

C. H. Spurgeon's Expositions
Volume 1

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Expositions
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C. H. Spurgeon

Containing his readings from
Genesis - Song of Solomon

WITH INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS ON SPURGEON'S
PREACHING AND EXPOSITIONS

BY
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FOREWORD

Perhaps the most widely read and often quoted preacher in history is Charles Haddon Spurgeon. His published sermons, totaling 63 volumes, demonstrate his remarkable gifts, his understanding of the Scriptures, his theological acumen, his mastery of the English language, his ability to illustrate the profound truths of the gospel with simplicity, and his tremendous intellect.

Spurgeon preached *Christ* passionately. Without question, he was, and through his written works continues to be used of God for the furtherance of the gospel around the world in a remarkable way. Spurgeon's deep, yet simple trust and understanding of his Lord and Savior, his great mercy, grace and love is evident in his writings. His great longing to have others come to know, trust, love and to worship the Lord Jesus Christ is also evident. To that end he labored tirelessly in publishing the gospel.

Unfortunately there is an aspect of Spurgeon's preaching and writing that is hardly known. Before preaching to thousands at the Metropolitan Tabernacle each Sunday, he gave a brief exposition of a lengthy passage of Scripture before his sermon. Many of these expositions were published at the end of his weekly sermons in *The Sword and The Trowel*. However, they have never before been published as a work to themselves. Three volumes are here published under the title *Spurgeon's Expositions* containing a complete compilation of those expositions. While not every scripture of the Bible was covered in his transcribed expositions, this mammoth project has resulted in a 'virtual' concise Bible commentary.

At first glance, expositions of the same passage may appear repetitive, but you will find repeated expositions of the same passages to contain fresh comments each time that he read them. It is the most valuable Bible reference material made available to pastors in a generation, and its value as a family devotional is beyond measure. It is our prayer that these expositions will be blessed of God to the good of many for the glory of Christ.

PSALM 90:17. *And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*

“Let not what we do for thee fall to the ground like a badly-built wall! Let not our work be consumed in the great testing fire, ‘but the work of our hands establish thou it!’” (Taken from a Spurgeon exposition)

INTRODUCTION

The following observations were written by General James A. Garfield, later to become President of the United States, after visiting The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit and hearing a Spurgeon exposition and sermon from Job. It is a fitting introduction to these volumes of *Spurgeon's Expositions*.

“I did not intend to listen to Spurgeon as to some *lusus naturae* (freak of nature), but to try to discover what manner of man he was, and what was the secret of his power . . . At half-past eleven Spurgeon came in, and at once offered a short, simple earnest prayer, and read and helped the whole congregation to sing Watts' stirring hymn:

There is a land of pure delight.

“For the first time in my life I felt some sympathy with the doctrine that would reject instrumental music from church worship. There must have been five thousand voices joining in the hymn. The whole building was filled and overflowed with the strong volume of song. The music made itself felt as a living, throbbing presence, that entered your nerves, brain, heart, and filled and swept you away in its resistless current.

“After the singing, he read a chapter of Job, and then a contrasted passage from Paul, both relating to life and death. He accompanied his reading with familiar and sensible, sometimes expositional, comments; then followed another hymn, a longer prayer, a short hymn, and then the sermon from a text in the chapter he had read in Job 14:14, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." He evidently proceeded upon the assumption that the Bible, all the Bible, in its very words, phrases, and sentences, is the word of God; and that a microscopic examination of it will reveal ever-opening beauties and blessings. All the while, he impresses you with that, and also with the living fullness and abundance of his faith in the presence of God and the

personal accountability of all to him. An unusual fullness of belief in these respects seems to me to lie at the foundation of his power. Intellectually he is marked by his ability to hold with great tenacity, and pursue with great persistency any line of thought he chooses. He makes the most careful and painstaking study of the subject in hand. No doubt fully as much of his success depends upon his labor, as upon his force of intellect. He has chosen the doctrines and the literature of the Bible as his field, and does not allow himself to be drawn aside. He rarely wanders into the fields of poesy (poetry), except to find the stirring hymns which may serve to illustrate his theme. He uses Bible texts and incidents with great readiness and appropriateness, and directs all his power, not toward his sermon, but toward his hearers. His arrangement is clear, logical, and perfectly comprehensible; and at the end of each main division of the sermon, he makes a personal application of the truth developed, to his hearers, and asks God to bless it. His manner is exceedingly simple and unaffected. He does not appear to be aware that he is doing a great thing, and I could see no indication that his success has turned his head.

“He has the word-painting power quite at his command, but uses it sparingly. I could see those nervous motions of the hands and feet which all forcible speakers make when preparing to speak; and also in the speaking, the sympathy between his body and his thoughts which controlled his gestures, and produced those little touches of theatrical power, which are so effective in a speaker. . .

“Every good man ought to be thankful for the work Spurgeon is doing. I could not but contrast this worship with that I saw a few days ago at Westminster Abbey. In that proud old mausoleum of kings, venerable with years and royal price, the great organ rolled out its deep tones, and sobbed and thundered its grand music, mingled with the intoning of the hired singers. Before the assembly of rich and titled worshipers, sat a choir of twenty persons. The choir boys in their white robes had just been fighting among the tombs and monuments of the nave just before the service began. However devout and effective their worship may be, it is very costly, and must be confined, to a great extent, to the higher classes. I felt that Spurgeon had opened an asylum where the great untitled, the poor and destitute of this great city, could come and find their sorrows met with sympathy; their lowliness and longings for a better

life touched by a large heart and an undoubted faith. God bless Spurgeon! He is helping to work out the problem of religious and civil liberty for England, in a way he knows not of.”

James A. Garfield
General of the Union Army
20th President of the United States

GENESIS

GENESIS 1

1. *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

When that “beginning” was, we cannot tell. It may have been long ages before God fitted up this world for the abode of man, but it was not self-existent; it was created by God, it sprang from the will and the word of the all-wise Creator.

2. *And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.*

When God began to arrange this world in order, it was shrouded in darkness, and it had been reduced to what we call, for want of a better name, “chaos.” This is just the condition of every soul of man when God begins to deal with him in his grace; it is formless, and empty of all good things. “There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way.”

2. *And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

This was the first act of God in preparing this planet to be the abode of man, and the first act of grace in the soul is for the Spirit of God to move within it. How that Spirit of God comes there, we know not, we cannot tell how he acts, even as we cannot tell how the wind bloweth where it listeth, but until the Spirit of God moves upon the soul nothing is done towards its new creation in Christ Jesus.

3, 4. *And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.*

“Light be.” “Light was.” God had but to speak the word, and the great wonder was accomplished. How there was light before there was any sun, — for the sun was not created until the fourth day of the week — it is not for us to say. But God is not dependent upon his own creation. He can make light without a sun, he can spread the

gospel without the aid of ministers, he can convert souls without any human or angelic agency, for he does as he wills in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

5. *And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.*

It is a good thing to have the right names for things. An error is often half killed when you know the real name of it; its power lies in its being indescribable; but as soon as you can call it “darkness,” you know how to act towards it. It is a good thing also to know the names of truths, and the names of other things that are right. God is very particular in the Scripture about giving people their right names. The Holy Spirit says, “Judas, not Iscariot,” so that there should be no mistake about the person intended. Let us also always call persons and things by their right names: “God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.” “And the evening and the morning were the first day.” Darkness first and light afterwards. It is so with us spiritually; first darkness, then light. I suppose that, until we get to heaven, there will be both darkness and light in us; and as to God’s providential dealings, we must expect darkness as well as light. They will make up our first day and our last day, till we get where there are no days but the Ancient of Days.

6-8. *And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.*

“The firmament” — an expanse of air in which floated the waters which afterwards condensed, and fell upon the earth in refreshing showers. These waters above were divided from the waters below. Perhaps they were all one steamy conglomeration before, but now they are separated. Note those four words, “and it was so.” Whatever God ordains always comes. You will find that it is true of all his promises that, whatever he has said, shall be fulfilled to you, and you shall one day say of it all, “and it was so.” It is equally certain concerning all his threatenings that what he has spoken shall certainly be fulfilled, and the ungodly will have to say “and it was so.” These words are often repeated in this chapter.

They convey to us the great lesson that the word of God is sure to be followed by the deed of God. He speaks, and it is done.

9-13. *And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day.*

Having attended to the air, God further exercised his power by setting the earth in order. Observe the remarkable fact that, no sooner had God made the dry land appear, than it seemed as if he could not bear the sight of it in its nakedness. What a strange place this world must have looked, with its plains and hills and rooks and vales without one single blade of grass, or a tree, or a shrub; so at once, before that day was over, God threw the mantle of verdure over the earth, and clad its mountains and valleys with forests and plants and flowers, as if to show us that the fruitless is uncomely in God's sight, that the man who bears no fruit unto God is unendurable to him. There would be no beauty whatever in a Christian without any good works, and with no graces. As soon as ever the earth appeared, then came the herb, and the tree, and the grass. So, dear brethren, in like manner, let us bring forth fruit unto God, and bring it forth abundantly, for herein is our heavenly Father glorified, that we bear much fruit.

14-19. *And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.*

Whether the sun and moon are here said to be absolutely created, or whether they were only created so far as our planet was concerned by the dense vapours being cleared away so that the sun and moon and stars could be seen, is a matter of no consequence at all to us. Let us rather learn a lesson from them. These lights are to rule, but they are to rule by giving light. And, brethren, this is the true rule in the Church of God. He who gives most light is the truest ruler, and the man who aspires to leadership in the Church of God, if he knows what he is at, aspires to be the servant of all by laying himself out for the good of all, even as our Saviour said to his disciples, "Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all." The sun and moon are the servants of all mankind, and therefore do they rule by day and by night. Stoop, my brothers, if you wish to lead others. The way up is downward. To be great, you must be little. He is the greatest who is nothing at all unto himself, but all for others.

20-23. *And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.*

There was no life in the sea or on the land until all was ready for it. God would not make a creature to be unhappy. There must be suitable food to feed upon, and the sun and moon to cheer and comfort ere a single bird shall chirp in the thicket or a solitary trout shall leap in the stream. So, after God has given men light, and blessed them in various ways, their spiritual life begins to develop to the glory of God. We have the thoughts that soar like fowl in the open firmament of heaven, and other thoughts that dive into the mysteries of God, as the fish dive in the sea, and these are after-development, after-growths of that same power which at the first said, "Let there be light."

24, 25. *And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after*

his kind, and cattle after their kind, and everything that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

There is as much wisdom and care displayed in the creation of the tiniest creeping insect as in the creation of leviathan himself. Those who use the microscope are as much amazed at the greatness and the goodness of God as those are who use the telescope. He is as great in the little as he is in the great. After each day's work, God looks upon it, and it is well for us every night to review our day's work. Some men's work will not bear looking at, and tomorrow becomes all the worse to them because today was not considered and its sin repented of by them. But if the errors of today are marked by us, a repetition of them may be avoided on the morrow. It is only God who can look upon any one day's work, and say of it, as a whole, and in every part, that it is "good." As for us, our best things need sprinkling with the blood of Christ, which we need not only on the lintels and side posts of our house, but even on the altar and the mercy-seat at which we worship God.

26-28. *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

God evidently meant the two persons, male and female, to complete the man, and the entireness of the manhood lies in them both. The earth is completed now that man has come upon it, and man is completed when the image of God is upon him, when Christ is formed in him the hope of glory, but not till then. When we have received the power of God, and have dominion over ourselves, and over all earthly things, in the power of God's eternal Spirit, then are we where and what God intends us to be.

29, 30. *And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to*

every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

Now you see God's commissariat. He has not made all these creatures in order to starve them, but he has supplied them with great variety and abundance of food, that their wants may be satisfied. Does God care for the cattle, and will he not feed his own children? Does he provide for ravens and sparrows, and will he suffer you to lack anything, O ye of little faith? Observe that God did not create man until he had provided for him neither will he ever put one work of his providence or of his grace out of its proper place, but that which goes before shall be preparatory to that which follows after.

31. *And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.*

Taken in its completeness, and all put together, God saw that it was very good. We must never judge anything before it is complete.

GENESIS 2:1-17

1-8. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made. These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

Everything was ready for man's use, every fruit-bearing tree for his nourishment, every creature to do his bidding, for it was the will of God that he should "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." God did

not place the man formed in his image, after his likeness, in an unfurnished house or an empty world, and leave him to provide for himself all that he required but he prepared everything that man could possibly need, and completed the whole plan by planting “a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.”

9. *And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.*

That tree of life in the midst of the earthly paradise was to be symbolic of another tree of life in the paradise above, from which the children of God shall never be driven as Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden.

10-14. *And a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.*

That river in Eden also reminds us of the “pure river of water of life clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb,” of which we read almost at the end of the Revelation that was given to John in Patmos. Thus the beginning and the end of the Bible call our attention to the tree of life and the river of life in the paradise below and the better paradise above.

15. *And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden; of Eden to dress it and to keep it.*

There was to be occupation for man even in paradise, just as they who are before the throne of God in glory “serve him day and night in his temple.” Idleness gives no joy, but holy employment will add to the bliss of heaven.

16, 17. *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden, thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

Apparently, Adam was not forbidden to eat of the fruit of the tree of life, though, after his fall, he was cast out of Eden, as God said, “lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.” He might freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden except one: “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.” It was a slight prohibition, yet the test was more than man, even in a state of innocence, was able to endure, and, alas! his failure involved all his descendants, for he was the federal head of the human race, and “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men.” Happily, there is another federal Head, and therefore we read, “For if through the offense of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.”

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 2:1-17; AND REVELATION 22.

GENESIS 3

1. Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

He began with a question. How much of evil begins with questioning! The serpent does not dare to state a lie, but he suggests one: “Has God refused you all the fruit of these many trees that grow in the garden?”

2, 3. And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

Eve had begun to feel the fascination of the evil one, for she softened down the word of God. The Lord had said concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. A little of the spirit of doubt had crept into Eve’s mind, so she answered, God hath said, “Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.”

4, 5. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

The serpent insinuated that God selfishly kept them back from the tree, lest they should grow too wise, and become like God himself. The evil one suggested ambition to the woman's mind, and imputed wicked designs to the ever-blessed and holy God. He did not say any more; the devil is too wise to use many words. I am afraid that the servants of God sometimes weaken the force of the truth by their verbosity, but not so did the serpent when he craftily suggested falsehoods to Mother Eve; he said enough to accomplish his evil purpose, but no more.

6. *And when the woman saw —*

Sin came into the human race by the eye; and that is the way that Christ comes in, by the eye of faith, the spiritual eye. "Look unto me, and be ye saved," is the counterpart of this word, "When the woman saw "

6. *That the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

This was a distinct act of rebellion on the part of both of them. It may seem a small thing; but it meant a great deal. They had cast off their allegiance to God; they had set up on their own account; they thought they knew better than God, and they imagined they were going to be gods themselves.

7. *And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.*

All they had gained by their sin was a discovery of their nakedness. Poor creatures, how the serpent laughed as his words were fulfilled, "your eyes shall be opened"! They were opened, indeed; and Adam and Eve did know good and evil. Little could they have dreamed in what a terrible sense the serpent's words would come true.

8. *And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day:*

No doubt, when they had heard the voice of the Lord before, they had run to meet him, as children do to a father when he comes home "in the cool of the day." But now, how different is their action!

8. *And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.*

What fools they were to think that they could hide themselves from God! The fig leaves were to hide their nakedness, and now the trees themselves were to hide them from God.

9-11. *And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?*

God comes to judge his fallen creature, yet he deals kindly with him. The Lord will have it from his own lips that he has offended; he summons no other witness.

12. *And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.*

This is a clear proof of his guilt, first, that he throws the blame on her whom he was bound to love and shield; and next, that he throws the blame on God himself: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree." Ah, me, what mean creatures men are when sin comes in, and shame follows at its heels!

13. *And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.*

How often we throw the blame of our sin on the devil, who certainly has enough to bear without the added guilt of our iniquity! What Eve said was true; but it was not a sufficient reason for her sin. She should not have been beguiled by the serpent.

14, 15. *And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

Here was the first proclamation of the gospel. Strange to say, while God pronounces a curse upon the enemy of mankind, he is uttering a blessing upon the whole of those who belong to Christ, for HE is that seed of the woman, and all that belong to him are a simple-minded, child-like people, children of the woman. Their

opponents are the seed of the serpent, crafty, cunning, wise, full of deceit; and there is enmity between these two seeds. Christ is the Head of the one seed, and Satan is the head of the other; and our Lord Jesus Christ has had his heel bruised, and he suffered in that bruising of his heel; but he has broken the head of the dragon, he has crushed the power of evil, he has put his potent foot upon the old serpent's head.

16-18. *Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;*

He had been accustomed to eat of the fruit of the many trees of paradise now he must come down, and eat "the herb of the field." He is lowered from royal dainties to commoner fare.

19. *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground;*

"Thou shalt get thy life out of the ground till thou thyself shalt go into the ground."

19-21. *For out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*

This was a very significant gospel action. The Lord took away from Adam and Eve the withered fig-leaves; but put on them the skins of animals, to show, in symbol, that we are covered with the sacrifice of Christ. The giving up of a life yielded a better covering than the growth of nature; and so today the death of Christ yields us a better covering than we could ever find in anything that grew of our poor fallen nature. Blessed be God for thus thinking of us when providing raiment for our first parents!

22. *And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:*

That would have been a horrible thing, for man to be incapable of death, and so to continue for ever in a sinful world. It is by passing through death that we come out into the realm of perfectness.

23, 24. *Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*

“O, what a fall was there, my countrymen, Then I, and you, and all of us fell down;” while sin triumphed over us; yet even the fall by Adam’s sin was not without the promise of a gracious recovery through the last Adam, the Lord from heaven. Well does Dr. Watts set forth the contrast between the fall of the angels and the fall of man, —

“Down headlong from their native skies
The rebel angels fell,
And thunderbolts of flaming wrath
Pursued them deep to hell.”

“Down from the top of earthly bliss
Rebellious man was hurl’d;
And Jesus stoop’d beneath the grave
To reach a sinking world.”

He took not on him the nature of angels; but he took our nature, and died in our stead. May we trust to his death to bring us life, and thereby be saved from the consequences of the fall!

GENESIS 3

1-9. *Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they*

sewed; fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. .And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

In tones of mingled pity and rebuke he asked, "Where art thou?"

10, 11. *And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, —*

Note the calm majesty of every word. Here is no human passion, but divine dignity: "And he said," —

11,12. *Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat! And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.*

There is no sign of true confession here. Adam had been an unfallen creature a few hours before, but, now, he had broken the commandment of the Lord, and you can see how completely death was brought into his moral nature; for if it had not been so, he would have said "My God, I have sinned, canst thou and wilt thou forgive me?" But instead of doing so, he laid the blame for his sin upon his wife, which was an utterly mean action: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." He almost seemed to lay the blame upon God because he had given him the woman to be with him. He was guilty of unkindness to his wife and of blasphemy against his maker, in seeking to escape from confessing the sin which he had committed. It is an ill sign with men when they cannot be brought frankly to acknowledge their wrongdoing.

13. *And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done?*

Oh, that question! How far reaching it is! By her action, and her husband's, the flood-gates had been pulled up, and the flood of sin had been let loose upon the world. They had struck a match, and set the world on fire with sin. And every one of our sins is essentially of the same nature, and has in it, substantially, the same mischief. Oh, that at any time when we have sinned, God would ask each one of us the question, "What is it that thou hast done?"

13. *And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.*

Still, you see, there is no confession of guilt, but only the attempt to push the blame off upon somebody else. The Lord God did not ask the serpent anything, for he knew that he was a liar, but he at once pronounced sentence upon him: —

14, 15. *And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

And, now, there is no creature so degraded as that once bright angel, who is now the devil. He is always going about with serpentine wriggling, Seeking to do more mischief. On his belly does he go, and still is dust his meat. That which is foul, material, carnal, he delights in. And his head is bruised, blessed be the name of the Woman's promised seed! The old serpent's head is bruised with a fatal bruising, while the wounded heel of our Saviour is the joy and delight of our hearts.

16, 17. *Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;*

How obliquely fell the curse! Not, "Cursed art thou," as the Lord said to the serpent; but, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake."

18-21. *Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*

Some creature had to die in order to provide them with garments, and you know who it is that died in order that we might be robed in his spotless righteousness. The Lamb of God has made

for us a garment which covers our nakedness so that we are not afraid to stand even before the bar of God.

22-24. *And the LORD God said, Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*

GENESIS 7

1. *And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark;*

Notice that the Lord did not say to Noah, "Go into the ark," but "Come," plainly implying that God was himself in the ark, waiting to receive Noah and his family into the big ship that was to be their place of refuge while all the other people on the face of the earth were drowned. The distinctive word of the gospel is a drawing word: "Come." Jesus says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" and he will say to his people at the last, "Come, ye blessed of my Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." "Depart" is the word of justice and judgment, but "Come" is the word of mercy and grace. "The Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark;" —

1. *For thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.*

Therefore God drew a distinction between him and the unrighteous, for he always hath a special regard for godly people.

2, 3. *Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.*

Of the clean creatures which might be offered in sacrifice to God you see that there was a larger proportion than there was of the unclean, that there might be sufficient for sacrifice without the destruction of any species. The unclean beasts were mostly killers and devourers of others, and therefore their number we to be less than that of the clean species. Oh, that the day might soon come

when there would be more of clean men and women than of unclean, when there would be fewer sinners than godly people in the world, though even then there would be the ungodly “by two” like the unclean beasts.

4. For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth.

It is the prerogative of the king to have the power of life and death, and it is the sole prerogative of the King of kings that — “He can create, and he can destroy.” But what destructive power is brought into operation because of human sin! Sin must be a very heinous thing, since God, who despiseth not the work of his own hands, will sooner break up the human race, and destroy every thing that liveth rather than that sin should continue to defile the earth. He has destroyed the earth once by water because of sin, and he will the second time destroy it by fire for the selfsame reason. Wherever sin is, God will hunt it; with barbed arrows will he shoot at it; he will cut it in pieces with his sharp two-edged sword, for he cannot endure sin. Oh, how foolish are they who harbour it in their own bosoms, for it will bring destruction to them if they keep it there!

5. And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him.

Here was positive proof of his righteousness, in that he was obedient to the word of the Lord. A man who does not obey God’s commands may talk about righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith, but it is clear that he does not possess it, for faith works by love, and the righteousness which is by faith is proved by obedience to God. “Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him,” and so proved that he was righteous before God.

6. And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth.

He was nearly five hundred years old when he began to preach about the flood, — a good old age to take up such a subject. For a hundred and twenty years he pursued his theme, — three times as long as most men are ever able to preach, and now at last God’s time of long-suffering is over, and he proves the truthfulness of the testimony of his servant by sending the flood that Noah had foretold.

7, 8. *And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood. Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth,*

This largest and most complete menagerie that was ever gathered together was not collected by human skill; divine power alone could have accomplished such a task as that.

9. *There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and female, as God had commanded Noah.*

They “went in.” Noah had not to hunt or search for them, but they came according to God’s plan and purpose, even as, concerning the salvation which is by Christ Jesus, his people shall be willing to come to him in the day of his power; with joyfulness shall they come into the ark of their salvation.

10, 11. *And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.*

Perhaps the world was in its prime, when the trees were in bloom, and the birds were singing in their branches, and the flowers were blooming on the earth, “the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.”

12-13. *And the rain was upon the earth forty day and forty nights. In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah’s wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark;*

These eight persons are very carefully mentioned. “The Lord knoweth them that are his,” “and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up” — or, shut up — “my jewels,” as he was about to do in the case. In similar fashion, God makes a very careful enumeration of all those who believe in him, precious are they in his sight, and they shall be preserved when all others are destroyed.

14. *They, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort.*

“Every bird of every sort,” that is, every kind of bird; they are all mentioned over again. God makes much of salvation, oh, that we also did! We may recount and rehearse the story of our rescue from universal destruction, and we need not be afraid or ashamed of repeating it. As the Holy Ghost repeats the words we have here, you and I may often tell out the story of our salvation, and dwell upon the minute particulars of it, for every item of it is full of instruction.

15, 16. *And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life. And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the LORD shut him in.*

Now the jewels are all in, and therefore the casket is closed.

17. *And the flood was forty days upon the earth;*

Just as it had been foretold, for God’s providence always tallies with his promises or with his threats. “Hath he said, and shall he not do it?”

17. *And the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth.*

You can see it begin to move until it is afloat. The same effect is often produced on us; when the flood of affliction is deep, then we begin to rise. Oh, how often have we been lifted up above the earth by the very force that threatened to drench and drown us! David said, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted,” and many another saint can say that he never was floated until the floods were out, but then he left the worldliness with which he had been satisfied before, and he began to rise to a higher level than he had previously attained.

18-19. *And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered.*

If Moses had meant to describe a partial deluge upon only a small part of the earth, he used very misleading language; but if he meant to teach that the deluge was universal, he used the very word which we might have expected that he would use. I should think that no person, merely by reading this chapter, would arrive at the conclusion that has been reached by some of our very learned men, — too learned to hold the simple truth. It looks as if the deluge

must have been universal when we read that not only did the waters prevail exceedingly upon the earth, but that “all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven;” that is, all beneath the canopy of the sky, “were covered.” What could be more plain and clear than that?

20-23. *Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.*

This is the counterpart of what will follow the preaching of the gospel those who are in Christ shall live, shall rise, and reign with him for ever but none of those who are outside of Christ shall so live. “Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.”

24. *And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.*

GENESIS 8

1. *And God remembered Noah,*

Noah had been shut up in the ark for many a day, and at the right time God thought of him, practically thought of him, and came to visit him. Dear heart, you have been shut out from the world now for many days, but God has not forgotten you. God remembered Noah, and he remembers you.

1. *And every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark:*

Does God remember cattle? Then he will certainly remember men made in his own image He will remember you, though you think yourself the most worthless one on the face of the earth: “God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark.”

1. *And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged;*

Winds and waves are wholly under God's control. I suppose that this was a very drying wind, so the waters began to turn to vapor, and gradually to disappear. It is God who sends the winds; they seem most volatile and irregular, but God sends them to do his bidding. Blow it east, or blow it west, the wind comes from God; and whether the waters increase or are assuaged, it is God's doing. Are the waters very deep with you, dear friend? God can dry them up, and, singularly enough, he can stop one trouble with another, he can dry up the water with the wind. I have known him very strangely with his people, and when they thought they were quite forgotten, he has proved that he remembered them, and both the winds of heaven and the waters of the sea have had to work their good. There is not an angel in heaven but God will make him to be a servant to you if you need him; there is not a wind in any quarter of the globe but God will guide it to you if it is necessary; and there are no waves of the sea but shall obey the Lord's will concerning you.

2. The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained;

God works upwards, and stops the windows of heaven. He works downwards, and stays the breaking up of the fountains of the deep.

“He everywhere hath sway,
And all things serve his might.”

Be not afraid; he can open the windows of heaven, and pour down abundant blessings for you, and he can let down the cellar-flaps of the great deep, and stop its flowing fountains.

“When he makes bare his arm,
What shall his work withstand?”

3-5. And the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated. And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat. And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month: in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen.

God told Noah when to go into the ark, but he did not tell him when he should come out again. The Lord told Noah when to go in, for it was necessary for him to know that; but he did not tell him when he should come out, for it was unnecessary that he should know that. God always lets his people know what is practically for

their good. There are many curious points on which we should like to have information, but God has not revealed it, and when he has not revealed anything, we had better not try to unravel the mystery. No good comes of prying into unrevealed truth. Noah knew that he would come out of the ark one day, for was he not preserved there to be a seed-to keep the race alive? Noah was not told when he should be released, and the Lord does not tell you when your trouble will come to an end. It will come to an end; therefore wait, and be patient, and do not want to know the time of your deliverance. We should know too much if we knew all that will happen in the future. It is quite enough for us if we do our duty in the present, and trust God for the rest. Still, I think that Noah must have been very pleased when he felt the ark grating at last on the mountains of Ararat. He could not build a dock for his big ship; but God had prepared a berth for it on the mountain side. Now, as he looked out, he could see, here and there, a mountain top rising like an island out of the great expanse of water.

6, 7. *And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made: And he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro,*

Sometimes alighting on the ark; then flying away again.

7-10. *Until the waters were dried up from of the earth. Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from of the face of the ground; But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark. And he stayed yet other seven days;*

I wonder whether Noah sent out these creatures on the Sabbath mornings. The mention of seven days, and the resting in between seems to look like it. Oh, dear friends, sometimes people send out a raven on the Lord's day morning, and it never brings them anything. Send out a dove rather than a raven; come to the house of God with quiet, gentle, holy expectation, and your dove will come back to you. It may be that it will bring you something worth bringing one of these days, as Noah's dove brought to him.

10, 11. *And again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive*

leaf plucked off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth.

The waters were abated as far as the fruit trees; not only the tallest forest trees, but some of the fruit trees were uncovered from the water. The dove had plucked off “an olive leaf.” Perhaps you have seen a picture of the dove carrying an olive branch in its mouth, which, in the first place, a dove could not pluck out of the tree, and in the second place, a dove could not carry an olive branch even if she could pluck it off. It was an olive leaf, that is all. Why cannot people keep to the words of Scripture? If the Bible mentions a leaf, they make it a bough; and if the Bible says it is a bough, they make it a leaf.

12. *And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; which returned not again unto him any more.*

Noah could read something from that leaf that the dove brought to him, but he learned more when she did not return to him. He knew that she had found a proper resting-place, and that the earth was clear of the flood.

13. *And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth:*

That was a happy New Year’s day for Noah. He was glad to find himself at rest once more, though not yet at liberty.

13. *And Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry.*

Why did not Noah come out? Well, you see, he had gone in by the door, and he meant to come out by the door, and he that opened the door for him, and shut him in, must now open the door for him, and let him out. He waits God’s time, and we are always wise in doing that. You lose a great deal of time by being in a hurry. Many people think they have done a great deal when they have really done nothing. Better take time in order to save time. Slow is sometimes faster than fast. So Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked out, but he did not go out till God commanded him to do so.

14. *And in the second month,*

Nearly two months Noah waited for the complete drying of the earth.

14. *On the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried.*

“The face of the ground was dry” in the first month; “the earth was dried,” the second month. Noah might have thought it was dry enough before; but God did not think so, there was enough mud to breed a pestilence, so Noah must wait until God had made the earth ready for him.

15-16. *And God spoke unto Noah, saying, Go forth of the ark,*

Noah must wait till God speaks to him. Oh, that some people would wait for God’s command, but they will not! He shall bless thy going out and thy coming in if thou wilt go forth and come in when he bids thee. “Go forth,” says the Lord, “Go forth of the ark.”

16-19. *Thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons’ wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth. And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons’ wives with him: Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.*

That was a very wonderful procession, it was the new beginning of everything upon the earth. Whatever evolution or any other folly or evil of man may have done, everything had to begin again over. Everybody was drowned save these great fathers of the new age, and all must begin from this stock.

20. *And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.*

Common sense would have said, “Spare them, for you will want every one of them.” But grace said, “Slay them, for they belong to God. Give Jehovah his due.” I have often admired that widow of Sarepta. When she had but a handful of meal, she made a little cake for God’s prophet first, but then God multiplied her meal and her oil. Oh, if we would but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all things should be added unto us! Out of the small stock he had, Noah took of the clean beasts, and of the clean fowls, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

21. *And the LORD smelled a sweet savour;*

Noah's faith was pleasing to God. It was Noah's confidence in a bleeding sacrifice that gave him acceptance with the Lord. God thought upon his Son, and that great Sacrifice to be offered long afterwards on the cross, and he "smelled a sweet savour."

21. *And the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.*

God always speaks comfortable words to those who bring an acceptable sacrifice. If you would hear the voice of a divine promise, go to the atoning blood of Jesus. If you would know what perfect reconciliation means, his to the altar where the great Sacrifice was presented.

22. *While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

They never have ceased. He have this year had a long and dreary winter; it looked as if spring would never come. Only a few days ago, the chestnuts were just beginning to turn green, and then there came the little spikes, and now you can see them in full flower. How faithfully God fulfils his covenant with the earth! How truly will he keep his covenant with every believing sinner! Oh, trust ye in him, for his promise will stand fast for ever!

GENESIS 8:15-22

15-21. *And God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth. And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him: every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark. And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a sweet savour;*

Until then, the earth had been obnoxious to Jehovah. He had put it away from him as a foul thing, drowned beneath the flood; but

after the offering of Noah's sacrifice, the Lord smelled "a savour of rest."

21, 22. *And the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground. And any more for man's sake, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

Thus we see what we may expect so long as the earth remains, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Now let us read a few verses from Jeremiah's prophecy.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 8:15-22; AND JEREMIAH 33:15-26.

GENESIS 8:20-22

20, 21. *And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offering on the altar. And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; —*

A savour of rest, —

21, 22. *And the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

So that you all live under a covenant, — a gracious covenant, and, by virtue of it, the day succeeds the night, the summer follows the winter, and the harvest in due course rewards the labour of the seedtime. All this ought to make us long to be under the yet fuller and higher covenant of grace, by which spiritual blessings would be scoured to us, — an eternal day to follow this earthly night, and a glorious harvest to follow this time of seed-sowing.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 8:20-22; 9:8-17; AND ISAIAH 54:1-10.

GENESIS 9:8-17

8-10. *And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, sayings, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed*

after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth.

Happy fowls, and happy cattle, and happy beasts of the earth to be connected with Noah, and go to come under a covenant of preservation and we, — though only worthy to be typified by these creatures which God had preserved in the ark, — are thrice happy to be in the same covenant with him who is our Noah, our rest, our sweet savour unto God.

11-17. *And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token for a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud. And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, —*

What a wonderful expression that is! It is similar to that remarkable declaration of Jehovah, recorded in Exodus 12:13. “When I see the blood, I will pass over you.” The blood was not to be sprinkled inside the house where the Israelites might be comforted by a sight of it, but outside the house, where only God could see it. It is for our sake that the rainbow is set in the cloud, and we can see it there; yet infinite mercy represents it as being there as a refreshment to the memory of God: “The bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it,”-

16. *That I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.*

So, when my eye of faith is dim, and I cannot see the covenant sign, I will remember that there is an eye which never can be dim, which always sees the covenant token; and so I shall still be secure notwithstanding the dimness of my spiritual vision. For our comfort, we must see it; but for our safety, blessed be God, it is only needful that he should see it.

17. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

Now let us read what the Lord says, through the prophet Isaiah, concerning this covenant.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 8:20-22; 9:8-17; AND ISAIAH 54:1-10.

GENESIS 12:1-7

We will read two or three passages in the Book of Genesis concerning God blessing his servant Abraham. Turn first to the twelfth chapter.

1. Now the lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

It was God's intention to keep his truth and his pure worship alive in the world by committing it to the charge of one man, and the nation that should spring from him. In the infinite sovereignty of his grace, he chose Abraham,—passing by all the rest of mankind,—and elected him to be the depository of the heavenly light, that through him it might be preserved in the world until the days when it should be more widely scattered. It seemed essential to this end that Abraham should come right out from his fellow-countrymen, and be separate unto Jehovah, so the Lord said to him, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.”

2, 3. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

There, you see, was the missionary character of the seed of Abraham, if they had but recognized it. God did not bless them for themselves alone, but for all nations: “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

4. So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

He had already attained a fine old age, but he had another century of life before him, which he could not then foresee, or

expect. If, at his age, he had said, “Lord, I am too old to travel, too old to leave my country, and to begin to live a wandering life,” we could not have wondered; but he did not talk in that fashion. He was commanded to go and we read, “So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.”

5, 6. *And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.*

Fierce and powerful nations possessed the country; it did not seem a very likely place to be the heritage of a peace-loving man like Abraham. God does not always fulfill his promises to his people at once; else, where would be the room for faith? This life of ours is to be a life of faith, and it will be well rewarded in the end. Abraham had not a foot of land to call his own, except that cave of Machpelah which he bought of the sons of Heth for a burying-place for his beloved Sarah.

7. *And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.*

Thus, you see, Abraham began his separated life with a blessing from the Lord his God.

Further on in his history he received a still larger blessing when he returned from his victory over the kings.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 12:1-7; 14:17-24; and 22:15-18.

GENESIS 14:17-24

17. *And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king’s dale. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him,—*

In the name of God, Melchizedek blessed Abraham. This mysterious personage, the highest type of our Lord Jesus Christ, blessed Abraham; “and without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.” “He blessed him,”—

19, 20. *And said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.*

Abraham recognized the priest of God as his spiritual superior, “and he gave him tithes of all.”

21. *And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.*

It was according to the rule of war that, if persons who had made an invasion were afterwards themselves captured, then if the new captor gave up the persons, he was fully entitled to take the goods to himself.

22, 23. *And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich:*

The patriarch is greater than the king. He has a right to all his spoil; but he will not touch it, lest the glory of his God should thereby be stained. Abraham will have nothing but what his God shall give him; he will not take anything from the king of Sodom. I like to see this glorious independence of the believing man. “I have a right to this,” says he, “but I will not take it; what are mere earthly rights to me? My chief business is to honour the God whom I am, and whom I serve; and if the taking of this spoil would dishonour him, I will not take even so much as a thread or a shoe-latchet.”

24. *Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.*

“Though I am willing to give up my share of the spoil, that is no reason why these men should do the same.” Christian men ought not to expect worldlings to do what they cheerfully and willingly do themselves; and, indeed, it is not much use to expect it, for they are not likely to do it. Now let us read in the twenty-second chapter of this same Book of Genesis. Abraham had endured the supreme test of his faith, and had, in full intent, offered up his son Isaac at the command of God, his hand being withheld from the actual sacrifice only by an angelic voice.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 12:1-7; 14:17-24; and 22:15-18.

GENESIS 14:17-24

17, 18. *And the King of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.*

One who exercised both the kingship and the priesthood, the only person that we know of who did this, and who, therefore, is a wonderful type of that marvellous King-Priest of whom we read in the 110th Psalm, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

19, 20. *And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.*

It must have been peculiarly refreshing to Abraham to be met by a man of kindred spirit, and one whom he recognized as his superior. No doubt he was weary, though triumphant; and so, just then, the Lord sent him special refreshment, and, beloved, how sweet it is to us when the greater Melchizedek meets us! Jesus Christ our great King-Priest, still meets us, and brings us bread and wine. Often, the very symbols on his table have been refreshing to us, but their inner meaning has been far more sustaining and comforting to our spirit. There is no food like the bread and wine that our blessed Melchizedek brings forth to us, even his own flesh and blood. Well may we give him tithes of all that we have. Nay more, we may say to him, "Take not tithes, O Lord, but take all!"

21. *And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.*

They were all Abraham's by right as the spoils of war.

22, 23. *And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich:*

Sometimes, a child of God will find himself cast, through force of circumstances, into very curious companionship. For the sake of Lot, Abraham had to go and fight the enemies of the king of Sodom, and sometimes, in fighting for religious liberty, we have had to be

associated with persons from whom we differ as much as Abraham differed from the king of Sodom but right must be fought for under all circumstances. Yet, sooner or later, there comes a crucial test in which our true character will be discovered. Shall we personally gain anything by this association? We loathe it even while we recognize that it is needful for the time being, but we have not entered it for the sake of personal gain.

24. *Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.*

They had a right to it. What we do ourselves, we do not always expect others to do. There is a higher code of morals for the servant of God than for other men; and we may often think of what they do, and not condemn them, although we could not do the same ourselves, for we are lifted into a higher position as the servant of the Lord.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 14:17-24; and 15.

GENESIS 15

1-3. *After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.*

Perhaps he did not doubt the promise, but he wanted to have it explained to him. He may have wondered if it meant that one born in his house, though not his son, was to be his heir; and that, through him, the blessing would come. He takes the opportunity of making an enquiry, that he may know how to act. At the same time, there does seem to be a clashing between Abraham's question, "What wilt thou give me?" and the declaration of God, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." There is a great descent from the language of the Lord to that of the most stable believer, and when you and I are even at our best, I have no doubt that, if all could be recorded that we think and say, some of our fellow-believers would feel that the best of men are but men at the best, and that God's language is after a nobler fashion than ours will ever be, till we have seen his face in glory.

4, 5. *And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come out of thine own bowels shall be their heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.*

Now was his faith tried indeed, he had no child, he was himself old, and his wife also was old, yet the Lord's promise was, "So shall thy seed be" as the stars of heaven. Could he believe it? He did.

6. *And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*

Oh, what a blessing to learn the way of ample faith in God! This is the saving quality in many a life. Look through Paul's list of the heroes of faith; some of them are exceedingly imperfect characters' some we should hardly have thought of mentioning, but they had faith; and although men, in their faulty judgment, think faith to be an inferior virtue, and often scarcely look upon it as a virtue at all, yet, in the judgment of God, faith is the supremest virtue. "This," said Christ, "is the work of God," the greatest of all works, "that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." To trust, to believe, this shall be counted to us for righteousness even as it was to Abraham.

7, 8. *And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?*

What! Abraham, is not God's promise sufficient for thee? O father of the faithful, though thou dost believe, and art counted as righteous through believing, dost thou still ask, "Whereby shall I know?" Ah, beloved! faith is often marred by a measure of unbelief; or, if not quite unbelief, yet there is a desire to have some token, some sign, beyond the bare promise of God.

9-11. *And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*

Here is a lesson for us. Perhaps you have some of these unclean birds coming down upon your sacrifice just now. That raven that you did not lock up well at home, has come here after you. Eagles

and vultures, and all kinds of kites in the form of carking cares, and sad memories, and fears, and doubts, come hovering over the sacred feast. Drive them away; God give you grace to drive them away by the power of his gracious Spirit!

12. *And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.*

He had asked for a manifestation, a sign, a token, and, lo, it comes in the “horror of great darkness.” Do not be afraid, beloved, if your soul sometimes knows what horror is. Remember how the favored three, on the Mount of Transfiguration, “feared as they entered into the cloud;” yet it was there that they were to see their Master in his glory. Remember what the Lord said to Jeremiah concerning Jerusalem and his people, They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.” That is the right spirit in which to receive prosperity, but as for adversity, rejoice in it, for God often sends the richest treasures to his children in wagons drawn by black horses. You may except that some great blessing is coming nigh to you when a “horror of great darkness” falls upon you.

