

Psalm 147:3

EXPOSITION

Verse 3. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. This the Holy Spirit mentions as a part of the glory of God, and a reason for our declaring his praise: the Lord is not only a Builder but a Healer; he restores broken hearts as well as broken walls. The kings of the earth think to be great through their loftiness, but Jehovah becomes so by his condescension. Behold, the Highest has to do with the sick and the sorry, with the wretched and the wounded! He walks the hospitals as the good Physician! His deep sympathy with mourners is a special mark of his goodness. Few will associate with the despondent, but Jehovah chooses their company and abides with them till he has healed them by his comforts. He deigns to handle and heal broken hearts: he lays on the ointment of grace, and the soft bandages of love, and thus binds up the bleeding wounds of those convinced of sin. This is compassion like a God. Well, may those praise him to whom he has acted so gracious a part? The Lord is always healing and binding: this is no new work to him, he has done it of old; and it is not a thing of the past of which he is now weary, for he is still healing and still binding, as the original hath it. Come, broken hearts, come to the Physician who never fails to heal: uncover your wounds to him who so tenderly binds them up!

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS

Verse 3. He healeth the broken in heart, etc. Here are two things contained in this text; the patients and the physician. The patients are broken in heart. The physician is Christ; it is he who bindeth up their wounds.

The patients here are felt and discerned to have two wounds or maladies; brokenness of heart, and woundedness: he binds up such. The brokenness of the heart presupposes a former wholeness of the heart. Wholeness of the heart is twofold; either wholeness of heart in sin, or wholeness of heart from sin. First, the wholeness of heart from sin is when the heart is without sin; and so the blessed angels have whole hearts, and so Adam and Eve, and we in them, before the fall, had whole hearts. Secondly, the wholeness of heart in sin; so the devils have whole hearts, and all men since the fall, from their conception till their conversion, have whole hearts; and these are they that our Saviour intends, -- "The whole need not the physician, but they that are sick".

The brokenness of heart may be considered two ways; first, about the wholeness of heart in sin: so brokenness of heart is not a malady, but the commencement of the cure of a desperate disease. Secondly, about the wholeness of heart from sin; and so it is a malady or sickness, and yet peculiar to one blood alone, namely, God's elect; for though the heart is made whole in its desire towards God, yet it is broken for its sins. As a man that hath a barbed arrow shot into his side, and the arrow is plucked out of the flesh, yet the wound is not presently healed; so sin may be plucked out of the heart, but the scar that was made with plucking it out is not yet cured. The wounds that are yet under cure are the plagues and troubles of conscience, the sighs and groans of a hungering soul after grace, the stinging poison that the serpent's fang hath left behind it; these are the

wounds.

Now the heart is broken three ways. First, by the law; as it breaks the heart of a thief to hear the sentence of the law, that he must be hanged for his robbery; so it breaks the heart of the soul, sensibly to understand the sentence of the law, -- Thou shalt not sin; if thou do, thou shalt be damned. If ever the heart comes to be sensible of this sentence, -- "Thou art a damned man", it is impossible to stand out under it, but it must break. "Is not my word like a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29). Can any rock heart hold out and not be broken with the blows of it? Indeed, thus far a man may be broken, and yet be a reprobate; for they shall all be thus broken in hell, and therefore this breaking is not enough.

Secondly, by the Gospel; for if ever the heart comes to be sensible of the love of the Gospel, it will break all to shatters. "Rend your heart; for the Lord is gracious", etc.: Joel 2:13. When all the shakes of God's mercy come, they all cry "Rend." Indeed, the heart cannot stand out against them, if it once feels them. Beat thy soul upon the gospel: if any way under heaven can break it, this is the way.

Thirdly, the heart is broken by the skill of the minister in the handling of these two, the law and the gospel: God furnishes him with the skill to press the law home and gives him an understanding of how to put the gospel, and by this means doth God break the heart: for, alas, though the law be never so good a hammer, and although the gospel is never so fit an anvil, yet if the minister lay not the soul upon it the heart will not break: he must fetch a full stroke with the law, and he must set the full power of the gospel at the back of the soul, or else the heart will not break.

He healeth the broken in heart. Hence observe, that Christ justifies and sanctifies; for that is the meaning.

First, because God hath gives Christ the grace to practice for the sake of the broken in, heart; and therefore if this is his grace, to heal the brokenhearted, certainly he will heal them. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me", etc. "He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted", etc.: Luke 4:18. If he is created master of this art, even for this purpose, to heal the broken in heart, he will verily heal them, and none but them. It is not like Hosander and Hippocrates, whose father appointed them both to be physicians; he appointed his son Hippocrates to be a physician of horses, yet he proved a physician for men; he appointed Hosander to be a physician for men, and he proved a physical for horses. Jesus is not like these; no, no; he will heal those whom he was appointed to heal.

