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SERMON CXLIII.

BY REV. CYRUS MASON,

NEW-YORK.

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF JOSEPH.

GENESIS xlv. 28.—*And Israel said, it is enough : Joseph my son is yet alive ; I will go and see him before I die.*

THE same sons who had practised an ingenious falsehood to convince Jacob that Joseph was dead, afterward found it more difficult, by telling the truth, to convince him that Joseph was yet alive, and the governor of all Egypt. There is a natural caution in the human mind against admitting the evidence of a delightful discovery ; for the dawn of hope concerning a great benefit awakens fear lest it should fail to be made our own ; and the heart vibrates between confidence and diffidence until the evidence is reviewed, and becomes too clear to admit of doubt. While the patriarch listened to the story of his sons, concerning the greatness of Joseph, his heart fainted with doubt ; but when he went forth from his tent, and saw the wagons which Joseph had sent, his spirit revived, and he said, " It is enough"—I am satisfied : " Joseph my son is yet alive."

This discovery of Joseph removed from the mind of Jacob a load of grief, which the old man had long sustained, and even cherished with sacred fondness ; for his tenderest affections were ever connected with Rachel and Joseph, both of whom had been early taken from him. He had refused to forget them : but now he was comforted. He was sure that Joseph was yet alive, and a man of great power in Egypt, and he prepared for his journey.

But between the departure of Joseph from his father and this discovery of him in Egypt, there was a long and mysterious chasm of which Jacob knew nothing, but which he was anxious to explore. He wished to hear by what marvellous course his son had been preserved alive, and how he

SERMON CXLIV.

BY REV. WILLIAM NEVINS,
BALTIMORE.

THE SOLEMN QUESTION ANSWERED.

JEREMIAH viii. 6.—*What have I done?*

THE person now addressed, is supposed to ask, "What have I done?"—and it is designed to answer his question. Let no one refuse to consider the answer, on the ground that he knows already what he has done better than any one can tell him. It may appear, on examination, that you have yet much to learn in regard to what you have done. Nor let any one deny me a hearing on the plea, that it matters not what he has done. It matters *much*—you are a moral and accountable agent, answerable for your conduct to God. There is a rule by which it should be regulated. God is the author of that rule; and he is the avenger of its violations. There is a conduct which is pleasing to him, and a conduct which is displeasing: and whether he be pleased or displeased, whether he smile or frown, is certainly of *some* consequence.

The inquiry relates not merely to overt acts: what you have done, embraces what you have *said, thought, and felt*, as well as what you have acted; and for all you are equally accountable. "The law is spiritual—the commandment is exceeding broad—God will bring every work into judgment with every *secret* thing—all a man's ways are right in his own eyes, but the Lord *pondereth the heart*—the Lord *weigheth the spirit*."

This language, "What have I done?" sometimes bespeaks a mind utterly devoid of conviction. It asks in a spirit of self-justification, what evil the person has done. At other times it expresses the keenest sensibility to sin. A person having done something, the evil nature of which he did not at the time fully apprehend, and the sad consequences of which he did not foresee, when afterward he comes to perceive the evil and mischief of it, *exclaims*, in mingled alarm and grief, "What have I done!"

I shall consider it as the language of simple *inquiry*; as the serious *interrogation* of a person willing to know what he has done. And God grant that while I am answering the *interrogation*, "What have I done?" it may become the heart-felt *exclamation* of each impenitent hearer.

You ask what you have done. I will tell you; neither on the one hand extenuating, nor on the other exaggerating.

1. What if you had done *nothing*? You say, "What have I done?" meaning perhaps that you have done *nothing*, and supposing that this is a valid plea, a sufficient justification for you. But is it so? Can I not condemn you on your own admission, out of your own mouth? You have done *nothing*! But you are required to do *something*, ay *much*. You have done *nothing*! Then you have not loved God with all your heart, nor glorified him in your body and spirit, which are his. If you have done nothing, you have broken *one half* at least of the law of God. In so far as its *positive* requirements are concerned, you are guilty, according to your own confession. It was for *not doing*, that the inhabitants of Meroz were cursed—"they *came not* to the help of the Lord against the mighty." They staid at home and minded their worldly business. And Christ will say, he informs us, to those on his left-hand in the final day, when he bids them depart from him, "Inasmuch as ye *did it not*, &c." And he says also, "Cast ye the *unprofitable* servant (the servant that *does nothing*), into outer darkness." You have done nothing! But to do *nothing*, when there is so much required to be done, is to do *evil*, to do *wrong*, to do that which must cast you away for ever. You need do no more than *nothing* to ensure and justify your condemnation. Strange that you should expect to be justified for the very reason for which Christ says he will condemn men!—But