13. *And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;*

It was to be a long while before the nation should enter upon its inheritance. Here is a promise that was to take four hundred years to ripen! Some of you cannot believe the promise if its fulfillment is delayed for four days; you can hardly keep on praying, if it takes four years; what would you think of a four hundred years promise? Yet it was to be so long in coming to maturity because it was so vast. If Abraham’s seed was to be like the stars of heaven for multitude, there must be time for the increase to come.

14-17. *And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.*

True emblems of the Church of God with her smoke and her light, her trying affliction, yet the grace by which she still keeps burning and shining in the world.

18-21. *In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.*

He mentions the adversaries to show how great would be the victories of the race that should come and dispossess them. Let us always look upon the list of our difficulties as only a catalogue of our triumphs. The greater our troubles, the louder our song at the last.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 14:17-24; and 15.

GENESIS 18:17-33

17-19. *And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.*

Abraham is called “the friend of God.” It was not merely that God was his Friend; that was blessedly true, and it was a great wonder of grace; but he was honoured to be called “the friend of God” -one with whom God could hold sweet converse, a man after his own heart, in whom he trusted to whom he revealed his secrets. I am afraid there are not many men of Abraham’s sort in the world even now; but, wherever there is such a man, with whom God is familiar, he will be sure to be one who orders his household aright. If the Lord is my Friend, and if I am indeed his friend, I shall wish him to be respected by my children, and I shall endeavor to dedicate my children to his service. I fear that the decline of family godliness, which is so sadly remarkable in these days, is the source of a great many of the crying sins of the age; the Church of God at large would have been more separate from the world if the little church in each man’s house had been more carefully trained for

God. If you want the Lord to confide in you, and to trust you with his secrets, you must see that he is able to say of you what he said of Abraham, “he will command his children and his household after him.”

20-22. *And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.*

He was in no hurry to close that blessed interview; when he had once come into the Lord’s immediate presence, he lingered there. Those who are friends of God like to be much in their Lord’s company.

23. *And Abraham drew near,*

There is nothing like coming very close to God in prayer: “Abraham drew near.” He was about to use his influence with his great Friend; not for himself, but for these men of Sodom, who were going to be destroyed. Happy are those who, when they are near to God, use the opportunity in pleading for others, ay, even for the most wicked and abandoned of men.

23-25. *And said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*

Abraham bases his argument upon the justice of God; and when a man dares to do that, it is mighty pleading, for, depend upon it, God will never do an unjust thing. If thou darest to plead his righteousness, his infallible justice, thou pleadest most powerfully.

26-30. *And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy*

it. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.

This time the patriarch has advanced by ten; before, it was by fives. Pleading men grow bolder and braver in their requests. A man who is very familiar with God will, by-and-by, venture to say that which, at the first, he would not have dared to utter.

31, 32. *And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.*

He went no farther than to plead that Sodom might be spared if ten righteous persons could be found in it. I have heard some say that it was a pity Abraham did not go on pleading with God; but I would not dare to say so. He knew better when to begin and when to leave off than you and I do; there are certain restraints in prayer which a man of God cannot explain to others, but which he, nevertheless, himself feels. God moves his servants to pray in a certain case, and they do pray with great liberty and manifest power. Another case may seem to be precisely like it: yet the mouth of the former suppliant is shut, and in his heart he does not feel that he can pray as he did before. Do I blame the men of God? Assuredly not; the Lord dealeth wisely with his servants, and he tells them, by gentle hints, which they quickly understand, when and where to stop in their supplications.

33. *And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.*

We know that the angels went down to Sodom, where they were received by Lot, and despitefully used by the Sodomites. We will continue our reading at the twelfth verse of the next chapter.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 18:17-33, 19:12-28.

GENESIS 19:12-28

12. *And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place:*

Let me bid every Christian man to look about him, among all his kith and kin, to see which of them yet remain unconverted. Let your prayers go up for them all: “Son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters.”

13, 14. *For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.*

“The old man is in his dotage,” said they; “he always was peculiar, he never acted like the rest of the citizens; he came in here as a stranger, and he has always been strange in his behavior.”

15, 16. *And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him; and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.*

I have always felt pleased to think that there were just hands enough to lead out these four people, Lot, and his wife, and their two daughters. Had there been one more, there would have been no hand to lay hold of the fifth person; but these two angels, with their four hands, could just lead these four persons outside the doomed city. God will always have agents enough to save his elect; there shall be sufficient gospel preaching, even in the darkest and deadest times, to bring his redeemed out of the City of Destruction. God will miss none of his own.

17. *And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.*

Perhaps the old man's legs trembled under him; he felt that he could not run so far; and, beside, the mountain seemed so bleak and dreary, he could not quite quit the abodes of men.

18-21. *And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saying my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I wilt not overthrow this city, for thou hast spoken.*

I think that I have said to you before that this sparing of Zoar is an instance of the cumulative power of prayer. I may liken Abraham's mighty pleading to a ton weight of prayer, supplication that had a wonderful force and power. Lot's petition is only like an ounce of prayer. Poor little Lot, what a poor little prayer his was! Yet that ounce turned the scale. So, it may be that there is some mighty man of God who is near to prevailing with God, but he cannot quite obtain his request; but you, poor feeble pleader that you are, shall add your feather's weight to his great intercession, and then the scale will turn. This narrative always comforts me I think that Zoar was preserved, not so much by the prayer of Lot, as by the greater prayer of Abraham which had gone before; yet the mighty intercession of the friend of God did not prevail until it was supported by the feeble petition of poor Lot.

22. *Haste thee, escape thither;*

The hand of justice was held back until God's servant was safe. There can be no destruction of the world, there can be no pouring out of the last plagues, there can be no total sweeping away of the ungodly till, first of all, the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads, and taken to a place of security. The Lord will preserve his own. He lets the scaffold stand until the building is finished; then, it will come down fast enough.

22-28. *For I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all*

the inhabitants of the cities, and that, which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt. And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the LORD: and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

What must Abraham's meditations have been! What should be the meditations of every godly man as he looks towards Sodom, and sees the smoke of its destruction? It might do some men great good if they would not persistently shut their eyes to the doom of the wicked. Look, look, I pray you, upon that place of darkness and woe where every impenitent and unbelieving spirit must be banished for ever from the presence of the Lord! Look till the tears are in your eyes as you thank God that you are rescued from so terrible a doom! Look till your heart melts with pity for the many who are going the downward road, and who will eternally ruin themselves unless almighty grace prevent!

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 18:17-33, 19:12-28.

GENESIS 22:1-19

1. *And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt-*
That is, "God did test or try"-

1, 2. *Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son,*
"But, Lord, I have two sons, Ishmael and Isaac."

2. *Thine only son,*

"But, Lord, both Ishmael and Isaac are my sons, and each of them is the only son of his mother."

2. *Isaac, whom thou lovest,*

See how definitely God points out to Abraham the son who is to be the means of the great trial of his father's faith: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest";"-

2. *And get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*

It was usually the way, in God's commands to Abraham, to make him sail under sealed orders. When he was first bidden to leave his country and his kindred, and his father's house, he had to go to a land that God would shew him. They have true faith who can

go forth at God's command, not knowing whither they are going. So Abraham did, and now the Lord says to him, "Take Isaac, and offer him for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

3. *And Abraham rose up early in the morning,-*

Obedience should be prompt, we should show our willingness to obey the Lord's command by not delaying: "Abraham rose up early in the morning,"-

3. *And saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.*

All the details are mentioned, for true obedience is very careful of detail. They who would serve God aright must serve him faithfully in little things as well as in great ones. There must be a saddling of the ass, a calling of the two young men as well as Isaac, and a cleaving of the wood for the burnt offering. We must do everything that is included in the bounds of the divine command, and do it all with scrupulous exactness and care. Indifferent obedience to God's command is practically disobedience, careless obedience is dead obedience, the heart is gone out of it. Let us learn from Abraham how to obey.

4. *Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.*

His was deliberate obedience; he could bear suspense, thinking over the whole matter for three days, and setting his face like a flint to obey his Lord's command.

5. *And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.*

Abraham did not deceive the young men, he believed that he and Isaac would come to them again. He believed that though he might be compelled to say his son, "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." Abraham bade the young men stay where they were, they must not see all that he was to do before the Lord. Oftentimes, our highest obedience must be a solitary one; friends cannot help us in such emergencies, and it is better for them and better for us that they should not be with us.

6. *And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife;*

That knife was cutting into his own heart all the while, yet he took it. Unbelief would have left the knife at home, but genuine faith takes it.

6-8. *And they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.*

Abraham here spoke like a prophet; in fact, throughout this whole incident, he never opened his mouth without a prophetic utterance; and I believe that, when men walk with God, and live near to God, they will possibly even without being aware of it, speak very weighty words which will have much more in them than they themselves apprehend. Is it not written, concerning the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord, “his leaf also shall not wither”? Not only shall his fruit be abundant, but his casual word, “his leaf also shall not wither.” So was it with it Abraham. He spoke like a prophet of God when he was really speaking to his son in the anguish of his spirit, and in his prophetic utterance we find the sum end substance of the gospel: “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” He is the great Provider, and he provides the offering, not only for us, but for himself, for the sacrifice was necessary to God as well as to man. And it is a burnt offering, not only a sin-offering but an offering of a sweet savour unto himself. “So they went both of them together.” Twice we are told this, for this incident is a type of the Father going with the Son and the Son going with the Father up to the great sacrifice on Calvary. It was not Christ alone who willingly died, or the Father alone who gave his Son, but they went both of them together,” even as Abraham and Isaac did here.

9. *And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there,*

See him pulling out the large, rough, unhewn stones that lay round about the place, and then fling them up into an altar.

9, 10. *And laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.*

So that, in intent and purpose, he had consummated the sacrifice, and therefore we read in Hebrew 11:17, “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son.” He had virtually done so in the esteem of God though no trace of a wound could be found upon Isaac. How often God takes the will for the deed with his people! When he finds them willing to make the sacrifice that he demands, he often does not require it at their hands. If you are willing to suffer for Christ’s sake, it may be that you shall not be caused to suffer and if you are willing to be a martyr for the truth, you may be permitted to wear the martyr’s crown even though you are never called to stand at the stake, the scaffold or the block.

11. *And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.*

Abraham always gives the same answer to the Lord’s call, “Here am I.”

12. *And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.*

The needful test had been applied, and Abraham’s faith had endured the trial. God knows all things by his divine omniscience, but now he knew by this severe test and trial which he had applied, that Abraham really loved him best of all. Notice that the angel says, “Now I know that thou fearest God.” I do not think that the gracious use of godly fear has ever been sufficiently estimated by the most of us; here, the stress is not laid upon the faith, but upon the filial fear of Abraham. That holy awe, that sacred reverence of God is the very essence of our acceptance with him.” The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him.” This is a very different thing from slavish fear; it is a right sort of fear, the kind of fear that love does not cast out, but which love lives with in happy fellowship.

13. *And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and*

took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

Here is another type of our Saviour's great sacrifice on Calvary,- the ram offered in the place of Jesus. How often do you and I have our great Substitute very near to us, yet we do not see him because we do not lift up our eyes and look. "Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns." So, if you lift up your eyes, and look the right, ay, you will see the great sacrifice close by you held fast for you, even as this ram was caught to die instead of Isaac. Oh, that you may have grace to turn your head in the right direction, and look to Christ and live!

14. *And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.*

God will foresee; "God will"-as we usually say,-"provide," which is being interpreted, fore-see. He will have everything ready against the time when it will be needed. He who provided the ram for a burnt offering in the place of Isaac will provide everything else that is required; and you may depend upon it that he who, in the greatest emergency that could ever happen, provided his only-begotten and well-beloved Son to die us the Substitute for sinners, will have foreseen every other emergency that can occur, and will have fore-provided all that is needful to meet it. Blessed be the name of Jehovah-jireh!

15, 16. *And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD,*

"Because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself."

16-18. *For because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.*

There stands the old covenant, the covenant of grace made with Abraham concerning his seed. Paul writes to the Galatians, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." It is in Christ that all the nations of the earth are to be blessed. If

there is a nation that has not yet heard the gospel, it must hear it, for so the promise stands, “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” We may look for a glorious future from the preaching of Christ throughout every land, for so the covenant was made with Abraham because he had obeyed God’s voice.

God had been good to Abraham before that time, for he was his beloved friend, but now he lifts him up to a higher platform altogether, and makes him a greater blessing than ever. It may be that God is about to test and try some of you in order that he may afterwards make you to be greater and more useful than you have ever been before.

19. *So Abraham returned unto his young men,*
As he said that he would.

19. *And they rose up and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.*

So the Lord bore his servant through this great trial, and blessed him more than he had ever blessed him before.

GENESIS 22:15-18

15. *And the angel of the lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee,—*

“Whenever I am engaged in blessing, I will bless thee. I win not pronounce a benediction in the which thou shalt not share: ‘In blessing I will bless thee,’”—

17, 18. *And in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.*

See the result of one man’s grand act of obedience, and note how God can make that man to be the channel of blessing to all coming ages. Oh, that you and I might possess the Abrahamic faith which thus practically obeys the Lord, and brings a blessing to all the nations of the earth!

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 12:1-7; 14:17-24; and 22:15-18.

GENESIS 24:1-16

Our subject is the value of divine guidance, and we shall, therefore, read two passages of Scripture illustrating the truth which we hope to enforce.

1. *And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.*

Happy man that can say that, who has a blessing everywhere! And yet Abraham had his “but,” for as yet Isaac was unmarried, and perhaps he little dreamed that for twenty years afterwards he who was to build the house of Abraham was to remain childless. Yet so it was. There was always a trial for Abraham’s faith, but even his trials were blessed, for “God blessed Abraham in all things.”

2. *And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh:*

According to the Eastern manner of swearing.

3. *And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, And the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell:*

This holy man was careful of the purity of his family; he knew what an ill-effect a Canaanitish wife might have upon his son, and also upon his offspring. He was, therefore, particularly careful here. I would that all parents were the same.

4, 5. *But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?*

The servant was very careful. Those that swear too readily they know not what, will ere long swear till they care not what. Better still is it for the Christian to remember the word of Christ, “Swear not at all, neither by heaven, nor by earth, nor by any other oath.” Doubtless the doctrine of the Saviour is that all oaths of every sort are lawful to the Christian, but if they ever be taken, it should be with deep circumspection and with earnest prayerfulness, that there be no mistake about the matter.

6. *And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again.*

He knew that God had called him and his kindred to inherit the land of Canaan, and, therefore, he was not willing that they should go back to their former dwelling-places.

7. The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.

What simple faith! This was the very glory of Abraham's faith; it was so simple, so childlike. It might be many miles to Padanaram, but it does not matter to faith. "My God will send his angel." Oh! we are always making difficulties and suggesting hardships; but if our faith were in lively exercise, we should do God's will far more readily. "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." Brethren, let us be of good heart and of good courage in all matters, for doubtless the angel of God will go before us.

8-11. *And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again. And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter. And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water.*

Now I think I may freely say that this looks something like what we call "a wild-goose chase." He was to go and find a wife for a young man left at home; he knew nothing of the people among whom he was to sojourn, but he believed that the angel of God would guide him aright. What ought he to do, now he had come near to the time when the decision must be made? He should seek counsel of God, and observe that he did so.

12-14. *And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy*

pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.

I do not know that he is to be imitated in setting a sign to God; perhaps not, but he did his best; he left the matter with God, and a thing is always in good hands when it is left with him. There is a deal of wisdom in this sign, however. Why did he not say, “The damsel that shall first offer me to drink”? No; she might be a little too forward, and a forward woman was not a fit spouse for the good and meditative Isaac. He himself was to address her first, and then she must be ready, with all cheerfulness, to do far more than he asks. She was to offer him to drink, and draw water for his camels; she would thus not be afraid of work, she would be courteous, and she would be kind, and all these meeting in one might show him, and by this test he might very wisely discover, that she was a fitting woman for Isaac, and might become his spouse.

15. *And it came to pass, before he had done speaking,*

Ay, he did not know that promise, “While they are yet speaking I will hear”; but God keeps his promises before he makes them, and, therefore, I am sure he will keep them after he has made them.

15, 16. *That, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up.*

And so on; I need not read the rest of the story, because we now find that, through earnest prayer, the good servant has been rightly led. We will now turn to another passage where we shall have another instance of a difficult case, where another person put his case before the Lord, and sought guidance and found it.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 24:1-16; 1 SAMUEL 30:1-13; 1 JOHN 1:1-3.

GENESIS 27:1-29

1-4. *And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: Now*

therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat: that my soul may bless thee before I die.

A sad misfortune to lose the sight of the eyes! How greatly, how much more than we do, ought we to thank God for the prolongation of our sight, and it has been well remarked by one of our greatest men of science “that we seldom hear Christian men thank God as they should for the use of spectacles in these modern times.” A philosopher has written a long paper concerning the blessings which he found in old age from this invention, and we, enabled still to read the Word when our sight decays, should be exceedingly grateful for it. After all, with all alleviations, it is a very great trial to be deprived of one’s eyesight, but those who are in good company. Whilst they have some of the greatest divines in modern history, they have here one of the best of men — one of the patriarchs whose eyes were dim so that he could not see. He seems to have had some sort of mistiness of soul about this time which was far worse, and so he desired to give the blessing to Esau, whom God had determined should never have it.

5-11. *And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the LORD before my death. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee. Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth: And thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death. And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man:*

He does not appear to have raised any objection to what she proposed on moral grounds, but only on the ground of the difficulty of it and the likelihood of being discovered. It only shows how low the moral sense may be in some who, nevertheless, have a desire towards God and have a faith in him. In those darker days we can hardly expect to find so much of the excellences of the spirit as we

ought to find now-a-days in those who possess the spirit of God fully.

12-15. *My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing. And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them. And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother: and his mother made savoury meat, such as his father loved. And Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son:*

And Esau, altogether a man of the world, one very like the sons of other families around about, took care to adorn himself in goodly raiment. It seems always more becoming to the worldling than the Christian. Jacob had a suit good enough for this occasion, but the worldly man had not. I would that those who fear God were less careful about the adornments of their persons. There are far better ornaments than gold can buy — ornaments neat, and raiment comely — may we all possess them.

16-19. *And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck: And she gave the savoury meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob. And he came unto his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I; who art thou, my son? And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn;*

Which, whatever may be said about it, was a plain lie, and is not to be excused upon any theory whatever. It was as much a sin in Jacob as it would be in us, except that perhaps he had less light, and the general cunning of those who surrounded him may have made it more easy with him and a less tax on conscience for him to do this than it would be in our case. “I am Esau,” said he. Why is all this recorded in the Bible? It is not to the credit of these men. No! the Holy Spirit does not write for the credit of man: he writes for the glory of God’s grace. He writes for the warning of believers now, and these things are examples unto us that we may avoid the blots and flaws in good men, and may thereby ourselves become more what we should be.

19-20. *I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac said*

unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the Lord thy God brought it to me.

Here he draws God's name into this lie, And this is worse still.

21-29. *And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him. And he said, Art thou my very son Esau? and he said, I am. And he said, Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless thee. And he brought it near to him, and he did eat: and he brought him wine, and he drank. And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son. And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed: therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.*

So he tied his own hands: he could not revoke his blessing, or, had he done so, he would have brought the curse upon himself.

GENESIS 32

1. *And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.*

When he left the promised land, he had a vision of angels, ascending and descending upon the ladder, as if to bid him farewell. Now that he is going back, the angels are there again to speed him on his way home to the land of the covenant, the land which the Lord had promised to give to Abraham and his seed.

2. *And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

The marginal reading is "Two hosts, or, camps." The angels of the Lord were encamping round about the man who feared him, though shore had been much in his character and conduct which the Lord could not approve.

3. *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother into the land of Seir, the country of Edom.*

After a visit from angels, afflictions and trials often come. John Bunyan wrote, as I have often reminded You, “The Christian man is seldom long at ease, When one trouble’s gone, another doth him seize;” and though the rhyme is rather rough, the statement is perfectly true. Full often, we are hardly out of one trial before we are into another.

4, 5. *And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and women servants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.*

It is very proper, when we have offended other people, and especially if we feel that we have done them wrong, as Jacob had done to Esau, that we should use the humblest terms concerning ourselves, and the best terms we can about those whom we have offended. Yet I must say that I do not like these terms that Jacob uses; they do not seem to me to be the right sort of language for a man of faith: “My lord Esau, Thy servant Jacob saith thus.” What business had God’s favored one to speak “thus” to such a profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright? Surely, there was more of the Jacob policy than there was of the Israel faith in this form of speech.

6, 7. *And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and alas he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed:*

“Four hundred men with him”! “That must mean mischief to me, and my company. Surely, he is coming thus to avenge himself for the wrong I did him, long ago. My brother’s heart is still hot with anger against me.” So, “Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.”

7, 8. *And he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; and said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.*

This man Jacob was always planning, and scheming; he was the great progenitor of the Jews, who are still preeminent in bargaining. See how he plots and arranges everything to the best advantage. I

blame him not for this, yet, methinks, he is to be blamed that he did not pray first. Surely, it would have been the proper order of things if the prayer had preceded the planning; but Jacob planned first, and prayed afterwards. Well, even that was better than planning, and not praying at all; so there is something commendable in his action, though not without considerable qualification.

9. *And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD*

Jacob uses that August name “Jehovah” — “the Lord” —

9, 10. *Which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred and I will deal well with thee; I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.*

Not even one servant had he with him when he fled away across the river, he was alone and unattended, and now he was coming back at the head of a great family, with troops of servants, and an abundance of cattle, and sheep, and all things that men think worth having. How greatly God had increased him, and blessed him! He remembers that lonely departure from the home country, and he cannot help contrasting it with his present prosperity.

11-13. *Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude. And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother;*

There he is, planning again! And this time, perhaps, since he has prayed over the matter, he is planning more wisely than he did before, intending now to try to appease his brother’s anger by a munificent “present for Esau his brother.”

14-16. *Two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, Thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals. And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto His servants, Pass over before me, and put a pace betwixt drove and drove.*

In order that there might be time for his brother to look at the present in detail, and see it piece by piece, and so be the more struck with the size of it. This was true Oriental policy, and crafty Jacob always had more than enough of something and planning even when it was not done with wisdom; but, in this case, I think it was a wise arrangement, for which he is to be commended.

17-19. *And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him.*

What care he takes about the whole affair! We cannot blame him, under the circumstances, yet how much grander is the quiet, noble demeanour of Abraham, who trusts in God, and leaves matters more in his hands! Yet, alas! even he tried plotting and scheming more than once, but failed every time he did so.

20-24. *And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me. So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company. And he rose up that night, and took his two womenservants, and his two women servants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. And Jacob was left alone;*

This was a very anxious time for him, the heaviest trial of his life seemed impending. He was dreading it more than he need have done, for God never meant the trouble he feared to come upon him at all. He was trembling under a dark cloud that was to pass over his head without bursting. No tempest of wrath was to break out of it upon him. However, we must admire Jacob in this one respect, that, with all his thought, and care, and planning, and plotting, he did not neglect prayer. He felt that nothing he could do would be effectual without God's blessing. He had not reached the highest point of faith, though he had gone in the right direction a great deal further than many Christians. He now resolved to have a night of prayer, that he might win deliverance: "Jacob was left alone;"

24. *And there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.*

I suppose our Lord Jesus Christ did here, as on many other occasions preparatory to his full incarnation, assume a human form, and came thus to wrestle with the patriarch.

25. *And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh;*

Where the column of the leg supports the body, and if that be disjoined, a man has lost all his strength. It was brave of Jacob thus to wrestle, but there was too much of self about it all. It was his own sufficiency that was wrestling with the God-man, Christ Jesus. Now comes the crisis which will make a change in the whole of Jacob's future life: "He touched the hollow of his thigh."

25. *And the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.*

What can Jacob do now that the main bone of his leg is put out of joint?

He cannot even stand up any longer in the great wrestling match; what can he do?

26. *And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*

It is evident that, as soon as he felt that he must fall, he grasped the other "Man" with a kind of death-grip, and would not let him go. Now, in his weakness, he will prevail. While he was so strong, he won not the blessing; but when he became utter weakness, then did he conquer.

27. *And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.*

That is, a supplanter, as poor Esau well knew.

28. *And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel:*

That is, a prince of God.

28. *For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men and hast prevailed.*

Jacob was the prince with the disjoined limb, and that is exactly what a Christian is. He wins, he conquers, when his weakness becomes supreme, and he is conscious of it.

29. *And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.*

There are limits to all human intercourse with God. We must not go where vain curiosity would lead us, else will he have to say to us, as he did to Jacob, “Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?”

30. *And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.*

How he must have trembled to think that he had the daring perhaps his fears made him call it the presumption actually to wrestle with God himself, for he was conscious now that it was no mere angel, but “the Angel of the covenant,” the Lord himself, with whom he had wrestled.

31. *And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.*

The memorial of his weakness was to be with him as long as he lived. People would ask, “How came the halting gait of that princely man? “And the answer would be, “It was by his weakness that he won his principedom, he became Israel, a prince of God, when his thigh was put out of joint.” How pleased would you and I be to go halting all our days with such weakness as Jacob had, if we might also have the blessing that he thus won!

32. *Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob’s thigh in the sinew that shrank.*

GENESIS 32

Jacob had just come out of a great trouble. God’s gracious interposition had delivered him out of the hand of the angry Laban, — Laban the churl, who cared for Jacob only for what he could get out of him.

1, 2. *And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

The angels of God are always round about his people. It was well for Jacob to be reminded of that fact, for he was about to pass into another trouble. John Bunyan truly says, —

“A Christian man is seldom long at ease;
When one trouble’s gone another doth him seize.”

Certainly it was so with Jacob; for, after he had escaped from Laban, he knew that he had to meet his brother Esau, whom he had so greatly wronged so many years before. Then it was that “the angels of God met him.” Go on your way in peace and safety, beloved believer, for God’s hosts are all around you. You do not go unattended at any single moment of your life. Better than squadrons of horse and regiments of foot are the ministering spirits who are “sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.”

3-5. *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Sier, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.*

This was a wise and proper action on the part of Jacob, for he had grossly wronged his brother, and it was right for him to make advances toward a reconciliation. He prayed to God for help, but he also used such means as he could, — the means that ought always to be used when any of us realize that we have done an injury to others. We should even be willing to humiliate ourselves in order to make peace. I think that, when Christians differ from one another, there should be a holy emulation between them as to which shall be the first to give way, and which will give way the more to the other. How many quarrels might soon be ended if there were this spirit of conciliation among all professing Christians. I have heard of one, who had offended a brother Christian during the day; possibly, the brother-Christian had offended him quite as much. But the first one saw that the sun was going down, so he turned to seek his friend, that he might say to him, “Friend so-and-so, I was wrong in being angry today.” Half-way between their two houses, they met, and each of them said, “I was just coming to say that I was wrong.” There is no need of any arbitrator when each of the disputants is willing to say, “I was wrong,” and the trouble is soon over when that point is reached. In this case, it certainly was Jacob’s duty to make some reparation to his brother, whether Esau accepted it or not.

6. *And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him.*

He would not have minded Esau coming alone to meet him, but the thought of the four hundred rough men, who had gathered around this wild warrior of the desert, made him wonder what they might do, and what Esau might do with their help.

7, 8. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; and said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.

He used the means that he judged to be the best under the existing circumstances, and I believe that God intends us always to use our best wits and judgment, and then to fall back upon him in confiding prayer just as if we had done nothing at all. Do everything as if God were not about to help you, and then trust in God as if you had done nothing at all. An Arab said to Mahomet, "I let my camel run loose, and trusted it to Providence," but Mahomet replied, "You should have tied it up first, and then trusted it to Providence;" and Jacob was very much of that mind and a very sensible mind it was, not at all inconsistent with the very best of faith.

9-12. And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, —

That is always the most powerful plea when we can quote God's own promise: "Thou saidst," —

12-19. I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea which cannot be numbered for multitude. And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother, two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milch camels with their costs, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses and ten foals. And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove. And he commanded the

foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him.

That was a very anxious night for Jacob; he was to have another night of sterner work still, but in doing as he did he acted wisely and rightly.

20. *And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me.*

Depend upon it, our sins will come home to us sooner or later. Jacob must have bitterly regretted, that night, that he had ever wronged Esau. There was a long interval between Jacob going away, and he coming back again, but his sin came home to him; and if you are a child of God and you do wrong, it is more certain to come home to you, in this life, than if you were one of the ungodly. As for them, they are often left to be punished in another world; but if you are a child of God, you will be chastened here for your iniquity. Remember how earnestly David prayed about the sins of his youth, and his later transgressions too; and Jacob, in deep humility, must have most vividly remembered his sin against his brother.

21-24. *So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company. And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.*

We know who that Divine Man was, the God who afterwards actually became man, of whom it might even then be said that "His delights were with the sons of men."

25. *And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.*

For even with a dislocated hip Jacob would not give up wrestling; he meant to hold this wondrous Man until he got a blessing from him.

26-29. *And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.*

He would not gratify Jacob's curiosity concerning his name, but he gave him the blessing that he craved. This was just as our Divine Master acted when his disciples enquired of him concerning the times and seasons, he told them it was not for them to know what the Father had retained in his own power; but Christ added, what was much better for them, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." He will not tell us all we want to know, but he will give us all we need to have. What a wise and prudent Lord is ours!

30, 31. *And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.*

He was lame, and probably remained lame for life.

32. *Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.*

Some touch of human weakness must always accompany the divine strength that God may give to us. If we are allowed the high honour of carrying the untold treasure of the gospel, we must be reminded that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." Yet who would not be content to limp for life if he might but win such a victory as Jacob won on that memorable night by the brook Jabbok?

GENESIS 32

1, 2. *And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

Jacob was about to enter upon a great trial, and therefore he received a great comfort in preparation for it. God knows when to send angels to his servants; and when they come, it is often as the forerunners of a trial which is to follow them.

3-5. *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.*

It has been judged by some that Jacob, in sending such a message to Esau, acted unworthily and unbelievably; but I think we are not called upon to censure the servants of God in points wherein they are not condemned in Scripture. The elder brother, according to all Eastern customs, was the lord of the family, and Jacob had so grossly injured Esau that it well became him to walk very humbly and to abound in courtesy towards him. Besides, I hope we shall never imagine that the highest faith is inconsistent with the greatest prudence, and that we shall never forget that there is such a book in the Bible as the Book of Proverbs, which contains counsels of wisdom for daily life. That Book of Proverbs is placed not far from the Song of Solomon, which treats of high spiritual communion, as if to teach us that the next-door neighbour to the wisdom that cometh from above which walks with God, is that prudence which God gives to his servants for their dealings with men. He that walks with God will not be a fool, for God is the source of all wisdom, and the man who walks with him will learn wisdom from him.

6-8. *And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks and herds, and the camels, into two bands; and said, If Esau come to the one*

company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.

This fear and distress were sad proofs of want of faith on Jacob's part; for where there is strong faith, there may be a measure of human fear, but it will not go to the length of being "greatly afraid and distressed," as he was. In this respect he falls short of his grandfather Abraham; yet, nevertheless, he acts wisely, first with common prudence, and next with uncommon prayerfulness.

9-12. *And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.*

Note the humility of Jacob's prayer. We cannot expect our supplications to speed with God unless we put them upon the footing of free grace by acknowledging that we have no merit of our own which we can plead before him.

Yet notice also how Jacob reminds God of his promise, "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good." That is the very pith and marrow of prayer when we can quote the Lord's promise, and say to him, "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." You have a strong plea to urge with God when you can say to him, "Thou saidst," for he is a God who cannot lie.

13-16. *And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother; two hundred she goats, twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals. And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove.*

That also was a very sensible arrangement on Jacob's part, so that his brother might have time to think how he should act, for angry men often do in a hurry what they would not do if they had a

little time given them for consideration. Jacob knows this, so he lets Esau's anger have an opportunity to cool down while he watches drove following drove.

17-21. *And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him. And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face: peradventure he will accept of me. So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company.*

But in the middle of the night, he was in such deep anxiety concerning his meeting with his brother, and probably still more concerning his position towards his God, that he felt that he must get away alone to pray.

22-24. *And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.*

It does not say that he wrestled with the man, but "there wrestled a man with him." We call him "wrestling Jacob," and so he was; but we must not forget the wrestling man,—or, rather, the wrestling Christ,—the wrestling Angel of the covenant, who had come to wrestle out of him much of his own strength and wisdom, which, though it was commendable in a measure, and we have commended it, was an evil because it kept him from relying on the strength and wisdom of God.

25. *And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.*

So that he fell, or began to fall; but still he gripped the Angel, and would not let him go.

26. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

That was grandly spoken.

27. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

“The supplanter.”

28. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel:

“A prince of God.”

28, 29. For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.

And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

He received what he sought for his necessity, but not what he merely asked out of curiosity.

30-32. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob’s thigh in the sinew that shrank.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 32, 33:1-12.

GENESIS 32

1. And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.

What an encouragement the visit of these angels must have been to Jacob after the strife which he had had with Laban! But, dear friends, angels often come to meet us, though we know it not. As in the old classic story, the poor man said, “This is a plain hut, but God has been here,” so we may say of every Christian’s cottage, “Though it be poor, an angel has come here,” for David says, “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” As the angels of God met Jacob, I trust that, if you have come here after some stern battle, and trial, and difficulty, you may find the angels of God meeting you here. They do come into the assemblies of the saints. Paul tells us that the woman ought to have her head covered in the assembly “because of the angels,” that

is, because they are there to see that all things are done decently and in order.

2. *And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

He gave it a name to commemorate God's having sent the angels, and called it "two camps" or "two hosts."

3. *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.*

He is out of one trouble with Laban; now he is into another with Esau.

Well did John Bunyan say. —

"A Christian man is seldom long at ease;

When one trouble's gone, another doth him seize."

4, 5. *And he commanded them, saying, Then shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have adjourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.*

This is very respectful language, and rather obsequious, too; but when a man knows that he has done wrong to another, he ought to be prepared to humble himself to the injured individual; and, though it happened long ago, yet Jacob really had injured his brother Esau, and it was but right that, in meeting him again, he should put himself into a humble position before him. There are some proud people who, when they know that they have done wrong, yet will not own it, and it is very hard to end a quarrel when one will not yield, and the other feels that he will not either. But there is good hope of things going right when Jacob, who is the better of the two brothers, is also the humbler of the two.

6, 7. *And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed:*

And well he might be, for an angry brother, with four hundred fierce followers, must mean mischief.

7, 8. *And he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; and said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.*

This is characteristic of Jacob. He was a man of plans and arrangements, a man of considerable craftiness, which some people nowadays call “prudence.” He used means, and he sometimes used them a little too much. Perhaps he did so in this case; but, at the same time, he was a man of faith, and therefore he betook himself to prayer.

9-12. *And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the seas which cannot be numbered for multitude.*

A prayer most humble, most direct in its petitions, and also full of faith. That was a grand argument for him to use: “Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good.” This is one of the mightiest pleas that we can urge in praying to God: “Do as thou hast said. Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.” O brethren, if you can remind God of his own promise, you must win the day, for promised mercies are sure mercies.

“As well might he his being quit,
As break his promise, or forget.”

“Hath he said, and shall he not do it? “Only for this will he be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them, and we must take care that we call his promise to mind, and plead it at the mercy-seat.

13-21. *And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother; two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals. And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove. And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, ‘Whose art thou? and whither goest*

thou? and whose are these before thee? Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him. And say we moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me. So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company.

If Jacob had been true to his faith in God, he would have dispensed with these very prudent preparations; for, after all, the faithfulness of God was Jacob's best defense; it was from God that his safety came, and not from his own plotting, and planning, and scheming. There are some of you, dear brethren, who have minds that are naturally given to inventions, and devices, and plans, and plots, and I believe that, where this is the case, you have more to battle against than those have who are of an ample mind, and who cast themselves more entirely upon the Lord. It is a blessed thing to be such a fool that you do not know anyone to trust in except your God. It is a sweet thing to be so weaned from your wisdom that you fall into the arms of God. Yet, if you do feel that it is right to make such plans as Jacob made, take care that you do what Jacob also did. Pray as well as plan, and if your plans be numerous, let your prayers be all the more fervent, lest the natural tendency of your constitution should degenerate into reliance upon the arm of flesh, and dependence upon your own wisdom, instead of absolute reliance upon God.

22-24. *And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.*

It was the man Christ Jesus putting on the form of manhood before the time when he would actually be incarnate, and the wrestling seems to have been more on his side than on Jacob's, for it is not said that Jacob wrestled, but that "there wrestled a man with him." There was something that needed to be taken out of Jacob, — his strength and his craftiness; and this angel came to get it out of him. But, on the other hand, Jacob spied his opportunity, and,

sending the angel wrestling with him, he in his turn began to wrestle with the angel.

25. *And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.*

So that he was made painfully to realize his own weakness while he was putting forth all his strength.

26. *And he said, let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*

Bravely said, O Jacob! And ye sons of Jacob, learn to say the same. You may have what you will if you can speak thus to the covenant angel, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

27, 28. *And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, —*

The supplanter, —

28. *But Israel: —*

A prince of God; —

28, 29. *For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.*

That has often been the request of God's people, they have wanted to know God's wondrous name. The Jews superstitiously believe that we have lost the sound of the name of Jehovah, — that the name is unpronounceable now altogether. We think not so; but, certainly, no man knows the nature of God, and understands him, but he to whom the Son shall reveal him. Perhaps Jacob's request had somewhat of curiosity in it, so the angel would not grant it.

29. *And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.*

He did not give him what he asked for, but he gave him something better, and, in like manner, if the Lord does not open up a dark doctrine to you, but gives you a bright privilege, that will be better for you.

30-32. *And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank,*

which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew which shrank.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 32. AND PSALM 119:33-40.

GENESIS 32:22-30

We shall read three short portions of Scripture, all illustrative of the great truth that God has sometimes given grace to his people to overcome himself, the Almighty has condescended to be vanquished by man. First, let us read the story of Jacob in the Book of Genesis, the thirty-second chapter, at the twenty-second verse: —

22-24. And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. And Jacob was left alone;

He had made a quiet oratory for himself by sending everyone else of the company over to the other side of the brook; his own resolve being —

“With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.”

24, 25. And there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw —

When the wrestling Man, the Angel of the covenant, saw —

25, 26. That he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, so he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

When we come nearest to God, we must have a deep sense of our own personal weakness; it must never be supposed, if our suit prevails with heaven, that there is anything in us, or anything in our prayers, to account for our prevalence. Whatever power we have, must come from God's grace alone; and hence, usually, when we pray so as to prevail with the Lord there is at the same time a shrinking of the sinew, a consciousness of weakness, a sense of pain; yet it is just then that we are prevailing, and therefore we may rest assured that our prayer will be answered. The Angel said, “Let me go,” at the very time when Jacob felt the shrinking of the sinew: “He said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he (Jacob) said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

27-29. *And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?*

Holy desires will be realized, and believing prayers will be answered, but mere curiosity will not be gratified. Those who read the Scriptures with a view simply to find out novelties that may tickle their fancy, read in vain. The covenant Angel will give thee what thou wilt if it be needful for thee; but he will not answer thine idle questions. He said to Jacob, “Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?”

29, 30. *And, he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.*

Thus did Jacob the wrestler overcome his God. Now turn to the thirty-second chapter of the Book of Exodus, where we find a description of the sin of idolatry into which the Israelites fell while Moses was absent in communion with God upon the mountain. The people brought their golden ear-rings to Aaron, and he made a calf, and they bowed before it, saying, “These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” While this wickedness was going on, Moses was on the mountain-top with God.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 32:22-30; EXODUS 32:7-14; AND MARK 7:24-0.

GENESIS 33:1-12

1, 2. *And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost.*

He placed them in the order of his affection for them, the best-beloved in the rear.

3, 4. *And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. And Esau ran*

to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.

God had been very gracious to him, and all his fears were gone, so he met Esau as a brother, not as an enemy, and the four hundred men were willing to become his protectors.

5. *And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are those with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.*

There was a considerable number of them altogether, more than enough, I expect most of you would think if you had them; but Jacob did not speak of them disparagingly, but he described them as “the children which God hath graciously given thy servant.”

6-10. *Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves. And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves: and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves. And he said, What meanest thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, What meanest thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, These are to find grace in the sight of my lord. And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself. And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand:*

For, among Orientals, it is such a common custom to offer and receive presents, that, if they are not accepted, it is regarded as an affront.

10-12. *For therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me. Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it. And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee.*

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 32, 33:1-12.

GENESIS 45:1-13

1, 2. *Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him: and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud:*

Emotion long pent up grows violent; and when at last it does burst forth, it cannot be restrained: "He wept aloud."

2, 3. *And the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.*

What a rush of thoughts must have passed through their minds when they remembered all their unkind behavior toward him! There is no wonder that "they were troubled at his presence."

4. *And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you.*

He pleads with them, he who was far greater than they—a prince among peasants,—now prays to them; and is it not wonderful that the Lord Jesus, our infinitely-greater Brother, at times pleads with us, even as he said to the woman at the well, "Give me to drink"? Joseph said unto his brethren, "Come near to me, I pray you."

4, 5, *And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, not angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.*

"You did very wrong, but I say nothing about that, for I want you to notice how God has over-ruled your action, how your sin has been made to be the means of your preservation and the preservation of many besides: 'God did send me before you to preserve life.'"

6. *For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be eating nor harvest.*

There were to be five more dreary years of utter desolation and want.

7. *And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.*

How wonderfully those two things meet in practical harmony,—the free will of man and the predestination of God! Man acts just as freely and just as guiltily as if there were no predestination whatever; and God ordains, arranges, supervises, and over-rules, just as accurately as if there were no free will in the universe. There are some purblind people who only believe one or other of these two truths; yet they are both true, and the one is as true as the other. I believe that much of the theology which is tinged with free will is

true, and I know that the teaching which fully proclaims electing love and sovereign grace is also true; and you may find much of both these truths in the Scriptures. The fault lies in trying to compress all truth under either of those two heads. These men were verily guilty for selling their brother, yet God was verily wise in permitting him to be sold. The inference which Joseph draws from their misconduct is, of course, an inference of love. Love may not be always logical, but it is sweetly consoling, as it must have been in this case.