Because Christ hath undertaken to do it. When a skillful Physician hath undertaken a cure, he will surely do it: indeed, sometimes a good physician may fail, as Trajan's physician did, for he died under his hands; on whose tomb this was written, "Here lies Trajan the emperor, that may thank his physician that dies." But if Christ undertakes it, thou mayest be sure of it; for he tells thee that art broke in the heart that he hath undertaken it, he hath felt thy pulse already. Isaiah 57:15. He doth not only undertake it, but he saith he will go visit his sick patient, he will come to thy bedside, yea, he will come and dwell with thee all the time of thy sickness; thou shalt never want anything, but he will be ready to help thee: thou needest not complain and say, "Oh, the physician is too far off, he will not come at me."

I dwell in the high places indeed, saith God, but yet I will come and dwell with thee that art of a humble spirit. Thou needest not fear, saying, "Will a man cure his enemies? I have been an enemy to God's glory, and will he yet cure me?" Yea, saith Christ, if thou be broken in heart I will bind thee up. Thirdly, because this is Christ's charge, and he will look to his calling: "The Lord hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted" (Isa 61: ... Neither needest thou fear thine own poverty because thou hast not a fee to give him; for thou mayest come to him by way of begging; he will look to thee for nothing; for, "To him will I look that is poor", etc.: Isaiah 66:2. Fourthly, none but the broken in heart will take physic of Christ. Now, this is a physician's desire, that his patient would cast himself upon him; if he will not, the physician hath no desire to meddle with him. Now none but the broken in heart will take such physic as Christ gives, and therefore he saith, "To him will I look that is of a broken heart, and trembles at any words": Isaiah 56:2. When I bid him take such a purge, saith, God, he trembles, and he takes it. --William Fenner, in a Sermon entitled, "The Sovereign Virtue of the Gospel", 1647.

Verse 3.

*O Thou who driest the mourner's tear,
How dark this world would be,
If, when deceived and wounded here,
We could not fly to Thee!
The friends, who in our sunshine live,
When winter comes are flown;
And he who has but tears to give
Must weep those tears alone.
But Thou wilt heal that broken heart,
Which, like the plants that throw
Their fragrance from the wounded part,
Breathes sweetness out of woe.
When joy no longer soothes or cheers,
And e'en the hope that threw
A moment's sparkle o'er our tears
Is dimmed and vanished too;
Oh! who would bear life's stormy doom,
Did not Thy wing of love
Come, brightly wafting through the gloom
Our peace branch from above?
Then sorrow, touched by Thee, grows bright
With more than rapture's ray;
As darkness shows us worlds of light
We never saw by day! --Thomas Moore, 1779-1852.*

Verse 3. He healeth the broken in heart. The broken in the heart is one whose heart is affected with the evil of sin, and weeps bitter tears on account of it; one who feels sorrow, shame, and anguish, on the review of his past sinful life, and his base rebellion against a righteous God. Such a one has a broken heart. His heart is broken at the sight of his ingratitude -- the despite done by him to the strivings of the Holy Spirit. His heart is broken when he considers the numberless invitations made to him in the Scriptures, all of which he has wickedly slighted and despised. His heart is broken at the recollection of a thousand kind providences to him and his

family, by day and by night, all sent by God, and intended for his moral, spiritual, and eternal benefit, but by him basely and wantonly abused. His heart is broken at the consideration of the love and compassion of the adorable Redeemer; the humiliation of his birth; the devotedness of his life; the reproach, the indignity of his sufferings; the ignominy and anguish of his death. His heart is broken when his conscience assures him that all this humiliation, this suffering, this death, was for him, who had so deliberately and repeatedly refused the grace which the blood and righteousness of Christ have purchased. It is the sight of Calvary that fills him with the anguish of spirit, that overwhelms him with confusion and self-abasement. While he contemplates the amazing scene, he stands, he weeps, he prays, he smites upon his breast, he exclaims", God is merciful to me a sinner!" And adds, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

The broken in the heart must further be understood as one who seeks help from God alone, and will not be comforted till he speaks peace to his soul.

The act of God, in the scripture before us, is the moral and spiritual health of man -- of man, who had brought the disease on himself -- of man, by his rebellion against his Creator of man, who had, in ten thousand ways, provoked the justice of heaven, and deserved only indignation and eternal wrath -- the health of man, whom, in an instant, he could hurl to utter destruction. The saving health here proposed is the removal of all guilt, however, contracted, and of all pollution, however, rooted. It is the communication of God's favor, the riches of his grace, the implantation of his righteousness.