2. This plea, though it would not sustain you, if you could offer it, you cannot offer, for you *have done something*. You have not been idle. You are no mere *negative* character. You have acted under law, and in view of law, as a moral and accountable agent. As such you have performed innumerable acts, and have been the subject of numberless exercises of thought and feeling; each of which acts and exercises has possessed a moral character; has or has not been conformed to the revealed rule of duty; and is worthy of praise or blame. It is impossible to compute the number of times you have acted and been exercised in the capacity of a moral agent and an accountable subject of the law of God; and all these have been acts of obedience or of disobedience. Each exercise has been right or wrong. They have met the approbation of God, or provoked his displeasure. If they have been worthy of reward, they will be rewarded; if of punishment, they will be punished. Of the one or the other they are worthy. All the while you have lived, God has been looking on your heart and life, and in view of each emotion, thought, and act, has smiled or frowned.

Yes, you have done something—you have formed a *decided* character. You have laid up a large store of something for the future—you have done a great deal of good or of evil—you are very much in the right, or very far in the wrong—which is it? *What* have you done?

3. You have done *wrong*. You have acted unreasonably and unfitly. You have acted in opposition to those dictates of duty, which come to you from within. You have disobeyed conscience. You have transgressed the law written upon the heart.

You have done more—you have not only sinned against your own soul, but against God. You have disobeyed the Lord of conscience. You have acted contrary to his known will; broken his holy, just, and good law. You have done all this. You cannot deny it;—*wrong* and thus wrong.

4. Now suppose you had done this but once—suppose that of your innumerable acts and exercises, only one was *sinful*. Even on that hypothesis, you are guilty, condemned, inexcusable, and undone. You cannot answer for that one sin. The divine law tolerates sin in no respect, and in no instance. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all things* written in the book of the law to do them. He that offendeth in one point, is guilty of all.” Gal. iii. 10. James ii. 10. The law of God is *one*, and he that breaks it in any part, breaks it all. The *angels* who kept not their first estate were consigned to the place they now occupy, in chains and utter darkness, for *doing wrong ONCE*. Did God wait for a *second* offence? Why should he? Does human law wait for the repetition of a crime? In like manner Adam, for *one* offence, incurred the sentence of death. Now if you have done wrong *only once*, you have done as much as dethroned the angels, and destroyed the father of the human race. If one offence ruined them, is not *one* enough to ruin you? But I need not speak on this supposition. For

5. You have done wrong *more than once*. How many times in your life do you suppose that you have acted, spoken, thought, and felt sinfully and wrong? So many times, that there is but one Being who *can* tell *how many*—and he *will* tell, when “the books are opened”—before assembled worlds.

Some appear to think that if their *wrong* doings, no matter how *many* they be, do not exceed their *right* doings; if their good deeds only outnumber by one their evil deeds, they have nothing to fear, and this is all that is required of them. For this opinion there is a little support derived from reason as from Scripture. There is none from either. It is absolute folly to think and talk thus. A man should be *ashamed* to entertain such an opinion. All analogy is against it. Is this all that the magistrate requires of the subject, or the parent of the child; viz., that they be careful to maintain a proper proportion between their acts of obedience and their acts of disobedience, never permitting the latter to outnumber the former? May the subject or the child break *this* law, provided only he obey *that*? Does not *all* law require *universal* obedience? Did any law ever allow or excuse its own transgression in any respect or instance? There is not a government or society of any kind existing among men, having laws or rules for its regulation, which does not require the strict observance of all its rules by its every member. It punishes every breach of each rule. It does not wait till more than half of them are broken; and yet men expect that the great and jealous God will allow them to treat his holy, just, and good law, as no other law was ever allowed to be treated! And all the hope which many

have, is built on this expectation! Standing on this foundation, they are looking forward to the prospect of meeting God, with a calmness and confidence that nothing seems capable of disturbing. They acknowledge they have sinned, and they do not pretend that they have repented and secured an interest in the atonement. They have not, they suppose, sinned enough for that. It is not every sin, according to their notion, that renders repentance and a satisfaction necessary; but only the *surplusage* of sin, if any there should be after their good doings are subtracted from their evil ones! Into what absurdity and folly, not to say aggravated guilt, will erring mortals plunge! Sin first infatuates, then destroys them. It begins with making *fools* of them, and ends with making them *wretches*!

