

## Ineffective Repentance

1 Kings ii. 28.—...*And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD,  
and caught hold on the horns of the altar.*

The holy Scriptures teach truth to man, not only by abstract precepts and instructions, but by living and impressive examples. They are for man a guide-book, as well as history. They proclaim the principles by which he ought to be governed, and according to which he is to meet his final responsibility to God...

I would present to you, the history of Joab, as an illustration of the invalidity of a voluntarily late repentance; of the presumption of looking forward to the hour of death, at a time in which to call for protection and hope from him, to whom we have refused to yield obedience in life... He was in many respects a great and remarkable man. He was one of the most valiant and powerful men of his time. He performed important services for the king...

But Joab passed a proud and prosperous life, without submitting himself to the authority, or seeking the favour of God. He was a cruel, revengeful, and imperious man. He suffered his own vindictive spirit to imbrue his hands in causeless blood. The will of his Creator kept him back, even from revenge and murder; and he was too elevated in life to be restrained by inferior circumstances. He could carry out the purposes of his wicked heart, without fear of consequences from man; and no sense of responsibility to God was present in his mind, to keep him back, from the extreme of evil.

In his long and prospered life, he might have been the instrument of vast blessings to others. But the man who lives without God cannot live as a blessing to his fellow-men. The blessing of God is not with any thing that he does.

But now Joab comes to old age, and his character remains entirely unchanged. He engages with Adonijah in his unnatural rebellion against the aged king... And when the intelligence came to Joab, that Adonijah was put to death, and Abiathar the priest was banished, his guilty conscious warned him of his exposure to similar condemnation.

He fled to Gibeon, and concealed himself for protection in the tabernacle of the Lord, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. Foolish man! If he had accustomed himself to seek for counsel at this tabernacle in previous life, he would not now have needed to fly to it for such protection. But the worst of men are glad to make use of God's ordinances for their own selfish advantage. Necessity will drive the most profane in a hypocritical profession to God.

But there was no protection for impenitent guilt at the altar. The divine law was, in regard to the murderer, "thou shalt take him even from mine altar, that he may die." And Joab, the aged rebel, perishes in guilt, even while he clings to the altar for protection. His flying there, driven by fear, when all other refuge had failed, and destruction was rapidly coming upon iniquity as its recompense, furnished him no deliverance. No desire for God led him to the tabernacle. A fear of punishment drove him thither.

He had no longing to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord. He would far rather dwell in the tents of ungodliness. And this fear-extorted cry for mercy, in the hour of his sorrow, upon him whom he had despised, and whose law he had trodden under his feet, could furnish no expiation for his guilt, and no hope for his soul. Joab was not a penitent, though he clung to the altar. His soul could not go out in peace, though expired in the tabernacle of God.

(Stephen H. Tyng, *The Israel of God*, New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1849, 283-287; paragraph structure modified)