8. *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.*

See how Joseph traces God's hand in his whole career.

9. *Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not:*

See how love attracts; Joseph must have his brothers near him, now he wants to have his father also near. "Go up to my father, and say unto him, 'Come down unto me.'" "See how great love turns pleader again; he who said to his brethren, "Come near to me," sends to his father the message, "Come down unto me."

10. *And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast:*

Our common saying, "Love me, love my dog," is very true. Love me, love even my flocks and my herds. So the blessing of God extends to all that his chosen people have; not only to their children, but to all that they possess.

11-13. *And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.*

Love is impatient to have the object of its affection brought near. Now we will read two short portions out of the Song of Solomon, from which you will see how love evermore craves for nearness to the loved one. The Song opens thus:—

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 45:1-13; SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-7; 3:1-5.

GENESIS 45:9-28

9. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt; come down unto me, tarry not:

Joseph, having made himself known to his brethren, bids them return to their father, and bring him down to Egypt to see his long-lost son.

10-11. And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: and there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.

It is just like Joseph to speak thus kindly, and to put the invitation so attractively to his father: "Thou shalt be near unto me." That would be the greatest joy of all to old Jacob; and this is the greatest joy to a sinner when he comes to Christ, our great Joseph, "Thou shalt be near unto me." It is not merely that he gives us the land of Goshen to dwell in, but he promises that we shall be near unto him, and that is best of all.

12-22. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him. And the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, Joseph's brethren are come: and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Say unto thy brethren, This do ye; lade your beasts, and so, get you unto the land of Canaan; and take your father and your households, and come unto me: and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land. Now thou art commanded, this do ye; take you wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and bring your father and come. Also regard not your stuff; for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours.

And the children of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way. To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment.

Benjamin was his full brother, so he loved him best, and gave him most.

23, 24. *And to his father he sent after this manner; ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way. So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way.*

This was a sure sign that Joseph knew his brethren, and they might well recognize him even by that precept, for their consciences must have told them that it had been their common habit to fall out either with or without occasion, so he bids them not to do so.

25-28. *And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: and Israel said,*

See how quickly the patriarch changes from Jacob into Israel; when his spirit if revived, he becomes Israel.

28. *It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.*

Now we are going to read in the Gospel according to John, the fifth chapter, beginning at the twenty-fourth verse.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 45:9-28; AND JOHN 5:24-44.

GENESIS 49

1-3. *And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father. Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power:*

All this was to Reuben's advantage, yet he was spoiled through one fault.

4. *Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; —*

So it is clear that the greatest strength and dignity and power will not serve a man, so as to make him excel, if he be unstable. There are many such persons still remaining in the world; their doctrine changes like the moon, and we never know what it is. Their spirit and temper constantly change; their pursuits are sometimes in one direction, and sometimes in another; they are "everything by starts, and nothing long;" and to each of them it may be said, "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.":

4-7. *Because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch. Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.*

It is a very remarkable circumstance, well worthy of notice, that this curse was turned into a real blessing, especially in the case of the tribe of Levi. It is true that they were divided and scattered, like handfuls of salt, throughout the whole of Israel, for they were attendants upon the Lord's priests, and they had cities appointed to them so that, while they did dwell here, and there, and everywhere, it was in order that they might reach the whole of the people, and prove a blessing to them. Are any of you labouring under a very serious disadvantage? Does it look to you like a curse? Then pray to God to make it into a blessing. I believe that, often, the worst thing that can happen to Christian men is really the best thing, for, while nature would cry out, "The clouds are to be dreaded," grace can reply, — The clouds ye so much dread Are big with mercy, and shall break In blessings on your head.

8. *Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise:*

His name was praise, and such was his history to be, for David came of that tribe, and great David's greater Son, whom it is our joy to praise.

8. *Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee.*

While that was true of Judah, it is still more true of him who sprang out of Judah, even our Lord and King, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

9. *Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion, who shall rouse him up?*

Our Lord overcame his enemies even in the thicket of this world; and all power is given unto him now that he has "gone up" again into his glory. Let that man beware who would attack this Lion of the tribe of Judah: "Who shall rouse him up?" If you persecute his followers, you will rouse him up. If you deny his truth, trample on the doctrine of atonement, and reject his love, you will rouse him up. But beware in that day, for terrible is the King of Judah when he is once aroused. Wherefore, submit yourselves to him: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little."

10. *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*

When did the dominion depart from Judah till the Lord Jesus came as the Seat One? And unto him, to this very day, the people gather, and more and more shall gather in the latter days.

11, 12. *Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice wine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.*

It was literally so with Judah, but it is gloriously as with our Lord to this day. It was his blood which yielded the juice of those rare clusters of the choice vine; and now, with garments dyed with his own blood, he comes from Edom, for he has trodden down his foes, and he cries, "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me."

13. *Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon.*

So did Zebulun dwell even until the day when our Lord came, for Matthew writes concerning him, "Now when Jesus had heard

that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.”

14, 15. *Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens: and he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.*

This was a poor character for Issachar to possess; it was a tame-spirited tribe, that loved rest and ease, and therefore did not fight with the common foe. Issachar crouched down between the burdens instead of taking them up and bearing them; God grant that none of us may be of that lazy tribe! I think that I know some who are; they could do a great deal, but they see that rest is good, and the land is pleasant, so they idle away their days.

16, 17. *Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.*

Dan is noted among the tribes for its famous leap, capturing that distant part of the country for itself. Here good old Jacob, worn out by what he had already said, exhausted by the ecstasy into which as a prophet he had been cast, paused awhile, and panted.

18. *I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.*

But he soon resumed his prophecy: —

19. *Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.*

Many of God’s servants belong to this tribe, for their life is spent in conflict. They do not seek it, but it comes to them; and, for a time, they seem to be overcome, yet let them clutch at the promise given by God.

20. *Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.*

Well fed, and then yielding correspondingly. There are some people who like to have their bread to be fat, but they yield to the

King no dainties. Let it not be so with us; but let us both feed well and yield well.

21. *Naphtali is a hind let loose: —*

The type of what a Christian minister should be,— indeed, what every Christian worker should be,— “a hind let loose,” one who can say with David, “O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid. Thou hast loosed my bonds.”

21. *He giveth goodly words.*

He has liberty in speech, freedom of utterance, he is not in bonds, he is as “a hind let loose.”

22. *Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; —*

Where he can suck up abundant nutriment,—

22. *Whose branches run over the wall:*

He does more than he is expected to do; nothing seems to content him, his “branches run over the wall.”

23, 24. *The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength,*

You know how sorely Joseph was persecuted by his brethren, yet how the Lord was with him in all his troubles. It appears from these words that he was himself an archer, and that he was not in a hurry to shoot his arrows; his bow remained still. It is the strong who can afford to be quiet; as you go across the village green, a goose will hiss at you, while the strong ox lies down calmly, and takes no notice of you: “His bow abode in strength,” —

24. *And the arms of his hands —*

Not only his hands, but the arms of his hands —

24-27. *Were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: the blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren. Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.*

Little Benjamin is the last of the tribes.

28-33. *All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them. And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the came that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying-place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth. And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.*

It is a very sweet thing to die with a blessing on your lips, and it is equally good to live in the same spirit. Our Lord Jesus was blessing his disciples when he was taken from them; and since we do not know when we shall be taken sway from our relatives, let us be always blessing them. May the Lord, who has blessed us, make us a blessing to others!

GENESIS 49:1-28

1, 2. *And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last day. Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.*

It must have been a great comfort to the old man to have all his twelve sons with him. What a quiet answer this was to his former unbelief! They were all there, yet he could remember the time when he had said, “Ye have bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away.” Ah! we also shall have in our later days to chide ourselves for our foolish unbelief. “Jacob called unto his sons,” so he was not bereaved after all. They are all here, Jacob. It falls to the lot of few fathers to have twelve sons, and to fewer still to have all twelve of them gathered about his dying bed. “Gather yourselves together.” They were to keep together as a family; and shall not the people of God keep together? Come away from the world, beloved, but come close to one another; be one household, be it your delight to assemble

around your elder Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days." We are not told nowadays everything about the future, but much of the future is unfolded to us in the great principles of the law and the gospel, and we may learn very much of holy foresight by coming to the oracles of God.

3. *Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power:*

The patriarch fixes his eyes on his firstborn; he must say something sharp that would dishonour him, but he does not deny him the rights of birthright. He clothes him with the robes and the jewels of primogeniture, and then he strips him: —

4. *Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.*

So a man may have great opportunities, and yet lose them. Uncontrolled passions may make him very little who otherwise might have been great. Reuben was "the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power," yet his father had to say to him, "Thou shalt not excel."

5. *Simeon and Levi* —

They stood next according to the order of birth: "Simeon and Levi" —

6. *Are brethren;*

They are very much like each other.

6,7. *Instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.*

Hence we do not read of the tribe of Simeon in the blessing of Moses at the end of Deuteronomy; but the Levites had this curse turned into a blessing, for, though they were scattered, yet they were scattered as priests and instructors to the other tribes. Happy is that man who, though he begins with a dark shadow resting upon him, so lives as to turn even that shadow into bright sunlight. Levi gained a blessing at the hands of Moses, one of the richest blessings of any of the tribes. This holy man, Jacob, in dying, did not express himself

according to the rules of natural affection but he yielded himself up to the Spirit of God; hence he had to say very much that must have been very bitter for a father to say, and he said it in all faithfulness being taught of the Spirit concerning things to come.

8. Judah, —

Now the patriarch changes his tone, for he has come to that tribe which would take the birthright, out of which the Christ would come: “Judah” —

8. *Thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise:*

They praised God for him, they praised God by him, they praised God in him; he is the type of Jesus, of whom we can say all this with great emphasis.

8. *Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father’s children shall bow down before thee.*

In the person of David, in the long line of kings of the tribe of Judah, all this came true; and in the person of the great Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, all this has come true to a very high degree.

9. *Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?*

The coat of arms of Judah was a lion couchant, in the fullness of his strength, keeping still, waiting to spring upon his adversary. Our Lord Christ is such a lion today; “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” couchant, lying down: “who shall rouse him up?” Ah! if he be once fully aroused what power will he put forth when he shall spring upon his adversaries?

10. *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*

Jacob’s eyes were dim, but he could see a very long way; he could see to the coming of Christ, the Shiloh, the Pacificator, the Peace-maker; he could see that day when the Jews would cry, “We have no king but Caesar,” for the Shiloh would have come, and the scepter would have departed from Judah’s tribe. “Unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” Oh, that it might be so today! May many be gathered to Christ! He is the true center, and we gather unto him. May the divisions of the Church be soon healed by a

general gathering unto Christ, who alone is the center of the Church. “Unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”

11,12. *Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.*

They were to have a land in which would be milk for babes and wine for strong men; surely this land is “thy land, O Emmanuel!” What nourishing milk there is in the gospel, and what exhilarating wine for those who know the love of Christ!

13. *Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his brother shall be unto Zidon.*

When the land was divided by lot, the lot was disposed by God to the complete fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy. Many things may seem to be left to chance, but they are not, the hand of God still guides and controls. This blessing is very suggestive “Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for a haven of ships.” If God puts you by the mind that you are a haven for ships, the Lord, in his providence, fixes your position. See that you turn it to account for the good of others.

14-15. *Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens: and he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.*

Issachar's was a poor case; he was so idle, so fond of rest, that he was willing to become a servant unto tribute. This seems hardly a blessing yet it was true of Issachar. He was strong, but then he was an ass as well as strong, so he liked couching down between two burdens much better than bearing either one of them, yet he had to bow his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.

16, 17. *Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.*

This tribe would show more cunning than courage; it would excel rather in the strategy of war than in the force of arms. Here the old man paused, and refreshed himself by saying, —

18. *I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.*

What a happy breathing-space is this! When you and I also are near our journey's end, may we be able to say, as Jacob did, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." He could not have said that once. This is the very Jacob who had, in his earlier days, been full of crafty policy, and tricks and schemes; but he has done with all that now, and he is able truthfully to say, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

19. *God, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.*

This has been the blessing of many a child of God, — to fight, and apparently to lose the battle, yet to win it at the end. O thou who art striving against sin, or seeking to win souls for Christ, after many disappointments may you be able to clutch this sweet assurance, "He shall overcome at the last."

20. *Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.*

Asher was a tribe that was placed in a very fertile region where everything was crowned with delight. Oh, to have our inheritance where we feed upon the bread of heaven, and where the deep truths of God become to us royal dainties!

21. *Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words.*

Naphtali was a tribe notable for those that could speak freely, helped of God with a holy freedom in bearing testimony to his truth.

22. *Joseph —*

Ah, now the patriarch comes to his beloved Joseph, and here the old man lingers long, longer than upon any other of his sons: "Joseph" —

22. *Is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall:*

The Hebrew puts it, "Joseph is a son of fruits, even a son of fruits by a well; whose daughters run over the wall."

23, 24. *The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hand were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)*

Joseph is a type of him who is both the Shepherd and the Stone to us, the Shepherd who defends us, provides for us, and dies for us, and the foundation on which we build for time and eternity.

25-28. *Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: the blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren. Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.*

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.

EXODUS

EXODUS 3:1-10

1. Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.

It must have been a great change for Moses, after forty years in the court of Pharaoh, to be spending another forty years in the wilderness. But it was not waste time; it required the first two periods to make Moses fit for the grand life of the last forty. He must be a prince, and he must be a shepherd, that he might be both a ruler and a shepherd to God's people, Israel. He must be much alone; he must have many solitary communings with his own heart; he must be led to feel his own weakness. And this will be no loss of time to him; he will do more in the last forty years because of the two forties thus spent in preparation. And it is not lost time that a man takes in putting on his harness before he goes to the battle, or that the reaper spends in sharpening his scythe before he cuts down the corn.

2. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

How near God seemed in those ages when he could be beheld in a bush or sitting under an oak! And is he not equally near to us if we are but prepared for his presence? Surely pure eyes are scarce, or sights of God would be more frequent, for "the pure in heart shall see God."

3-5. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

God is not to be viewed by curiosity; he is not to be approached by presumption. A holy trembling well becomes the man who would commune with the most holy God. We are not fit for intercourse with God without some measure of preparation, There is something to be put off ere we can behold the Lord.

6. *Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.*

Partly because of the universal superstition that if God appeared to any man, he would surely die; but in Moses' case, perhaps more because of an appreciation of the holiness of God and of his own unworthiness. There is not a man among us but what must do as Moses did if we are in a right state of mind. They that think they are perfect might presume to look, but they that are truly so, as Moses was, would, as he did, hide his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

7. *And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;*

Beautiful verse. God had seen and God had heard, as if their griefs had had two avenues to his heart. God seeth not with eyes, and heareth not with ears, as we do, but he speaketh after the manner of men, and he saith by two ways they had reached his very soul: "I have surely seen the affliction; I have heard their cries"; and then he adds, as if to show the perfection of his sympathy with them: "I know their sorrows." Now it is quite true today concerning us and concerning our God, he has seen, he has heard, and he knows — "I know their sorrows." When the sorrow is known, then God begins to work. He is no passive spectator of the misery of his chosen, but his hand goes with his heart.

8. *And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.*

"Now, therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me," and when the cry of God's children goes unto him, depend upon it there will be something moving before long. When a

father hears the cries of his children, when a mother hears the cry of her babe, it is not long before there will be a movement of the heart and of the hand. I am sure, brethren and sisters, there have been crises in English history which have been entirely due to the prayers of God's people. There have been singular occurrences which the mere reader of history cannot understand, but there is a number still alive who wait upon God in prayer, and they make history. There is more history made in the closet than in the cabinet of the ministry. There is a greater power at the back of the throne than the carnal eye can see, and that power is the cry of God's children.

9, 10. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

I do not wonder that Moses opened his eyes when he knew what a poor creature he was for God to say, "Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh" — the very man whose life was sought by Pharaoh — "I will send thee unto Pharaoh" — the man that had been rejected by his own people when he took their part — "Thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." Oh! let us be ready for any commission. If God were to say that he would build up heaven by the poorest and meanest among us, it would not be for us to draw back. Let him do what he wills with us! Oh! for a faith to believe that in the midst of our weakness God's strength would appear.

EXODUS 3:1-14

This chapter tells of the appearance of God to Moses in the Wilderness. Has he removed from us brethren? He used to be seen by godly souls by mount and stream and sea; and even bushes were alive and blazing with the indwelt Godhead. Oh, that he would reveal himself to us tonight! I am going to read this chapter with this longing in my heart. I pray that the same longing may be in the heart of every child of God: "Show me thy face: show me thy face, my God, tonight."

1. *Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.*

There is nothing dishonourable about common trade, and matters of business at all. Here is a shepherd, who keeps his flock, and God keeps him and reveals himself to him. When God wants a man to lead his people he seeks for him not among idlers, but busy, active men, and God was pleased to show himself more to Moses as a shepherd, than he had ever shown himself to him as a prince in Egypt. I find no glowing Deity in the halls of Pharaoh, but I find the consuming fire manifested in the lone wastes of the desert of Sinai.

2. *And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.*

Well might it say, "Behold." I have seen a bush set alight by a match. It blazed in a moment, but it was gone in another moment. It burned up so fiercely and hastily. But God was pleased to make a poor consumable bush to be the unharmed place of his abiding. He dwells today in the human person of the Saviour. The Godhead is in Christ. He dwells today in the church, which might well enough be consumed by his presence; but it is not consumed. He can come and dwell in my heart and in yours tonight, and yet we shall bear the presence of Deity to the hour of our death. He has a way of so throwing himself into our feebleness that it becomes strong, and that which might otherwise have been destroyed, is even preserved by his presence. The bush burned with fire, and was not consumed.

3, 4. *And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.*

Oh, that personal call, that voice from God to the heart! How much we need it. Do you not remember when first the Lord called some of you? Then he says to you tonight, "I have called thee by my name. Thou art mine." Own that sweet impeachment, confess that you are his, and say to him, "For suffering or for service, here am I ready, aye ready, even as Moses was. Here am I."

5. *And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.*

Stand as a servant stands in the presence of his master in the East. He is not expected to wear in the court of his master the shoes which have trodden in the mire of the world. Now, put off thy cares, put off thy carnal thoughts, put off thyself, put off thy sin. When God is near, solemnity and deep reverence become us. "The place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

6. *Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.*

Thou needest not hide thy face if God shall appear to thee, though I am sure thou wilt do it. Thou mayest come boldly. It is thy Father's face: it is the face of one who is reconciled to thee in Christ. Therefore open thine eyes and look; and may the Lord show himself to thee!

7. *And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;*

Now, you troubled ones, are not these verses real music to you? God has seen your afflictions, there are God's eyes; God has heard your cry, there are God's ears. "I know their sorrows": there is God's mighty understanding. He is thinking about you. He knows all that which tries you tonight.

8-10. *And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.*

"Come now therefore," This was a very extraordinary thing to follow after all that. God has seen the affliction of his people. What then? He says, "I am come down to deliver them." What then? Why, the next thing is that he is going to use this trembling man who stands awe-struck with his shoes from off his feet in the presence of the still burning bush. "Come now, therefore."

10. *And I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.*

You have been praying for a blessing. God is going to give it through you. You have been looking east and west and north and south for some deliverer that shall win souls and stir up the church. God calls you to do it. He invites you to undertake this gigantic service, and I think that I see the colour come into your face, and then fly away again. You are ready to faint at the thought of such a charge laid upon you.

11. *And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?*

Now, catch this: —

12. *And he said, Certainly I will be with thee;*

What more does Moses want? He said, “Who am I?” This showed his weakness. God said, “Never mind who you are. Certainly I will be with thee.” Here was strength enough for him.

12. *And this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.*

And he did. You know how Sinai trembled while God made it his throne, and how Moses must have been strengthened when he did exceeding fear and quake before God when he recollected that this same God had appeared to him when he was alone in the desert, and had promised that they should worship him there.

14. *And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM:*

That is his name: the Infinite, Eternal, and Unchangeable God.

14. *And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.*

Oh, what a glorious commission — to receive it direct from the self-existent God, who is the same for ever and ever, and only hath immortality. Speak to us tonight, thou great I am, Jah, Jehovah, God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob. Speak to this company in this house of prayer tonight, because of Jesus, Joshua, Jehoshua, Jehovah, Jesus. I have tried to show you how that name of Jesus has the name “Jehovah” hidden away in it. Because of him, draw near to us, O Lord.

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 3:1-14; ROMANS 9:1-25.

EXODUS 10:1-20

1, 2. *And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him: and that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I am the LORD.*

God would stamp the early history of Israel with the deep impression of his Godhead. His overthrow of the proud Egyptian king should let Israel know in the very beginning how great a God had chosen her to be his own peculiar portion.

3. *And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me.*

Can you imagine these humble individuals, Moses and Aaron, thus bearding the great king whose word could make their heads to roll upon the sword? They were not afraid, for God was with them; and they who speak in God's stead are traitors if they be not brave. The ambassadors of so great a King must not demean themselves by fear, therefore right boldly said they to Pharaoh, "Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me."

4-6. *Else, if thou refuse to let my people go, behold, to morrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast: and they shall cover the face of the earth, that one cannot be able to see the earth: and they shall eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remaineth unto you from the hail, and shall eat every tree which groweth for you out of the field: and they shall fill thy houses, and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians; which neither thy fathers, nor thy fathers' fathers have seen, since the day that they were upon the earth unto this day. And he turned himself, and went out from Pharaoh.*

Moses had delivered his message, he had uttered his solemn warning, so he waited no longer in the tyrant's presence.

7. And Pharaoh's servants said unto him, How long shall this man be a snare unto us? let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God; knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?

The seven former heavy judgments had so effectually bruised Egypt that the people began to cry against their king for his obstinacy in still further resisting God.

8, 9. *And Moses and Aaron were brought again unto Pharaoh: and he said unto them, Go, serve the LORD your God: but who are they that shall go? And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the LORD.*

Pharaoh was inclined to make terms with Moses, but God will have no conditions with men who are rebelling against him. An unconditional surrender is all that God will accept.

10, 11. *And he said unto them, Let the LORD be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones: look to it; for evil is before you. Not so: go now ye that are men, and serve the LORD; for that ye did desire. And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.*

See how proud, how stout-hearted towards evil is this wicked and foolish king. When his people appeal to him to yield, he only does so for a moment, and then he drives out the messengers of God in anger.

12-17. *And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land, even all that the hail hath left. And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous were they; before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such. For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left: and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and*

entreat the LORD your God, that he may take away from me this death only.

See how he is obliged to come to his knees at length. He will be up again soon, for his heart is not humbled, though he is eating his own words. An unhumbled heart is not subdued by judgments; it is so apparently, but really it is still a heart of stone.

18-20. *And he went out from Pharaoh, and entreated the LORD. And the LORD turned a mighty strong west wind, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt. But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go.*

God kept his grace back from him, so that he relapsed into his natural state of obduracy. Pharaoh is the great mirror of pride and obstinacy; I wonder whether we have a Pharaoh here. Now let us turn to the 105th Psalm, and see further what God did against this proud Pharaoh.

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 10:1-20; AND PSALM 105:26-38.

EXODUS 12:1-20

1, 2. *And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.*

God thinks a great deal of the redemption of his people. When he redeemed them out of their Egyptian bondage, he took care that the mighty deed should be worthily commemorated. Thenceforth, the Jewish year was to begin with the celebration of the national deliverance; and now, when any of us are converted to God, and so are set free from the slavery of sin, we should reckon that then we really begin to live. All the previous part of our life has been wasted; but when we are brought truly to know God, through faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, then have we realized, indeed, what life is. The month of our conversion should be to us the beginning of months, the first month of the year to us.

3, 4. *Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: and if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls;*

every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb.

The worship of God must be rendered in an orderly manner, with due thoughtfulness and preparation. This paschal supper was not to be celebrated in any fashion that the people might choose; but they were to take time to have the lamb properly examined, that it might be found perfect in every respect, and that everything might be set in order so that the feast should be observed with due reverence and solemnity. Let us take care that we act thus in all our devotions; let us never rush to prayer or hasten to praise; but let us pause awhile, and think what we are about to do, lest we offer the sacrifice of fools, and so cause the Lord to bid us take back that which we have brought to put upon his altar without due thoughtfulness.

5. *Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats:*

It was to be a type of Christ, and, therefore, it must be the best that they had. It must be in the prime of its strength, otherwise it would not be a fit emblem of the “strong Son of God” whose mighty love moved him to give himself to death for us.

6-10. *And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.*

Everything was to be done exactly according to God’s order; the alteration of the slightest detail would have spoiled it all. I wish that all Christians would remember this rule with regard to the ordinances of God’s house. They are not for us to make, or for us to alter, but for us to keep.

11. *And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD’S passover.*

They were thus to exercise an act of faith. Why were they to eat in haste, but that they expected soon to be gone? They were to stand like travelers who are starting upon a journey, believing that God was about to set them free. Oh, that we would always exercise faith in all our devotions, for without faith it must ever be impossible to please God.

12, 13. *For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, —*

What a grand gospel statement that is! When the sinner sees the blood, it is for his comfort; but it is God's sight of the blood that is, after all, the grand thing; and when is it that he does not see it?

13-20. *And the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.*

Thus we see God instituting a commemoration of the deliverance of his people out of Egypt. How much more ought you and I, with joyful gladness, to remember the deliverance of our soul from the slavery of sin and Satan! Let us never forget it. I should

like to refresh the memories of bygone times with you who know the Lord; the Lord help you now, with deepest gratitude, to recollect the day when first you saw your Saviour, and the yoke was taken from your neck, and the burden from your shoulder, glory be to the delivering Lord!

EXODUS 12:1-27

1, 2. *And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.*

And for this reason that, now, as a nation, they were to begin their separate history, separate in existence from all the rest of mankind.

3, 4. *Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house: and if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb.*

The separation of the lamb was to take place some four days before the time of its slaughter. Probably it was kept in the house, according to the Jewish tradition it was so, and they would hear it bleating, and be reminded of the purpose for which it was to be slain.

5. *Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats:*

You know what a type this is of Christ, “without blemish,” offered up for us in the very fullness of his strength, in the prime and glory of his manhood, giving himself up to be our Paschal Lamb, “The Lamb of God.”

6. *And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.*

Just as the sun went down, or just before it set for the evening. There is also the marginal reading “between the two evenings.” The even before the sun set, was the first, and then the daylight after the sun set was the second evening.

7. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.

Not on the threshold, lest it should be trodden upon; and woe be unto the man who shall trample upon the blood of Christ! On the two side posts and on the lintel was placed the mark indicating that God had redeemed the inmates of that house with blood.

8, 9. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof.

We are to have a whole Christ, with his head of wisdom and his heart of love, the walk and conversation of Christ, and all the inward secret life and grace of Christ all to be ours.

10. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.

Not a bone was to be left for the Egyptians to treat with dishonour, but all was to be consumed.

11, 12. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against as the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.

All those false gods had been smitten in the different plagues; and now, inasmuch as the Egyptians regarded the firstborn in the family with veneration, the last stroke was about to be struck, and Pharaoh and all his subjects would stagger under the tremendous blow.

13. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are:

Oh that we would all look upon the blood of Jesus as a token, — a token of divine love in giving the Well-beloved to die for us, — a token that justice has had its due, — a token that we are perfectly secure for ever!

13. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you,

It is God's view of the blood of Christ, which is the all-important matter; when he looks at Christ upon the cross, and is

satisfied with the atonement that he there offered, the Lord passes over all those for whom Christ died as a Substitute.

13-15. *And the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.*

Therefore he was no partaker in the redemption purchased by blood. He who is not purged from hypocrisy may say what he likes, but the blood will not save him unless he repents. There must be the putting away of this leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy, or else even the blood of atonement will not avail.

16. *And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you.*

What rest this brought into the houses of the Israelites! There was not only deliverance from the plagues, but there was also rest from all manner of work. Herein is the blessedness of the blood of the Lamb; when it comes to the home and the heart of the believer, it gives him rest of soul while others are toiling in vain to get relief by their own works.

17-25. *And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread, for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generation, by an ordinance for ever. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread. Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the Passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in*

the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason, and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service.

What! were they never to forget the slaying of the lamb and the sprinkling of the blood? No, never. Not when they came to Canaan, to the land that flowed with milk and honey, and when God had wrought other great marvels for them? No, never; and the highest honour that we shall ever have will be this, to be able truthfully to sing, —

“A monument of grace,
A sinner saved by blood.”

26, 27. *And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.*

EXODUS 13:21-22

We are going to read once more the familiar story of how the Lord relieved his people from the power of Egypt after he had brought them out of the house of bondage.

21, 22. *And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way: and by night in pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: he took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.*

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 13:21, 22; AND 14.

EXODUS 14

1, 2 *And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pihahiroth*

between Migdol and sea, over against Baalzephon: before it ye shall encamp by the sea

It might have been sufficient for the pillar of cloud to move that way; but it was really such an extraordinary thing for the Lord to lead the people right down to the sea that he gave a special command as well as the movement of the cloud. That Moses himself might not be staggered by what would seem to him to be such strange guidance the Lord tells him what to say to the people and then gives him this explanation:

3, 4. *For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so.*

Those four words, "And they did so," though they are very short and very simple words, express a great deal. Oh, that it might always be said of all of us whenever God commands us to do anything, "And they did so."

5. *And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?*

Nothing but the grace of God will truly humble men. These Egyptians had been crushed by terrible plagues into a false kind of humility, but they were soon as proud as ever. Nothing but the omnipotent grace of God can really subdue a proud and stubborn heart.

6-8. *And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: and he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand.*

They were resolute and brave as long as they realized that God was with them; and the Egyptians behind them were bold and proud although God was not with them. There were two high hands that day, the high hand of the proud, puny Pharaoh and the high hand of the ever-blessed omnipotent Jehovah.

9, 10. *But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon. And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid:*

Forgetting what God had done for them, and promised to them, they became timid at the sight of their old master. They knew the cruelty of the Egyptians in time of war, and their hearts failed them.

10. *And the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD.*

Ah, dear friends, if they had cried to the Lord in true believing prayer, they would have been worthy of commendation; but they did not do so. They cried out unto the Lord in an unbelieving complaint, as the next verse plainly shows: —

11, 12. *And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.*

What cowards they were, and how faint-hearted! Were these the people that were to conquer Canaan? Were these God's chosen people? Ah, judge them not, for you and I have often been quite as faint-hearted and quite as fickle as they were. May God forgive us as he again and again forgave them!

13-15. *And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians, whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:*

Moses was no doubt praying in his heart though it is not recorded the he uttered any words in prayer; but it was not the time for prayer, it was the time for action. When people sometimes say when they know their duty, "We will make it a matter of prayer," they generally mean that they will try to find some excuse for not doing it. You need not pray about any matter when you know what you ought to do; go and do it.

16-20. *But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them: and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these; so that the one came not near the other all the night.*

God was like a wall of fire between them and their enemies, so that they had no cause for fear even though the Egyptians were so near.

21-25. *And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians. And took of their chariot wheels, that they drove them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.*

They were now in the midst of the sea between the two high walls of water, and before they could flee see what happened to them: —

26-31. *And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared, and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the water returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the*

hosts of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.

And well they might! Yet how soon they murmured both against the Lord and against Moses!

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 13:21, 22; AND 14.

EXODUS 15

1. *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.*

Note, that they were singing, singing a very loud and triumphant song; and you would have thought that they would have kept on singing for the next forty years. It was such a triumph, such a deliverance, God's arm was made so bare before their eyes, that you would have thought that their jubilation would have lasted throughout a lifetime, at the least. On the contrary, it lasted a very little while. Yet what a song it was that they sang! "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." What a song of triumph that is which is sung by souls saved from sin, and death, and hell, by the great atoning sacrifice of Christ! Oh, when we first realize that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, we do, indeed, "feel like singing all the time", for our sins are washed away, and we have a notion that we shall always keep on singing till we join in the song of the glorified in heaven. So it ought to be; but, alas, from sad experience we know that it is not so! However, the song of Moses and the children of Israel goes on:

2. *The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.*

The heart is prompted by gratitude to think of doing something for God. It thinks of preparing him a habitation; but what habitation

shall we prepare for him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain? All that we can possibly do is too little for the greatness of his grace and his glory. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart," said the Lord to David, though he might not prepare God a habitation. It is well that it is in our heart today to do some little thing for the glory of God. As an old Puritan says, we give for love-tokens a cracked sixpence, or a flower that soon fades. It is accepted as a love-token, not for its intrinsic value, but as an emblem of what our heart feels, and would do if it could. Even so it is with the Lord and the service his people seek to render to him. He takes our trifles, and makes much of them.

3-5. *The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea. The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone.*

And this is what has happened to all the powers that were against us. Our sins, where are they? Has not the Lord cast them into the depths of the sea? Yes, blessed be his name for ever! We, like Israel on the other side of the Red Sea, praise the Lord that we have escaped out of the hand of the oppressor, and that Pharaoh holds us as servants no longer. To the Lord alone is due the glory of our deliverance.

6-8. *Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee: thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.*

What cannot God do? The liquid becomes solid; nature itself changes when the God of nature puts forth his power. Trust thou in God, and he will do wonders for thee also, as he did for his ancient people Israel.

9. *The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.*

How the powers of darkness rage and rave! What a flurry they are in! What big words they speak! What cruel designs they harbour

against God's people! See how still and calm is the Lord amid all their raging.

10. *Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.*

God has only to use his breath to blow upon them, and away they go, and all their boastings, too. One word from the mouth of God can destroy all our doubts and fears. The breath of his Spirit can sink all our enemies, and make us sing for joy of heart at our great deliverance.

11-13. *Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.*

The song becomes prophetic. All joy gets to be prophetic; at least, the joy of earth when once it is touched with the live coal from off the heavenly altar. We begin to praise God "for all the grace we have not tasted yet," as Israel here does. They praise the Lord for leading his people through the wilderness, and bringing them unto his holy habitation, even while they are only at the beginning of their journey.

14. *The people —*

That is, the Canaanites, —

14, 15. *Shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away.*

When they hear of the great things that Jehovah has done for his people, they shall feel that the day of their doom is come. Who can stand against so mighty a God? Yet there are some, in our day, whose hearts are stouter and harder than the hearts of the dukes of Edom and the mighty men of Moab. They hear of God's judgments upon the wicked, and of the terrible doom of the ungodly, and yet they dare to defy the Lord, and to continue in their evil ways.

16-18. *Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine*

inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O LORD, which thy hands have established. The LORD shall reign for ever and ever.

How grandly that last note must have pealed forth from the hundreds of thousands of male voices! The women must also have sung it with the utmost conceivable joy as they struck their timbrels, and danced before the Lord.

19-22. *For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea. And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water.*

At first, they were afraid of too much water, from the waves of the sea; now they are afraid of too little. Will their songs be over in three days? Ah, yea! At the end of the third day they came to some springs of water, but they were brackish or bitter.

23, 24. *And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured —*

Ah, these singers had sadly changed their notes! Where are the timbrels now? “The people murmured”

24-27. *Against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee. And they came to Elim,*

They did not stop long at Marah, probably only a few hours.

27. Where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees and they encamped there by the waters.

That Elim must have been prepared on purpose for Israel. Twelve springs of water — that was the number of the tribes. Threescore and ten palm trees that was the number of the elders. I do not wonder that Moses noted these numbers. It must have seemed remarkable that, long before they came there, there were the wells and there were the palm trees all ready for their encampment. It was most significant that these things should have been prepared according to the number of the children of Israel; but everything else is arranged by the same rule. When the Lord divided the people, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the children of Israel. It is by this line that he builds his Church still. It is according to his thoughts of his own people that he rules everything in his providence. There are a few verses in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, at the seventh chapter, which we will read concerning this subject.

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 15; AND JEREMIAH 7:21-26.

EXODUS 15:1-21

1-10. Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea. The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone. Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee: thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy

them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

They were all noise, and bluster, and boast; but observe the sublime attitude of God, how readily he eased himself of his adversaries: “Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.”

11-14. *Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina.*

That is, the heathen nations who, at that time, inhabited the land of Palestine: “Sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina.”

15. *Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away.*

This great deed of God would be told, and told again, all over Palestine; and the inhabitants would feel that their end was come, for who could stand against Israel’s mighty God?

16. *Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased.*

And how still they were! All the forty years that the Israelites were in the wilderness, they were scarcely ever attacked; and even then, it was not by the inhabitants of Canaan, but by the wandering Bedouin tribe of the Amalekites, who slew the hindmost of them. It was wonderful that no troops ever came out of Egypt to molest God’s people after the destruction at the Red Sea; neither out of Canaan did any come to block their way. When God strikes, he makes his adversaries dread all future conflicts.

17-21. *Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O LORD, which thy hands have established. The LORD shall reign for ever and ever. For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the*

sea, and the LORD brought again the waters of the sea upon them, but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea. And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously! the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

They sang as in an oratorio, Miriam singing the solo, and all the women joining in the jubilant chorus; and well might they rejoice after the great deliverance which the Lord had wrought for them.

This exposition consisted of readings from HOSEA 2:14-15; AND EXODUS 15:1-21.

EXODUS 16:1-5, 11-36

1, 2. *And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:*

They have been only about six weeks in the wilderness, and already they are up in arms against their leaders. Remember that we have the same kind of people to deal with as Moses and Aaron had. The children of Israel were no better than any other nation; and I do not think they were any worse. We may take them as a fair average of human nature, which is a discontented, rebellious thing in the best of circumstances.

3. *And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.*

They forgot all about the brick-making, and the whips, and the iron bondage, and they recollected nothing but the fleshpots of Egypt. Ah, me! how soon, when we escape from a great trial, we forget it! The present much smaller one seems far heavier than that which is past.

4. *Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain*

rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.

See God's answer to man's murmuring. They send up their complaint, and he promises to rain bread down from above. It is a blessed story on God's part all along; a rain of mercy for a smoke of complaining.

5. *And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.*

Now let us read at the eleventh verse.

11, 12. *And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel:*

"I have heard them." God always does hear. Oh, his wonderful patience! If he took no notice of the murmurers, or punished them for their wickedness, we should have no cause for wonder; but he is longsuffering, even to those who do not deserve his pity.

12. *Speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God.*

"There shall be no mistake about who I am. I will work this miracle in such a Godlike style, and on such a divine scale, that ye shall know that I am Jehovah your God."

13-16. *And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat. This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man,*

About two pints and a half, I think; according to some calculations, two quarts, or thereabouts. There would be more sustenance in it than in a half-quarter loaf of bread per diem: "An omer for every man."

16-18. *According to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so,*

and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating.

God meant it to be so; not every man according to his avarice, that he might save any of it; but “every man according to his eating.” God took care that neither should feebleness be stinted, nor should greed have any excess.

19-22. *And Moses said, Let no man leave, of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them. And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted. And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses.*

He had told them that it would be so, but they evidently did not accept the message that he had delivered to them as the very Word of Jehovah their God; so that, when it was fulfilled, it struck them with wonder, and they “came and told Moses.”

23. *And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said. How often could that answer be made to us!*

God hears our prayer, and we run and say, “What a wonderful thing! God has heard my prayer.” “This is that which the Lord hath said.” Is it a strange thing that what Jehovah has said is proved to be true, and is it a subject for surprise that he should keep his promise? You dishonour God when you talk after this fashion.

23. *To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD:*

And yet the Sabbath had not been instituted according to law, which proves that its foundation lay deeper and earlier than the promulgation of the Ten Commandments; it is bound up with the essential arrangement of time since the creation: “This is that which the Lord hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord.”

23-27. *Bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses*

said, Eat that today; for today is a sabbath unto the LORD: to day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none. And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none.

They might have expected it to be so; but they would not believe, and as they would not believe, they must needs put the Word of God to the test. But it endures the trial; it is always true. Oh, that men would, in a believing spirit, test the Word of God, instead of doing it after this skeptical fashion!

28-31. *And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the LORD hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day. And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna:*

Or, "What is it?" It was something too wonderful to be understood and they kept the expression of their wonderment as the name of their bread from heaven. When they first saw it, they exclaimed, "Man-hu?" "Man-hu?" "What is it?" "What is it?" Thus it received its Hebrew name, Manna; but God called it, "Bread from heaven."

31-33. *And it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. And Moses said, This is the thing which the LORD commandeth, Fill an omer of it to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread where with I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt. And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a pot, and put an omer full of manna therein, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations.*

This production, which would not keep a single day under ordinary circumstances, would keep for two days to supply the needs of the Sabbath, and it would keep for generations as a memorial of God's goodness to his chosen people during their forty years' wanderings through the wilderness. We may be quite sure that Aaron would not have kept a stinking thing laid up before the Lord.

34-36. *As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept. And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years, until they came to a land inhabited; they did eat manna, until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan. Now an omer is the tenth part of an ephah.*

Now I want you to read in the Book of Numbers. Further on in the history of the children of Israel, when the people had been long in the wilderness, the same kind of thing happened again.

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 16:1-5, 11-36; AND NUMBERS 11:1-10.

EXODUS 20:1-17

1-3. *And God spake all these words saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*

God is the only God, and no other object of worship is to be tolerated for a moment.

4-6. *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.*

Here we are forbidden to worship God under any similitude whatever. The first command forbids the worship of another God: the second strictly forbids us to worship anything which our eyes can see, under the pretense that we are worshipping God thereby. This is another offense, and much more common than the first; and it is often pleaded — “Oh, we do not worship these things: we worship God whom these represent.” But here it is strictly forbidden to represent God under any form or substance whatsoever and to make that an object of worship.

7. *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD shall not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*

A reverence for the very name of God is demanded and all things that are connected with his worship are to be kept sacred.

8-11. *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within the gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*

It is good for us that we make the Sabbath a day of rest — a day of holy worship — a day of drawing near unto God. Thus far, we have the first table, containing the duties towards God. The rest inscribed on the second table are our duties towards man.

12-14. *Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

These commandments take a far wider sweep than the mere words. “Thou shalt not kill” includes the doing of anything by which life may be shortened as well as taken away. It includes anger — every evil wish and every malicious passion. And “Thou shalt not commit adultery” includes every form of unchastity and impurity.