To effect the healing of the broken heart, God has, moreover, appointed a Physician, whose skill is infallible, whose goodness and care are equal to his skill. That Physician is none other than the Son of God. In that character has he been made known to us. "They that be a whole need, not a physician, but they that be sick." The prophet Isaiah introduces his advent in the most sublime language: "He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

The health, the moral and spiritual soundness of the soul, my brethren, is derived from the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The grace of God flows to the broken in the heart through his manhood, his godhead, his righteousness, his truth; through his patience, his humility, his death, and passion; through his victory over sin, his resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Here, thou broke in heart, thou sorrowing, watching penitent; here is the medicine, here the Physician, here the cure, here the health thou art seeking.

The healing of the broken in the heart must be further understood as effected through the agency of the Holy Spirit. It is done by the Spirit of God, that it may be done, and that it may be well done; and that all the praise, the glory of that which is done, maybe ascribed to the plenitude, the freeness, the sovereignty of his grace. The Spirit of God, however, uses means. The means of grace are appointed expressly for this purpose; the blessing of health is there applied. There, under the sound of the everlasting gospel, while looking by faith to Christ, and appropriating his

merits, he healeth the broken in heart. There, while commemorating the dying love of Christ, and applying for its benefits by faith to the soul, he healeth the broken in heart. There, while the soul, sensible of his goodness, is offering up the song of praise, and trusting alone in his mercy, he healeth the broken in heart. There, while prostrate at his footstool, supplicating his grace, resting on his finished redemption, he healeth the broken in heart. In the private acts of devotion, the Spirit of God also is near to bless and save. There, while reading and believing his holy Word, while meditating on its meaning; there, while in secret, solemn prayer, the soul takes hold on God in Christ Jesus; he healeth the broken in heart. -- Condensed from a Sermon by Thomas Blackley, 1826.

Verse 3. He healeth the broken in, heart. I do indeed most sincerely sympathize with you in this fresh sorrow. "Thy breaking waves pass over me." The trial, so much the heavier that it is not the first breaking in, but the waters continuing still, and continuing to rise until deep calleth unto deep at the noise of God's water spouts, "Yea, and thy billows all." In such circumstances, we are greatly tempted to wonder if it is true, of the Holy One in the midst of us, that a bruised reed he will not break, that the smoking flax He will not quench. We may not, however, doubt it, nor even in the day of our grief and our desperate sorrow, are we at liberty to call it in question. Our God is the God of the broken heart. The deeper such a heart is smitten, and the more it bleeds, the more precious it is in his sight, the nearer he draws to it, the longer he stays there. "I dwell with him who is of a contrite heart." The more abundantly will he manifest the kindness and the glory of his power, in tenderly carrying it in his bosom, and at last binding up its painful wounds. "He healeth the broken in heart." "O, thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires." Weeping Naomi said, "Call me Marah, for the Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me." Afterward, happy Naomi took the child of her own Ruth and laid it in her bosom, and sweetly found that the days of her mourning were ended.

My dear friend, this new gash of deep sorrow was prepared for you by the Ancient of Days. His Son -- and that Son is love -- watched over the counsels of old, to keep and to perform them to the minutest circumstance. --John Jameson, 1838.

HINTS FOR PASTORS AND LAYPERSONS

Verse 3. See "Spurgeon's Sermons", No. 53: "Healing for the Wounded."

Verse 3. God a true physician, and a tender nurse. --J.F.

Verse 3-4. Heaven's Brilliants, and Earth's Broken Hearts.

The Proprietor of the Stars with the Wounded. The stars left kingless for broken hearts. Jehovah! with lint and liniment and a woman's hand. Who binds together the stars, shall bind firmly grieved hearts.

The Gentle Heart healer with the Stars. Be all power entrusted to such tenderness. Its comely splendor. God guides the stars with an eye on wounded hearts. The hopefulness of prayer.

Hearts, Stars, and Eternity. Some hearts shall "shine like the stars." Some stars shall expire in "blackness of darkness." God's hand and eye are everywhere making justice certain. Trust and sing. --W.B.H. Verse 3-4. God's Compassion and Power.

***The striking diversity of God's cares: "hearts" and "stars."
Wonderful variety of God's operations. Gently caring for human hearts.
Preserving the order, regularity, and stability of creation.
Blessed results of God's work. Broken hearts healed; wounds bound up.
Light, harmony, and beauty in the heavens.
Mighty encouragement to trust in God. God takes care of the universe; may I not entrust my life, my soul, to him? Where he rules unquestioned there is light and harmony; let me not resist his will in my life.
--C.A.D.***