You perceive then, that it would avail nothing, though you could maintain the ground, that your right doings outnumber your wrong doings. But even this ground, were it available, you cannot maintain. For,

6. *You have not done more good than evil; more right than wrong.* The facts are against you. I know it is an astounding and unpalatable sentiment that I am about to advance; but it has the recommendation of being *true*, if it is not popular. You may disbelieve it, but you cannot *disprove* it. It is this—instead of having done more good than evil, if you are not now a penitent, a believer in Christ, a new creature; you have, so far as your moral nature is concerned, *done no good; you have done nothing right.* Your moral acts and exercises have been all of one kind, and *all evil*, all *wrong*. When this is said, it is not meant that your acts have been evil and wrong in every sense of those words. Right and good, according to the subordinate signification of those words, it is not disputed that you have done; but in the most important sense of the words, their *scriptural* sense, that sense of them in which they will be explained by God, and understood in the day of judgment (and that is the *true* sense of them), you have done “only evil,” and that “continually.” This assertion, though clothed with Divine authority, may give offence; but examine it carefully, remembering with whom you have to do.

Right is that which is conformable to the rule which God has given for the regulation of human conduct; that conformity having for its spring and principle the love of God, and for its object his glory. Now, though you have acted in some things agreeably to the revealed rule of God; yet has your *motive* been his *love*, and your *aim* his *glory*? It is quite possible to do things required by the law of God, and yet render no acceptable obedience to that law; for they may be done without any respect for the law; done for other reasons than that God requires them; or done rather from fear than love. To do right is to do *what* God requires, *because* he requires it, at the suggestion of *love*, and with a desire to *glorify him*. To do good is to do what is pleasing to God; but “without *faith* it is impossible to please him.” There are no truly good works, according to the Scriptures, but those unto which we are “created in Christ Jesus.” They that are in the flesh (i. e. in an

unregenerate state), cannot please God." "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." And *it stands to reason*, that repentance, in the case of the sinner, must go before all acceptable obedience, and that all good in him must be the fruit and consequence of repentance. In the case of the rebelling subject or child, after the first act of rebellion and disobedience, it is all rebellion and disobedience up to the moment he repents and makes his submission. So it is with all who rebel against God.

Well then, it appears you have done wrong, and *nothing but wrong*. You have done a great deal, and it has all been evil. All the entries under your name, in the book of God's remembrance, are on one side. The other side is a blank. You will never have anything of your own to be entered there; and the obedience of the great Surety is not entered to your account, because you have not believed on him, and with all your heart confided in him as *your* Surety. So the case stands. This is what you have done. And now,

Consider *to whom* you have done it,—*to God*, the great, blessed, and benevolent God, your creator, preserver, and benefactor. You have broken *his* law, which is holy, just, and good; have transgressed his commandments, which are not grievous; and have refused to render to him that which is your reasonable service!

Consider *under what circumstances* you have done it; circumstances of *light* and *love*; in despite of exhortation and command, admonition and entreaty, promise and threatening, judgment and mercy; with heaven open to allure you, and hell uncovered to alarm you, and the cross of the Son of God in full view before you; you have acted wrong, with every inducement to act right.

Consider also the *evils* involved in such doings, under such circumstances; the presumption and rebellion; the impiety and injustice; the folly and madness; the baseness and daring; but above all the *ingratitude*, of having, under such circumstances, acted as you have acted towards God!

The *ingratitude!* There never was such a case of ingratitude before, and I suppose there never could be another like it. God never *so* loved any other world as to give his only-begotten Son to die for its inhabitants. *Such* goodness does not exist to lead other sinners to repentance. They have no such love to despise. They have no *blood* of atonement to tread under foot. They *cannot* be so ungrateful. The intervention of the Son of God to save rebel *man*, renders his case *peculiar*, and will render his condition hereafter peculiar. He will rise to the highest in heaven, or sink to the lowest in hell. He is the only sinner that ever received a call to repent and return. God never before sought to woo back a wandering soul to him. But for you, O *man*, He has bowed his heavens and come down. He has sent his Son after you. And what have you done? How have you requited God's gift of his Son? How have you met the mercies of redemption? How have you treated Christ? Has his story interested you? Has his cross attracted you?

Have you stopped and gone near to see and sympathize in those unparalleled sorrows, of which you were equally the *author* as the *object*?—For he, who died *for* you, died also *by* you.—Have you ever looked on him whom *you pierced*, and mourned? Have you given to him your heart? and are you living now to him who died for you? Alas! has he not been despised and rejected of you? Have you not *passed him by*, even if you have done no more?

But some, to all else they have done, are adding this, the last and worst they can do, *the resisting and grieving of the Holy Ghost*.—Art thou one of them?—They counterwork the Divine Spirit, who strive with them. God comes on a visit of mercy to them, and whispers in the ear of the soul, of pardon and heaven; but they say, “Depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. Who is the Lord that we should obey him?”—And he departs perhaps; for he says, “Be instructed O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee. My spirit shall not always strive with man.” What then?—What is their history after that? I know not, but this I know, a dark death and a deep and desperate damnation are the subjects of the last chapter.