15-17. *Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.*

It was the tenth commandment that convicted the apostle Paul, for he says, “I had not known sin except the law had said “Thou shalt not covet.” When men break the other commandments they often break this one first.

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 20:1-17; AND 2 KINGS 17:23-41.

EXODUS 24:1-10

1, 2. *And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. And Moses alone shall come near the LORD: but they shall not come nigh; neither shall the people go up with him.*

Nearer to God than the people were allowed to come, but still at a distance from him. It was a covenant of distance, — bounds were set about the mount lest the people should come too near. Yet they were near unto God as compared with the heathen, but far off as compared with those who now, by the teaching of the Spirit of God, have been brought near to God through the precious blood of Jesus. Moses alone could come near to Jehovah on mount Sinai, the people could not go up with him, — nor even with the man who was their mediator with God, for such Moses was; but you and I, beloved, can go up with him who is far greater than Moses, —with him who is the one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ at Jesus, for God “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

3-8. *And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.*

There is a double power about the blood; — towards God an atonement, that is the blood sprinkled on the altar, — and towards ourselves a sense of reconciliation, thus must the blood be sprinkled upon us that we may prove its cleansing power.

9, 10. *Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: and they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.*

This exposition consisted of readings from HEBREWS 9., AND EXODUS 24:1-10.

EXODUS 25:10-22

10, 11. *And they shall make an ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about.*

The ark of the covenant was the most sacred object in the tabernacle in the wilderness. It stood at the extreme end of the holy of holies. It was the place over which the bright shining light, called the Shekinah, which was the token of the presence of God, shone forth. The ark was, doubtless, typical of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was a sacred chest made to contain the law. Blessed are they who know the law in Christ. Out of Christ, the law condemns. In Christ, it becomes a blessed guide to us. This ark was made of wood, perhaps to typify the human nature of our blessed Lord; but it was of unrotting wood, acacia, which resists the worm; and, truly, in him there was no corruption in life by way of sin, and no corruption sullied him in death when he slept for a while in the grave. Wood is a thing that grows out of the earth, even as Jesus sprang up like a root out of a dry ground.

But the ark must be made of the best kind of wood, — unrotting and untainted. Yet the ark, though made of wood, did not appear to be so, for it was completely overlaid with pure gold, so, everywhere, the Deity, or, if you will, the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ could be seen. The ark was of shittim wood, yet it was an ark of gold; and he, who was truly man was just as truly God, blessed be his holy name. Round about the top of this ark there was a crown of gold. How glorious is Christ, in his mediation, as covering the law, and preserving it within himself! He is King, glorious in holiness, and honoured in the midst of his people.

12-14. *And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four corners thereof; and two rings shall be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it, and thou shalt make staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put the staves into the ring by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them.*

The rings were, of course, for the staves to pass through, and the staves were for the priests to carry the ark as it moved from place to place. It went with the children of Israel in all their journeys; and

our Lord Jesus is always with us. He goes with us wherever we go, and tarries with us wherever we abide. Though his glorified person is in heaven, yet his presence is not restricted to any one place, as he said to his disciples, "Lo, I am with you away, even unto the end of the world."

15. *The staves shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not be taken from it.*

So that it was always ready to be moved.

16. *And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee.*

That is to say, the two tables of stone were to be put into the ark of the covenant.

17. *And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof.*

It exactly fitted upon the top of the ark, and so completely covered whatever was put within. It was of pure gold. This, perhaps, was the most important part of this very important article of the tabernacle furniture. It was the mercy-seat, the cover that hid the law, the place where God promised to meet with his people.

18-20. *And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof, and the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be.*

They were part and parcel of the mercy-seat; they were made of the same precious metal, and all formed one piece. They may represent the angels, who stand desiring to look into the mysteries of God, and they may also represent the Church, which is all of a piece with Christ, for ever one with him.

21, 22. *And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark*

of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.

It was the meeting place of God and men, where the law was covered with a solid plate of gold, so is Jesus the meeting place between God and sinners, where the law is covered with his perfect righteousness.

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 25:10-22; AND PSALM 32.

EXODUS 29:38-46

38. *Now this is that which thou shalt offer upon the altar; two lambs of the first year day by day continually.*

Remember, as long as there was a Jewish state, the morning and the evening were to open and to close with the sacrifice of a lamb.

39-42. *The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at even: And with the one lamb a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of beaten oil; and the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering. And the other lamb thou shalt offer at even, and shalt do thereto according to the meat offering of the morning, and according to the drink offering thereof, for a sweet savour an offering made by fire unto the LORD. This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee.*

See, the lamb is the place of meeting; God comes to his people as his people come to him, with the morning and with the evening lamb.

43. *And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory.*

God's glory is in the lamb: it is there he is pleased to manifest himself in the glory of his infinite grace to his people.

44, 45. *And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God.*

Not without the lamb, you see; that morning and evening sacrifice must be the token and the way of God's dealing with his people.

46. *And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the LORD their God.*

Now concerning this same lamb, we will read in: —

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 29:38-46; ISAIAH 53.

EXODUS 32

1. *And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.*

What a terrible speech to be made by the people whom God had chosen to be his own! “Make us gods. Make our Creator.” How could that be?

2. *And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me.*

Poor Aaron! He never had the backbone of his brother Moses. He was a better speaker; but oh, the poverty of his heart! He yields to the will of these idolatrous people, and bows to their wicked behests at once.

3. *And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.*

Idolaters spare no expense; there is many a worshipper of a god of wood or mud who gives more to that idol than professing Christians give to the cause of the one living and true God. It is sad that it should be so.

4. *And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.*

This was an Egyptian idolatry, the worship of God under the fashion of an ox, the emblem of strength; but God is not to be worshipped under emblems at all. What a poor representation of God any emblem must be!

5. *And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD.*

They were going to worship Jehovah under the emblem of an ox. This is what you will hear idolaters say; they do not worship the image, they say, but the true God under that image. Yet that is expressly forbidden under the second commandment.

6. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

Lascivious games were sure to accompany idolatrous worship, for idolatry always leads to filthiness in some form or other, as if it were inevitable.

7. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:

How startled Moses must have been when Jehovah said this to him!

8, 9. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people.

Moses perhaps begins to lift his voice in prayer, and God says:-

10. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.

“I will keep my promise to Abraham by destroying these rebels, and taking thee, his true descendant, and fulfilling the covenant in thee.”

11-13. And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the

stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.

What a brave prayer this was! Here is a wrestling Moses, true son of wrestling Israel; and he brings his arguments to bear upon Jehovah when he is angry, and he succeeds in turning aside the Lord's wrath.

14, 15. *And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people. And Moses turned, and went down from the mount,*

An unhappy, broken-hearted man, going from the closest communion with God, down into the midst of a wicked people.

15-17. *And the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp.*

Joshua had probably waited lower down, and he met Moses in his descent. He heard with the quick ears of a soldier, and his thoughts went that way.

18, 19. *And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear. And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.*

This is he who had been praying to God, and saying, "Why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people?" Now he is in deep sympathy with God, and he is himself angry with the idolaters. He cannot help it when he begins to see their sin. Before, he had only thought of the people; but now he looks at their sin. When you see sin, if you are a man of God, your wrath waxes hot, and you get into sympathy with that holy God who cannot be otherwise than indignant at iniquity wherever it may be.

20. *And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it.*

See the power of this one man who has God at his back, and God in him. While the people are dancing around their idol, he tears

it down, grinds it to powder, and says, "You shall drink it every one of you." Why, there are millions to one; but what cares he about their millions? God is with him, and he is God's servant; and, therefore, they all tremble before him.

21-24. *And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my Lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off so they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.*

That was a lie, for he had made the calf, and shaped it himself. Aaron had not any backbone, nor any principle, he could not be stout-hearted for God. What a poor little man he seems by the side of his great brother! How he shrivels up under the rebuke of Moses!

25. *And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:)*

Moses does not spare Aaron, he lays at his door the guilt of the great sin he had committed: "Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies.

26, 27. *Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.*

This is the man who pleaded for them on the top of the mount. See how he acts in the sight of their sin; by divine authority, he smites them right and left. Possibly, those who were slain were the men who refused to drink the water on which the powder had been sprinkled, or those who continued in rebellion against the Lord.

28-30. *And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to day to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow*

upon you a blessing this day. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin; and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.

I will be bound to say that this was said after a sleepless night. The people's sin is now so vividly before him that he begins to feel that God will be just if he punishes them, and does not grant them any forgiveness, so he goes once more up that steep climb to the top of Sinai with a trembling heart, and with only a "peradventure" on his lip.

31, 32. *And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin-,*

There he broke down, he could not finish that sentence.

32. *And if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.*

"Let me die in their stead!" But God could not accept one man in the stead of another; there is a great Substitute, ordained of old, but he is more than man, and therefore he can stand in the sinner's stead.

33-36. *And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them. And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.*

Moses had only half success in pleading for the people; they were not to die as yet, but God declared that he would visit their sin upon them.

EXODUS 32:1-29

1. *And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us, for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.*

They wanted something to look at, — something visible that they could adore. It was not that they meant to cease to worship

Jehovah, but they intended to worship him under some tangible symbol. That is the great fault of Ritualists and Romanists, they aim at worshipping God, but they must do so through some sign, some symbol, some cross, some crucifix, or something or other that they can see.

2, 3. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.

People are often very generous in their support of a false religion; and, to make idol gods, they will sacrifice their most precious treasures, as these idolaters willingly gave their golden earrings.

4. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

No doubt they copied the Egyptian God, which was in the form of a bull, which the Holy Spirit, by the pen of Moses, here calls a calf. The psalmist probably also alludes to it when he speaks of “an ox or a bullock that hath horns and hoofs.” It seems strange that these people should have thought of worshipping the living God under such a symbol as that.

5. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.

“To Jehovah.” They intended to worship Jehovah under the form of a bull — the image of strength. Other idolaters go further, and worship Baal and various false gods, but, between the worship of a golden calf and the worship of false gods, there is very little choice; and, between the idolatry of the heathen and Popery, there is about as much difference as there is between six and half a dozen.

6. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

It was usual to worship false gods with music and dancing and with orgies of drunkenness and obscene rites, and the Israelites fell into the same evils as they had seen among their neighbours.

7. *And the LORD said unto Moses,*

Just in the midst of his hallowed communion, the Lord said to him: —

7. *Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:*

God would not own them as his people. He called them Moses' people: "thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves."

8-10. *They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, these are thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.*

For Moses began at once to pray for the people, — to interpose between God and the execution of his righteous wrath; and, therefore, the Lord said to him, "Let me alone,... that I may consume them."

11. *And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, —*

See how he dares even to say to God, "They are thy people, though they have acted so wickedly. 'Why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people,'" —

11-13. *Which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.*

Moses pleaded the covenant which the Lord had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and there is no plea like that. Although

it might have been to his own personal interest that the people should be destroyed, Moses would not have it so; and he pleaded with God, for the sake of his own honour, his faithfulness, and his truth, not to run back from the word which he had spoken.

14, 15. *And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people. And Moses turned, and went down from the mount,*

Does it not seem sad for Moses to have to go down from the immediate presence of God, and to stand among the idolatrous and rebellious people in the camp? Yet that is often the lot of those whom God employs as his servants. They have, as it were, to come down from heaven to fight with hell upon earth.

15-17. *And the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides, on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp.*

For Joshua was a younger man than Moses, and also a soldier, so his ear was quicker to hear what he took to be “a noise of war in the camp.”

18. *And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear.*

Moses knew that it was not a battle cry either of the victors or the vanquished; but the song of idolatrous worshippers.

19. *And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.*

In righteous indignation, preserving those sacred tablets from the profane touch of the polluted people, by dashing them to fragments in his holy anger

20. *And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it.*

Think of the courage of this one man, to go single handed right into the middle of the idolaters' camp, and deal thus with their precious god!

21-24. *And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.*

Which was a lie. Aaron was a poor weak-minded creature, easily persuaded to do wrong; and when his stronger-minded and more gracious brother was absent, he became the willing tool of the idolatrous people; and yet Aaron is called, by the psalmist, “the saint of the Lord,” and so he was, taking him as a whole. One black spot, on the face of a fair man, does not prove him to be a negro; and so, one sin, in the life of a man who is usually holy, does not put him among the ungodly.

25-28. *And when Moses saw that the people were naked, (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies) then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses:*

The rebellious, the idolatrous, the men who had defied the authority of God, were to be summarily executed on the spot.

28, 29. *And there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to day to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.*

Such a colossal crime as that must be expiated before the Lord could again bless the chosen race.

EXODUS 32:7-14

7. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:

See how Jehovah will not own these idolaters as his people. He says to Moses, “Thy people which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.”

8-10. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.

What a great future was thus opened up before Moses! He might become another Abraham, and in him should all the nations of the earth be blessed. But Moses loves the people, even the people who have vexed and provoked him so many years. He still loves them so much that, even before he begins to pray for them, God says, “Let me alone,” as if he felt the force of Moses’ coming prayer, and would not have him offer it. O wondrous power of intercession, that by it even God’s right hand is held back when it is lifted up to smite!

11. And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?

Moses will not have it that they are his people, nor that he brought them out of the land of Egypt; but he declares that they are God’s people, and that He brought them forth “with great power, and with a mighty hand.”

12-14. Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed so the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your

seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

So a second time the mighty power of prayer was proven, and the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man. In the seventh chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, beginning at the twenty-fourth verse, is another story which you know well, which tells how the Lord Jesus was overcome by a woman's mighty faith.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 32:22-30; EXODUS 32:7-14; AND MARK 7:24-0.

LEVITICUS

LEVITICUS 16:1-31

1, 2. *And the LORD spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered before the LORD, and died; and the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.*

The way into the heavenly places was not yet made manifest; the inner shrine, called the holy of holies, was specially guarded from human access. No one could have said in those days, "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace," for only the high priest could approach the mercy seat at all, and he must go within the vail strictly in accordance with the instructions given to Moses by the Lord. Nadab and Abihu appear to have entered into the presence of God wrongfully. They had probably been drinking, for there was a command afterwards given that no priest should drink wine or strong drink when he went into the house of the Lord. God in his righteous anger slew these young men at once, and now, lest any others should intrude into the secret place of communion, a law was given to tell when and how man might approach his God.

3. *Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering.*

There is no access to God except by sacrifice; there never was, and there never can be, any way to God for sinful man except by sacrifice.

4. *He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on.*

Our great High Priest offered himself without spot to God, and he is himself without sin; but the Jewish high priest must make himself typically pure by putting on the snow white garments of

holy service, and before doing so he must wash himself with water, that he might come before God acceptably. None might approach the Holy God with impurities upon them.

5, 6. *And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house.*

These priests were sinful, and therefore they must first themselves be purged from guilt before they could come nigh to God; but the true High Priest of God, our Lord Jesus, needed to offer no sacrifice for himself, for he was pure and without blemish or stain of sin.

7. *And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.*

These two goats were not for himself, but for the people. You must regard them as if they were but one offering, for it needed both of them to set forth the divine plan by which sin is put away; one was to die, and the other was typically to bear away the sin of the people.

8. *And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat.*

One goat was to show how sin is put away in reference to God by sacrifice, and the other goat was to show how it is put away in reference to us, God's people, by being carried into oblivion.

9-14. *And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself: and he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: and he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: and he shall take of the blood of the*

bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

This was his first entrance within the veil, with holy incense to denote the acceptance which Christ has with God, though he is always well-beloved, and dear, and precious to his Father. This incense sent up a cloud that veiled the glory of the Shekinah which shone between the two wings of the cherubim, and so the high priest was better able to bear the wondrous brilliance by which God revealed his presence. When Aaron had thus filled the place with the sweetly perfumed smoke, he took the blood of the bullock of the sin offering, and carefully sprinkled it seven times on the mercy seat, and on the ground around the mercy seat. What a mercy it is for you and me that the spot where we meet with God is a place where the blood of the great sacrifice has been sprinkled, ay, and that the ground of our meeting with God, the place on which the mercy seat rests, has also the blood mark upon it!

15. *Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat:*

Twice, you see, is the holy place thus besprinkled, first with the blood of the bullock, and then with that of the goat.

16. *And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.*

If God is to dwell in the midst of sinful men, it can only be through the blood of the atonement. Twice seven times were the holy place and the tabernacle to be sprinkled with blood, as though to indicate a double perfectness of efficacy of the preparation for God's dwelling among sinful men.

17-19 *And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel. And he*

shall go out unto the altar that is before the LORD, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

Even this altar, to which we bring our prayers and our thankofferings, has sin upon it. There is some defilement even in the saltwater of our penitent tears; there is some unbelief even in our most acceptable faith; there is some want of holiness about our holiest things. We are unclean by nature, and by practice, too, what could we do without the sprinkling of the blood? See how the Lord insisted upon it in the case of his ancient people, yet there are some in these modern times who deride it. God forgive their blasphemy!

20, 21. *And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness:*

Notice the “all” in this twenty-first verse: “Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness.” This was the second part of the atonement showing, not sacrifice, but the effect of sacrifice, and explaining what becomes of sin after the sacrifice has been accepted, and the blood has been presented within the veil.

22-25. *And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. And Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall put off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there: and he shall wash his flesh with water in the holy place, and put on his garments, and come forth, and offer his burnt offering, and the burnt offering of the people, and make an atonement for himself, and for the people. And the fat of the sin offering shall he burn upon the altar.*

Only the fat of it, the best of it, was burnt upon the altar, for sin offerings were not acceptable to God. They were regarded as being filled with impurity by reason of the sin which they brought to mind; for this reason the bullock and the goat of the sin offering had to be burnt without the camp: "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate," as our sin offering. Yet, inasmuch as the fat was accepted upon the altar, so is Christ, even as our sin offering, acceptable before God.

26, 27. *And he that let go the goat for the scapegoat shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward come into the camp. And the bullock for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall one carry forth without the camp; and they shall burn in the fire their skins, and their flesh, and their dung.*

All must be burnt; and the last is mentioned because it more strikingly sets forth the impurity of the sin connected with the sin offering. All must be burnt right up; there must not be a particle of the sin offering left unconsumed.

28. *And he that burneth them shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp.*

Everything that has to do with God's service must be clean and purified by fire, and purified by water. An atonement cannot be made by that which is itself defiled; it must be without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing before it can put sin away; this is the virtue of Christ's atonement, for he was altogether without sin of any kind.

29-31 *And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: for on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever.*

This shows what sacredness the Lord attached to the great day of atonement, and gives us more than a hint of the preciousness of our Lord's atoning work for us. Now let us turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews, and see how the apostle spiritualizes the services of the Mosaic dispensation.

This exposition consisted of readings from Leviticus 16:1-31; And Hebrews 9:1-22.

LEVITICUS 25:1-7, 17-22

1, 2. *And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD.*

The Jews had much rest provided for them. If they had had faith enough to obey God's commands, they might have been the most favored of people; but they were not a spiritual people, and the Lord often had to lament their disobedience as in the words recorded by Isaiah, "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

3, 4. *Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD:*

Think of a Sabbath a year long, in which nothing was to be done but to worship God, and so to rest!

4, 5. *Thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land.*

A restful period in a restful land; all land to have rest, and yet to have fruitfulness in that rest; the rest of a garden, not the rest of a task. Thus is it oftentimes with God's people, when they rest most, they work best; and while they are resting, they are bearing fruit unto God.

6, 7. *And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, and for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat.*

There was to be no private property in the spontaneous produce of that year. It was free to everybody; free even to the cattle, which might go and eat what they would, and where they would.

17-21. *Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God. Wherefore ye shall do*

my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety. And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years.

Not merely for the one year of rest, but fruit for three years.

22. *And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store.*

They were to have enough for the year of rest, and for the next year in which the harvest was growing, and still to have something over for the ninth year. They scarcely could want as much as that; but God would give them more than they actually needed, exceeding abundantly above what they asked or even thought. That Sabbatical year had other blessings connected with it. Let us read about them in the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter fifteen.

This exposition consisted of readings from LEVITICUS 25:1-7, 17-22, AND DEUTERONOMY 15:1-18.

NUMBERS

NUMBERS 4:1-33

1, 2. *And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers,—*

There were three families, those of Kohath, Gershon, and Merari, and to each of these families a different service was allotted. First, they were to be numbered. “The Lord knoweth them that are his,” and he takes count of all his people.

3. *From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation.*

They were to take up this work as a warfare; for, though it was a peaceful work, yet it is described as being a warfare: and he who serves the Lord, though that service be perfect peace, will not serve him without finding it to be also a warfare.

4. *This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation, about the most holy things:*

They were to have to do with the most holy place, to carry it, and to carry the vessels of it, a very honourable position.

5, 6. *And when the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering vail, and cover the ark of testimony with it: and shall put thereon the covering of badgers' skins, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof.*

These Kohathites might not so take the ark as to handle it, much less might they ever look at it. But the priests, and the sons of Aaron, went in first, and after carefully covering the holy place, they covered up the sacred ark with a cloth of blue. Blue was the token of holiness, — of separation. Hence, every Israelite wore a border of blue upon his garment, but this, which was the symbol of the divine presence, was “all of blue.” It is all holiness. We wear, alas! but a border of blue, but this holy thing was “all of blue.”

7. And upon the table of shewbread they shall spread a cloth of blue, and put thereon the dishes, and the spoons, and the bowls, and covers to cover withal: and the continual bread shall be thereon:

When they moved the sacred table, the bread was always there; twelve cakes for the twelve tribes, for the bread of God's house is never lacking.

8-10. *And they shall spread upon them a cloth of scarlet, and cover the same with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put in the staves thereof. And they shall take a cloth of blue, and cover the candlestick of the light, and his lamps, and his tongs, and his snuff dishes, and all the oil vessels thereof, wherewith they minister unto it: and they shall put it and all the vessels thereof within a covering of badgers' skins and shall put it upon a bar.*

There were means for handling these vessels without touching them. I mean, the ark had staves, and the vessels were put upon a bar for carrying them.

11. *And upon the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put to the staves thereof:*

A type of the holiness veiled in our Lord's humanity, the badger skin made apparent the simplicity, the poverty, the humility of our Lord, covering evermore that wondrous cloth of blue.

12, 13. *And they shall take all the instruments of ministry, wherewith they minister in the sanctuary, and put them in a cloth of blue, and cover them with a covering of badgers' skins and shall put them on a bar: and they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth thereon:*

A royal altar is this, always grand and glorious in our eyes, covered with a purple cloth.

14-20. *And they shall put upon it all the vessels thereof, wherewith they minister about it, even the censers, the fleshhooks, and the shovels, and the basons, all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread upon it a covering of badgers' skins, and put to the staves of it. And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the*

congregation, and to the office of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest pertaineth the oil for the light, and the sweet incense, and the daily meat offering, and the anointing oil, and the oversight of all the tabernacle, and of all that therein is, in the sanctuary, and in the vessels thereof. And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites: but thus do unto them, that they may live, and not die, when they approach unto the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and anoint them every one to his service and to his burden: but they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die.

This is a very awful thing; I mean, something which should produce a great awe and solemnity in our hearts. These men were chosen to carry the vessels of the most holy place, yet they must never see them. They must be covered up by the hands of the priest, and they must never touch them. They must bear them by their staves, or upon the bar upon which they were placed. Oh, how terrible a thing it is to draw near to God. The Lord our God is a jealous God. He will be served with holy reverence; or not at all. Hence he says to Moses and Aaron, “Take care that you do not lead these men into any mistake. You go in first, and point out to each man what he is to carry. See that all is covered up, for if you do not, they may die in their work. Do not be accessories to their act, and bring upon them this terrible judgment.” I often wish that God’s people would be careful not to cause sin in any of his servants when they are engaged in the divine ministry. Perhaps in preaching, or otherwise, there may be something done which vexes the Holy Spirit, and causes trouble and sin. And, oh! he who stands in the holy place, and bears the holiest of the vessels, needs to fear and tremble before God; and he needs to ask his brethren to see that they do nothing which might inadvertently cause him to sin.

21-24. *And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take also the sum of the sons of Gershon, throughout the houses of their fathers, by their families, from thirty years old and upward until fifty years old shalt thou number them; all that enter in to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation. This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, to serve, and for burdens:*

They were to bear the external coverings of the holy place. The most holy place was in the custody of the Kohathites; but the Gershonites were to carry as follows,

25-28. *And they shall bear the curtains of the tabernacle, and the tabernacle of the congregation, his covering, and the covering of the badgers' skins that is above upon it, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the hangings of the court, and the hanging for the door of the gate of the court, which is by the tabernacle and by the altar round about, and their cords, and all the instruments of their service, and all that is made for them: so shall they serve. At the appointment of Aaron and his sons shall be all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their burdens, and in all their service: and ye shall appoint unto them in charge all their burdens. This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation: and their charge shall be under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.*

There was a wise decision of labour. I wish we had the same kind of thing in every church, and that every member occupied himself in that to which God has appointed him. But there are some who want to do what they cannot do, and who do not care to do what they can do.

29-32. *As for the sons of Merari, thou shalt number them after their families, by the house of their fathers; from thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old shalt thou number them, every one that entereth into the service, to do the work of the tabernacle of the congregation. And this is the charge of their burden, according to all their service in the tabernacle of the congregation, the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and sockets thereof, and the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords, with all their instruments, and with all their service: and by name ye shall reckon the instruments of the charge of their burden.*

They had the heaviest load to carry, but they were the more numerous. They carried the solid columns upon which the covering of the tabernacle rested. And notice that they had also to carry the pins. Sometimes, God's servants dislike carrying pins. They feel themselves too big, but blessed is that servant who, in his place, can be content to carry "their sockets, and their pins, and their cords, with all their instruments."

33. *This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, according to all their service, in the tabernacle of the congregation, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.*

NUMBERS 8:5-22

5, 6. *And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them.*

These men were to be the servants of God; they are the type of God's elect, — a people set apart unto divine service, to be zealous for good works. "Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them." That is just the way that God the Holy Ghost takes Christians out of the main of mankind, and cleanses them.

7, 8. *And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean. Then let them take a young bullock with his meat of offering, even fine flour mingled with oil, and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin offering.*

There are still, typically, these three things in the cleansing of God's people, — the blood, the water, and the razor. There is blood, the emblem of the putting away of sin by Christ's atoning sacrifice; the water, typical of the Holy Ghost, by whom the power of sin is overcome; and then that razor, cutting off that which grows of the flesh; that which was their beauty and their glory is all taken away from them. There are some of God's people who have not felt much of that razor; but if they are to serve God perfectly, it must be used. "Let them shave all their flesh.

9-12. *And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together: and thou shalt bring the Levites before the LORD: and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites: and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD for an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the LORD. And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one for a sin of offering, and the other for a burnt offering, unto the LORD, to make an atonement for the Levites.*

There is no true way of serving God without the atonement. Leave that out, and you have left out the vital part of the whole. What service can we render to the Most High if we begin by disloyalty to him whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for sin, even his dear Son?

13, 14. *And thou shalt let the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them for an offering unto the LORD. Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine.*

We are to offer up to God our spirit, soul and body, which is our reasonable service; and if we be indeed God's children, we are to feel that, henceforth, we are not our own, for we are bought with a price. We belong wholly to God; all that we are, and all that we have, is to be his through life, and in death, and throughout eternity.

15. *And after that shall the Levites go in to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them for an offering.*

An offering must be presented for us before we can offer ourselves as an offering unto God.

16. *For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel;*

Listen to this, you who trust that you are made like unto the elder Brother, and the firstborn from among the creatures of God:

16-18. *Instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me. For all the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself. And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel.*

God's people are the elect; they have escaped from death. In that day when the sword of the Lord was drawn, they were shielded by the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the lintel and on the two side posts; and, henceforth, because they have been thus preserved, they belong unto the Lord.

19-22. *And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague*

among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary. And Moses, and Aaron, and all the congregation of the children of Israel, did to the Levites according unto all that the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did the children of Israel unto them. And the Levites were purified, and they washed their clothes; and Aaron offered them as an offering before the LORD, and Aaron made an atonement for them to cleanse them. And after that went the Levites in to do their service in the tabernacle of the congregation before Aaron, and before His sons: as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did they unto them.

How instructive all this is to us! We are not to begin blunderingly to serve God while we are yet in our sins, — before we have been sprinkled with the blood, — before we have been washed in the water which flowed with the blood, — before we have felt that razor that takes away from us all our own pride and glory. No; but when all that is done, then there is to be no delay: “After that went the Levites in to do their service.”

NUMBERS 9

1, 2. And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season.

I should almost fear that they had omitted the keeping of the passover for a year. There was a first celebration of it when they came out of Egypt; but then it was not so much a type as a matter of fact; it was the thing itself, not the remembrance of the coming out of Egypt, but the actual coming out, the exodus. One would gather from this command of the Lord that, on the first anniversary of that memorable season, the children of Israel had omitted its observance, and hence Jehovah said to Moses, “Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season.” If this conjecture is correct, it is very significant that a rite which belonged to the law, and was therefore to pass away, was so soon neglected,—and certainly it was afterwards neglected for many, many years; whereas, the great memorial ordinance of the Christian dispensation,—the Lord’s supper,—was not neglected even when

Christians were under fierce persecution from the Jews or other nations. When the observance of that rite among the heathen was pretty sure to bring death, yet Christians met together on the first day of the week, and continually broke bread in remembrance of their Lord's death, even as we do to this day. I suppose that the supper, which is the memorial of Christ our Passover, has never been altogether neglected throughout the world; but has been a matter of constant observation in the Church of Christ, and shall be "till he come."

3-7. In the fourteenth day of this month, at even, ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it. And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, that they should keep the passover. And they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at even in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel. And there were certain men, who were defiled by the dead body of a man, that they could not keep the passover on that day: and they came before Moses and before Aaron on that day: and those men said unto him, We are defiled by the dead body of a man: wherefore are we kept back, that we may not offer an offering of the LORD in his appointed season among the children of Israel?

They were in a great difficulty. They were commanded to come to the passover, they sinned if they did not come; but they had defiled themselves, either through accident or of necessity and if they came thus to the passover they would be committing sin, so that either way they were in an ill case. There must be somebody to bury the dead. I suppose that these persons had fulfilled that necessary office, and there had not been time for them to purge themselves from the ceremonial defilement involved in the touching of the dead; so what were they to do?

8. And Moses said unto them, Stand still, and I will hear what the LORD will command concerning you.

Oh, how wisely we should give advice if we would never decide till we had prayed about the matter! Possibly, we think ourselves so experienced, and so well acquainted with the mind of God, that we can answer offhand; or, peradventure, we think that we need not consult the Lord at all, but that our own opinion will be sufficient guide. Moses was greater and wiser than we are, yet he said to these

men, “Stand still, and I will hear what Jehovah will command concerning you.”

9-12. *And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the passover unto the LORD. The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it unto the morning, nor break any bone of it: according to all the ordinances of the passover they shall keep it.*

So that, provision was made for the holding of a second passover, that persons who were defiled at the first observance might have the opportunity to keep the feast a month afterwards.

13. *But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin.*

What a solemn sentence that is! Let me read it apart from its connection: “Because he brought not the offering of the Lord in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin.” You see, the great offering of the Lord, the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the only way by which sin can be put away; and if any man will not bring that, in other words, if he will not believe in Jesus, then here is his certain doom, “that man shall bear his sin.” No more terrible judgment can be pronounced upon any one of us than this, “that man shall bear his sin.” “If ye believe not that I am he,” said Christ, “ye shall die in your sins.”

14. *And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the passover unto the LORD; according to the ordinance of the passover, and according to the manner thereof, so shall he do: ye shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land.*

Now comes another subject: -

15, 16. *And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony; and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night.*

This was the sign of the presence of God in the midst of that vast canvas city. I suppose that the great cloud rose up from the most holy place, and probably covered the whole camp of the tribes, so that it shielded them from the fierceness of the sun, while at night the entire region was lit up by this marvelous illumination. The chosen nation had the pillar of cloud by day for a shelter, and the pillar of fire by night for a light. God's presence acts upon us in much the same way as the cloudy fiery pillar acted upon Israel.

“He hath been my joy in woe,
Cheer'd my heart when it was low,
And, with warnings softly sad,
Calm'd my heart when it was glad.”

We get shelter from the fierce heat of the world's day and deliverance also from the darkness of the world's night through our Lord's gracious presence.

17-20. And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents. At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed.

Happy people to be thus divinely guided! They could never tell when they would have to be on the move; they had no abiding city. When their tents were pitched, and they were just getting comfortably settled, perhaps that very morning the pillar of cloud moved; and, at other times, when they desired to be marching, it stood still. They could never be certain of staying long in any one place. It is just so with you and with me; our Lord intends to keep us with a loose hold on all things here below. We cannot tell what changes may come to any one of us; therefore, reckon on nothing that God has not plainly promised. Be certain of nothing but uncertainty; and always expect the unexpected. You cannot tell between here and heaven where your Guide may take you; happy

will you be if you can truly say that you desire ever to follow where the Lord leads.

21-23. *And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed. At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.*

So may each one of us ever be divinely guided! “Let the fiery cloudy pillar Lead me all my journey thru.”

NUMBERS 11:1-10

1. *And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD:*

Interpreters cannot make out what they had to complain of. The curse of labour had been removed; they did not earn their bread with the sweat of their face, for it fell from heaven every day. They were at no expense for clothing; and though they journeyed, their feet did not swell. I suppose that they complained of the weather. It was too cold; it was too hot; it was too wet; it was too dry. They complained when they stood still; they were much too long in a place. They complained when they marched; they moved too often. In fact, they were very like ourselves; they often complained most when they had least to complain of. Discontent is chronic to our humanity; and I do not believe that the poorest are the most discontented. It is often the very reverse. When a man is put in a place where he has nothing to complain of, especially if he is an Englishman, he feels quite out of place. He must have something to grumble at, something or other to be a grievance, or else he is not happy. “When the people complained, it displeased the Lord.”

1. *And the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.*

He could hear their first murmurings, as they were new to the wilderness, they were hungry, they were thirsty, and the Lord pitied

them. But now, when there was no reason for their complaining, his fire in terrible judgment visited his people, on account of their rebellion and murmuring against the goodness of God.

2-4. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched. And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them. And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting:

All evil seems to begin there, among “the mixt multitude”, as it does among those church members who are unconverted, and among those people who try to hold with the hare and run with the hounds, those who want to be Christians and worldlings, too.

4. And the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?

Even the true people of God caught the infection of the scum that was mixed with them, and they fell weeping, and said, —

5. We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

Fine stuff that to recollect! “Why!” say you, “you have read before something very much like that.” I am reading another record; but there is no originality in grumbling; it is always the same old thing over again. You might well suppose that I was reading in the Book of Exodus, but I am not; there are many years in between. He who sitteth down with a discontented hand to paint a picture will paint the same picture that he painted before. There is no originality in the murmuring, although they put in a few new touches. Before, it was the flesh pots that they remembered; now, in addition to the flesh, there are these savoury vegetables, “the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick.”

6. But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

Here they pour contempt upon the bread of angels, upon the food of heaven, upon the benison of God. Oh, what will men not complain of?

7. And the manna was as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium.

A fine white colour, like a pearl.

8. *And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil.*

At first they thought it was like wafers made with honey. Getting more used to it, they, perhaps, described it quite as accurately, but not quite so sweetly; they said it was like fresh oil, and there is no better taste than that. Oil, by the time it comes to us, has usually a rank and rancid taste; but in the oil countries it is delicious; and he who has bread and a drop or two of oil, will find himself not ill supplied with a dinner. “The taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil.”

9. *And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it.*

God took care to preserve his precious gift, encasing each single particle of it within a drop of dew, which gave it freshness. And when truth comes to us encased in the dew of the Spirit, how sweet is its taste! May it be so to us whenever we feed on Christ!

10. *Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased.*

And no wonder; meek man as he was, they vexed his gracious spirit by their perpetual murmurings. As we read this sad story, let us, as in a glass, see ourselves; and let us deeply repent of our murmuring and complaining, and henceforth sing —

“I will praise thee every day!
Now thine anger’s turn’d away.”

Perhaps our next hymn (Number **697**) will help us that way.

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 16:1-5, 11-36; AND NUMBERS 11:1-10.

NUMBERS 19

1. *And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, —*

This ordinance was not given to Moses on Mount Sinai, but in the wilderness of Paran, after the people had broken their covenant with God, and were condemned to die. You know that the 90th Psalm — that dolorous dirge which we read at funerals, — called, “a prayer of Moses the man of God.” Well might he write that Psalm, for he lived among a generation of people who were all doomed to die within a short time, and to die in the wilderness. This

ordinance was especially appointed to meet the cases of those who were rendered unclean by the frequent deaths which occurred. There was to be a simple and easy way of purification for them; and the teaching of this chapter to us is that, inasmuch as we dwell in a sinful world, there needs to be some simple and ready method of cleansing us, that we may be able to draw near to God.

2, 3. *This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke: and ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face:*

This was not a usual sacrifice, for the beasts offered were as a rule males; but this was to be a special sacrifice. It was not to be killed by the priest, as other sacrificial offerings were; but the Lord said, "One shall slay her before his face."

4. *And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times:*

This makes it a sacrifice; otherwise, it scarcely deserves the name.

5, 6. *And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn: and the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer.*

All was to be burnt, and then the ashes, the essence and product of it, were to be preserved to make the water of purification needed to remove those constant defilements which fell upon the people of the camp. So, the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are the very essence of him, are perpetually preserved for the removal of our daily pollution. There was also the essence of cedar wood; that is, the emblem of fragrant immortality, for cedar was an unrotting wood. "And hyssop, and scarlet." There must be the humble hyssop used, yet there must be some degree of royalty about the sacrifice, as the scarlet colour imported; and all this is mixed with the blood and the flesh and the skin of the creature, to make the ashes of purification.

7. Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even.

What a strange sacrifice was this, for even when it was offered it seemed to make unclean all those who had anything to do with it!

8, 9. And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even. And a man that is clean-

Now we come to the merit of Christ, for who is clean except Christ?

9. Shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.

This ceremonial does not represent the putting away of sin, that typified in the slaying of the victims; but it represents that daily cleansing which the children of God need, the perpetual efficacy of the merit of Christ; for this red heifer was probably killed only once in the wilderness. According to Jewish tradition, there never have been more than six killed. I cannot tell whether that is true or not; but certainly the ashes of one single beast would last for a long time if they were only to be mixed with water, and then the water to be sprinkled upon the unclean. So this ordinance is meant to represent the standing merit, the perpetual purifying of believers by the sacrifice of Christ enabling them to come to the worship of God, and to mingle with holy men, and even with holy angels, without defiling them. In the fullest sense, it may be said of our Lord's atoning sacrifice, "It is a purification for sin."

10. And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever.

That was the remedy ordained by the Lord for purifying the defiled; now notice what made this remedy so necessary.

11, 12. He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean: but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean.

I wonder whether that is a revelation of our being justified through the resurrection of Christ, which took place on the third day after his death, and then our being brought into perfect rest, which represents the seventh day, through the wondrous purifying of our great Sacrifice, the Lamb of God.

13, 14. *Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him. This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days.*

Think, dear friends, what a solemn and yet what an irksome ordinance this must have been! Why, according to this regulation, Joseph could not have gone to see his father Jacob, and to be present at his death, without being defiled. You could not have watched over your consumptive child, or have nursed your dying mother, without becoming defiled, if you had been subject to this law; and everything that was in the tent, or in the house, became defiled, too.

15, 16. *And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean. And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.*

This law was indeed a yoke of bondage which our fathers were not able to bear. It was meant to teach us how easily we can be defiled. Anywhere they went, these people might touch a bone or touch a grave, and then they were defiled, and you and I, watch as carefully as we may, will find ourselves touching some of the dead works of sin, and becoming defiled. It is a happy circumstance for us that there is the means of purification always at hand; we may ever go to the precious blood of Jesus, and may once again be washed clean, and be made fit to go up to the house of the Lord.

17-22. *And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel and a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: and the clean person*

shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself and wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even. But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean. And it shall be a perpetual statute unto them, that he that sprinkleth the water of separation shall wash his clothes and he that toucheth the water of separation shall be unclean until even. And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until even.

This ordinance was partly sanitary. The Egyptians were accustomed to keep their dead in their houses, preserved as mummies. No Jew could do that, for he would be defiled. Other nations were accustomed to bury their dead, as we once did, within the city walls, or round their own places of worship, as if to bring death as near as they could to themselves. No Jew could do this, for he was defiled if he even passed over a grave; so they were driven to what God intended they should have, — that is, extramural interments, and to keep the graveyard as far as they could away from the abodes of the living. The spiritual meaning of this regulation is that we must watch with great care against every occasion for sin; and, inasmuch as there will be these occasions and we shall be defiled, we must constantly go to the Lord with a prayer like that of David in the 51st Psalm, which we will now read.

This exposition consisted of readings from NUMBERS 19.; AND PSALM 51.

NUMBERS 21:1-9

1-4. And when king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners. And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah. And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.

They were not allowed to go through the land of Edom, they had therefore to turn round, and go right away from the land where they one day hoped to dwell, and the road was a particularly trying one, over hot and burning sand, “and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.” Sometimes, God’s own people, when they find that they are not so far advanced in the divine life as they thought they were, when they find old sins reviving, and when troubles multiply upon them, get “discouraged because of the way.” If this is our experience, let us not fall into the sin into which these Israelites fell, but even in our discouragement let us turn to our God.

5. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

One gets tired, in reading of the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness, of this parrot cry, “Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt?” For nearly forty years, this was their cry whenever they met with any sort of difficulty. How weary God must have been of their cry, and how weary of them too! And now it was raised because they had been fed with “angels’ food” which they called “light bread.” It was easy of digestion, healthful, and the very best kind of food for them in the wilderness; but they wanted something more substantial, something that had a coarser flavour about it, more of earth and less of heaven. There is no satisfying an unregenerate heart. If we had all the blessings of this life, we should still be vying for more.

6, 7 And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.

