made everything subservient to the advancement of his own name, the advancement of his own conquest, the progress of his own kingdom, and the salvation of his people. My hearers, did not the Lord there make the worst doings ever perpetrated by man subservient to the noblest purposes of his everlasting love and mercy? Is not this to encourage us? Are things cloudy with you? Are they dark with you? Are you saying, "My hope and my strength are perished from the Lord;" and are you saying, "Why go I mourning all the day because of the oppression of the enemy? Lord, where are your former loving-kindnesses which you swore unto David?" Lord, if you are with us, why is all this come upon us? Are you thus mourning? Ah! the afterwards will come; when he will bring things round in that way which he himself has promised, and he gives you a kind word of direction under these difficulties; "Commit your way unto the Lord, and he shall bring it to pass." What shall he bring to pass? You want something that is wrong made right, he will do so; or you want some heavy mountain that seems to threaten to fall upon you and destroy you, lowered, he will do so; or you want some deep valley into which you are afraid to go exalted, he will do so. "Commit your way unto the Lord, and he shall bring it to pass." "He shall bring forth your righteousness." You have a righteousness if you are a believer; you have by faith a righteousness, and that righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus Christ; and "he shall bring forth your righteousness." Take notice of that; the minister may bring it forth in his testimony, and you may bring it forth in prayer. Are you led to say as said the Psalmist, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of your righteousness, even of your only." You may bring it

forth in meditation, and so far, so good. I don't say a word against this; but I do contend for this, that it is not until the Lord brings it forth that it is really done. "He shall bring forth your righteousness." When he brings in this righteousness as the waves of the sea; when he brings a man to justification, he points to that man and says, There, Satan, lay something to the charge of that man if you can; there, law, find fault with that man if you can; there, holiness, disapprove of that man if you can. It is a universal defiance of all things. The victory is thus by the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And notice, "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light." It was dark before with you, now it shall be light; it was night, but now it shall be day; everything shall be gladsome. "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment" ah! this is the judgment of justification, "as the noon day." I will sing of mercy, and I will sing of your wise arrangement; I will sing of the certainty of his truth; I will sing of judgment. Lord, you have acted with judgment. I found fault with this, and that, and the other, and with a great many things, and have even said. If I were God, I would keep my children better than that; I would not suffer them to be the subjects of so many weaknesses and troubles; I would have things a great deal better than they are. What, say some, do you talk in that blasphemous way? I feel I have a nature arrogant enough, impudent enough, presumptuous enough, and infidel enough so to talk. I feel that I have such workings within me. Perhaps I am not right in speaking this out; but I speak it out because, perhaps, Satan has some of you in this kind of snare, and he is saying, If you were a child of God, you would not talk like that; you would not be exercised like that. But you would be exercised like that; and then, by-and-bye, when the afterwards shall come, and the Lord shall put things right, you will say, I see now after all his dealings have been to make way for mercy, and all his dealings have been according to the arrangement; he has entered upon the matter of my eternal welfare with a wise judgment, carried on the affairs with good judgment, and he will terminate them with good judgment. Let not then, the wise man glory in his earthly wisdom, nor the mighty man glory in his earthly strength, nor the rich man glory in his earthly riches; "but let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord."

Then the last thought upon this matter is that of justification; there is the judgment of justification. And I am sure here this will, if possible, I was going to say, surpass all; no, this will be merely carrying out what the Savior has done, this will be merely carrying out the perfection of the Lord's dealings with us. The judgment of justification; that is the judgment with which the people of God shall be finally judged. And here they may sing of mercy and of judgment. There are but two judgments at the last great day, the one is the judgment of condemnation, and the other is the judgment of justification; they are both complete; the judgment of condemnation will be entire, proportioned to the crimes of the man; on the other hand, the judgment of justification will be complete, in accordance with the perfection that is in Christ Jesus the Lord. They shall sing in that sense of mercy and judgment. This judgment is recorded in many places in the Bible, which I must not stop now to bring before you. You know it is written that "It is God that justifies." So that the Lord will bring his people off at last without spot, or wrinkle, or blemish, or defect, or superfluity, or deformity, or any such thing. Ah, we have nothing to do but live; and then fall asleep, and go home into glorious, full possession. Sweet religion! blessed Jesus! wondrous mercy! Ah, when the Lord raises us up to an apprehension of these things, and assimilates us in our feelings to them, then what little things the things of time are in comparison of these eternal realities. "I will sing of mercy and judgment; unto you, O Lord, will I sing."

I must now say something in conclusion. “I will sing of mercy and judgment; unto you, O Lord, will I sing.” As the Lord is discriminating in his mercy towards his people, so they in return are discriminating towards him. As they, and they only, and no others, are his people, so on the other hand; he and he only, is their God. “Unto you, O Jehovah” for the original here is Jehovah; “will I sing.” It is therefore a contrast to false gods. I will be joyful with no other god, I will praise no other God, I will worship no other god, I will trust no other god, I will sing unto no other god, I will not mingle the songs of Zion with the songs of Babylon, though they are very kind in their invitations, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” Yes, we will begin the service with one of your hymns, and then the next shall be one of ours, and so we will mix it up, and be friendly. Oh, no, we will not: the harp shall hang on the willow as long as I live first; whatever sufferings may await me in the future, I can sing unto no god but the true God.

Our God is a God of supremacy, a God of sovereignty, a God of certainty. Take the 136th Psalm, and there you will find represented to you the God of our text; “O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endures forever.” God of gods, and Lord of lords; there he appears in his supremacy; and in that supremacy what does he do? Why, exercises an eternity of mercy. “He is God of gods, and Lord of lords; his mercy endures forever.” And in his judgments what does he do? Why, remembers mercy. Why did he smite Egypt in their first born? Simply to show that his mercy towards his own endures forever. Slew the mighty kings that stood in their way, because his mercy endures forever; remembered them in their low estate, because his mercy endures forever; redeemed them from the enemy, because his mercy endures forever.