Sinner, there is one piece of advice, that as a friend I would give you. It is, that whatever you do, “quench not the Spirit.” You may do any thing but that, and your case not be desperate. But if you quench the spirit, there remains no hope, there is no refuge left—there is no *fourth* person in the Godhead, to undertake the case of the sinner who has wilfully put away from him the light and fire of the Divine Spirit. Art thou grieving him? Beware!—Another hour—another moment—and he may depart for ever!

I have told you what you have done. Let me now urge you to consider the *consequences* of having done so; the great *guilt* you have incurred, the deep and virulent *depravity* you have contracted, the tremendous *wrath* you have treasured up for yourself, and the utter *ruin* you have entailed on soul and body, for time and for eternity. In doing what you have done, you have destroyed yourself. You have forfeited the divine favor, and lost the divine likeness. You are no longer a child and heir of God. That privilege and dignity are gone from you, and peace is gone, and purity is gone, and freedom and honor, and all but just one only hope is gone, and that is *going*, and unless you lay hold of it will soon be gone, never to return. You have blasted your prospects for eternity. You have caused a blight to come over the beauty and fruitfulness of the soul. You have lost all that was worth having, and have got in exchange nothing but what it is as much your interest as your duty to give up!

You have done what to undo, constituted a problem that baffled all created minds! You have done what to undo, required a special interposition from the adorable Trinity, and from the Son of God exacted suffering the deepest and most dreadful.

In fine, you have done, O sinner, so *much* that it is necessary you should do *something more*. And do you ask me what it is? Dost thou,

in view of what thou *hast done*, ask what thou *must do*? I am glad to hear that question—it indicates returning reason. I will briefly answer it. And

First,—You must do *something*—you must *act*—you will never be saved without your own agency. When the jailer asked this question, did Paul and Silas say, “Do nothing—wait—wait God’s time?” A time, by the way, which cannot be *waited* for, because it has come already. It is *now*.

Secondly,—What you do, you must do *quickly*. The command of God urges you to *immediate* action. The difficulty of the work urges you. The uncertainty of life urges you. The ever-increasing hardness of the unregenerate heart, affords another argument for doing immediately what you find to do. “Behold *now* is the accepted time—behold *now* is the day of salvation.”

Thirdly,—You cannot be saved by doing any thing which you *may choose* to do, aside from what God commands you to do. No amount of *unauthorized effort* will avail you any thing.

Fourthly,—You may do many things which the word of God approves, and even enjoins, and yet never be saved; for no one of them may be that *specific thing* to which the promise of salvation is made.

Fifthly,—There is *only one* thing that you can do to secure your salvation. You will be disappointed if you expect to be saved by doing *many* things. One act, one single exercise, is the indispensable requisite to salvation. What is it?

Sixthly,—That which you do *in order to be saved*, is not to make an *atonement* for sin, nor is it to acquire yourself a *title* to heaven: it is not any act whereby you may make yourself *better*, or recommend yourself to God. There is nothing expiatory, meritorious, or commendatory in what you are required to do. The *object* of the act is not to make atonement, but to receive an atonement already made. It is not to do something for yourself, but to avail yourself of what another has done for you.

Seventhly,—It is no *external* act or movement that is required. It is an act of the *soul*, a single, *confiding* act of the soul, the object of the confidence being Christ Jesus. There are two things presupposed as necessary to this act; viz. a sense of your need of him, and an apprehension of his suitableness and sufficiency for you. These existing, you have nothing to do that you may be saved, but heartily to *trust in him*. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Exercise a confiding faith in him, and all is done. Cease to do any thing for yourself, except cordially to trust Christ to do every thing for you.

This is what you must do. Now *do it*. It is reasonable that you should. Christ is altogether worthy of your confidence. He is *able* to save, and he is *willing*. He offers himself to you—He presses himself upon you. Receive him and you are saved. Do not be confounded by the very *simplicity* of the requirement. Do not say, “Can this be all?” I assure you it is *all*. And there is nothing to be done in preparation for doing this. If you know that you are a sinner, and believe that

Christ is a Savior, then as a sinner trust in that Savior. And you can do it *now*, as well as at any other time; yea, *better*. The duty will never be *different* from what it now is—never *easier*. *Will you do it now?* Now, while God waits to be gracious; and Jesus stands with arms extended, and with open heart to receive you; and the blessed Spirit striveth with you; *now*, when all things are ready, and all circumstances favor; now, in the strength of God, *will you do it?* What is your decision? It is known in heaven. It is recorded there.

“My former hopes are fled,
My terror now begins;
I feel, alas! that I am dead
In trespasses and sins.

Ah, whither shall I fly?
I hear the thunder roar;
The law proclaims destruction nigh,
And vengeance at the door.

When I review my ways,
I dread impending doom;
But sure, a friendly whisper says,
‘Flee from the wrath to come.’

I see, or think I see,
A glimm’ring from afar;
A beam of day that shines for me,
To save me from despair.”