Like a true mediator, he was always ready — even when they had most insulted him, and grieved his meek and quiet spirit, — still to bow the knee, and intercede with the Lord on their behalf. The people implored him to ask that the serpents might be taken away from them; but, apparently, they still continued to trouble them. However, if God does not answer prayer in one way, he does in another. The fervent prayer of a righteous man may not prevail in the particular direction in which it is offered, but it “availeth much”

in some direction or other. Just as when the mists ascend they may not fall upon the very spot from which they rose, but they fall somewhere, and true prayer is never lost, it cometh back in blessing, if not according to our mind, yet according to another mind that is kinder and wiser than our own.

8, 9. *And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.*

This exposition consisted of readings from NUMBERS 21:1-9; AND JOHN 3:1-15.

DEUTERONOMY

DEUTERONOMY 6

1. *Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it:*

God's commandments are to be taught, but they are also to be practiced: "which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them." And it is this doing of them that is the hard part of the work. It is not easy always to teach them; a man needs the Spirit of God if he is to teach them aright, but practice is harder than preaching. May God grant us grace, whenever we hear his Word, to do it!

2. *That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.*

The fear of God must always be a practical power in our lives: "that thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments." And that practical fear should lead us into obedience in detail; we ought so to study God's Word that we endeavor "to keep all his statutes and his commandments." A slipshod obedience is disobedience. We must be careful and watchful to know the divine will, and in all respects to carry it out. You who are his children, dwelling in such a household, and with such a Father, it well becomes you to be obedient children. Nay, it is not only for us to obey the command of the Lord our God, but we should pray till the rest of the verse also comes true: "thou, and thy son, and thy sows son," our children and our children's children. I am sure that, if we love God, we shall long that our children and our children's children may love him, too. If your trade has supported you, and brought you in a competence, you will naturally wish to bring your son up to it. But, on a far higher platform, if God has been a good God to you, your deepest desire will be that your son and your son's son should serve the same Divine Master through all the days of their life. "That thy days may be prolonged." God does

not give long life to all his people; yet in obedience to God is the most probable way of securing long life. There are also many of God's saints who are spared in times of pestilence, or who are delivered by an act of faith out of great dangers. That ancient declaration of God often comes true in these later times, "As the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." At any rate, you who love the Lord shall live out your days, whereas the wicked shall not live out half their days. You shall complete the circle of life, whether it be a great circle or a little one; with long life will God satisfy you, and show you his salvation. The passage which now follows is held in very great esteem by the Jewish people even down to this day. They repeat it frequently, for it forms part of their morning and evening services.

3, 4. *Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:*

There is but one God. This is the very basis of our faith; we know nothing of "gods many and lords many." Yet it is the Triune God whom we worship; we are not less Unitarians in the highest meaning of that word because we are Trinitarians. We are not less believers in the one living and true God because we worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

5. *And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

Does not this show what is the very nature of God? God is love, for he commands us to love him. There was never an earthly prince or king whom I have heard of in whose statute book it was written, "Thou shalt love the king." No; it is only in the statute book of him who is the Lord of life and love that we read such a command as this. To my mind it seems a very blessed privilege for us to be permitted to love One so great as God is. Here it is we find our heaven. It is a command, but we regard it rather as a loving, tender invitation to the highest bliss: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart," — that is, intensely; "and with all thy soul," — that is, most sincerely, most lovingly, "and with all thy might" with all thy energy, with every faculty, with every possibility of thy nature.

6. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

Oh, how blessed to have them written on the heart by the Holy Spirit. We can never get them there except he who made the heart anew shall engrave upon these fleshy tablets the divine precepts.

7. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children,

Christian parent, have you done this? “Thou shalt” not only teach them, but “teach them diligently unto thy children.”

7. And shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Our common talk should be much more spiritual than it often is. There is no fear of degrading sacred subjects by the frequent use of them; the fear lies much the other way, lest by a disuse of them we come to forget them. This blessed Book, the Holy Word of God, is a fit companion for your leisure as well as for your labour, for the time of your sleeping and the time of your waking. It will bless you in your private meditations, and equally cheer the social hearth, and comfort you when in mutual friendship you speak the one with the other. Those who truly love God greatly love his holy Word.

8. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand,

They shall be thy practical guide, at thy fingers’ ends, as it were.

8. And they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

Thou shalt see by them, thou shalt see with them, thou shalt see through them.

9. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

I could almost wish that this were literally fulfilled much more often than it is. I was charmed, in many a Swiss village, to see a text of Scripture carved on the door post. A text hung up in your houses may often speak when you are silent. We cannot do anything that shall be superfluous in the way of making known the Word of God.

10-12. *And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be*

full; then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Bread eaten is soon forgotten. How often we act like clogs that will take the bones from our hand, and then forget the hand that gave them! It should not be so with us. All our spiritual, mercies, and many of our temporal ones, are very much like the inheritance of Israel in the land of Canaan, wells that they did not dig, and vineyards which they did not plant. Our blessings come from sources that are beyond our own industry and skill; they are the fruits of the holy inventiveness of God, and the splendor and fullness of his thoughtfulness towards his poor children. Let us not forget him, since evidently he never forgets us.

13-15. *Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (for the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the Lord thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.*

Our God is a jealous God. One said to a Puritan, “Why be so precise?” and he replied, “Because I serve a precise God.” God has done so much for us, in order to win our hearts, that he ought to have them altogether for himself. When he has them all, it is all too little; but to divide our heart is to grieve his Spirit, and sorely to vex him.

16-24. *Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah. Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the Land hath spoken. And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: and the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: and he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. And the LORD commanded*

us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.

Oh, friends, it will be well when our boys and girls ask us questions like this, and when we can give such answers! The great lack of the age in which we live is obedience to God. "Modern thought" has flung off obedience to Divine Revelation; and even in matters relating to social morality, many men reject all idea of anything being commanded of God; they only judge by what appears to them to be either pleasurable or profitable. What is most needed just now is that we ourselves, and those about us, become really conscious of the greatness and sovereignty of God, and yield ourselves to him to do as he bids us, when he bids us, where he bids us, and in all things to seek to follow his commandments that he may "preserve us alive, as it is at this day."

25. *And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.*

That would have been Israel's righteousness if the people had observed to do all these commandments before the Lord; but it was marred and spoilt by disobedience. We rejoice to know that we who believe in Jesus have a righteousness unto which Israel did not attain, for the Lord Jesus Christ himself is our righteousness.

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-23

1, 2. *Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.*

Obedience to God should arise from the fear of him, or from a holy awe of God felt in the heart, for all true religion must be heart work. It is not the bare action alone at which God looks, but at the motive — at the spirit which dictates it. Hence it is always put, "That thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments." Neither are we to be content with keeping commands ourselves. It is the duty of parents to seek the good of

their children — to seek that the son and the son's son should walk in the ways of God all their lives. May God grant us never to be partakers of the spirit of those who think that they have no need to look after the religion of their children — who seem as if they left it to a blind fate. May we care for them with this care that our son and our son's son should walk before the Lord all the days of their life.

3. *Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may will be with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.*

It seems, according to the old covenant, that temporal prosperity was appended as a blessing to the keeping of God's commandments. It has been sometimes said that while prosperity was the blessing of the old covenant, adversity is the blessing of the new, and there is some truth in that statement, for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and yet is it true that the best thing for a meal is that he should walk in the commands of God. There is a sense in which we do make the best of both worlds when we seek the love of God. When we seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, other things are added be us; so that it is not without meaning to us that the Lord here promises temporal blessings to his people.

4. *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:*

This is the great doctrine that we learn, both from the Old and the New Testament there is one Lord. And this great truth has been burnt into the Jews by their long chastisement, and, whatever other mistakes they make, you never find them making a mistake about this. The Lord thy God is one Lord. May we be kept always from all idolatry — from all worship of anything else, except the living God. The sacred unity of the Divine Trinity may we hold fast evermore.

5. *And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

It is not a little love that God deserves, nor is it a little love that he will accept. He blesses us with all his heart and all his might, and after that fashion are we to love him.

6, 7. *And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when*

thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

The Word of God is not for some particular place called a church or a meeting house. It is for all places, all times, and all occupations. I wish that we had more of this talking over of God's Word when we sit by the way, or when we walk.

8. *And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.*

With thee in all thine actions — with thee in all thy thoughts — conspicuously with thee — not out of ostentation, but through thine obedience to become apparent unto all men.

9-12 *And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,*

And the houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged which though diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantest not when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Pride in the peculiar sin of prosperity, and pride stands side by side with forgetfulness of God. Instead of remembering whence our mercies came, we begin to thank ourselves for these blessings, and God is forgotten. I remember one of whom it was said that he was a selfmade man, and he adored his Creator, and I may say that there are a great many persons who do just that. They believe that they have made themselves, and so they worship themselves. Be it ours to remember that it is God who giveth us strength to get wealth or to get position, and, therefore, unto him be all the honour of it, and never let him be forgotten.

13-15. *Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you: (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you)*

He will have the heart all to himself. Two Gods he cannot endure. Of false gods, there may be many: of the true God there can be but one, and he is a jealous God.

15-19. *Lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah. Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, To cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the LORD hath spoken.*

Now, this covenant of works they break, as we also have long ago broken ours. Blessed be God, our salvation now hangs on another covenant which cannot fail nor break down — the covenant of grace. Yet, still, now that we become the Lord's children, we are put under the discipline of the Lord's house, and these words might not unfitly set forth what is the discipline of the Lord's house towards his own children, namely, that he does bless us when we walk in his ways, and that he will walk contrary to us if we walk contrary to him. He keeps a rod in his house, and in love he uses that upon his best beloved ones. "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for your iniquities." He will not kill his children, nor treat them as a judge treats a criminal, for they are not under the law, but under grace; but he will chasten them and treat them as a father chasteneth his child — out of love. Oh! that we might have grace to walk before him with a holy, childlike fear, that so we may walk always in the light of his countenance.

20-23. *And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statues, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you? then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: And the LORD shewed signs and wonders great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: and he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers.*

And cannot we tell our children what God has done for us — how he brought us out of our spiritual captivity, and how in his almighty love, he has brought us into his Church and will surely bring us into the glory above? May God grant us grace to speak

about these things without diffidence, With great confidence to tell our children of what he has done.

DEUTERONOMY 8

1. *All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers.*

Every word here seems emphatic. Like the children of Israel, we are to observe all the commandments of the Lord our God; not merely some of them, picking and choosing as we please. It is a very ill conscience, which regards some of God's statutes, and pays no attention to the others; in fact, the very act of making a selection as to what commands we will observe is gross disobedience. "All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do." Notice that we are not only to do as we are bidden, but to do it with carefulness: "ye shall observe to do." God would not have a thoughtless, careless, blind service; but we must bow our mind and heart as well as our will to his service. Remember also that it is not sufficient to "observe" the commandments so as to note what they are, but we are to "observe to do" them. That observation which does not end in right practice is like a promising blossom upon a tree, which never knits, and which therefore produces no fruit. Further notice that, to walk in the ways of God, is for our own benefit as well as for his glory: "That ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers." There are, doubtless, many good things, which we miss because we are not careful in our walking. I am sure that the happiest life will be found to be that which is most carefully conducted upon the principles of holy obedience to God's commands. There are certain blessings which God will not give to us while we are disobedient to him. Many a father feels that he cannot indulge his child as he would wish to indulge him when he finds the child negligent as to his father's will. So, if we please God, God will please us; but, if we walk contrary to him, he will walk contrary to us. Let me read this most instructive verse again, that it may be further impressed upon your memories and your hearts: "All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and

multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore unto your fathers.” To help you in obeying these commands, it is added,-

2. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

Look back, and derive from your past experience a motive for more careful obedience in the future. He does not read his own life aright who does not see in it abundant causes for gratitude; and how can gratitude express itself better than by a cheerful, hearty obedience in the present and the future?

3. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna,

These two sentences come very closely together: “Suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna.” I suppose we are not fit to eat heavenly bread till first of all we begin to hunger for it. God loves to give to men who will eat with an appetite: “He suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna.”

3. Which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know;

It was a new kind of food; and even in the day when they ate it, they did not fully know what it was. They saw that it came by a miracle, and it remained a mystery; and I think we can say that, though we have fed upon the Bread of heaven, some of us, for well-nigh forty years, yet we hardly know, nor dare to think that we know, what it is made of, nor can we tell all the sweetness that is in it. We know the love of Christ, but it still passes our knowledge. It is true of us, as of Israel in the wilderness, “He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know.”

3. That he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

It is a grand thing to be delivered from materialism, to be freed from the notion that the outward means are absolutely essential for the accomplishment of the divine purpose. If God had so willed it, we could have lived on air, if the air had been sanctified by the Word of God and prayer for such a use. The Lord has, however, chosen to feed us upon bread; yet our highest life, our real life, does

not live on bread, but it lives on the Word which proceeds out of the mouth of God. This is one of the passages with which our Lord fought Satan in the desert, and overcame him. Happy is that servant of God who will arm himself with this same truth, and feel, "I am not to be provided for merely by money, or by anything else that is visible. God will provide for me somehow, and I can leave all care about the means if the means fail, and get away to the God of the means, and lean, not on what I see, but on that arm which is invisible. That which you can see may fail you, for it is, like yourself, a shadow; but he whom you cannot see will never fail you. The strongest sinew in an arm of flesh will crack, but the arm eternal never faileth, and never is shortened. Lean on that arm, and you shall never be ashamed, nor confounded, world without end. It takes forty years to teach some people that lesson, and some, alas! have not learned it even at the end of eighty years.

4. *Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.*

See how God not only cares for his people's food, but for their raiment also. We may, therefore, well take heed to Paul's injunction: "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content." Whether it was by a miracle that the Israelites' raiment did not wear out, or whether it came to pass, in the order of providence, that they were able to get fresh clothing when it did wear out, does not signify at all; it made no difference to them how it was arranged, for it was equal kindness on the part of God who provided for them. "Neither did thy foot swell." We call the Arab, sometimes, "The pilgrim of the weary foot;" but the Israelites' feet were not weary. They traversed a stony, wilderness, yet God kept them in such health and strength that their feet swelled not even after forty years of journeying. You and I often get worn out in forty hours; forty days are as long as we can hope to go; but God enabled his ancient people to go on for forty years, and still their feet swelled not. Dr. Watts sweetly sang, -

"Mere mortal power shall fade and die,
And youthful vigor cease;
But we that wait upon the Lord Shall feel our strength increase.
The saints shall mount on eagles' wings,
And taste the promised bliss,
Till their unwearied feet arrive Where perfect pleasure is."

5. *Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.*

We sometimes think that we could do without the Lord's chastening. If he will give us food and raiment, and keep our foot from swelling, we will not crave the rod. No; but though we do not ask for it, the rod is one of the choicest blessings of the covenant; and if we are the Lord's children, we shall not go without it. To come under divine discipline, is one of the greatest mercies we can ever have. Many of us, who are now men and women, thank God for earthly parents who have corrected us; we wonder what we should have been if there had been no discipline in our father's house. So, truly, is it with all of us who are God's children; in years to come, we shall prize the chastisement which now makes us grieve. Even now, it is well if, by faith, we can apply to our own heart this text: "as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee."

6, 7. *Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him. For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills;*

There are changes in our condition. Israel was not always in the wilderness; the chosen people were brought into a good land, into a place of rest from their weary wanderings. So it may happen to you and to me that, even in temporal circumstances, God may work a great change for us, and especially will he do this in spiritual matters. After a time of wilderness traveling, we who have believed do enter into rest; we come to understand the gospel, and he who understands the gospel is not any longer in the wilderness. In a certain sense, he has come into the land of promise, where he already enjoys covenant mercies. It is true that the Canaanite is still even in that land, and we have to drive him out; but it is a good land to which God has brought us, "a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills." The Lord makes us drink of the river of his good pleasure, he satisfies us with the cooling streams of his covenant love.

8. *A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey;*

I will not go into a spiritualizing of all this; but I know that you, who have come to believe in Christ, and have entered by faith into

his rest, know what sweet things God has provided for you; not merely bare necessities, but choice delights. He gives you to eat of the sweetnesses, he gives you the fatnesses,-the wines on the lees, well-refined, and the fat things full of marrow. I trust that there are many here who know the blessed experience of joy and peace in believing. You have entered into a fair region, you have passed through the belt of storms, you have come where the trade winds blow heavenward, your sails are filled, your vessel skips along before the breeze, you are making good way towards the Fair Havens of eternal felicity.

9. *A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.*

There are deep things hidden away in the gospel treasures. Silver and gold there may be none; but then, iron and copper are much more useful things, and the most useful things we shall ever want in this life lie hidden beneath the surface of the gospel. If we know how to dig deep, we shall be abundantly rewarded by the treasures, which we shall discover. Well now, if your experience has thus changed, if you have left the fiery serpents and the howling wilderness behind you, and have come into a place of peace and enjoyment, what follows?

10. *When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.*

He permits you to eat, not to satiety, but you may eat and be full; only not so full but that you can always bless his name. Do not be afraid of holy joy. Eat and be full of it, only let it never take off your heart from him who gives you the joy. On the contrary, bless thy God for the good land, which he has given thee. It is said that, in the olden time, pious Jews always blessed God before they ate, and always blessed God after they ate. They blessed God for the fragrance of the flower when ever they smelt it. Whenever they drank a cup of water, they blessed the Lord who gave them drink out of the rock in the desert. Oh, that we were always full of praises of God! Then it would not hurt us to be full of meat; but if we get full of meat, and are empty of praises, this is mischievous indeed.

11. *Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day:*

That would be practical atheism; not keeping the commandments of God, is one of the most vivid ways of forgetting him.

12-14. *Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;*

The other day, a friend asked me this question, “Whence does God get his princes?” and the answer I gave was, “He often picks them off dunghills.” Oh, but they sometimes forget the dunghills where they grew, and think themselves wonderfully important individuals! Then there is a time of pulling down for them. We cannot eat and be full without having the temptation of getting our heart lifted up. It is a great blessing to have the heart lifted up in one way, that is, in God’s ways; but to be lifted up by bread, to be lifted up by silver, to be lifted up by flocks and herds, is such a bad way of being lifted up that evil and sorrow must come of it. See, the Lord does not forbid his people to build a house, or to eat and to enjoy what he gives them; but he does charge them not to forget the God who gave them these mercies, nor to forget where they used to be in slavery: “Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”

15. *Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint;*

I cannot but pause as I recollect my own passage through “that great and terrible wilderness, where there was no water.” When a soul is under conviction of sin, “fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought” are very feeble images of the pains and miseries that come of guilt unforgiven. “Where there was no water.” Oh! what would we not have given then to have understood a little of that gospel which, perhaps, we now despise? Oh! what would we not have

given then just to have moistened our burning lips with the living water of the precious Word in which, possibly, now we see no refreshing? May God have mercy upon us for our forgetfulness of his great mercy! Let us, with deep gratitude, think of him again: “Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint.” “More likely,” says one, “to bring fire rather than water out of a rock of flint;” and it did seem as if the cross of the curse must have cursed us, yet it blessed us. The Lord brought forth living water out of that Rock which was smitten for guilty man.

16, 17. *Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; and thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.*

We must not say this either about temporal or spiritual wealth. If we have grown in grace, and have become useful, and are spiritually a blessing to others, we must not take any credit for it to ourselves; or else down we shall go before long. God did not enrich thee that thou mightest set up for a god in opposition to him. Christ did not love thee that thou mightest make thyself a rival to him. Oh, that must not be! We must never say in our heart, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.”

18, 19. *But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish.*

If you live like sinners, you will die like sinners. “Where, then, is the perseverance of the saints?” asks one. Why, in this, that they shall not live like sinners! God’s grace will not let them go wandering after idols, to worship and to serve them. He will keep us faithful to himself; but if we will wander after idol gods, it proves that we are not the Lord’s true Israel, and we must expect to be served as others have been who have turned aside to worship idols,

20. *As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God.*

DEUTERONOMY 8

1. *All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers.*

Observe, dear friends, that the Lord demands of his people universal obedience to his commands: “All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do.” Christians, although they are not under the law, are under the sweet constraints of love; and that love incites them to complete obedience, so that they desire to leave undone nothing which the Lord commands. And this obedience is to be careful as well as complete: “All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do;” not only do them, but do them with care. When the commandment applies to a certain duty, obey it in full, both in the letter and in the spirit, for there are numerous and weighty blessings attached to obedience, — not of merit, but of grace. If we walk carefully in the fear of God, we shall find that in keeping his commandments there is great reward.

2. *And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.*

It is well to have a good memory, and that is the best memory which remembers what is best worth remembering. There are many things which we would gladly forget, yet we find it hard to forget them; they often rise up at most inappropriate times, and we loathe ourselves to think that we should ever recollect them at all. But, whatever we forget, we ought always to remember what God has done for us. This should excite our gratitude, create deep humility, and foster our faith both for the present and the future: “Thou shalt remember all the way which Jehovah thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness” If forty years of the Lord’s leading should make some of us bless his holy name, what ought you to do, my brethren, who, perhaps, are getting near the fourscore years? What

praise and gratitude should be rendered by you to him who has led you all your life long! See what God intends to accomplish by our wilderness experience. It is, first, to “humble” us. Has it had that effect? Then it is to “prove” us. Ah, I am afraid it has had that result, and has proved what poor wretched creatures we are! That has been proved in our experience again and again. It is, also that it may be known what is in our heart, whether we will keep God’s commandments, or not.

3. *And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, —*

What a wonderful sequence there is in these short sentences! “He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger,” and one would think that the next sentence would be, “and allowed thee to starve.” No; it is, “and fed thee with manna.” They had the better appetite for the manna, and were the more ready to see the hand of God in sending the manna, because of that humbling and hunger which God had previously suffered them to endure. “Fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not.” The very name by which they called it was, “Manna,” or, “What is this?” “for they wist not what it was.” “And fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not.”

3. *Neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.*

God can make us live on bread, if it be sanctified by the Word of God and prayer; he does make our souls to live upon his Word. He could, if so it pleased him, make our bodies live by that Word without any outward sustenance whatever.

4. *Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.*

What a wonderful experience the Israelites had in the wilderness! They were always fed, though in a waste howling wilderness, dry and barren. They always had water following them from that stream which flowed out of the flinty rock, from Which you might sooner have expected to strike fire than to obtain water. And as for their garments, they did not wear out. They had no shops to go to, and they were unable to make new clothes in the wilderness, on account of their frequent moving to and fro; yet were they always clad; and, though they were a host of weary pilgrims,

marching backwards and forwards for forty years, yet their feet did not swell. Oh, what a mercy that was! “He keepeth the feet of his saints.” Has it not been so with you also, dear friends? You have said, “What shall I do if I live so long, and if I have to bear so many troubles, and make so many marches through the very valley of the shadow of death?” What will you do? Why, you will do as you have done! Trust in God, and go on. You shall be fed, and you shall be upheld even unto the end.

5. *Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, —*

Note that we are not only to remember God’s dealings with us, but we are to consider them, to ponder them, to weigh them. “Consider in thine heart,” —

5. *That, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.*

Do I speak to anyone who is just now under the rod? “Consider in thine heart” then, that God is dealing with you as a father deals with his sons, “for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” How would you like to be dealt with? Would you rather be without the rod? Then remember that “if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” Do you wish to be treated so? I am sure you do not; you wish to have the children’s portion; so you say, “Deal with me, Lord, as thou art wont to do with those that fear thy name. We are willing to have the rod of the covenant for the sake of the covenant to which it belongs.

6-8. *Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him. For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey;*

This also is the experience of the child of God; in one sense, in heaven; but in another, and perhaps a truer sense, even here below. “We which have believed do enter into rest.” By faith, we take possession of the promised land; and when a Christian gets out of the wilderness experience of doubting and fearing, and comes into the Canaan experience of a simple faith and a fully assured trust, then he comes “into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of

wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey;” for God gives to his people not only all they need, but something more. He gives them, not only necessities, but also luxuries, delights, and joys.

9. *A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it;*

When you live in communion with God, and he brings you into the full enjoyment of the covenant blessings, then there is no scarceness with you, there is no lack of anything.

9. *A land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.*

Or, copper. Silver and gold they had none; but then the princes of Sheba and Seba were to offer them gifts, and bring them their gold and their silver. But if they had nothing for show, they had plenty for use, for iron is a great deal more useful metal than gold; and the copper, which they hardened into brass, was of much more service to them than silver would have been. God will furnish you, dear brother, with all the weapons you need for the Holy War; there may be no gold and silver ornaments for your pride, but there shall be iron instruments to help you in your conflict with your adversaries.

10. *When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.*

God permits his people to eat, and to be full; but, when they are so, they must take care that they do not become proud, and that they do not begin to ascribe their profiting to themselves.

11. *Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day:*

Whenever we see the word “Beware” in the Bible, we may be sure that there is something to beware of. The point here to note is, that our times of prosperity are times of danger. I remember that Mr. Whitefield once asked the prayers of the congregation “for a young gentleman in very dangerous circumstances,” for he had just come into a fortune of £5,000. Then is the time when prayer is needed even more than in seasons of depression and of loss.

12-16. *Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks*

multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end;

Why do we get these passages repeated? Surely it is because we have such slippery memories, and the Lord has to tell his children the same thing over and over again: “precept upon precept: line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little;” because we so soon forget.

17-20. *And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish;*

“If you sin as they do, you shall fare as they do.”

20. *Because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God.*

DEUTERONOMY 15:1-18

1, 2. *At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release.*

What a wonderful title for it, “the LORD’S release”!

3. *Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release;*

How was a man to pay when he did not sow or reap during the Sabbatical year? The foreigner did not observe the year of rest;

consequently he was bound to pay, and it was only fair that he should do so; but for the Israelite, who carried out the divine law, there was provision made if he was in debt.

4. *Save when there shall be no poor among you;*

If there were no poor, then there would be no need for this law.

4-6. *For the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it: only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee:*

That little clause, “as he promised thee,” is worth noticing. This is the rule of God; he deals with us” according to promise.”

6. *And thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee.*

If God’s people had done his will, they would have been like their language; it is observed of the Hebrew by some, that it borrows nothing from other tongues, but lends many words to various languages.

7-9. *If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, the seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee.*

Moses, moved by the Spirit of God, anticipates what would very naturally occur to many: “Then I shall not lend anywhere near the seventh year; if I do, I shall lose it, for I must release my debtor then.” The hardhearted would be sure to make this their evil excuse for lending nothing. But here the Hebrew is warned against such wicked thoughts, lest, refusing to lend to his poor brother for this cause, the needy one should cry to God, and it should be accounted sin on the part of the merciless refuser.

10, 11. *Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the*

LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land:

They would have done so, they might have done so, if the rule of God had been kept; but inasmuch as he foresaw that it never would be kept, he also declared, “the poor shall never cease out of the land.”

11. *Therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.*

See how God calls them, not “the poor,” but “thy poor” and “thy needy.” The Church of God should feel a peculiar property in the poor and needy, as if they were handed over, in the love of Christ to his people, that they might care for them.

12. *And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.*

He might be under an apprenticeship of servitude for six years; but the seventh year was to be a year of rest to him, as it was a year of release to debtors, and of rest to the land.

13. *And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty:*

To begin life again with nothing at all in his pocket.

14. *Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him.*

Who would think of finding such a law as that on the statute book? Where is there such a law under any governor but God? The Theocracy would have made a grand government for Israel if Israel had but been able to walk before God in faith and obedience.

15. *And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day.*

The remembrance of their own deliverance out of Egyptian bondage was to make them merciful and kind to their own bondservants.

16-18. *And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; then thou shalt take an awl, and thrust it through his ear*

unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise. It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years:

He has had no pay; he has been always at his work; he has been worth two ordinary hired labourers; let him go, therefore, and let him not go away empty.

18. *And the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.*

This exposition consisted of readings from LEVITICUS 25:1-7, 17-22, AND DEUTERONOMY 15:1-18.

DEUTERONOMY 29:1-21

1. *These are the words of the covenant, which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb.*

That is the preamble, just as in legal documents there is usually some statement of the purport and intent of the indenture before the matter is proceeded with. These covenants with God are solemn things, and therefore are they given in a formal manner to strike attention, and command our serious thoughts.

2-4. *And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles: yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.*

You saw all that, and yet did not see it; you saw the external work, but the internal lesson you did not perceive. A very mournful statement to make; but God's servants are not sent to flatter man but to speak the truth, however painful the speaking of it may be.

5, 6. *And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot. Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink: that ye might know that I am the LORD your God.*

Either there had been means of frequent renewal of their garments, or else by a miracle these garments had never worn out; and the very shoes that they put upon their feet on the Passover night were on their feet still; if not the same yet still they were shod,

though they trod the weary wilderness which well might have worn them till they were bare. “Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink:” — a nation of total abstainers for forty years. There was no bread in the wilderness for them, and there was no wine. It may have been obtained as a great luxury, as it probably was, for we have reason to believe that Nadab and Abihu were slain by fire before the Lord because they were drunken when they offered strange fire; but taking the whole people around, anything like wine had not crossed their lips for forty years, yet there they were, strong and healthy. “That ye may know that I am Jehovah your God.”

7. And when ye came unto this place, Sihon the king of Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, came out against us unto battle, and we smote them:

People not used to war either, and feeble folk, yet they smote the great kings and slew mighty kings, for the Lord was with them.

8, 9. And we took their land, and gave it for an inheritance unto the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to the half tribe of Manasseh. Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.

This, then, was the covenant made with the nation, that God should be their God and he would prosper them: as he had done, so would he do: he would be their protector, defender, strength, and crown and joy.

10, 11. Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water:

This national covenant embraced all the great men, the captains, the wise men, all that were in authority, “your elders, and your officers.” It took in all their children, for it was a covenant according to the flesh, and their children according to the flesh are included. “Your wives,” too, for in this matter their was no sex. “The stranger also.” Here we poor Gentiles get a glimpse of comfort, even though from that old covenant we seem to be shut out. “Thy stranger that is in thy camp” is included. And the poorest, and those that performed the most menial service, were all to be

made partakers of this covenant, “from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water.”

12-15. *That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: that he may establish thee today for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day:*

With the sick that were at home, with the generations that were not yet born, for this was intended to be a national covenant in perpetuity to their children and their children’s children to the end of time. Had they kept it so would it have stood.

16, 17. *(For ye know how we have dwelt in the land of Egypt; and how we came through the nations which ye passed by; and ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them:)*

Now you have seen how they worshipped idols; you have seen that you may avoid; you have beheld their folly that you may escape from it.

18. *Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood;*

For the worship of false gods is the cause of untold mischief and evil: wherever it is found it is a root that beareth gall and wormwood, and God would not have it in a single individual, man nor woman, nay, not in a single family or tribe.

19. *And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst:*

For there were some who so hardened themselves against God that they said, “We shall have peace: let us do what we like: let us worship these idol gods more and more and more: let us add drunkenness and idolatry to our thirst.”

20. *The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him,*

Not light upon him, but lie upon him, rest there and stop there.

20, 21. *And the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven. And the LORD shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel,*

As a huntsman separates a stag from the herd that he may hunt it all the day, so shall God with any idolater that should come amongst his people with whom he made a covenant that day. Oh, how God hates that anything should be worshipped by us but himself: how indignant is he if anywhere anything takes the supreme place in the human heart which ought to be occupied by God alone.

DEUTERONOMY 32:1-39

A very marvelous chapter it is — a song and a prophecy, in which the poet-seer seems to behold the whole future spread before him as in a map, and it is so vivid to him that he describes it rather as a matter present or past, than as a thing which is yet to be. It is the story of God's dealing his chosen and peculiar people, Israel, from the beginning to the end. The commencement is exceedingly noble.

1-3. *Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass" Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God.*

All through, the song is for the glorification of God; not a syllable, indeed, in which man is held up to honour, but the Lord alone is exalted in his dealings with his people. He is the rock. All other things are the mere cloud that hovers on the mountain's brow; but —

4. *He is the rock,*

Immutable, eternal.

4. *His work is perfect:*

Sometimes very terrible and very mysterious, but his work is perfect.

4. *For all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*

But as for his people, what a contrast between them and their God!

5. *They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation.*

What a stoop from the God of truth, without iniquity, to a people full of iniquity — a perverse and crooked generation. We never know so much of our own vileness as when we get a clear view of the excellency of God. What said Job? “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

6. *Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?*

Who made the Jews to be a people? Who set Israel apart to be a nation? Who, but God, who bought them with a price when they came out of Egypt, and, in his fatherly care, led them through the wilderness?

7, 8. *Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.*

God’s first point in the government of the world was his own people. Everything else was mapped out after he had set apart a place for them — a place sufficient, large, fruitful, and in an admirable position, that there they might multiply and enjoy all the good things which he so freely gave them; and to this day dynasties rise and fall, kings reign or are scattered by defeat, only with this one point in God’s eye, and purpose in his mind — the upholding of the Church in the world — the spread of his glorious truth.

9-12. *For the LORD’S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.*

This is the history of the tutoring of Israel in the wilderness. When they came out of Egypt they were a mere mob of slaves, degenerate by the debasing influence of long bondage. They had to be trained before they were lit to be a nation. Now in all this, let us try to see ourselves. What has God wrought for those of us who are his people in bringing us out from the bondage of sin? and how graciously does he this day preserve us as a man guards the apple of his eye! No sooner does anything come near the eye than up goes the hand instinctively to shield the eye. And let anything happen to the people of God, and the power of God is ready at once for their defense. An eagle has to teach her young eaglets to fly. She will take them on her wings, so they say; cast them off, and let them flutter, and then dash down and come reader them and bear them up again till she has taught them to use their wings. And the Lord has been doing this with many here — apparently casting them off, only that, when they fall, underneath them may be the everlasting arms. We have to be trained to faith. It is a difficult exercise for such poor creatures as we are. We are being trained for it at this day. After they had been thus tutored, they were brought into the promised land, which Moses never entered, but yet in his vision of prophecy he sees it all.

13, 14. *He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape.*

It was a very fruitful land, abounding not merely in necessaries, but in luxuries. Palestine bear to its inhabitants all that heart could wish, and for a long time, while they were faithful to God, they lived in the midst of plenty.

15. *But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked:*

“The little holy nation” — for I suppose that is the meaning of “Jeshurun.” It is a diminutive word — “the little religious nation waxed fat. It abounded in prosperity. It grew stout and kicked.”

15. *Thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.*

Alas! alas! alas! they set up calves in Bethel. They turned aside to Ashtaroth, and worshipped the queen of heaven.

16, 17. *They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils,*

Demons — not to God.

17. *Not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.*

There is nothing new in religion that is true. The truth is always old. But only imagine a new God! And verily we have had lately some new fashions brought up — some new styles of worship. I think they call them mediaeval. They certainly are no older than that — “new gods that newly came up, whom your fathers feared not.”

18. *Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.*

Israel was nothing apart from God — a little tribe of people — nothing to be compared with the great nations of the earth. Its only reason for existence was its God. He was its center, its light, its glory, its power. They had got away from him that formed them.

19, 20. *And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.*

There is the mischief — want of faith. Want of faith leads to all manner of sin. Oh! that we had a strong elastic faith to realize the unseen God, and keep to purely spiritual worship, not wanting symbols, signs, and outward tokens, all of which are abominable in his sight, but worshipping the unseen in spirit and in truth. But the Lord said: —

21. *They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.*

And so the idolatrous nations came and conquered Judaea. One after another, they trampled down the holy city, and let them see that God could use the nations that they despised to be a scourge upon them.

22-25. *For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs.*

Now read the story of the destruction of Israel and Judea the overthrow of these two kingdoms — and you will see how, word for word, all this came tame.

26, 27. *I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men: Were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the LORD hath not done all this.*

God always looks out for some reason for mercy when he is dealing with his people, and he found it here — that the heathen nations would not admit that God had thus been chastening his erring people, but would begin to ascribe their victories to their own demon gods; therefore, he said he would scatter them.

28-30. *For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?*

That little people would have been victorious over all their enemies if God had still been with them, but they were defeated and scattered because they had grieved the Lord. Oh! what strength believers might have if they would but believe! If we could but cast ourselves upon God in simple, childlike faith, we might play the Samson over again and smite our thousands. But we, too, have little faith in God, even those who have most of it; and when the time of trial comes, we also are a stiff-necked and unbelieving generation, as our fathers were.

31-34. *For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges. For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and*

of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps. Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures?

What an awful text! God lays man's sins by — seals them up amongst their treasures, that they should not be forgotten, and he will bring them to account.

35, 36. *To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the LORD shall judge his people,*

He will not always let his enemies triumph over them. He will come back to his people whom he seemed to cast away. "The Lord shall judge his people."

36. *And repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left.*

He seemed very angry, but how soon he comes back in love and tries his people over again.

37-39. *And he shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? let them rise up and help you, and be your protection. See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me; I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.*

DEUTERONOMY 32:1-43

1. *Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.*

Because men are so slow of hearing, Moses calls on the heavens and the earth to bear witness against them; and because of the sublimity of his subject, he calls upon the heavens and the earth to pay attention to it.

2. *My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass:*

It is good preaching, and good hearing too, when the gospel comes like a gentle shower which saturates and soaks into the soil, and refreshes and makes it fruitful; may God the Holy Spirit make it

to be so whenever we gather together for worship! The Word of the Lord may be as a driving hail, breaking everything upon which it falls, and so becoming the savour of death unto death. But may God make it to us as the dew and the small rain from heaven, that it may be a savour of life unto life!

3-5. *Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he. They have corrupted themselves,*

What a contrast there is between the incorruptible and immutable God and corruptible man! “They have corrupted themselves,”—

5. *Their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation.*

God’s children have spots,—the spot caused, by sin, which are recognized, mourned over, and struggled against by them; the ungodly have the same sort of spots but they have no repentance concerning the sin which causes them.

6. *Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?*

Sin is the basest form of ingratitude. We owe everything to God, and we ought therefore to treat him as our Creator and Father should be treated. On the contrary, how often have we requited him evil for good, and acted as if we regarded him as our enemy rather than as our best Friend!

7, 8. *Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.*

His first thought was concerning his own people. He provided Canaan for them; it was just the very land for them, with space enough, and yet with not too much room, so that they might cultivate it all, and prove it to be a land flowing with milk and honey. Yet these special thoughts of God, with regard to his own chosen people, did not exclude kind thoughts towards the rest of mankind, for “he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of

the people,” that is, the people belonging to other nations; but, still, his deepest and his highest thoughts were concerning the children of Israel.

9, 10. *For the LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.*

And is not this also a true description of God's love and kindness to you and to me, beloved in the Lord? Did he not find us in the wilderness? Has he not led us about, trod by our experience instructed us, and has he not guarded us with as much watchful care as a man bestows upon the apple of his eye? Oh, blessed be his holy name, we owe everything to him! He giveth us everything that we have.

11-14. *As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape.*

God fed his ancient people with the best of the best, and gave it to them with no stinted hand; and, oh! when I think of the spiritual food which God has prepared for his people, surely “butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs,” and all such carnal things are but poor in comparison with the provisions of his grace. In a spiritual sense, the Lord hath indeed given to us “a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of mallow, of wines on the lees well refined.” But now look again at the contrast between the Lord and his ancient people. God's great goodness makes man's sin appear all the blacker:—

15. *But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.*

Many can endure the trials of adversity who cannot escape the perils of prosperity. Solomon truly said, “As the fining pot for

silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise;” and many a man has failed in that time of testing. When you come to be wealthy, to be admired, to receive honour among men, then is the time of your severest trial.

16, 17. *They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.*

Moses multiples expressions to show the folly of Israel’s idolatry. Only think of “new gods that came newly up,” as if that which is new could be a god! The same thing may be said of the “new truth” of which we hear so much nowadays. That which is new cannot be true. Certainly, there is nothing new in theology but that which is utterly false. The idols, which the Israelites worshipped, were not only new gods, but they were strange gods, which their fathers feared not. Worse than that, they were demons: “they sacrificed unto devils not to God.” How low had even the chosen people sunk!

18-27. *Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them, I wilt spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs. I said, I would scatter them into corners? I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men: were it not—*

Here is a sweet word of grace amid the just judgments of Jehovah: “Were it not”—

27. That I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the LORD hath not done all this.

So he spared them for his own name's sake; and, to this day, when God can find no other reason for showing mercy to the guilty, he does it for his name's sake; and this is a blessed plea, to be urged by a man who can see no reason why God should have mercy upon him. He may say, "Lord, do it for thy name's sake, to make thy grace and thy mercy illustrious, in the salvation of such a poor, hopeless wretch as I am."

28-32. For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up? For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges. For their vine—

That is, the vine of God's enemies,-

32-34. Is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps. Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures?

What a striking and startling question that is, as though God laid up the memory of man's sin, sealed it up, and kept it in a secret place against the day when he shall call sinners to account, and visit them for their iniquities! What an awful thing it is to have the sins of one's youth laid up, sealed up, and put away in God's treasury; and the sins of middle life, and perhaps the sins of old age, too, to be brought out, by-and-by, and laid to our charge! Who shall be able to stand in that great day? Only those who are washed in the blood: and robed in the righteousness of Christ Jesus our Lord.

35-38. To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the LORD shall judge his people and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left. And he shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine

of their drink offerings? let them rise up and help you, and be your protection.

To you who trust in anything except God, the day will come when you will hear such terrible words as these—“Now let your riches save you, let your pleasures and your vices cheer you; go ye now in your own wicked ways, and see if you can find any comfort in them!” What holy sarcasm there is in these words, which will cut to the quick the conscience when it is once fairly aroused!

39-43. *See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy. Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.*

It is only in mercy, you see, that the Lord deals with his people; they cannot stand before him on the ground of justice, but in his mercy is their place of refuge. May we all find that mercy by fleeing for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us in Christ Jesus and his glorious gospel! Amen.

DEUTERONOMY 33

1. *And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death.*

A very beautiful thought, that he should conclude his life with a blessing. Though they had greatly grieved and provoked his spirit, he was always meek and tender, but he had very much to bear from them, and this is the end of it all, that he will dismiss them with his blessing.

2, 3. *And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law*

for them. Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words.

“Yea, he loved the people.” God’s appearance on Sinai was a token of his love to them, even though it amazed them and distressed many of them. Yet still it was a great thing that God should come so near to these people, and should reveal his will to them. Dear friends, if God should come to you with his fiery law; if he should humble you, and make you “exceeding fear and quake,” it would be a token of love. The ungodly are left to go in their sin, but as for you, if you are one whom he loves, he will rebuke you, and he will bring his law to do its work upon your heart and conscience. It seems strange to you, but so it is. “From his right hand went a fiery law for them. Yea, he loved the people.” Oh! it is so, because he loves them he reveals to them his fiery law. “All his saints are in thy hand.” A place of safety, a place of privilege, where they learn how precious they are to him, for he holds them so dear that he keeps them always in his hand. “All his saints are in thy hand, and they sat down at thy feet.” Another place for saints; they are always learning; they are disciples; they sit with meek humility at their Master’s feet, and drink in his words, “Everyone shall receive of thy words.” Those who know not God’s love, trifle with God’s words and reject them; those whom he loves receive his words and feed upon them.

4-6. *Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together. Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few.*

Here is his blessing, “Let Reuben live.” Reuben’s great sin had lost him his birthright, yet Moses gives him as much of his blessing as he can. If we are not allowed to draw the largest blessing, let us go as far as we can.

7-9. *And this is the blessing of Judah: and he said, Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou an help to him from his enemies. And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his*

brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant.

Judah was the royal tribe — had to do much with warfare. Lord give him power in prayer! This is the peculiar benediction of those who have to lead the way in the battles of God. In the service of God, Levi was impartial; he did not wink at sin in his dearest relatives. You remember how they took the sword, and went through the camp, and slew their own brothers when they found them guilty of idolatry, and because of this faithfulness we read, “They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law.” Above all things, a teacher of the truth of God must be fearless and impartial in the delivery of God’s Word; then God will bless him, and it shall be said of such, “They shall teach Jacob,” etc.

10. *They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar.*

True hearts alone can be God’s priests; he will not accept sacrifices from those who will dally with his truth, and trifle with his Word.

11, 12. *Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again. And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; and the LORD shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.*

They that have God near them are safe indeed. There is no protection in such a world as this like constant communion with God. We have to go out into a world full of all manner of evil. Go not out into the world without thy God. Let him dwell with thee and cover thee all the day long, and so shalt thou be safe.

13. *And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the LORD be his land, for the precious things of heaven,*

Oh! in a spiritual sense, what a rich blessing this is! and remember it came upon that tribe whose father was the most afflicted of all Jacob’s sons. If thou art, an afflicted Joseph rejoice, for one of these days thou shall have the capacity for receiving great blessings.

13. *For the dew,*

The Lord send us that dew tonight to rest upon our branch.

13. *And for the deep that coucheth beneath,*

These deep eternal springs out of which we drink the divine water springs.

14. *And for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon,*

They shall have blessings both ways, in the day and in the night. Those whom God blesses, the sun doth not smite by day, nor the moon by night, but, on the contrary, they are blessed both in the one and in the other.

15, 16. *And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills, And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush:*

Oh! that we may enjoy ever the good will of God, who wills good to us, who in all his dealings with us has a good will towards us. Oh! that we may have the good will of him that dwelt in the bush!

16-18. *Let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren. His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh. And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents.*

You that go much abroad in the world, God give you to rejoice in your opportunities of doing good. You that never go abroad, but live at home in the kitchen and the parlor, learn to rejoice in your tents, for there, too, you have a sphere of holy service.

19-22. *They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand. And of Gad he said, Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad: he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head. And he provided the first part for himself, because there, in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the LORD, and his judgments with Israel.*

And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan.

“And of Gad, he said, Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad.” God knows how to enlarge his people, give them more grace, more gifts, more opportunities of usefulness. Which he did. His tribes enlarged their boundaries by a sudden leap. God gives his people sometimes their leaping times; they leap from Bashan: some great purpose is accomplished, some great feat is done.

23. *And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south.*

What a condition of heart to be in! “Satisfied with favor; full of the blessing of the Lord.” Beloved, may you enjoy that tonight!

24. *And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil.*

Then will he leave a mark wherever he goes of holy unction. He possesses it himself, and he will impart it to others.

25. *Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.*

Will not some believer grip that promise tonight and find it true?

26-28. *There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew.*

“Israel then shall dwell in safety alone.” There is no place for God’s people like a separated place; they must get without the camp; they must not be numbered among the people. Notice, there is none like unto the God of Israel, and there is none like to Israel.

29. *Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.*

As God is by himself, so all his people are favored beyond all others.

JUDGES

JUDGES 7:19-25

19-21. *So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.*

This was at the dead of night, when the hosts of Midian were fast asleep. They were startled from their slumbers by the blast of three hundred trumpets, and the flaming of three hundred torches. They gathered that these were only the bugles and the lamps at the head of vast regiments of Israelites, and they hardly dared to calculate how great the whole host must be. Filled with fear, astonished at the sound of the trumpets, and the shouting of Gideon's band all round their camp, they took to their heels: "all the host ran, and cried, and fled."

22. *And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host:*

They were a motley company, every man afraid of his fellow. They had gathered together to share the spoil, and now, when fear demoralized them, the hordes of wild warriors began to destroy one another.

22-23. *And the host fled to Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abelmeholah, unto Tabbath. And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.*

If some have the courage to strike the enemy, there are others who will come out of their hiding places to hunt the beaten foe. When you really want help, often you cannot get it; but when you

can afford to do without assistance, you will sometimes be embarrassed by it.

24. *And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters —*

“Secure the fords in the streams which flow into the Jordan from the mountainous region of Ephraim, so that the refugees cannot get away.”

24-25. *Unto Bethbarah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan. And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.*

So that, though they had been very backward at the first, yet, when they were once aroused, these men of Ephraim did their part in ridding the land of the common foe, and among the trophies of war, the heads of two of the princes of the Midianites fell into their hands.

This exposition consisted of readings from Judges 7:19-25; Judges 8:1-27.

JUDGES 8:1-27

1. *And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.*

We have some friends, like these men of Ephraim, who do not like being left out of the battle for the Lord. They say, “Why are we not asked for our help? Why are we not allowed to take our share?” These are very good people; but we have known some of them who have made these enquiries rather late in the day. These Ephraimites knew all about the war, and they might have volunteered to help Gideon, and we should have been glad of the earlier help of some who tarried till the victory was won.

2. *And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you?*

Gideon answered them very kindly and very wisely. He flattered them he attached great importance to what they had done, and took little credit to himself for his valiant service. In this he showed his

self-command and his discretion. When persons chide sharply, it is a pity to chide back again; the best way of dealing with them is with a soft answer to turn away their wrath.

2-5. Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that. And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them. And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian.

This was a very natural and a very reasonable request. Gideon did not ask the men of Succoth to come with him, nor even to give a lodging to his soldiers. The fear of Midian was upon Israel, and the people were afraid to do anything against their oppressor, but surely they might have relieved the hunger of their fellow countrymen. Instead of doing so, they answered Gideon with arrogant and cruel words.

6. And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?

As much as to say, "What have you done, after all? There are fifteen thousand men with Zebah and Zalmunna, and there are only three hundred of you. You have not even captured the leaders yet." They forgot that Gideon's band had slain a hundred and twenty thousand already; they underrated and mocked him, and would not give him the help he asked.

7. And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.

Some have said that this showed resentment and harshness, but when a man is at war, he is not in the habit of sprinkling his adversaries with rosewater. War is in itself so great an evil that there are many other evils necessarily connected with it. It seems to me that if, when Gideon was trying to deliver his own countrymen, they scoffed at him, and refused him bread for his soldiers in the day of their hunger, they deserved to be punished with great severity.

8, 9. *And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him. And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.*

They took liberty to speak rudely because theirs was a fortified city, guarded by a strong tower, and Gideon, nothing doubting that he would come back that way, God having given him the victory, said, “When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.”

10, 11. *Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword. And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure.*

He went by an unusual route, and took them at night again unawares when they felt perfectly safe, and were sound asleep: “for the host was secure.” As I read these words, I think, what a pity it is ever to fancy ourselves secure while we are really in peril! Carnal security is a great danger. To be “safe in the arms of Jesus,” is a most blessed condition; but to be secure in self-confidence, is a thing that hath a curse upon it.

12. *And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host.*

There was an end of the tyranny of the Midianites. Gideon slew great numbers of them, and drove away such as yet remained alive.

13-17. *And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up, and caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and enquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof even threescore and seventeen men. And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary? And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taugth the men of Succoth. And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.*

He probably slew the most public revilers, the leading men of Penuel, even as he had chastised the princes and elders of Succoth with thorns and briers. I have often observed that you and I have been taught a great many things “with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.” If we refuse to help God’s weary and tried people, it is highly probable that, one of these days, we may have to learn a great deal from the thorns of the wilderness and from the briers. Do we ever learn much apart from the thorns of the wilderness? Surely, trials and troubles have been our great instructors from the first day even until now.

18, 19. *Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king. And he said, they were my brethren, even the sons of my mother:*

In the East, there is much greater affection between those who are the sons of one mother than between those who are only sons of one father.

19. *As the Lord liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you.*

But now it devolved upon him to be an avenger of blood according to Oriental law, and to put to death those who had slain his brothers.

20-22. *And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he was yet a youth. Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that were on their camels’ necks. Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.*

There was always an itching among the Israelites to have a king, an earthly monarch to rule over them; but God did not so design it. It was want of loyalty and love to God that led them to make this request.

23-27. *And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you. And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had*

golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey. And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels' necks. And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.

He did not set up an idol, but he made an ephod, an imitation of that wonderful vestment worn by the high priest. Perhaps he made it of solid gold, not to be worn, but to be looked at, simply to remind the people of the worship of God, and not to be itself worshipped. But ah, dear friends, you see here that, if we go half an inch beyond what God's Word warrants we always get into mischief! You hear people say, "We have such and such symbols, not to worship, but to help us in worship." Ah, yes; but the tendency of the symbol is to act as a dam to the stream of devotion, and to make it end there! God forbid that we should ever violate the rules that Christ has laid down for us! The slightest deviation from the simplicity of the gospel may lead us away into sheer apostasy? Whence have come all the errors of Rome but from little accretions and alterations? A little ornament here, a little symbol there, and a little variation of truth yonder and the gigantic system of Romanism has thus been created. Gideon probably meant well, and we may do wrong even though we mean well. May the Lord preserve us from the smallest departure from the way that he has marked out for us in his Holy Word! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from Judges 7:19-25; Judges 8:1-27.

RUTH

RUTH 1

1. *Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.*

That was a bad move on their part; Better poverty with the people of God, than plenty outside of the covenanted land.

2. *And the name of the man was Elimelech,—*

“Elimelech? means, “my God is King.” A man with such a name as that ought not to have left the kingdom where his God was King; but some people are not worthy of the names they bear.

2. *And the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Beth-lehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.*

That is generally what happens; those who go into the country of Moab continue there. If Christians go away from their separated life, they are very apt to continue in that condition. It may be easy to say, “I will step aside from the Christian path for just a little while;” but it is not so easy to return to it. Usually something or other hampers; the birdlime catches the birds of Paradise, and holds them fast.

3, 4. *And Elimelech Naomi’s husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.*

Which was about ten years too long. Probably they did not intend to remain so long when they went there, they only meant to be in Moab for a little while, just as Christian people, when they fall into worldly conformity, only purpose to do it once, “just for the sake of the girls, to bring them out a little.” But it happens to them as it is written here: “and they dwelled there about ten years.”

5. *And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.*

That seemed to be her great grief—that she was left. She would have been content to go with them, but she was left to mourn their loss.

6. *Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab:*

It is often the case that, when our idols are broken, we turn back to our God. It is frequently the case that the loss of earthly good leads us to return to our first Husband, for we feel that then it was better with us than it is now. Naomi had also another inducement to return:—

6. *For she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.*

Have any of you professors gone a long way off from God? I wish you knew what plenty there is in the Great Father's house, and what a blessed feast there is for these who live with him. There is no famine in that land; there is plenty of gladness, plenty of comfort, plenty of everything that is joyful, to be found there. You need not go to Moab, and to her false goes, to find pleasure and satisfaction.

7-9. *Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah. And Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.*

Separation was painful to them, for they loved their mother-in-law, a most unselfish person who, even though it was a comfort to her to enjoy their company, thought it would be for their good, in a temporal sense, that they should abide in their own country.

10-14. *And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also tonight, and should also bear sons; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for*

your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me. And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her.

What a difference there often is between two persons who are under religious impressions at the same time! The one would like to follow Jesus, but the price is too much to pay; so there is a kiss somewhat like that of Judas, and Orpah goes back to her people, and to her idols. But how different was the other case! Ruth was, as it were, glued to Naomi; she “clave unto her,” Stuck to her, and could not be made to go back with her sister.

15-17. *And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law. And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.*

That was bravely spoken, and she meant it, too.

18. *When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.*

That is a striking expression, “When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her.” O you dear young friends who want to be Christians, how glad we are when we see that you are stedfastly minded to go with the people of God! There are so many who are quickly hot and quickly cold,—soon excited towards good things, and almost as speedily their ardor cools, and they go back into the world. Do ask the Lord to make you stedfastly minded. This is one of the best frames of mind for any of us to be in.

19. *So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?*

They seemed all to turn out of doors to have a look at these two strangers, and especially at Naomi, for she was so different from what she had been when she went away. “And they said, Is this Naomi? Some said, “Is this Naomi?” questioning. Others said it with surprise as a thing incredible, “This Naomi! How can she be the same woman?” It was very rude of them to turn out, just like people, without sympathy, do on Ramsgate pier, to see the sick

passengers land. Nobody seems to have said, “Come into our house to lodge,” but all questioned, “Is this Naomi?”

20. *And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi,—*
“Call me not pleasant.”

20. *Call me Mara:*
That is, “bitter.”

20. *For the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.*

It was a pity for Naomi to say that; yet I fear that many of us have done the same; We have not borne such sweet testimony to the Lord as we might have done, but have sorrowfully moaned, as this poor woman did:—

21. *I went out full,—*
Why, then, did you go out?

21. *And the LORD hath brought me home again empty:*

Ah! but he has brought you home again. Oh, if she would but have noticed the mercy there was in it all, she might still have spoken like Naomi; but now she speaks like Mara,—bitterness. Her husband and her two boys—all her heart’s delight—were with her when she went out; and now that they are gone, she says:—

21. *Why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?*

Yet it is a sweet thing to be able to trace the hand of God in our affliction, for nothing can come from that hand towards one of his children but that which is good and right. If you will think of those hands of which the Lord says, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands,” you may rest assured that nothing can come from those hands but what infinite wisdom directs, and infinite love has ordained.

22. *So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.*

That is, at the time of the passover; let us hope that they received a blessing in observing the ordinances of that time, and that they were thus helped to get back to the only right and happy state of heart.

1 SAMUEL

1 SAMUEL 2

1-3. *And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogance come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.*

This is a very suggestive and forcible expression. God does not judge our actions by their appearance, but puts them into the scales of the sanctuary, and weighs them as carefully as bankers weigh gold.

4-8. *The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them.*

What a clear view Hannah had of the sovereignty of God, and how plainly she perceived that God overrules all mortal things, and doeth as he wills! How she seemed to glory in the power of that almighty hand whose working unbelievers cannot discern, but which, to this gracious woman's opened eye, was so conspicuous everywhere!

9-12. *He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the*

earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed. And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest. Now the sons of Eli were one of Belial; they knew not the LORD.

Yet they were priests, and when a man stands up to minister in holy things, and by virtue of his office is supposed to know the Lord, yet really does not, he stands, not only in a position of the utmost guilt, but also in a position in which he is never likely to get a blessing. He seems to be beyond the reach of the ordinary agencies of mercy, because he has assumed a position to which he has no right.

13, 14. *And the priests' custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; and he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither.*

There was no such rule or regulation given by God; but these sons of Eli had made rules for themselves. It is always wrong to alter the regulations of the Lord's house. Even the least of them should be obeyed exactly as it stands.

15, 16. *Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force.*

There were sacrifices in which God had his portion in the burning of the fat upon the altar, and the priest had a portion allotted to him; and the offerer himself had a portion upon which he fed, in token of his communion and fellowship with God. The priest ought to have been content with what was an ample portion for him; but the greed of these young men prostituted holy things, and defiled the house of the Lord.

17. *Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.*

They not only grieved God, but they also grieved his people so much that they ceased to come where their consciences were

wounded, and where their tenderest sensibilities were perpetually shocked.

18. *But Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.*

What a contrast there was between little Samuel and the sons of Eli! He was not led astray by the evil example of those who were older than himself, and to whom he would naturally look up because of their high office. This dear child escaped contamination because God's grace preserved him and also because his mother's prayers, like a wall of fire, were round about him.

19-21. *Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home. And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD.*

She lent one child to the Lord, and she had five others given to her. God always pays good interest on all his loans. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord." It would be well if more would see how much per cent they could get from such a loan as that.

22-25. *Now Eli was very old, and heard as his sons did unto all Israel and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil doings by all this people, Nay my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD'S people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall entreat for him?*

That is the way Eli rebuked his sons. "And very gently he did it, dear old man," says someone. Yes, but don't you imitate him; for, if you do, you may also inherit the curse that came upon his house. There are other virtues in this world besides gentleness. There is sometimes needed the power to speak sternly, — to rebuke with firmness and severity; and Eli had not this. He was an easy-going old soul. Ah! but when the honour of God is at stake, such action as his is out of place. It is all very well to have everybody saying, "Mr.

So-and-so is such an amiable man; there is no sectarianism and no bigotry about him; he never says a word to offend anybody." Just so, but Martin Luther was not at all that kind of man, and where should we have been without such protests as his?

25. *Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.*

They had gone so far in their sin that the Lord permitted them to go further still, and to bring punishment upon themselves for their evil deeds.

26. *And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men.*

How vividly the Holy Spirit brings out the contrast between Samuel and these two wicked young men! They grew on in sin, but the child Samuel grew on in favor both with God and with men. The Lord loves to watch his lilies growing among the sharp thorns, and to see how brightly his stars are shining in the blackest night.

27, 28. *And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him —*

That is, Aaron, —

28-30. *Out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever:*

There was a condition attached to that promise, — a condition implied, if not expressly stated.

30, 31. *But now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, —*

That is, "the strength of thy family shall be taken away," —

31-33. *And the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my*

habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age.

God does not think little of sin in his ministers, and in his sanctuary. There is a difference between sin and sin. The place where it is committed may make a difference, and the office of the man who commits it may make a difference. Sin makes its culmination when the sinner is highly favored, and brought into close relationship with God by office.

34, 35. *And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.*

No doubt first referring to Zadok, who succeeded afterwards to the priests office; but looking further forward still to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the ever-faithful High Priest who always does according to that which is in the mind and heart of the Father.

36. *And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.*

Or, rather, as the margin has it, "Put me, I pray thee, into somewhat about the priesthood." "Put me into something that has to do with the priesthood." So the house of Eli passed from its honourable elevation into degradation and poverty. However highly favored any of us may have been, let us never presume upon that, and turn aside to sin. If we do not know the Lord, and do not honour him in all the acts that we perform in his name, it may be that a like degradation to that of Eli's house may come upon us because we have despised the will and the words of the Most High.

1 SAMUEL 2:1-10

We shall read two portions of Holy Scripture, and may God the Holy Spirit bless us in the reading of his own Words. We shall first

read, in the first Book of Samuel, the second chapter, the song of Hannah. You remember that Hannah was a woman of a sorrowful spirit. A womanly sorrow preyed upon her heart, and brought her very low; not so low, however, as to prevent her from constantly praying to God. Her prayers were heard, and when she came up to the Lord's house, the joyful mother of son, he took care to remember her former supplication, and to offer unto God thanksgiving. Hannah was a woman of great ability, perhaps the chief poetess of either the Old or the New Testament. I expect that Mary borrowed not of her Magnificat from the song of Hannah, at least, the recollection of that song must have been strong upon her when she sang what we shall presently read.

2:1. *And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.*

Her deliverance seemed to her to be a type and symbol of the way in which God delivers all his people, so she rejoiced in that great salvation which he works out for his people as a whole.

2-7. *There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.*

With what jubilation she sings of the way in which God deals with men, putting down the mighty, and lifting up the lowly!

8. *He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them.*

Whatever solid thing it is that bears up the frame of this natural world, it is God's power that doth support it. He hath made all things that are, and he upholds them with the world of his power.

9. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness;

What an awful picture that is of the doom of the wicked, “Silent in darkness.” We read of the one, in the parable of our Lord, who had not on the wedding garment, that he was speechless; and, at the last the wicked will have nothing to say, nothing with which to excuse themselves, nothing with which to comfort themselves, and all around them will be—“Darkness, death, and long despair.” Vanquished in their fight with God, conquered for ever, “the wicked shall be silent in darkness.” I hardly know of a more dreadful picture than that of a spirit sitting amidst the clammy damps of the thick darkness of desolation, for ever silent.

9, 10. For by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

That is the song of this happy woman; and if we read the last three verses of Psalm 113., we shall see that the writer seems to have studied Hannah’s song, and to have molded his Psalm upon it: “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people. He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the Lord.” Now let us read Mary’s song in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. You remember, dear friends, how the Lord Jesus said, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hath revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.” The Saviour’s heart found a sacred satisfaction in the execution of his Father’s sovereign will in revealing to babes what he had hid from the wise and prudent; and it is remarkable that both Hannah and Mary sang upon that very theme which made the heart of the Saviour leap for joy. We might have expected to find an abundance of affection in a woman’s song rather than a depth of doctrine, but both Hannah and Mary make the sovereignty of God the strain of their songs.

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 SAMUEL 2:1-10; AND LUKE 1:46-55.

1 SAMUEL 2:12-36

12. *Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD.*

What a very dreadful thing it was that these sons of a man of God, the sons of God's high priest, were not themselves sons of God, but sons of Belial, foul-hearted, foul-mouthed, foul-living men, who knew not the very God at whose altar they served, and in whose house they lived!

13, 14 *And the priests' custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; and he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither.*

God had appointed a proper portion for his priests so that they who ministered at the altar might live of the altar. But these wicked men were not content with the divine allowance, so they must needs rob the altars of God, and show such greed as to make the appointed sacrifices to be obnoxious to the people.

15, 16. *Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force.*

It is a terrible thing when God's servants are domineering and oppressive towards the people of God. They who should be the gentlest of all, and the most self-denying of all must not talk as this priest's servant did, and he no doubt talked as the young men whom he served bade him talk.

17. *Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.*

It is horrible when those who should make God great among men cause his service to be despised and abhorred. When those who should be the friends and servants of God act like his enemies, it is indeed terrible.

18-24. *But Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod. Moreover his mother made him a little*

coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home. And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD. Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD'S people to transgress.

That is all that the godly old man said to his wicked sons. He was far too gentle in his way of reproofing them. He was evidently afraid of his own sons, not the only man who has been in the same predicament.

25. *If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.*

They had gone so far in vice and gin that the Lord did not mean to forgive them. They had transgressed so foully that he would permit them to go on in sin until they perished in it.

26-30. *And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men. And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever:*

“But I said it conditionally upon thy good behavior. I installed thee into the priest's office for life, and thy sons might have continued in it after thee if they had kept my commandment.”

30-36. *But now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut of from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever. And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.*

The same sad prophecy that the Lord communicated to old Eli was also revealed in a very special manner to young Samuel.

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 SAMUEL 2:12-36; AND 3:1-13.

1 SAMUEL 3

1. *And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli.*

Samuel was but a child, yet he was a faithful servant of God up to the light he had received. The grown-up sons of Eli were rebelling against God, but “the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord.” It is a great aggravation of sin for ungodly men to persist in it when even little children rebuke them by their careful walk and conversation; it made the sin of Eli’s sons all the worse because “the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before ELI”

1. *And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.*

God spoke with very few, and his speech to them was private: “There was no open vision.” What was spoken was very rich and rare, but there was little of it. The Lord, in anger at the sin of Eli’s sons, took away the spirit of prophecy from the land.

2. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;

He was a good old man, but he was almost worn out, and he had been unfaithful to God in not keeping his family right. He must have found some comfort in having such a sweet and dear companion and servant as little Samuel was.

3-5. And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; that the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.

Servants and children are to be attentive and obedient to the calls they hear, but masters must also be gentle, and kind, and considerate to them. Eli did not call the child a fool, or speak harshly to him; he knew that Samuel had a good intention, and even if he had been mistaken, and no one had called him, yet it was a good thing on the part of the child to act as if he had been spoken to; and Eli quietly and gently said, "I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down."

6. And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me.

He felt sure of it, confident that he had not been mistaken.

6, 7. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord.

There was the Beginning of the work of grace in his heart, he was well-intentioned; but as yet God had not revealed himself to him: "Samuel did not yet know the Lord," —

7, 8. Neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time.

We do not blame Samuel, for he was but a child, and spiritual understanding had not yet fully come to him; but what shall I say of some to whom God has spoken for years till their hair is gray, and yet they have not understood the voice of the Lord even to this hour? I pray God that he may call them yet again The Lord did not disdain to call Samuel four times, for when he means effectually to call, if one call is not sufficient, he will call again and again and again: "The Lord called Samuel again the third time."

8, 9. *And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.*

It was a chastisement to Eli that God did not speak directly to him, but sent him a message by another; and it must have been very humiliating to the aged man of God that God should select a little child to be his messenger to him. Yet, as Eli had not been faithful, it was great mercy on God's part to speak to him at all; and no doubt the old man did not resent the fact that God, instead of speaking to one of his sons, or to himself, spoke by this little child. Eli loved Samuel, and finding that the Lord intended to use this child, he did not grow jealous and angry, and begin to damp the child's spirit; but he gave him wise directions how to act in case God should speak to him again.

10. *And the LORD came, and stood,-*

From which we learn that there was some kind of appearance to Samuel such as that which was manifested to others. Some spiritual being was before him, though he could not make out the form thereof: "Jehovah came, and stood," —

10. *And called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel.*

This time the child's name was spoken twice, as though God would say to him, "I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine? It was no doubt to make a deeper impression upon the child's mind that his name was twice called by the Lord.

10. *Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.*

You observe that he did not say, "Lord;" perhaps he hardly dared to take that sacred name upon his lips. He was impressed with such solemn awe at the name of God, that he said, "Speak; for thy servant heareth." I wish that some Christian men of my acquaintance would leave out the Lord's name a little in their prayers, for we may take the name of the Lord in vain even in our supplications. When the heathen are addressing their gods, they are accustomed to repeat their names over and over again. "O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!" or, as the Hindus do when they cry, "Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!" "repeating the name of their god; but as for us,

when we think of the infinitely-glorious One, we dare not needlessly repeat his name.

11-13. *And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth;-*

What a striking expression, “ the iniquity which he knoweth.” There is a good deal of iniquity about us which we do not know; that is a sin of ignorance. But deep down in his heart Eli knew that he had been afraid to speak to his sons about their sins, and that, when he had spoken, it had been in such lenient terms that they made light of them. Possibly, he had never chastened them when they were young, and he had not spoken to them sharply when they were older. Remember that he was a judge, and he ought not to have allowed his sons to remain priests if they were behaving themselves filthily at the door of the tabernacle. He ought to have dealt with them as he would have dealt with anybody else; he did not, so God said, “I have told him, that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth;”-

13. *Because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*

A man said to me, one day, “I never laid my hand upon my children;” and I answered, “Then I think it is very likely that God will lay his hand upon you.” “Oh!” he said, “I have not even spoken sharply to them.” “Then,” I replied, “it is highly probable that God will speak very sharply to you; for it is not God’s will that parents should leave their children unrestrained in their sin.”

14, 15. *And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever. And Samuel lay until the morning, —*

I wonder whether he went to sleep; I should think not. After such visitation and revelation, it is a marvel that the child could lie still. One wonders that he did not go at once to Eli, but then the message was so heavy that he could not be in a hurry to deliver it: “And Samuel lay until the morning,” —

15. *And opened the doors of the house of the Lord.*

Dear child! There are some of us who, if God had spoken to us as he had spoken to Samuel, would feel a deal too big to go and open doors any more. If God were to come, and speak to some who are poor, they would run away from their trade. If God were to speak to some who are young, they would give themselves mighty sirs. But Samuel meekly accepted the high honour God had conferred upon him; and when he rose in the morning, he went about his usual duties: “He opened the doors of the house of the Lord.”

15. *And Samuel feared to show Eli the vision.*

The old man must have felt that it was nothing very pleasant; still, he wanted to know the Lord’s messages. I hope he was in such a frame of mind that he could say, “Lord, show me the worst of my case! Let me know all thy mind about it, and let me not go on with my eyes bandaged, in ignorance of thy will concerning me.”

16-18. *Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I. And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee. And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him.*

Samuel was obeying the divine command which had not then been given: “He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.”

18. *And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.*

This was a grand speech of old Eli. Terrible as it might be, he bowed his head to the divine sentence, and owned that it was just.

19-21. *And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.*

1 SAMUEL 3:1-13

1-13. *And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not*

see; and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; that the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth. And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

Take warning, fathers and mothers, by this experience of old Eli.

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 SAMUEL 2:12-36; AND 3:1-13.

1 SAMUEL 9

1, 2. *Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power. And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.*

Here we have the pedigree of the great king of Israel, Saul, the son of Kish. He was descended from a noble tribe, though not a very large one, and he appears to have been endowed with a very notable personal appearance: "There was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was

higher than any of the people;” and to the Israelites of that day, who had got away from looking up to God, and to the more valuable accomplishments of the mind and the heart, the striking personal appearance of Saul would be a great attraction and recommendation.

3, 4. *And the asses of Kish Saul’s father were lost. And Kish said to Saul his son, Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses. And he passed through mount Ephraim, and passed through the land of Shalisha, but they found them not: then they passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not: and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found them not.*

He was diligent in his father’s service, even though that service meant a fruitless journey in search of some straying asses. As he was then faithfully discharging the duties of his station in life; he was the man who was likely to rise to some higher position. He was the son of “a mighty man of power” or substance, and yet, so simple were the manners of the time that he was sent, with one of the servants, to look for the lost donkeys, and he appears to have started at once to carry out the commission which had been entrusted to him. Learn from Saul’s obedience, dear young people, never to despise any duty which falls to your lot in the ordinary avocations of daily life; you will be preparing yourselves for some higher position by doing well what you are called to do now.

5. *And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us.*

There was evidently in Saul, at that time, a great considerateness of spirit; he wished to save his father from having any painful anxiety concerning his son and his servant, for Saul put both together when he said “us.” It is most desirable that young men, in the present day, should have a tender regard for those to whom they owe their being, and who have done so much for them in the years of their tender infancy; and that all young people should be careful never needlessly to give their parents one anxious thought on their account.

6. *And he said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man; all that he saith cometh surely to pass: now let us go thither; peradventure he can show us our way that we should go.*

In this case, as in so many others, the servant seems to have had more grace than his young master had, for the name of Samuel the prophet was not unknown to him, and he knew where the “man of God” lived, and told Saul a good deal about him, and gave him some good advice as to what they should do. In any case where the servant, and not the master, knows the Lord, it is well, when occasion offers, and it can be done prudently and discreetly, for the servant to speak up, and give a good word for the cause of God and truth.

7. Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we?

He says nothing about any money that he may have had in his own pocket, and again his servant has to lead the way.

8, 9. And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver: that will I give to the man of God to tell us our way. (Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.)

He was a man who looked further ahead than others could; for, under divine inspiration, he could see into futurity.

10. Then said Saul to his servant, Well said; come, let us go.

Saul was willing to be liberal at his servant’s expense, and to let him give “the fourth part of a shekel of silver” to the prophet for him, and we have known some other folk who have been very generous in giving away the money of other people rather than their own.

10-12. So they went unto the city where the man of God was. And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here? And they answered them, and said, He is; behold, he is before you: make haste now, for he came today to the city; for there is a sacrifice of the people today in the high place:

These young maidens were evidently well informed, they knew where the man of God was, they knew what he was going to do, and they knew the time of the sacrifice or feast. Let us hope that they not only knew all this, but that they entered into the true spirit of it.

13-19. *As soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him. And they went up into the city: and when they were come into the city, behold, Samuel came out against them, for to go up to the high place. Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, Tomorrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me. And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people. Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is. And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer:*

Saul evidently did not know Samuel, and it appears from this fact that he was not a gracious, religious man. He had the charm of a fine outward appearances, and he probably had many of the domestic virtues, but he was not one who lived in the fear of God.

19-21. *Go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me today, and tomorrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart. And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house? And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?*

There was a very becoming modesty about him, he was really surprised and startled that such an honour should be in store for him; he had many natural virtues; but, alas the grace of God was not upon him.

22-24. *And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour, and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons. And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee. And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul.*

The right shoulder of the animal that was offered in sacrifice was part of the priest's portion, and this shoulder Samuel now ordered the cook to set before Saul as he sat in the place of honour.

24, 25. *And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee: and eat; for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day. And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house.*

For quietness and seclusion, Samuel took the young man upstairs to the flat roof of the house, and they walked to and fro, in the cool of the evening, talking about the high destiny to which Saul was, called, and Samuel doubtless giving him valuable instructions concerning his new and important duties.

26, 27. 1 Samuel 10:1, 2. *And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad. And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.*

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 SAMUEL 9, AND 10:1-8.

1 SAMUEL 10:1-8

1, 2. *Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance? When thou art departed from me to day, —*

He gave Saul some signs by which he could confirm the truth of all that he had spoken to him: "When thou art departed from me today," —

2. *Then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulcher in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah;*

It was well for Samuel to send Saul, with brilliant prospects opening before him, to the sepulcher of the mother of his tribe. Oh, that we were all wise enough to think often of our last hours! Communion with the grave might even help us to communion with heaven. Samuel said to Saul, "Thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulcher," —

2, 3. *And they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son? Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine:*

Going to offer to God a meat offering and a thank offering. How could Samuel have known all this if God had not anointed his eyes, and made him a seer who could see what others saw not?

4. *And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hand.*

“Thou shalt take from them thy first tribute as a king. They shall give thee two loaves of bread, to teach thee to avoid all luxury, and not to be a king who delighteth in delicate and dainty fare. Thou shalt fare as the people do.”

5, 6. *After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them, and they shall prophesy: and the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them,*

“Thou shalt speak with enthusiasm about God; moved with a holy passion, thou shalt speak like a man inspired.”

6. *And shalt be turned into another man.*

Note that Samuel did not say to Saul, “Thou shalt be turned into a new man,” for that is what he never was. He become, for awhile, another man, a different man from what he had been before, but he never became a gracious man.

7, 8. *And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee. And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do.*

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 SAMUEL 9, AND 10:1-8.

1 SAMUEL 12

In Samuel's old age, the people desired to have a king; and though it went much against the grain, yet, by the Lord's advice, Samuel consented to it.

Here he makes his last protest.

1. *And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you.*

"I have not stood in your way. I have not sought mine own honour. I have at once frankly resigned my office among you."

2. *And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grayheaded; and behold, my sons are with you and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day.*

"My sons come here today, not as my successors, but as fellow-subjects with you of your newly-chosen king; they are not in opposition to him any more than I am." Like an old servant who is about to be dismissed, Samuel asks them to bear witness to his character; and this he does, partly as a lesson to the king who had taken his place, and partly as a clearance of himself in rendering up his charge.

3. *Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you.*

It is so usual a thing, among Oriental judges and rulers, to expect bribes, that you cannot, in those countries, take a single step in a court of law without bribery. It was therefore a very unusual circumstance that Samuel should be able to challenge anybody to say that he had ever wrongfully taken so much as a single farthing. And the great rulers, in those countries, are accustomed to enrich themselves by levying heavy taxes upon the people. But Samuel affirmed that his services had been perfectly gratuitous, so that all he had done for the people had cost them nothing. If they had any fault to find with his government, it could only be because it had been so just and also so cheap; his yoke had indeed been easy to their necks. What a fine sight it is to see an old man able thus to challenge all who had known him, throughout a long life, to testify

that he had not led a selfish life, or studied his own interests even in the least degree!

4, 5. *And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. And he said unto them, The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness.*

In the most solemn way, they cleared him; when he rendered to them the account of his stewardship, they all bore witness that everything had been done, not merely according to strict rectitude, but in the most generous spirit of self-consecration. May all of us be enabled so to live that, when our sun goes down, it shall be as cloudless a sunset as was that of Samuel!

6-8. *And Samuel said unto the people, It is the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your Fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place.*

A remembrance of past mercies is very profitable to us. National mercies ought not to be forgotten, and personal favors should always be fresh in our memory. Alas! the old proverb is only too true, "Bread that is eaten is soon forgotten." So is it even with the bread which God gives us; we eat it, yet soon forget the hand that fed us. Let it not be so with us.

9-11. *And when they forgat the LORD their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. And they cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee. And the LORD sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephtah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe.*

They oft transgressed, and were as often afflicted; but whenever they returned to the Lord with their confession of sin, and again

sought his mercy, he was always quick to deliver them. Let us profit by their experience. Have we brought ourselves into trouble through sin? Have we wandered and backslidden, and are our hearts therefore heavy? Let us return unto the Lord, and confess our sin, for he hath not cast us away, He will not turn against the voice of our cry; he will forgive us, and graciously receive us unto himself again.

12, 13. *And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king. Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the LORD hath set a king over you.*

“He has consented to your request, though it was a foolish one.” Remember, brethren, it is not every answer to prayer that is a token of God’s favor. If our prayers are very foolish, and even if there is sin in them, God may sometimes give us what we ask in order to show us our folly, and make us smart for having offered such a prayer. Though, under God’s government, they had been most highly privileged, they must needs have a king, like the nations which were not so favored. “So now,” says Samuel, “God has given you this king, so do your best with him.” Samuel had a hopeful spirit; and he hoped that, though the circumstances were not as he would have wished them to be, yet that the people might do well after all.

14-17. *If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God: But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers. Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the LORD will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call unto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king.*

This was to be a token to them that Samuel was God’s prophet. On a previous occasion, in answer to his prayer, God had thundered against the Philistines but, this time, his thunder was his voice against Israel. In reading the Bible, we must always remember that it

was not written in England but in Palestine. Wheat harvest there takes place about the month of May, when the weather is usually settled, and such things as thunder and rain are almost unknown. It was extraordinary, therefore, as we speak of “a bolt out of the blue.”

18, 19. *So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.*

That thunderstorm was a powerful preacher to them, and the rain drops,

that fell so copiously, brought the tear drops into their eyes. The phenomena of nature frequently impress men with a sense of God’s power,

and prostrate them before him.

20-22. *And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart; And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people.*

How gently the old prophet speaks! What a change from the pealing thunder to this gracious voice! It seems like the clear shining after rain.

23-25. *Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed both ye and your king.*

1 SAMUEL 18:1-16

1. *And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.*

Jonathan, the brave young soldier who had himself done great exploits, naturally admired the youthful warrior who had slain the

Philistine giant, and also admired the modesty of his speech when he returned with the head of Goliath in his hand: “The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”

2-4. And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father’s house. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him,

No doubt, one suitable to his rank as the heir apparent to the throne of Israel.

4, 5. And gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle. And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war,

Probably, Jonathan had previously occupied that position; but now that David is called to supplant him, Jonathan is not jealous of him, but he loves him as he loves his own soul.

5-7. And he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul’s servants. And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. And the women answered one another as they played, and said,-

Singing in chorus, with answering refrains,-

7-9. Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.

This shows how envy will destroy a man’s own peace of mind, as well as make him plot against the one of whom he is envious. Instead of being thankful to God for sending him such a valiant champion as David to deliver both himself and his people, Saul is full of malice towards the young hero simply because he receives his due need of praise for his victory over the giant. “Saul eyed David” with an evil and envious eye; looked askance upon him, and determined to do him mischief whenever he could.

10. *And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house:*

Probably, talking wildly and foolishly,-

10. *And David played with his hand, as at other times:*

That is, as he had, at other times, played upon the harp to chase away the evil spirit.

10-12. *And there was a javelin in Saul's hand. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice. And Saul was afraid of David,-*

David was not afraid of Saul, although Saul was the man with the javelin, and with the murderous, malicious spirit, which prompted him to hurl it at the young harpist. David, guileless, brave, honest, trustful, was not afraid of Saul, but "Saul was afraid of David,"-

12-14. *Because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul. Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him.*

And, young man, you also will be wise if God is with you, and you will be able to behave yourself wisely, discreetly, prosperously, as the word seems to mean. Even when malicious eyes are fixed upon you, they will not be able to find any fault in you if the Lord is with you. You will win favor where you least expect it, if you do but so live that God can be with you, if you keep the vessel of your nature so pure that the Master can use it. May it be your portion and mine to have it said of each of us, "The Lord was with him"!

15, 16. *Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.*

This love of the people only caused Saul's hatred of David to be carried to a still greater excess; but Jonathan still loved David, and promised to cleave to him whatever might happen. In the 20th chapter, we can read still more concerning this faithful friendship.

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 SAMUEL 18:1-16; 20:1-17.

1 SAMUEL 20

1. *And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?*

David had an enemy upon the throne; and God gave him a friend in the heir to the throne. If thou hast an enemy, thou hast also a friend; God sets the one over against the other in his providence, do thou set the one over against the other in thy thoughts, and be thou comforted thereby. David might have been very heavy at heart about Saul, and so he was; but Jonathan came in to be the makeweight on the other side, and turn the scale in favor of the son of Jesse. Of him David enquired, "What is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?"

2. *And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so.*

One admires Jonathan for defending Saul; he will not believe anything bad of his father. Children should never believe anything evil of their parents unless it is forced upon them; this rule is a part of the command, "Honour thy father and thy mother."

3. *And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.*

He wanted Jonathan to believe the truth, namely, that Saul was seeking to kill him, and that he was in great danger from the wrath of the king; therefore he took a double oath that it was even so. It is not for Christians to imitate David in this respect, for our Lord's command to his disciples is, "Swear not at all; but let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."

4. *Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee.*

Love promises large things. One is reminded here of the love of Christ, and of how he says, "Ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

5, 6. *And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even. If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Bethlehem his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.*

The family of David was a godly household, and they had a meeting, not for pleasure-making, but for sacrifice; a special family gathering for worship, and David must needs be there. He spake no untruth; he did desire to go to Bethlehem.

7, 8. *If he say thus, It is well; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him. Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the LORD with thee: notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldst thou bring me to thy father?*

These two men had entered into a solemn covenant before God that they would be friends for life, so David pleaded with Jonathan. He was innocent, he knew that he had done no ill, and therefore he put it to Jonathan, “If I am what thy father thinks me to be, slay me thyself.”

9-11. *And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee? Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? or what if thy father answer thee roughly? And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field.*

Quite alone, away from their troops, where they could talk together without being overheard. These two good men sought private fellowship; and do you not think that, if we love Christ, we shall want to get alone with him? Shall we not say to him, “Let us go out into the field”? Where there is no private devotion, there is no devotion at all. If we never get alone with Christ, we are altogether strangers both to himself and also to his love.

12-15. *And Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not into thee, and shew it thee; the LORD do so and much more to*

Jonathan: but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father. And thou, shalt not only while yet I live shew me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not: But also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth.

In Jonathan's great love, he wished not only to be David's friend himself, but that all his children should be in love with the same valiant hero. Brethren, our love to Christ makes us long to see our children love him, too. I will not believe that you have any love to Christ unless you pray that your boys and your girls may also love him. Dear children of godly parents, our heart's desire and prayer to God for you is, that you may love your mother's God, and trust your father's Saviour.

16-18. *So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies. And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul. Then Jonathan said to David, To morrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty.*

David was not a nobody; if he was away, he was missed. I wish that all attendants at the house of prayer would remember that, when they are away, they are missed. Perhaps some of you have come tonight from some little chapel where you will be greatly missed; I am not going to thank you for coming here, because I am possibly unconsciously causing pain to your pastor, and I do not want to rob him of one of his sheep. David's seat is empty tonight, and he will be missed.

19-23. *And when thou hast stayed three days, then thou shalt go down quickly, and come to the place where thou didst hide thyself when the business was in hand, and shalt remain by the stone Ezel. And I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark. And, behold, I will send a lad, saying, Go, find out the arrows. If I expressly say unto the lad, Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them; then come thou: for there is peace to thee, and no hurt; as the LORD liveth. But if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows are beyond thee; go thy way: for the LORD hath sent thee away. And as touching the matter which thou*

and I have spoken of, behold, the LORD be between thee and me for ever.

Thus be arranged how to let David know in case he was in danger. Love is thoughtful, love would keep its object out of harm's way; therefore, as we love any, let us try to preserve them from sin, let us endeavor to warn them when temptation is near, that they may not fall by the hand of the enemy.

24-27. *So David hid himself in the field: and when the new moon was come, the king sat him down to eat meat. And the king sat upon his seat, as at other times, even upon a seat by the wall: and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, and David's place was empty. Nevertheless Saul spake not any thing that day: for he thought, Something hath befallen him, he is not clean; surely he is not clean. And it came to pass on the morrow, which was the second day of the month, that David's place was empty: and Saul said unto Jonathan his son, Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday, nor to day?*

David was the son of Jesse, but he was Saul's own son-in-law; yet, out of contempt, the angry king calls him "the son of Jesse."

28-30. *And Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Beth-lehem: and he said, Let me go, I pray thee; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city; and my brother, he hath commanded me to be there: and now, if I have found favour in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren. Therefore he cometh not unto the king's table.*

Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness? He was in such a passion that he began to abuse his own wife, the mother of his own son. In the East, if you want to sting a man most severely, give ill names to his mother; and surely, in the West as well, if anyone has anything to say against a man's mother, it cuts her son to his heart if he is what he ought to be.

31. *For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die.*

Saul knew that David, and not Jonathan, was to succeed him on the throne.

He gives Jonathan warning of that fact, yet seeks his rival's life.

32. *And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done?*

Very reasonable questions, very properly put.

33-42. *And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David. So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame. And it came to pass in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad with him. And he said unto his lad, Run, find out now the arrows which I shoot. And as the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. And when the lad was come to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried after the lad, and said, Is not the arrow beyond thee? And Jonathan cried after the lad, Make speed, haste, stay not. And Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows, and came to his master. But the lad knew not anything: only Jonathan and David knew the matter. And Jonathan gave his artillery unto his lad, and said unto him, Go, carry them to the city. And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded. And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.*

Behold the love of Jonathan and David! Here was a brother born for adversity, who clung to his friend in the day of danger, and even jeopardized his own life that he might defend David. Let us see here a faint emblem of what our great Friend, the Lord Jesus, has done for us.

1 SAMUEL 20:1-17

1, 2. *And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?*

And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: He could not think that his father really intended to take the life of his friend.

2, 3. *Behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me; and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so. And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes: and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.*

He had so often escaped, as it were by the skin of his teeth, from his cruel persecutor, that he knew himself to be in a position of extreme peril.

4. *Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee.*

Such was his love for David that he would make no exception; whatever there was that David wished him to do, he would do it for him.

5-10. *And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, to morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even. If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Bethlehem his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. If he say thus, It is well; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him. Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the LORD with thee: notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldest thou bring me to thy father? And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? or what if thy father answer thee roughly!*

What am I to do in such a case as that? If thy father should turn against thee as well as against me, what is to be done then?

11. *And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field.*

To get quite alone, that they might express to one another the feelings of their inmost hearts, and also might consult together without any risk of being overheard.

12-17. *And Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee; the LORD do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father. And thou shalt not only while yet I live shew me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not: but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth. So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies. And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul.*

Thus were these two men bound together by ties of mutual love; may we be thus bound to Jesus! Oh, that there may be such love between us and our Lord as shall even excel the love of Jonathan and David!

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 SAMUEL 18:1-16; 20:1-17.

1 SAMUEL 30:1-13.

1, 2. *And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire; And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way.*

What a singular providence! There was a blood-feud between Amalek and Israel since Israel endeavored to exterminate the Amalekites, and it is written, "The Lord shall have war with Amalek for ever and ever"; yet God holds in these tigers, and will not let the lions devour their prey.

3, 4. *So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, And their daughters, were taken captives. Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.*

They were tired and weary after a long march with Achish, and then another long march home. Oh! how they longed for their couches! How they desired to sit down and converse with their wives and their little ones! Tears did not seem a sufficient expression for their sorrow, and yet when a strong man weeps — a burly warrior like Joab, a rough, coarse man like Abishai, or a strong young man like Asahel — there must be deep grief. They wept till they had no more power to weep.

5, 6. *And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters; but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.*

He had not only his own personal sorrow, but that of all his people; and then, instead of comforting him, every friend had turned into a foe; his house was a heap of ashes; he might have said, "Ahinoam is not, and Abigail is not, and my children have ye taken away; all these things are against me!" But he had more faith than Job, and so he encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

7. *And David said to Abiathar, the priest, Ahimelech's son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David.*

Ah! that's the thing! Bring hither the old family Bible; let us go to prayer about it; down on our knees and tell the Lord the case.

8. *And David enquired at the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.*

But it is easier said than done. Where are they? How shall they find these fleet Amalekites Who fly away so rapidly?

9, 10. *So David went, he and the six hundred men that were with him. and came to the brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed. But David pursued, he and four hundred men: for two*

hundred abode behind, which were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor.

Worse and worse you see! But the case is in God's hands, and no matter what the circumstances may be. All's well that ends well, and God always has the enemy in his hands.

11-13. *And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water; And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins: and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him; for he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, three days and three nights. And David said unto him, To whom belongest thou? and whence art thou? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days agoe I fell sick.*

Shame on his master, I say, and yet there are some who stop their men's wages as soon as they get a little ill! Shame on them, I say. It might be fit for an Amalekite to do this, but certainly not for an Israelite. So this young Egyptian tells David all about what they had done; and David follows them, smites them with the sword, takes away their plunder, and, moreover, gets a great spoil to himself, and so the Lord hears the voice of David. Now Abraham's servant and David were men in like difficulties with us, but they asked guidance of God and received it; let us be sure in every time of difficulty to do the same.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 24:1-16; 1 SAMUEL 30:1-13; 1 JOHN 1:1-3.

1 SAMUEL 30:1-25

David had joined the army of the Philistines; but, as the Philistine lords suspected him, he was obliged to leave, so he went back to the little city of Ziklag, which King Achish had given him.

1, 2. *And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire, and had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way.*

They were roving bands of marauders, and no doubt preserved the women alive to sell them for slaves, the main object of those robbers being gain.

3, 4. *So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives. Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.*

Weary with their marching, they had hoped to rest at home; but now that everything was gone, the strong men, who were not often moved to weeping, wept till they could weep no longer; the very sources of tears were dried up by the exceeding heat of their grief.

5, 6. *And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him,*

These rough men, who had not all joined him from the best of motives, now turned against him for having left the city defenseless.

6. *Because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.*

Blessed faith, that finds a secure shelter even amidst the ashes of his burned home, and when even his own followers have turned against him!

7, 8. *And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David. And David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.*

The Hebrew runs, "Pursue, for overtaking thou shalt overtake, and recovering thou shalt recover;" that is to say, the work shall be done perfectly, and so it was.

9-17. *So David went, he and the his hundred men that were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed. But David pursued, he and four hundred men: for two hundred abode behind, which were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor. And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water; and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins: and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him: for he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, three*

days and three nights. And David said unto him, To whom belongest thou? and whence art thou? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick. We made an invasion upon the south of the Cherethites, and upon the coast which belongeth to Judah, and upon the south of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire. And David said to him, Canst thou bring me down to this company? And he said, Swear unto me by God that thou wilt neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring thee down to this company. And when he had brought him down, behold they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah. And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled.

It is noteworthy that the four hundred who escaped were equal in number to the whole of David's attacking force; so that, manifestly, God was with these valiant men, or else they would have been completely outnumbered.

18-20. *And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives. And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any thing that they had taken to them: David recovered all. And David took all the flocks and the herds, which they drave before those other cattle, and said, This is David's spoil.*

That which was over and above what had been taken from Ziklag was very properly appropriated by David. I thought, as I read that "David recovered all," how truly it can be said that the greater Son of David has recovered all. All that was lost by sin, our glorious and victorious Captain has recovered. What then shall be his spoil? It was foretold that "He shall divide the spoil with the strong." Let your hearts and mine, and all we are, and all we have, be yielded up to him, and let us say of it all, "This is Jesus' spoil, and to him be glory evermore!"

21. *And David came to the two hundred men, which were so faint that they could not follow David, whom they had made also to abide at the brook Besor: and they went forth to meet David, and to meet*

the people that were with him: and when David came near to the people, he saluted them.

There are some fainting and sick folk detained at home; I pray our blessed Lord to salute every one of them wherever they are at this moment.

22, 23. *Then answered all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them ought of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away, and depart. Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren,-*

They were poor brethren for David to have. They were brethren by race, but not brethren by grace Yet David was wise in speaking to them as he did. It is always well, when you are opposing people, to do it courteously. You can often prevail with soft words if you have strong arguments. David said, “Ye shall not do so, my brethren,” —

23-26. *With that which the LORD hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand. For who will hearken unto you in this matter? but as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day.*

2 SAMUEL

2 SAMUEL 5:17-25

17. But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David,

To thrust him down, and kill him if they could, and so put an end to his prosperous reign.

17-20. And David heard of it, and went down to the hold. The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. And David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the LORD said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand. And David came to Baalperazim, and David smote them there, and said, The LORD hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters.

As a flood breaks forth, and carries all before it.

20, 21. Therefore he called the name of that place Baalperazim. And there they left their images, and David and his men burned them.

The Philistines brought their gods with them, in the hope of being thereby defended; but “David and his men burned them.” That was the very best thing to do with them. What a pity they did not save them for aesthetic purposes! Thus do men with fine old works of art, like pictures of the Virgin Mary. No, no, burn them; for that is the very best thing to do with anything that ever has been worshipped of mortal man. If they have ever been set up in the place of God, they are cursed from that moment, let them be burned, or dashed in pieces, or in some way destroyed. “There they left their images, and David and his men burned them.”

22-24. And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. And when David enquired of the LORD, he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself:

Or be sharp up, and go at them.

24, 25. *For then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines. And David did so, as the LORD had commanded him:*

I hope that may be said of you and me all our lives long.

25. *And smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer.*

That is, he utterly overthrew them, and drove them away.

This exposition consisted of readings from Psalm 144., And 2 Samuel 5:17-25.

2 SAMUEL 7:1-22

1, 2. *And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies; that the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.*

He said no more, but his intention was very plain, namely, to build a house that should be a more suitable abode for the ark of the Lord.

3. *And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee.*

He spoke too fast. Even prophets, who are inspired of God, must wait upon their Master for their message; and when they utter words which only come out of their own mouths, they say what they will have to unsay before long. It did look very clear that this was the proper thing for Nathan to say to David; but he had not a “Thus saith the Lord” for it.

4, 5. *And it came to pass that night, that the ward of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD,—*

“You have already let him know what Nathan had to say about the matter;

now go and tell him what Jehovah says:”

5. *Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?*

The conception was altogether too low. He has made all space, time is his creation, and the arch of heaven stands by his almighty power; shall he himself have a house in which he can dwell?

6. *Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.*

A structure to be set up, and taken down, and to be moved about wherever the people journeyed. That was sufficient to be a central shrine of worship, and God cared for nothing else.

7. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?

Did God ever put to the children of Israel such a question as this? No; and it is very remarkable that, from the time that the temple was built, you may date the decay of true religion in Israel; and the same thing has happened many times since; whenever religion is surrounded by elaborate ceremonies, and gorgeous architecture, it is almost certain to suffer loss of power and efficacy. The simplicity of worship may not be the life of it, but it has a very intimate connection with that life.

8-11. *Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheeppcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel: and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies, out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, and as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house.*

God has a way of returning men's generosity in kind. Since David wished to build God's house, God would build David's house.

12-15. *And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes*

of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

Here is our warrant for believing in the final salvation of Solomon. Perhaps that Book of Ecclesiastes, the work of his old age, shows us by what rough and thorny ways God brought the wanderer back. He had tried to satisfy himself with the things of time and sense, but he was constrained at last to utter this verdict, "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity;" and he had to go back to his God, and God his comfort there.

16-18. *And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David. Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD,—*

Like one weighted down with a great load of mercy, too heavy for him to stand up under it, and therefore he must needs sit down, and consider, and meditate upon the wonderful words of God to him.

18, 19. *And he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O LORD GOD?*

"All that thou hast done for me, therefore, in overcoming my enemies, and making me king over this people, has seemed to be but a small thing to thee, for 'thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come.'" That astonished David, and therefore he asked, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" "Man gives stingily after his own grudging fashion; but thou givest in a lordly, kingly, divine way." David's question may be rendered, "Is this the law of the Man? Am I to be the parent of that Man who shall be my Lord as well as my Son, who shall reign for ever and ever, and of whose kingdom there shall be no end?" David was spelling out the inner mystery hidden in the words of the Lord, reading between the lines, and discovering that the covenant which God had made with him was, at least in some respects, a repetition of that greater covenant made with Christ on his behalf.

20. *And what can David say more unto thee?*

He had not said much, but he could not say much under such circumstances. He was utterly overwhelmed, just as, when some wondrous kindness has been shown to us, we wish rather to sit still, in grateful silence, than to stand up, and speak acknowledgments, for our heart is too full for utterance.

20-22. *For thou, LORD GOD, knowest thy servant. For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. Wherefore thou art great, O LORD GOD: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.*

God had said to David, in the message he sent by Nathan, "I have made thee a great nation, like unto the name of the great that are in the earth;" and now David brings back the words to God, and says, "Thou art great, O Lord God; for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee."

2 SAMUEL 7:18-29

18. *Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, —*

David desired to build a temple for God, and the prophet Nathan conceiving that such a design must be acceptable to the Most High, told the king to proceed with it, but God's mind was otherwise, and Nathan had to tell David that it was well that it was in his heart, but that God intended the temple to be built, not by him, but by his son Solomon. However, the Lord gave to David very large promises, and when he had received them, through Nathan, he was so overcome with gratitude that he went in, and "sat before the Lord." That was his posture in prayer on this occasion. Good men have been known to pray kneeling, which seems to be the most natural attitude. Some have prayed with their faces between their knees, as Elias did. Some have prayed standing, as the publican did. Some have prayed sitting, as David did. Probably, he was mingling prayer and meditation when he "sat before the Lord," —

18. *And he said, Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?*

How often has a similar feeling leaped into our heart! Why should the Lord have dealt so well with us? "What was there in you that could merit esteem, Or give the Creator delight?"

19. *And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD?*

No man could not have been so kind as that. The love of Jesus surpasses the love of women, and the love of God surpasses all the kindness of men.

20. *And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord GOD, knowest thy servant.*

“What I cannot utter, thou canst perceive in my heart, though I cannot express it.”

21-25. *For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemest to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, LORD, art become their God. And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.*

That is a very short, but exceedingly pithy prayer: “Do as thou hast said.” You do not need any larger promises, brethren, than the Lord has already given to you: could he give you any larger ones? “What more can he say than to you he hath said, You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?” What you have to do is to take the promises he has given, and spread them out before the mercy-seat, and then say to him, “Do as thou hast said.” What strength there is in this plea! Hath he said, and shall he not do it? “Will he break his promise, or shall his right hand fail to perform that which has gone forth from his lips? Far be it from us to think so, but let us say to him, “Do as thou hast said.” That is the very essence of prayer. Take care not to forget it.

26-29. *And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of*

Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. And now, O lord GOD, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee:

You see how he clings to God's promise: "Thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant." If you get a promise from the Lord, and cling to it as you wrestle with the angel, you will surely prevail. You must win the blessing if you can plead, as David did, "Thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant."

29. *For thou, O lord GOD, hast spoken it:*

How he dwells on it!

29. *And with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.*

Now let us read two of our Lord's parables concerning prayer. (See Luke 18:1-14.)

This exposition consisted of readings from 2 SAMUEL 7:18-29; AND LUKE 18:1-14.

2 SAMUEL 7:18-29

18. *Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD,*

This was not the usual Oriental posture of prayer, but David was mingling meditation with his supplication, so that his attitude was not according to ordinary rules.

18. *And he said, Who am I, O Lord GOD?*

Why, you are David, the valiant man who slew Goliath! No, no, no; the man of God is nobody in his own esteem.

18, 19. *And what is my house that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD?*

No, it is not the manner of man in general, but it is the manner of the Man Christ Jesus.

20-22. *And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord GOD, knowest thy servant. For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for*

there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.

There is some sweet doctrine here. The Lord blesses David, not because of David's virtue, or David's merit, or David's prowess, but for his own sake: "For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them." The reason why streams of love flow from God is just this, it is according to his nature. He is a fountain, so the blessing must flow from him. He is a sun, so he must shine. It is not only because we need his love, but because "God is love," that his love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us. Now what is the inference from all this? Does David say, "Wherefore, O Lord, I am great and honourable"? Oh, no! he has nothing to say in praise of himself; but he says, "Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears."

23-25. *And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemest to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, LORD, art become their God. And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.*

What a blessed prayer this is, "Do as thou hast said"! Get hold of a promise of the Lord, take it to the throne of grace, and then urge this plea, "Do as thou hast said." It is a good argument to use with every upright man when we remind him of his promise, and ask him to keep his pledged word; and certainly we may use this plea with the thrice holy God: "Do as thou hast said."

26. *And let thy name be magnified for ever,-*

Or, "be greatened"-be made great "for ever." Notice the way David returns to God the words that were addressed to himself. The Lord said to him, "I have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great that are in the earth;" so David replies, "Let thy name be made great for ever. Thou, Jehovah of hosts, art God over Israel; if thou hast made me king, and if my throne shall be established, much more shall thine."

26, 27. *Saying, The LORD of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel,-*

Notice how the name of the Lord seems to grow in this chapter until here it comes to its full force, and dignity, and majesty: “Thou, O Jehovah of hosts, God of Israel,”-

27. *Hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.*

That is the best place to find a prayer,-in your heart; no prayer comes up before God, with acceptance, but that which comes out of the very heart, which should be like the sacred ark of old, wherein were hidden Israel’s most precious things. God’s words had gone right down into David’s heart, and touched the secret springs of it, and now they welled up in this blessed prayer

28, 29. *And now, O Lord GOD, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Lord GOD, hast spoken it:*

There is that grand pleading again: “Thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it.” If you can remind God of his own promise, you may have whatsoever you will of him; if he has said anything, his word shall surely be fulfilled.

29. *And with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.*

2 SAMUEL 15:12-37

12. *And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.*

Absalom had, by graft, insinuated himself into the hearts of the children of Israel, and led a rebellion against his father David, that he might obtain the crown for himself.

13, 14. *And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee, for*

we shall not else escape from Absalom; make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.

It must have been a sore peril which compelled so brave a man as David to say to his servants, "Arise, and let us flee."

15. *And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint.*

What a loyal spirit they displayed in the time of trial! Oh, that such loyalty could always be found in all the servants of King Jesus! But, alas! many of his servants pick and choose as to which of his commands they will obey. Some of them will not understand the plain letter of Scripture; and others of them know their duty, yet they do it not. There is reason to question whether we are the servants of Christ if we have not the spirit of obedience to him. Brethren, let us search and look, in the book of the King's ordinances, and see whether we are walking in all of them blamelessly. If we can say that we are, it is well; but I am afraid that there are some of his commandments which we would rather not understand; or if we do understand them, we are not in a hurry to obey them. How easy it is to make excuses for not doing what we have no wish to do! Blessed are those Christians who can say, "Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint"

16-18. *And the king went forth, and all his household after him. And the king left ten women, which were concubines, to keep the house. And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath passed on before the king.*

The king's bodyguard of personal friends, who had seen long service with him in the contest with Saul, these kept close to his person.

19, 20. *Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, and also an exile. Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us?*

seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee.

This was the manifestation of a generous spirit on the part of David, and therein he was like the Son of David, who thought more of the safety of his disciples than he did of any way of escape for himself. Let the same mind be in us which was also in David, and in Christ Jesus, great David's greater Son; and let us look, not only on our own things, but also on the things of others.

21. *And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.*

He was a new-comer, but he was a fine recruit, and when our young converts, who have lately joined the church, have this spirit of loyalty in them, they will make mighty men of valor in the Lord's army. Whether Christ's cause be held in honour or in contempt, we will cast in our lot with him, whether he be reigning on the earth or his name be cast out as evil, we will share his fortunes. To whom should we go but to him, and where could we find a better Master than this gracious King under whose banner we have enlisted?

22-26. *And David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him. And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness. And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city. And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and show me both it, and his habitation; But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.*

David would run no risks with this sacred treasure, and though it would have been a great comfort to him to have had the ark of the covenant with him, yet he cared too much for it to think of his own comfort alone. How careful ought we to be of the truth of God, and of the things of God, of which this ark was but a type! Lord, let us run what risks we may, but we would not expose thy truth, or thy good cause to any risk. "Let him do to me as seemeth good unto

him.” What a grand spirit there was in David even in his exile! There was a sweet spirit of song in him before his great fall, but that fall broke his voice, and he sang more hoarsely ever afterwards; yet what depth, what volume, what melody and harmony are here; “deep calleth unto deep.” What submission and subjection to the divine will; and, withal, what a holy confidence! Let the Lord do as he wills, David feels himself to be less than nothing, and submits himself absolutely to the divine purpose. It is not easy to get to that pass, but we must be brought to it, if we are the Lord’s servants, we must lie passive in his hands, and know no will but his. Yet deep waters will have to be passed through ere we reach this blessed experience.

27-30. *The king said also unto Zadok the priest, Art not thou a seer? return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me. Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem: and they tarried there. And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.*

David probably wept partly because of his troubles, but also because of his sin, which the thought of his troubles doubtless brought to his mind, and especially that sin which he has so deeply deplored in the seven penitential Psalms, and most of all in the 51st Psalm. He wore no royal robe on this pilgrimage of sorrow, and “he went barefoot” up the slopes of Olivet.

31. *And one told David, saving, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.*

Ahithophel was David’s choicest friend, companion, and counsellor, yet he had failed him in his time of need. David could use the weapon of all-prayer when he could use no other, and this is like the flaming sword at Eden’s gate which turned every way. It will slay our foes if they come from hell, it will drive away Satanic suggestions; it will overcome our adversaries if they come from earth; it will sanctify our afflictions even if they come from heaven. To know how to pray is to know how to conquer. David checkmated

Ahithophel when he said, “O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.”

32. *And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, behold Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head:*

Here was an immediate answer to David’s prayer, for the very man, who alone could deal effectually with Ahithophel, comes to the king.

33-37. *Unto whom David said, If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me: But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father’s servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, that what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the king’s house, thou shalt tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz Zadok’s son, and Jonathan Abiathar’s son; and by them ye shall send unto me every thing that ye can hear. So Hushai David’s friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.*

You know the rest of the history, how Absalom took the advice of Hushai, and Ahithophel was defeated. God does not always answer prayer quite so rapidly as he did in this case, yet, when his people are in sore straits, they often have prompt replies to their petitions, to encourage their faith, and to keep their hope alive in the time of trial.

2 SAMUEL 15:13-23

This was one of the greatest trials of David’s life.

13, 14. *And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. and David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.*

There is much to admire in David’s conduct when he fled from Absalom, but yet his courage would seem to have well nigh forsaken him. In his brighter days before his great sin had weakened

him, he would have been master of the situation; but now he trembles in the presence of the great calamity.

15. *And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord, the king shall appoint.*

They were attached to him — ready to take his counsel at once. Can we say the same to King Jesus? Will every Christian here now say to his Master, “Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint”? There are many that pick and choose of Christ’s commands. They do not obey all his will. There are known duties which are neglected — plain precepts which are wilfully forgotten. I would to God we could all say from our heart to King Jesus, “Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint.”

16-18. *And the king went forth, and all his household after him. And the king left ten women, which were concubines, to keep the house. And the king went forth, and all the people after him and tarried in a place that was far off. And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king.*

These were his old guard, soldiers which he kept always around his person, deeply attached to him, upon whose loyalty he could rely. But what a come-down from the King of Israel to have an army of only six hundred men — to be fleeing before his own rebellious people, led on by his more rebellious son!

19-23. *Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, and also an exile. Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee. And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be. And David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him. And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over; the king also himself passed over*

the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness.

A fit type of that future passage of the Kidron by the great son of David, when on that dark and doleful night, when all the powers of darkness met, the Prince — the King himself — passed over that black and bitter brook into the garden of Gethsemane. There were faithful ones that went with David: there were some faithful ones with Christ. Happy are they who shall be found to be with their Lord and Master in the day of his sorrow, for they shall be with him in the day of his joy.

This exposition consisted of readings from 2 SAMUEL 15:13-23; ISAIAH 61.; MARK 14:22-41.

2 SAMUEL 23:1-5

1-5. *Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God;*

He remembered his many sins, and the many tribulations in his family which had come upon him in consequence of those sins, and the dying man felt a sad heart-ache so he thought of the errors of his life, so well he might.

5. *Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.*

What blessed words his last words were! His sorrow is turned into joy; his own house grieves him, but God's promise comforts him. I think we must read this verse again; perhaps there is some father here who is growing old, or some mother upon whom years are multiplying. May these last words of David be such as your last words may be! "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire."

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 44. AND 45; AND 2 SAMUEL 23:1-5.

1 KINGS

1 KINGS 5

1-5. And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father: for Hiram was ever a lover of David. And Solomon sent to Hiram saying, Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name.

When God intends a man to do any special work for him, he will find him all the helpers he needs. Sometimes those helpers may seem to be very unlikely persons; but —“Remember that omnipotence has servants everywhere.” See, dear friends, when the Lord had given rest to Solomon, he proceeded with the building of the temple which David had planned. Whenever God blesses you, show your gratitude to him by undertaking some special service for him. Now that you are out of your recent trouble, bring your sacrifice of thanksgiving, and do all that you can for your Lord; your time of rest may not last so long as you could wish, therefore use it while you have it to God’s glory.

6. Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar tree out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians.

It is not every man who has every gift. Hiram and his Sidonians could hew timber more skillfully than Solomon and his Israelites. God can always find the right sort of men to do his work. Do not be

dispirited because you cannot do everything; why should you? Should not somebody else have a share, and be also permitted to have the honour of serving his God? It is well that you cannot do all that has to be done, and that somebody else can do something better than you can.

7, 8. *And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the LORD this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people. And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for: —*

It is always a good thing, before you agree to do anything, to consider it, to look at it from all points of view. I wish that, in giving money to the service of God, there was more consideration as to the object for which it is given. Some give simply because others do, some because they are asked; but he gives best who considers the matter, and looks all round, and then says, “Yes, this is a just claim upon me as a servant of God, and therefore I will respond to it.” So, “Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for:”—

8-11. *And I will do all thy desire concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of fir. My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive them: and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household. So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to all his desire. And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year.*

Is it not a very pleasing thought that both Jews and Gentiles built the temple of Solomon put the big stones together, and cut the cedar and fir trees into the proper shape, yet they were Hiram’s fir trees and Hiram’s cedar trees, and he floated them by sea to the place where they were landed, and whence they were dragged to Jerusalem, and God will let his people of every race and nation have a share in the building of his great spiritual house.

12-14. *And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two*

made a league together. And king Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men. And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home: and Adoniram was over the levy.

That was a capital rule: “a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home.” You who work for God must have your month at work, but you also need two months at home to attend to your own business. There are some people who keep always at Lebanon, always at work; but there is spiritual work to be done at home as well, getting your heart ready for service, sharpening your tools, looking after your own flocks and herds, and so on. There was hard work to be done, and if it was to be done well, the workers needed to have their sinews and muscles in good order, so “a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home.” One prayer in the glass and two prayers at home; one hour of teaching the lesson, twice as much time taken in getting it up and preparing it.

15. *And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains;*

What were their names? I cannot tell you, but probably there was a book in which they were all recorded, and Christ has many humble workers, hewers of wood and bearers of burdens, whose names are not known among men. Well, what is in a name? Let us be content to serve under our greater Solomon, and let the whole glory of building his spiritual temple go to him. Never mind who bears the burdens or who hews the stones, the temple is for God, so let God be glorified, and not man.

16. *Beside the chief of Solomon's officers which were over the work, three thousand and three hundred, which ruled over the people that wrought in the work.*

There must be various degrees among the workers in the service of God. He is a Sovereign, and he divideth unto every man according as he wills. How this ought to hush all envy and rebellion against the officers in the work of God whom he has called to be overseers of others!

17. *And the king commanded,*

That is at the bottom of all service for our King; let us but get a command from the King, and we obey at once.

17, 18. *And they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house. And Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders did hew them, and the stonemasons:*

I am glad they are mentioned here, for there are still some brothers and sisters who are not hewers, but they are stonemasons. Perhaps they do not see many conversions through their efforts, but they do a great deal of the work of instructing the converts. They polish what other people have excavated, they are stonemasons; and just as the temple at Jerusalem needed the work of the stonemasons, so does God's great spiritual temple need those who square as well as those who hew the stones that are to be built into it.

18. *So they prepared timber and stones to build the house.*

Nothing is too good or too costly to be given to God, and let us reckon no labour too hard or too heavy that will bring glory to his holy name.

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 KINGS 5, AND PSALMS 48, AND 95.

1 KINGS 10:1-13

Let us first read part of the tenth chapter of the first Book of Kings; and, afterwards, a part of the twelfth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew.

10:1. *And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions.*

Her visit, you see, had a religious aspect. She "heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord." He had wisdom of various kinds, but it was his knowledge of God, and of God's ways, that seemed chiefly to attract this ruler from a far-distant land.

2. *And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.*

She came with a price in her hand to get wisdom. Well did Solomon say, "Buy the truth, and sell it not." No price is too dear to pay for it, but any price would be too cheap to sell it at.

3. *And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not.*

His wisdom came from God, and therefore it was full and complete, and could not be confounded by man. Let us seek after the wisdom which cometh from above, and remember that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Indeed, is it not the sum total of wisdom really to fear, in a filial sense, the Lord Most High?

4, 5. *And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon’s wisdom, and the house that he had built, and the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her.*

She was a queen, but she had never seen such royal magnificence as Solomon’s. “The ascent by which he went up unto the house of the Lord” appears to have been a marvelous viaduct, constructed of the most ponderous stones, by which the king went from his own house up to the temple itself. I have read that an arch of that viaduct is standing at the present day, and it is still a marvel. To this princess, it must have seemed a wonder of wonders.

6-12. *And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice. And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon. And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones. And the king made of the almug trees pillars for the house of the LORD, and for the king’s house, harps also and psalteries for singers: there came no such almug trees, nor were seen unto this day.*

Probably, these “almug trees” were trees of sandal-wood. Whatever they were, they seem to have been the best timber known to the Easterns, and therefore Solomon very properly used them in the house of the Lord. Let the harps of our praises be made of such

wood that there shall be no others equal to them in the whole world. Let us give to our Lord our best young blood, our warmest zeal, our highest thoughts, our most careful attention. Let us give him, in fact, the whole of our being, the love of our heart. He should be served with the best of the best, “for he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever.”

13. *And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.*

The king first of all bountifully gave her a present which he thought most fitting; and then, afterwards, permitted her to ask whatever she would. How much is this like our King Solomon, who has already given us all our hearts can wish for; and yet, if there be any right desire that is still ungratified, he provides the golden mercy-seat, at the foot of his throne, where we may present our petitions to him, encouraged by his gracious word, “Ask what thou wilt; according to thy faith, so shall it be unto thee.”

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 KINGS 10:1-13; AND MATTHEW 12:38-45.

1 KINGS 11:40-43

God threatened Solomon, on account of his setting up other gods, that he would rend away a great part of the kingdom from him, and that he would set up another king in his place.

40-43. *Solomon sought therefore to kill Jereboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon. And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon? And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.*

After great mountains there usually come low hills. After Solomon comes Rehoboam. Grace does not run in the blood, we may be sure, for even human wisdom does not descend from father to son. There is no necessary transmission of gifts and talents, much less of grace, from one generation to another.

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 KINGS 11:40-43; and 12.

1 KINGS 12

1-3. *And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam. The son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it, (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt;) that they sent and called him.*

It was a sure sign of great discontent when the people sent for a rebel to be their spokesman.

3, 4. *And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.*

This was a very natural request; these Oriental monarchs took their thrones as by a kind of divine right, and there was a tendency among the people to demand something like a constitution, some regulations by which they should not be so heavily oppressed. I do not know whether they had been oppressed by Solomon or not; certainly, the realm as a whole was greatly enriched under his government; but the wisest ruler must not expect that he will have the uniform love of the people, there will be come discontented ones in every community.

5. *And he said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And the people departed.*

One commentator says that it is the only sign of wisdom that there is in Rehoboam, that he took three days to consider the answer to this question.

Peradventure, if he had answered it rightly, it would have been better if answered immediately. Still, it is a good rule, when there is an important question before you, to take time to consider it. The mischievous point is that Rehoboam did not wait upon God for guidance in this emergency. Had he been like his grandfather David, those three days would have been spent with God in prayer, and he would have come back, with a greater wisdom than even his father Solomon possessed, to answer the people in this thing.

We often blunder over very ample matters when we speak without asking guidance of God; but in the most intricate circumstances our course will be perfectly clear if we commit our way unto the Lord.

6-8. *And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people? And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever. But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him:*

He was probably a man forty years of age, and therefore no longer young; but he had all the while been playing the part of a young man. He had not been old in wisdom when he was young in years; it would have been well for him if he had been.

9-11. *And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.*

Old men are not always wise, and young men are not always wise; he who consults with men only shall yet learn the truth of this verse, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Among Rehoboam's counsellors, the old men had no real principle to guide them, they said to the king, in effect, "Just butter these people with soft words, delude and deceive them with the idea that you are going to yield to them, and then, when you once get the reins into your own hands, you can govern the nation as you like." This was a wicked policy; but the young men said to the king, "No, no, no; do not pretend that you will listen to the people. There is nothing like putting a bold face on it, and just letting the people know that you will not yield to them. They will be startled by what you say; have you not the authority and example of your father Solomon? Nobody ever dared speak a word of this kind to him, so do you put it down at once, and be bold." There is no principle, you see, about the advice in either case; it is all policy, but the latter policy is sure not to

succeed. I counsel you, brother, — nay, I will give you no counsel except that I counsel you to take counsel of God. Wait upon him, for he knows what you should do in every difficulty that may arise. If Rehoboam had only had wit enough and grace enough to lay this case before his God he would have given him somewhat of the largeness of heart and the wisdom which he gave to his father Solomon.

12-15. *So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day. And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; and spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD,*

The great, deep, mysterious providence of God was quietly working even behind the folly and the domineering pride of this foolish man.

15, 16. *That he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the Son of Nebat. So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.*

He that speaks roughly must expect to be answered roughly. Let us learn from this incident as one might who sees the warning light of a beacon, and tacks his ship to avoid the rock on which it is placed.

17, 18. *But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the tribute;*

Having made trouble, the king tried to make piece. He selected one of the ancient officers of his father Solomon to be his ambassador, but he selected the very worst that he could have found, “Adoram, who was over the tribute.” The man who had been a leader in exactions from the people, or who had been thought to be so, was not the one to act as peace-maker.

18-20. *And all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.*

See what mischief may be done by one foolish man; and let me add, see what evil may come of the ill conduct of a wise man. Some think that Rehoboam was Solomon's only son, though he had a multitude of wives. That I cannot tell: but it is a singular thing that so wise a man should have but one son mentioned here, and that he should be such a foolish one. Yet what could be expected to come out of such a family as Solomon's was? He whose own house is so disorderly as his was, must expect that those who come after him will be no better than they should be. Blessed is that home where the Lord is the Master, where his law is loved, and his word is obeyed.

21-24. *And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD.*

It is a very striking fact that this one prophet did but speak in God's name, and that vast host disbanded in obedience to his word. It gives us some hope concerning Rehoboam, yet we cannot be sure that it was he who was thus obedient to the prophet. The people may have been better than their king; at any rate, they did not fight against their brethren, but they went their way. Oh, that God's servants in these days could speak with anything like such power as Shemaiah possessed!

25-27. *Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel. And Jeroboam*

said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.

Jeroboam is moved by policy, you see. It is very hard, I believe, to be a ruler over men, and yet to be a servant of God. There seems to be connected with politics in every country something that besmears the mind, and defiles the hand that touches it. The king of Judah had but little wit, and this king of Israel has too much cunning; he is a far-seeing man, and perceives that, if the people go up to Jerusalem to worship, they may by-and-by return to their allegiance to the house of David.

28. *Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.*

Truly, history repeats itself, only, if it be bad history, it is apt to grow worse. "Behold thy gods O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." This is almost exactly what they said in Aaron's days, when he made the ox which Scripture sarcastically calls a calf, the Egyptian image of strength. Jeroboam makes not merely one calf, but two; and he speaks of them in nearly the same language as they used concerning the golden calf in the wilderness: "Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

29, 30. *And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.*

I suppose that Jeroboam did not mean to draw them away from worshipping Jehovah; but he would have Jehovah worshipped under some visible image, and not according to the rule which God had laid down. That is just where mischief often begins, both in the church and in the world. Men are willing to worship God if they are allowed to have a ritual and symbols which they have themselves devised; so, instead of the divine simplicity of the New Testament, they have many things added, things to please the taste, aesthetic, beautiful, sensuous; all of which take off the mind from that sublime worship of the invisible God which alone can be acceptable before

him. It is not for us to determine how we will worship God; we are to worship him after his own manner, for his commandments are still in force: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them." "Well, but the cross," someone says, "surely that is a truly venerable symbol?" Let it be as venerable as you please; but we must not use it in divine worship. The ox was supposed to set forth strength; surely it was an admirable emblem of the Almighty, yet God pours contempt upon it when he bids his inspired servants to speak of it as the image of an ox that eateth grass, as if that could be any symbol of the Most High! "This thing became a sin."

31. *And, he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.*

For the sons of Levi went over to Judah, and remained faithful to God; and the better sort of people probably dreaded to assume the office to which God had called the sons of Levi, and none would undertake it but the very lowest of the people.

32. *And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah,*

He shifted the month, but retained the day, — the fifteenth day of the eighth month instead of the seventh. "That was quite unimportant," say some. I do not agree with them, for nothing is unimportant that has to do with the law of God's house. Disobedience may be more plainly seen in some of the non-essentials than in an essential thing. At all events, we have no right to alter jot or tittle of the divine command.

32, 33. *And he offered upon the altar. So did he in Beth-el, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Beth-el the priests of the high places which he had made. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Beth-el the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart;*

It is a strong condemnation of anything in religion if it be devised by a man's own heart. We are to do what God bids us, as God bids us, when God bids us, and because God bids us; but that which is merely of our own free will, ordained and manufactured by

ourselves, is practically the worship of ourselves, and not the worship of God.

33. *And ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.*

Thus Israel was led astray at the very beginning. She came to the turning of the roads, and took the wrong course, and she went from bad to worse. God save all of us from following her evil example, but may we all serve the one living and true God, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 KINGS 11:40-43; and 12.

1 KINGS 14:21-24

21. *And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah.*

After great mountains often come low valleys. Solomon was a wise man; Rehoboam was otherwise.

21. *Rehoboam was forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there.*

Rehoboam ought to have been a good king. Jerusalem was the holy city, the chosen city; God put his own name there. It is a sad thing that this king should try to put away God's name from the chosen city.

21. *And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess.*

There was bad blood in him. How often do we find that the good king has a good mother's name mentioned with his own! Bad kings generally come from some stranger, some heathen princess. It was so with Rehoboam.

22. *And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done.*

Their fathers had been great sinners; but, in the days of David, they had not set up false gods. In the days of Solomon, after the temple had been built, they began to go astray. It is a curious thing that a high ritualistic service, even if it be right, is usually attended with a down-coming in spirituality. When the temple service was instituted, it was the beginning of a decline; but in Rehoboam's day that decline became more apparent, the "down-grade" became more visible.

23. *For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree.*

They could not have enough of it. When men go wrong, they generally go wrong very greedily; they cannot have too much of evil.

24. *And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.*

When men once turn aside from the living God to follow inventions of their own, there is no telling where they will go; nothing is too foul, nothing is too filthy for them. Now read the same story as you find it in 2 Chronicles 12.

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 KINGS 14:21-24 AND 2 CHRONICLES 12.

1 KINGS 17

1. *And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.*

How abruptly this man breaks in upon the scene! He leaps like a lion from the thicket. There is no previous announcement of his coming; but here he stands, God's own man ordained to bear witness in evil times, — to stand like a brazen pillar when everything around him seems to be moving from its place. Ahab had not been accustomed to be spoken to in this fashion. Mark how personal is Elijah's message; he does not begin even by saying, as the prophets usually did, "Thus saith the Lord." There is something that at first seems almost audacious about his expression: "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." A man may sometimes seem self-assertive when, really, he has so completely lost himself in God that he does not care what people think about him, whether they regard him as an egotist or not. Some men appear to be modest because they are proud, while others seem to be proud because they have sunk themselves, and only speak so boldly because they have their Master's authority at the back of their words. Bravely did Elijah say, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

2, 3. *And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.*

Of course, the prophet would have had to share in the general want unless God had provided for him, and therefore the Lord took care that his servant should be hidden away where a brooklet would continue to run after the moisture had departed from other places.

4. *And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.*

Perhaps someone says, “Ravens were more likely to rob the prophet than to feed him;” and so they were. Some have objected that these ravens were unclean; what if they were? Things are not made unclean because they are carried by unclean creatures. Did not Abigail bring to David food upon asses which were unclean? There is no sense in that objection. “Oh, but!” somebody else asks, “how should ravens bring food?” How should they not, if God commanded them? All creatures are under his control. A God, and a miracle is simple enough. If God does not feed his people by any other means, he will command ravenous beasts and unclean birds to feed them.

5. *So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.*

It is the glory of Elijah that he does whatever God bids him, asking no questions. He simply, like a child, goes to the brook just as, like a hero, he had previously stood before the king.

6, 7. *And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.*

Brooks will dry up, even if godly men are being sustained by them. Is there anyone here whose brook is drying up? Has it quite dried up? Still trust you in God; for, if the ravens are put out of commission, God will employ some other agency.

8, 9. *And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.*

It was a time of famine, yet God sent him to a widow woman! She is sure to need sustaining herself; yes, and she shall get it, too,

through sustaining the prophet, he that could command the ravens to feed his servant could command a widow woman to do the same thing; and he did so. This woman does not appear to have been originally a worshipper of Jehovah. She lived in a heathen country, and probably was herself a heathen; but she revered the servant of Jehovah, and she did his bidding, and doubtless became a true follower of the living God.

10. *So he arose and went to Zarephath.*

There is the same unreasoning faith: "So he arose;" just as, in the 5th verse, it is written: "So he went;" that is, with all alacrity, he did his Lord's bidding without any question.

10. *And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there-*

There she was, the woman who was to sustain him. She had come, no doubt, with a carriage and pair, to take him home, to her mansion. Oh, no! "The widow woman was there" —

10. *Gathering of sticks:*

She was a poor woman to sustain him, but there she was: "gathering of sticks."

10. *And he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.*

Water was scarce then; every drop was very precious; it was therefore a large request that Elijah made to her.

11. *And as she was going to fetch it,-*

For she saw, by his garment, and by his majestic bearing, that he was a messenger of God: "As she was going to fetch it," —

11, 12. *He called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.*

It was such a little quantity, that two sticks would be quite enough; yet this is the woman who is to sustain Elijah! Poor creature, she needs someone to sustain her and her son! How often does God use very strange means for the accomplishment of his blessed purposes

13. *And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.*

What a trial for her faith! This stranger must have the first portion of her last meal; yet she had faith enough to obey his word.

14, 15. *For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the Saying of Elijah:*

Faith is blessedly contagious. God, by his Spirit can make the faith of one to beget faith in others. This woman learns, from the very boldness of Elijah, to believe in God; and she does as he tells her.

15-18. *And she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Elijah. And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?*

Poor creature, having lost her husband, her heart was wrapped up in her son! Under this sharp trial, she condemned herself; but she also began to have hard thoughts of the man of God. We none of us know what we may say when we are overwhelmed with a great trouble. It is easy to find fault with the utterance of a poor distracted spirit, and to say, "That is improper language." Hast thou never spoken so in the hour of thy grief? Blessed is that man from whose lips there has never escaped a wrong word in the time of his anguish. This widow woman was a mother with a dead child in the house; do not find fault with her, but tenderly pity her, and all who are in a like case.

19, 20. *And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son!*

The words of the woman had touched his heart, and perhaps he also spoke unadvisedly; but who are we that we should judge? He seemed to feel that, wherever he went, he was bringing trouble upon people. All Israel was afflicted with drought because of his prophecy, and now this poor woman had lost her darling child. Yet even in this desperate case he did not give up hope, and prayer, and effort.

21. *And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.*

This was splendid faith on the part of the prophet. Nobody had ever prayed before for the restoration of one who was dead; no one had ever attempted to work such a miracle as this; but Elijah's faith was strung up to a wonderful pitch. Here was faith ready to receive the blessing, so the blessing would surely come. Here was the faith that could move mountains, and stir the very gates of death. Elijah treads an unaccustomed road, and asks for what had never been given before.

22, 23. *And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.*

Elijah was never a man of many words; he was a prophet mighty in deeds; he said little, but what he did spoke loudly.

24. *And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.*

Did she not know this before? Yes, or else she would not have given him the first portion of her meal. She must have known it, for she had been living for a long time upon the meal and the oil which he had multiplied. But now she said that she knew it, as if she had never known it before. God has a way of bringing truth home to the heart with such vividness that, though we have been perfectly acquainted with it for years, yet we are compelled to cry, "Now I know it; now I have it as I never had it before; now I grasp it and embrace it with my very soul!" May we all know the truth of God in this grand fashion! Amen.

1 KINGS 18:17-40

We shall read at this time the story of Elijah's challenge to the priests of Baal. Remember that there had been three years without dew or rain. The whole country was dried up till it seemed to be a desert; and all were famished for lack of water.

17, 18. *And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel: but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and Thou hast followed Baalim.*

It is the way of men to cast the blame of their trouble not upon their sin and upon themselves, but upon those who have warned them. Mark Elijah's holy boldness. "I have not troubled Israel, but thou."

19. *Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.*

He knew how many there were of them. The man's heart was so engaged in this battle for God against idols, that he had counted all his adversaries.

20, 21. *So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel. And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.*

So undecided were they — perhaps so cowed by the presence of that brave man who feared none, but only feared God.

22-24. *Then said Elijah unto the people, I even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves. and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under. And I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.*

And the Baalite priests could not refuse the challenge. For they worshipped the sun-god — the god of fire; and if he could not answer the sun-worshippers, he must be no God at all.

25, 26. *And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon.*

Which was Baal's own high time, for then the sun would be at its zenith — "from morning, even unto noon."

26. *Saying, O Baal, hear us.*

Repeating their cry again and again. For this is the way of all false worship — to use vain repetitions, as the heathens do, which is forbidden to us.

26. *But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.*

Which was their superstition. They were going through the whole performance of the genuflexions of some kind or another. They leaped upon the altar which was made.

27, 31. *And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broke, down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name:*

For he meant this day to prove that God was God of the twelve tribes — not of himself and his tribe, but of all the families of Israel.

32-37. *And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill*

four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time, And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water. And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that. Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and thou hast turned their heart back again.

There was the prayer. How different altogether from this repetition of words — this leaping — this cutting with knives. He states his wish; he pleads his cause; he brings forward his arguments; and this is his prayer.

38-40. *Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.*

And thus did he prove that he was the prophet of God, and that God was the God of Israel.

1 KINGS 19

1, 2. *And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.*

She was too fast in uttering her threat, and it often happens that malice outwits and overleaps itself. If Jezebel meant to kill Elijah, she should not have given him notice that she intended to do it.

3. *And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-Sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.*

He did not feel safe even in the adjoining kingdom; for he fled through Israel, and then went almost the whole length of Judah, right into the wilderness. Note that he “left his servant there,” at

Beer-Sheba. Even in his anxiety about himself, he had tender consideration for others; and, besides, he wanted complete solitude.

4. *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.*

Having presented this passionate and unreasonable prayer, he laid himself down to sleep, — the very best thing that he could do under the circumstances.

5-8. *And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink and laid him down again. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.*

When he was hungry before, ravens fed him; but now an angel ministers to his wants. God uses all sorts of messengers, and means, so that his children may be provided for. This man's one meal lasted him through a fast of forty days and forty nights; and, dear friend, if God giveth not bread to thee, he can take away thy hunger, so that thou hast no need to eat and drink.

9. *And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there;*

There was something congenial about the rugged sides of Horeb, the mount of God, making it a suitable place for a man of Elijah's spirit; the very gloom of the cave gave him some sort of miserable comfort.

9. *And, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here Elijah?*

“Why hast thou run away?”

10-12. *And he said, I have been very jealous, for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the*

mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD; was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

A mystic whisper, and God was there, as he often is in little things.

13, 14. *And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous —*

He stands to what he had said before, and now repeats his assertion:

14, 15. *For the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria:*

It must have been a great comfort to Elijah to have some more work to do.

It often takes the mind off very pressing sorrow if one is sent on some new employment.

16, 17. *And, Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazuel shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.*

God heard the prayer that Elijah had prayed against Israel, for it was really a prayer against the people who had forsaken the Lord their God. There are times when men, who are most tender of heart, feel as if they must take God's side against sinners. But the Lord also comforted Elijah with good news: —

18. *Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.*

1 KINGS 19

1. *And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.*

Jezebel was the chief patroness of the idolatrous prophets, and therefore you may imagine how her wrath was stirred when her husband told her what Elijah had done to the men who ate at her table.

2,3. *Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.*

This is the man who could fearlessly face the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of the groves, and slay them at the brook Kishon, the dauntless prophet of fire, who dared to call King Ahab the troubler of Israel; yet now he trembles before a woman's threatening, and arises, and flees for his life. Verily, the best of men are but men at the best, and the strongest of men are weak as water when once the power of God is withdrawn from them. The high-strung tension of the top of Carmel was now to be followed by a not unnatural reaction, and the heroic prophet was to sink into the lowest state of despondency. He left his servant at Beersheba;-

4. *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die;*

What inconsistent beings men are! Elijah had fled to save his life, yet "he requested for himself that he might die;" — that he might die because he was afraid of death, die under a juniper tree in the wilderness in order to escape death at the hand of Jezebel.

4. *And said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.*

This was the man who never died, yet "he requested for himself that he might die." How gracious it is, on God's part, not to grant the requests of his people when they are unwise, as this petition of Elijah was! Had he known that he would go up by a whirlwind into heaven, riding in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire, surely he

would not have prayed after this fashion, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

5, 6. *And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.*

He was very sad at heart because of the apostasy of Israel; and beside that, he was very weary, utterly exhausted by the tremendous excitement through which he had passed, and by the long journey which he had already taken; so he did the wisest thing possible, "he did eat and drink, and laid him down again."

7. *And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.*

God exercises foresight on behalf of his people which they cannot themselves exercise. He knows when we are to be called either to unusual service or unusual suffering, and he prepares us for it. He not only gives us spiritual meat to eat because we know that we are hungry, but he also gives it to us because of our future needs which, for the present, are quite unknown to us.

8, 9. *And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?*

"Thou, Jehovah's courageous prophet, why hast thou fled? Why art thou here when so much is necessary to be done for the apostate people? 'What doest thou here?' How comest thou to be here, in a cave, when the nation needs thy presence? 'What doest thou here, Elijah?'"

10. *And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.*

He despaired of the good cause, and this was a great pity; for a man such as he was ought never to have given way to such feelings.

Was not God with him; and where God is, must there not be victory?

11-13. *And he said, go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?*

God will repeat his questions to his people if they have not due effect the first time, for he is very tender, and pitiful, and patient.

14. *And he said,-*

A second time pouring out the bitterness of his soul before his God,-

14. *I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.*

It was a good thing that Elijah could thus pour out his complaint into the sympathizing ear of the Most High. Such bitterness of soul as his is very apt to ferment, and to breed all manner of ills, but when we can tell the Lord all that is in our heart, then a time of blessed relief is not far off.

15. *And the LORD said unto him, go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus:-*

“Get back to thy work; be not a deserter from the field of battle; return, for thou art wanted for various duties.”

15,16. *And when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.*

Thus there shall be a successor to carry on your work when you have really done your part of it.

17, 18. *And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of*

Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

How this gracious assurance must have revived the prophet's spirit! He knew nothing about those seven thousand faithful Israelites, and he must have been amazed and delighted to hear of them. There was no need for him to say, "I, even I only, am left," for there was a noble band of stalwarts to stand up with him, and defend the name and cause of Jehovah.

19. *So he departed thence,-*

Cheered and comforted, he went back to his work without uttering another word, and we do not read of his spirit flagging again: "So he departed thence," —

19, 20 *And found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, And said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?*

The Lord wants no pressed men in his service; his soldiers must all be volunteers; but Elisha was a man of a true heart and a brave spirit, so we read:-

21. *And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah and ministered unto him.*

1 KINGS 20:1-34

1-4. *And Benhadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. And he sent messengers to Ahab, king of Israel, into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Benhadad, Thy silver and thy gold is mine, thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine. And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have.*

This was a king of Israel, meanly crouching before the idolatrous king of Syria. Not after this fashion would David have spoken, or any of those kings who followed the Lord of hosts; but

when men forsake God, they soon become cowards. What kingdom or nation shall prosper that casts off the yoke of the Most High?

5, 6. *And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Benhadad, saying, although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children; Yet I will end my servants unto thee tomorrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hand, and take it away.*

That is always the way with such people, give them an inch, and they take a mile. Ahab had agreed to all that the Syrian king claimed, so now Benhadad pushes his advantage. If you ever yield to Satan, you will find him to be a hard taskmaster. You can never yield enough to satisfy him; and if you yield to any sin, whatever it may be, you will find it to be a cruel tyrant to you. If you allow it once to have power over your soul, it will push its advantage further and further, and make your yoke to be exceedingly heavy.

7-9. *Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this man seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold, and I denied him not. And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Hearken not unto him, nor consent. Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Benhadad, Tell my lord, the king. All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again.*

Driven to extremity, Ahab showed that he had a little courage left, and when he was supported by his people, and, possibly, urged on by them, he put his foot down, and would not altogether submit to Benhadad. Oh, that men had the moral courage to revolt against sin! Would that, when they felt its cruel bondage, they would resist it! God grant them grace to do so, and strengthen them in their resistance!

10. *And Benhadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.*

As much as to say, "I will bring so many against you that all the dust of the city would not be enough to furnish a handful each."

11. *And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.*

That was a sharp shrewd check to the boasting of the Syrian king.

12-15. *And it came to pass, when Benhadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, Set yourselves in array. And they set themselves in array against the city. And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD. And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Even by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou. Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand.*

All the volunteers that were ready for the war; they were only seven thousand.

16-18. *And they went out at noon. But Benhadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him. And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Benhadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria. And he said, —*

In his drunken fury," he said," —

18. *Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive.*

They were not to be so easily taken as Benhadad imagined.

19-21. *So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them. And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them: and Benhadad the King of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.*

God has ways and means of delivering his people at his own time. I wish all the young men of our churches had the high ambition to be serviceable to the Lord of hosts. These young princes were a very small band of soldiers, but they led the way, and smote

the drunken monarch and his troops —and if our young men, full of holy zeal and ardor, had confidence in God, and went forth every one to slay his man, by which I mean, each one to win a soul to Christ, what glorious victories would be won for the truth as it is in Jesus!

22. *And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee.*

Another year would bring another war, so they must be prepared.

23. *And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are god of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.*

It was a current heathenish idea, that there was one god for a mountain,

another for a stream, another for a plain; and these men imagined that the glorious Jehovah was a local deity like their images were supposed to be.

24. *And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms:*

“Do not let the kings, who have their own armies, govern them, for that creates divisions in the camp; but appoint captains in their place.”

25-27. *And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so. And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Benhadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel. And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, —*

That is a grand record. It shows the kind of men they were. I wish that all our church-members were present at all our prayer-meetings, and on all occasions when work is to be done for Christ. What a healthy condition the church would be in if it could be said, “The children of Israel were numbered, and were all present,” —

27. *And went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids;*

A herd of goats was seldom very large, and the whole of the Israelites put together seemed only “like two little flocks of kids;”

27, 28. *But the Syrians filled the country. And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD.*

See how good came to Israel through the blasphemy of the Syrians! Whenever there is a rather worse book than usual brought out against the religion of Jesus Christ, or a more than ordinary villainous blasphemy is invented against the grace of God, you may almost clap your hands, and say, “Now will God bestir himself for his truth and for righteousness’ sake. These men will provoke him so that he will arise, and defend his own cause.”

29-32. *And they pitched one over against the other seven days. And so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men that were left. And Benhadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber. And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Benhadad —*

There is a wonderful difference between this language and the way in which he had previously spoken. “Thy servant Benhadad” —

32. *Saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, Is he yet alive? he is my brother.*

When a man leaves his God, he cannot distinguish between his foes and his friends; so that, oftentimes, those who would do him the direst mischief he reckons to be his brothers.

33, 34. *Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Benhadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Benhadad came*

forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot. And Benhadad said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away.

Ahab actually made a treaty of peace with him, and let him live to plot incalculable mischief against the nation.

2 KINGS

2 KINGS 4:1-7

1. *Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophet unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.*

It is sad for anyone to be in debt, and yet there may be circumstances under which even a man who fears the Lord may die in debt, and leave no provision for his wife and children except a large portion of sorrow. In the case of this poor widow, it was not long before she cried to Elisha, "The creditor is come." He generally does come pretty quickly, and he had come to her to take away her two sons whom she needed to support her, to make them bondmen, - slaves, to serve him for a certain number of years till their father's debt was worked out, and this hurt the poor woman's heart, so she came to see what the Lord's servant could do for her. She could not bear to see her sons taken away to serve as bondmen to a stranger, through no fault of their own; and, possibly, through no fault on their father's part.

2. *And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee?*

Elisha was probably about as poor as she was, so what could he do for her?

2. *Tell me, what hast thou in the house?*

"Whatever there is in the house must go towards this debt, so 'tell me what hast thou in the house?'"

2. *And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.*

Her husband had been a God-fearing man, a true servant of Jehovah, yet he had died in such dire poverty that his widow had to say to Elisha "Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil." Those were indeed bad times for the sons of the prophets; for, in those days, men cared more for false prophets and for the priests of Baal than for the servants of the Most High God.

3. *Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few.*

“Get as many empty oil jars as ever you can, it does not matter how great nor how many they are, but they must be empty.”

4-6. *And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed.*

There was no reason why “the oil stayed” except that there was “not a vessel more” to receive the flowing stream.

7. *Then she came and told the man of God.*

She must have understood that the oil was to be used for the payment of her debt; but she was a woman of delicate sensitiveness, with a tender conscience, as honest people usually are, so she wanted full permission from Elisha before she would dispose of the oil. She regarded it, in some sense, as his oil: as it was through using the means that he had directed that her little store of oil had been so miraculously multiplied; so “she came and told the man of God.”

7. *And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.*

What a merciful deliverance that was for the poor widow and her sons! And there have been many other deliverances, in the experiences of God’s people, which, if they have not been quite so miraculous as this one, have nevertheless been very remarkable, although God has appeared to work them the common way in which he is constantly working. Yet they have been uncommon mercies all the while. Now let us read Paul’s letter to the Christians at Philippi who had been the means of supplying his necessities, though not in the miraculous manner in which the prophet Elisha had supplied the needs of that poor widow.

This exposition consisted of readings from 2 KINGS 4:1-7; AND PHILIPPIANS 4.

2 KINGS 4:1-37

1. *Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and*

thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD; and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

According to the very cruel custom of those times, if a man were in debt, and had no means of payment, his children were sold for slaves. Here was a poor widow, whose husband had been one of the sons of the prophets, but he had died in debt. He was evidently one who was known to Elisha as a faithful, God-fearing man, and perhaps that partly accounted for his poverty. The false priests were fed at Jezebel's table; but because this man worshipped Jehovah, the one living and true God, he had probably been persecuted and hunted down until he had lost what little he formerly had, and, therefore, when he died, he could leave his wife no other legacy than that of debt; and, in consequence, the creditor came to seize her two sons to be bondmen.

2. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.

They used oil extensively in the preparation of their food as well as for lighting their dwellings. This woman was so poor that she had no meal in the house, but she had a little oil. When our Lord was about to feed the five thousand, he asked his disciples, "How many loaves have ye?" So here the prophet asked the poor woman, "What hast thou in the house?" and she told him she had only "a pot of oil."

3. Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few.

Evidently the poor woman's credit was good though her debts were heavy; her neighbours knew she would have paid her creditor if she could, so they were willing to grant her request though they probably wondered why she wanted so many empty vessels.

4-7. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed. Then she came and told the man of God.

As it was through obeying his directions she had miraculously obtained this large supply of oil, she would not make use of it without further counsel from the man of God, who had already given her such good advice.

7. *And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, —*

“That is thy first duty; ‘pay thy debt,’” —

7, 8. *And live thou and thy children of the rest. And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.*

The prophet had helped a poor woman; now a rich woman helps him. God sometimes pays his servants in kind very speedily for anything they have done for those who belong to him; at other times, he puts it to the credit of their account.

9-13. *And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?*

God’s servants must not be ungrateful for any kindness that is shown to them. If they receive hospitality, they must be ready to give a return of such things as they have. Elisha was willing to do anything in his power for this hospitable Shunammite, so he said to her, “Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?”

13. *And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.*

She had no desire for earthly greatness, and she was very wise, for, usually, happiness is to be found in that middle state which Agur desired when he said, “Give me neither poverty nor riches.” This Shunammite had no wish to be removed to the trying and

perilous atmosphere of the court or the army, so she answered, “I dwell among mine own people.”

14-19. *And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her according to the time of life. And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head.*

The sun had been too hot for the child; sunstroke had seized him.

19, 20. *And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died.*

How transient are all our earthly treasures! The child was well, and ill and dead in the course of a few hours. Hold with a loose hand all things earthly. Make not your gourds into gods, for they will soon wither and die. Very often, we destroy our own comforts by thinking too much of them. As soon as we make anything that we have into an idol, it will be broken in pieces, or taken from us, or in some way turned into a curse to us. See how this good woman acted when she had suffered this great sorrow.

21, 22. *And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again.*

She did not tell him her errand; she wished to keep the trouble to herself for a while.

23. *And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath.*

“It is not the ordinary time for going to the prophet.”

23. *And she said, (Salem, that is, Peace; or as we read it,) It shall be well.*

She must have been a woman of great faith. She checked her natural emotions, and believed in God that all would be for the best. "It shall be well."

24-26. *Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee. So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite: Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.*

It is heroic faith when we can feel that, if the child shall die, it is well; if this husband shall die, it is well: and if we ourselves shall die, all is well, for he who has the arranging of all that concerns us cannot arrange otherwise than well. Alas that, often, our rebellious spirit says, with poor old Jacob, "All these things are against me," but true faith sits humbly down at the feet of the great Disposer of all events, and says, "He hath done all things well."

27. *And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet:*

As if she feared lest he should go away before she had poured into his ears the story of her grief.

27. *But Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.*

Those ancient prophets of God had only limited knowledge. The Spirit of God taught them some things, but not all things so Elisha was made to feel that he was but man, even though the Spirit of God often spake through him.

28. *Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?*

Then he learned what her trouble was, and understood that the child was dead. Before she had said as much as that, he read the news in the tones of her voice.

29, 30. *Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way; if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon*

the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.

She did not believe in Gehazi, nor yet in the staff, and herein she was a wise woman God would not bless the prophet's staff to the child's restoration, lest relic worship should spring up amongst the Israelites, or lest they should begin to attach some value to outward signs.

30-34. *And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.*

See the power of prayer; the very gates of death are made to open when Elisha, a man of like passions with ourselves, bows before the Lord in prayer. Learn a lesson also from Elisha's attitude toward the dead child; for, often, God is pleased to give spiritual life through the power of human sympathy. When we put ourselves into the condition of the sinner, hope for him, pray for him, agonize for him in broken-hearted sympathy on his account, putting ourselves as far as we can into his place, God often makes us the instruments by which his Spirit quickens the dead in sin.

35-37. *Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.*

Her heart was too full for speech just then, so she took up her son, and went out.

2 KINGS 6:1-23

1. *And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us.*

It seems to have been a habit of the prophets to gather about them companies of young men whom they instructed in the holy Scripture and in the truths of revelation. Many of these young men became prophets themselves and were the instructors of the people. Elisha, then, was the President of a College for young men who were being trained for the sacred ministry of God. They had grown so numerous that they were cramped in their lodging and they said, "The place is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us fit place there, where we may dwell." They were ready to work to build their own lodging; they do not appear to have gone into debt for it, and to have saddled themselves and the institution for many years afterwards, but they put their own shoulders to the wheel as good men should do when there is any work to be done for the cause of God.

2, 3. *Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go.*

His presence would be an encouragement to them; his holy conversation would make their work more pleasant, they would feel also as if they were more truly working for God when they had the presence and the patronage of God's servant. He, on the other hand, was quite ready to go. God's ministers, if they are what they should be are quite ready to help in any kind of work. We find Paul the Apostle picking up sticks to make a fire, and we find Elisha going with his dear friends to the forest when they would cut down timber to make a house. We sometimes regret that spiritual work should so often have to come into contact with common-place things, and yet so it is. Young prophets must have a house, and when we gather a congregation we must build them a meeting-house. In this country we cannot meet every day in the open air, and we often regret this, yet I believe it is meant by God to be a discipline for His Church. If the Church cannot come into contact with common life without its spirituality being endangered, so much the worse for its spirituality.

It must be flimsy stuff if it cannot bear the wear and tear of common life.

4, 5. *So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.*

These young men were too poor to buy tools of their own, and they therefore asked for a kindly loan of an axe-head that they might use it in the Lord's service. It was very natural, therefore, that this young man should regret that the axe which he had borrowed should fall off into the water. This made him say,- "Alas!" Be very careful about loans, be sure to repay them in due time, and be very particular that nothing happens so that you cannot. He said, "Alas, master! for it was borrowed."

6. *And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim.*

God can do all things, he can make iron swim-we cannot-and yet you see the prophet did it, and he did it by the use of a stick. He cut down a stick. Was there any connection between the stick and the iron? I can't see any, and yet God does use means, and he would have us use means. "He cut down a stick and cast it in thither, and the iron did swim." If you're in great trouble tonight, have confidence in that God who can make the iron swim. If you have some worry, and you do not know how to meet it, some work, and you do not know how to do it, look to him who made the iron swim and he can do the same for you. Trust him, rest upon him and see if he does not do it.

7, 8. *Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it. Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp.*

Of course, he wanted to keep it secret, and pounce upon Israel here and there without notice and so win an easy victory.

9-11. *And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not*

once nor twice. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing;

He could not understand how all his well-laid plans were baffled.

11, 12. *And he called his servants and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O King.*

There is no traitor here, there is no one who blabs out the royal secrets, not anyone,

12. *But 'Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the King of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.'"*

For the Lord knows what we say in the bedchamber when no ears can hear; if we speak to ourselves he hears it, and if we whisper in all quietness into the ear of one who will never repeat, it is written in the book of the divine record "Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber."

13. *And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him.*

Not a very wise project, for if Elisha knew all about the words of the king it was not very likely that he would catch him.

13-15. *And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan. Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, beheld, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?*

That is a question we have often asked, "How shall we do." We shall do nothing at all. How shall we do? If that were the question we might sit down in despair. The proper question is, "How will God do? How will God deliver us? But it is only the man of faith who thinks about God at all. How many there are of you who are in trouble and you are wondering how you shall get out of it. Poor things! Poor things! Oh, if we had but faith to look to that Omnipotent arm that is moving among us, and to that great and wise heart that is thinking of us, and then trust our case with him.

16, 17. *And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said,*

LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

More of these horses of fire than there were horses of flesh, more of these chariots of flame than there were chariots of iron.

18, 19. *And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria.*

In all which-though I grant you it seems a stratagem Elisha spoke neither more nor less than the truth; Dothan was not his city, Samaria was the city where the man of God dwelt. He was then outside Dothan, and he said, I will bring you to the man whom ye seek, He did lead them to him, took them to his own home, to the very place where he lived. I think I see him leading all these blind men; they had come to catch him, and he had caught them, and he led them to Samaria.

20. *And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.*

In the central square of the city. They opened their eyes and found themselves caught like rats in a trap. What cannot God do!

21. *And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?*

His hand was on his sword, he would call his men to come forward with their lances. "My father shall I smite them?" See the fine spirit of the prophet, the magnanimity of the man of God!

22. *And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow?*

For if you had conquered them in fair fight you would not think of killing them; I have captured them by God's power, I have taken them prisoners and they had not be put to death.

22. *Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.*

This is the way of carrying on war, the best way in all the world; to conquer by grace, to conquer by kindness.

23. *And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master.*

Now mark the consequences.

23. *So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.*

No, they could not come any more to vex a people who had treated them so generously, and thus the man of God was master of the situation, his noble spirit was put to the front, and God was glorified.

2 KINGS 13

1, 2. *In the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son, of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.*

“Seventeen years” — that is a long time in which to do mischief. Seventeen years of reigning over a people, influencing them all for mischief, turning them aside from God, and doing his utmost to erase the name of Jehovah from the hearts of the people. Remember, this Jehoahaz was the son of John, who had been called to the front because of the sins of the house of Ahab. Though Jehu was brought forward to be a reformer, yet he and his race were as bad as those who were cast out. What a sad thing this is, when those who are planted where the cumber-ground tree used to be become just as barren as the one that has been out down, or are only fruitful in sour fruit! See here the force of evil example. It was many years since Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had set up the calves at Bethel and Dan; yet here is another king walking in his footsteps. You cannot tell, if you leave a bad example behind, how your children, and your grandchildren to distant generations, may follow your evil footsteps. Bad examples are very vital; they live on age after age; and influence others long after the first transgressor is dead. The thought that we may be ruining those who are yet unborn, should keep us back from sin. Notice also, at the end of the second verse, “He departed not therefrom.” There is a final perseverance in sin; some men seem to prove it: “He departed not therefrom.” He was warned

against it; he was chastened for it; but “he departed not therefrom,” If men hold on in sin, how much more ought the people of God to hold on in righteousness! Whatever happens to you when you are once in the good old way, may it be said of you, “He departed not therefrom.” If all other men should turn aside, yet let that be said of you, “He departed not therefrom.” But, if you are in the wrong road, may the Lord cause you to turn from it, and to turn to himself at once! If you depart not from evil, you must depart from God.

3. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, all their days.

God’s people cannot sin without coming under chastisement. Remember this word of the Lord, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” If you become church-members, and yet live unholy lives, you come under a special discipline, a discipline which I plainly see to be going on in the Church of God even to this day. “For this cause,” said Paul of the church in Corinth, “many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” No doubt God does send many rods to his rebellious family. He is not one of those fathers who “spare the rod, and spoil the child.” Hazael and Benhadad were both wicked men; yet God used them as rods to chastise his sinning people.

4. And Jehoahaz besought the LORD, and the LORD hearkened unto him

Bad as he was, he knew the hand that smote him, and he besought Jehovah. What a wonder it is that God does hear the prayers of even wicked men! I have heard it said, sometimes, that “the prayer of the wicked is an abomination unto God.” There is no such passage as that in the Scripture. It is “the sacrifice of the wicked” that is “abomination to the Lord.” Even when a wicked man cries unto God, and even if his prayer be not a spiritual and acceptable prayer, yet God may hear it in a measure, as he did in this case. Sometimes that hearing of prayer leads men to repentance; and they then pray better prayers, and receive greater blessings.

4. For he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them.

God cannot bear to see the sorrows of his own people. Even when he himself is laying on the rod, if his child cries, it goes to his heart. Remember what he did to Pharaoh when he heard the sighing and crying of his people in Egypt. There is nothing more powerful with a father's heart than the tears of his child; and God heard the prayers of this bad man because "He saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them."

5. (And the LORD gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime.

The Lord gave them deliverance from the cruel fetters of the Syrians. They had been so tormented, so plundered, so oppressed in every way, that God had pity upon them, and gave them peace.

6. Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin, but walked therein: and there remained the grove also in Samaria.)

Israel's repentance was only half-hearted; they repented because they suffered. They repented because of the suffering rather than because of the sin. They went back to the sin after they escaped from the sorrow. Oh, be not so, my hearer! If God has chastened thee on account of sin, let thine be a thorough repentance. Go to God with hatred of thy sin; for until thou dost get rid of sin, thy being rid of sorrow will be a small blessing.

7. Neither did he leave of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing.

God helped them and delivered them; but they were brought very, very low. If God's people sin, their deliverance will cost them dearly. Israel was once a great and powerful nation; their armies went forth in vast hosts; but now they have only the remnant of an army.

8. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

They were not worth writing in the Scriptures. We have very slender records concerning Jehoahaz; but quite enough for such a wicked man.

9-11. *And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria: and Joash his son reigned in his stead. In the thirty and seventh year of Joash king of Judah began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years. And he did that which was evil in, the sight of the LORD;*

One sinner was followed by another. This young man must have seen the mischief that his father's idolatry brought on the people; but he went on in the same evil way. Oh, you sons of godly parents, you ought to follow your fathers' footsteps, for these wicked sons of wicked men followed their fathers' evil example! Oh, that there were an inclination in all the children of the godly to be like their parents, for there is evidently a tendency in the heart of the children of the ungodly to be like their sires!

11. *He departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: but he walked therein.*

I repeat what I said before, what a mischievous thing is one evil example! When a man makes another sin, the other who sins is guilty, and the man who makes him sin is a sharer in his guilt. Here is Jeroboam, dead for years, and yet, he keeps on sinning. I may say of him, "He, being dead, yet sinneth." His sin goes on burning like a fire; and surely the punishment continues if the sin continues. As long as souls exist, sin will exist; you cannot stop it. Sin will repeat itself again and again, and multiply in its repetition spreading among thousands perhaps yet unborn. Oh, what an evil thing is sin! Prove to me that sin ever ceases to operate, and you might give me some thought that the punishment will cease; but that can never be; and, as long as sin continues to poison, God will continue to punish.

12, 13. *And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might wherewith he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Joash slept with, his fathers; and Jeroboam sat upon his throne: and Joash, was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.*

Now, here is a story about this Joash which is preserved to us.

14. *Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died.*

An old man, probably in his ninetieth year; he had served his generation well. We read nothing of him for five and forty years; he seems to have been in comparative seclusion; perhaps in his old age he had been neglected and forgotten, as many a man of God has

been who once stood in the front rank. Elisha has fallen mortally sick at last, and he is about to go home.

14. *And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him,*

This is one good thing that Joash did. He remembered that it was through Elijah and Elisha that the men of his house, the house of Jehu, had been put upon the throne; and when he heard that Elisha was dying, something like compunction crossed his heart, and he “came down unto him.”

14. *And wept over his face,*

As Bishop Hall says, he gave him some drops of warm water; and if a cup of cold water, given to a prophet, shall not be without its reward, so neither shall those tender tears be without their reward.

14. *And said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.*

Elisha must have opened his eyes when he heard those words, for he recollected that those were nearly the last words that he said to Elijah when his master was taken up to heaven. Perhaps the king had heard that; and, with a kind of delicate thoughtfulness, he applied the words to this grand old man, who was now about to die. He was to Israel chariot and horsemen, for it was by his means that Israel had been delivered.

15, 16. *And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it; and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands.*

Not because he could lend much strength, for he was an old man; but because this signified that God would be with the king, that the power which dwelt in the prophet's God would come through the prophet's hands to help the king.

17. *And he said, Open the window eastward.*

They had no glass windows in those days, you know; but they threw back the iron bars that made the shutter, and opened the window eastward.

17. *And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD'S deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them.*

It was usual, in the East, when war was proclaimed, to do it by shooting an arrow towards the enemy's country; and this brave old man, soon about to breathe out his life, had strengthened the king in the great weakness of the Israelitish state to proclaim war once more against Syria.

18. *And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them.*

I suppose, a quiver full.

18. *And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground.*

“Shoot the arrows out of the window, and let them strike into the ground, and stick there.”

18, 19. *And he smote thrice, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him,*

Elisha was angry, but he did not sin. He loved the people, and he was grieved to think that the king was so slack and slothful.

19, 20. *And said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shall smite Syria but thrice. And Elisha died, and they buried him.*

God has different ways of taking his people home. Some go on a sudden, whirled away, as Elijah was. This prophet died gently, worn out with age; but there is something very beautiful about his death. A king weeps over his aged face. He has the pleasure, though it was mingled with pain, of helping to deliver his people; and, after his death, God bore full witness to him.

20, 21. *And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulcher of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.*

Thus God gave Elisha power, even after death, and certainly set the divine seal upon his message. It was as great a glory to him to give life to the dead as it was to Elijah to pass to heaven without dying at all.

22, 23. *But Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant*

Ah, that is what always lies at the bottom of God's mercy, "his covenant." Oh, that grand word "covenant"! Some think very little of it, few preach much about it; but this is the very foundation of mercy. This is "the deep that lieth under", out of which all the wells of grace spring up.

23. With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet.

He would not do it till he was fully driven to it, till provocation upon provocation should wear out his patience,

24, 25. So Hazael king of Syria died; and Benhadad his son reigned in, his stead. And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Benhadad the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel.

He shot three arrows, and now it came to pass that three times did Joash beat Benhadad, and recover the cities of Israel. Oh, that he had beaten the king of Syria six times, and set Israel completely free from its enemy!

2 KINGS 17:23-41

23, 24. So was Israel carried away out of their own hand to Assyria this day. And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.

It was a part of the tactics of the Assyrian empire to take people away from their original location and colonize them in other places — to shift them to another land; so that while the Israelites were taken to Babylon, numbers of those who had lived round about Babylon were brought to live in the Samaritan province, in order that nationalities might thus be broken down and patriotism might expire, thus making it easier for the Assyrian tyrant to govern the land.

25-27. And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them. Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed and placed in

the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land. Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach in the manner of the God of the land.

He did not care one single farthing himself what religion they were of: but if they did not happen to have a religion to suit the country, "Well, then, send one of the priests who used to live there who can teach them what it is." According to his notions, they could take it up just when they liked.

28-31. *Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt. And the men of Babylon made Succothbenoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech the gods of Sepharvaim.*

It would answer no practical purpose if I were to explain the meaning of the names of these various gods. They were some of them of brute forms. Their worship was generally attended with the most lascivious rites, and especially the worship of Molech or Moloch, who is mentioned under two different forms here. He was a god whose worship was consummated with the most dreadful cruelties, for children were passed through the fires and burnt in his honour.

32-38. *So they feared the LORD, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the LORD, and served their own gods after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances or after the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel; with whom the LORD had made a covenant, and charged them, saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them,*

nor serve them nor sacrifice to them; but the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice. And the statues, and the ordinances, and the laws and the commandment, which he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore; and ye shall not fear other gods. And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods.

How this warning comes over and over and over again!" Hear, O Israel. The Lord thy God is one God." The worship of anything else under any pretext whatsoever, besides the one ever-blessed trinity in unity is for ever forbidden to us.

39-41. *But the LORD your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies. Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did their former manner. So these nations feared the LORD and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.*

Trying, as far as ever they could, to link the old idolatries with the worship of the true God, which thing is the most loathsome in the sight of Most High.

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 20:1-17; AND 2 KINGS 17:23-41.

2 KINGS 20:1-7

1. *In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.*

That is to say, in the common course of providence, without a miracle, Hezekiah must have died. God did by no means change when afterwards he permitted him to live. This time he spoke after the order of nature; the next time he spoke according to the extraordinary work of his marvelous power.

2. *Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying,*

What did he do that for? Well, as he could not rise from his bed through weakness he gets the greatest privacy he can, and the God who accepted Carmel as Elijah's prayer-shrine, would accept Hezekiah's prayer when he turned his face to the wall.

3. *I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.*

I do not think this was intended to be a self-righteous prayer, though it reads like one, or else the Lord would not have heard it. He meant to say, "Lord, thou hast been good enough to make me what I am, be pleased to spare me." In fact, the probability is that at this time Sennacherib had not been routed, and Hezekiah could not bear to die whilst the nation was in danger. Certainly there was no son born to Hezekiah at this time, for Manasseh was only twelve years old when he began to reign at his father's death, and Hezekiah thought it would be a sad thing to leave a troubled kingdom without a prince to be his successor. It may be, too, that seeing he had just commenced the reformation, and the casting down of the false gods, he trembled for the cause of God, and could not bear to be so soon taken away. "Hezekiah wept sore." Ah! these are the things that prevail with God, these tears of his people.

"Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye,
When none but God is near."

4-7. *And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying. Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years, and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered.*

This, of course, was not a sufficient means to cure the boil, but God made the means efficacious. Why were the means used? Why, to teach us that we are to expect God's blessing, not in neglecting means, but in using them. See how simple was the remedy — just a thick poultice of figs laid on the wound! Perhaps the physicians had tried expensive medicines without avail. What a mercy it is for us that the good medicine of the gospel is as cheap as it is good, that it is to be had for nothing. While some ransack the world for

expensive ceremonies and for gaudy shows, we have Christ, like the lump of figs, ready to heal the wound and make us strong again. Again I say Hezekiah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed earnestly that his life might be spared, and God delivered him from the jaws of death. Let us, therefore, not be afraid to pray.

1 CHRONICLES

1 CHRONICLES 13.

1-3. *And David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, If it seem good unto you, and that it be of the LORD our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren every where, that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us: and let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we enquired not at it in the days of Saul.*

It had lain neglected at Kirjathjearim, “in the fields of the wood,” as David writes in the 132nd Psalm.

4-5. *And all the congregation said that they would do so: for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people. So David gathered all Israel together, from Shihor of Egypt even unto the entering of Hemath, to bring the ark of God from Kirjathjearim. And David went up, and all Israel, to Baalah, that is, to Kirjathjearim, which belonged to Judah, to bring up thence the ark of God the LORD, that dwelleth between the cherubims, whose name is called on it. And they carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab: and Uzza and Ahio drave the cart. And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets.*

A stately array of all the leaders of the tribes, with all sorts of music, to do honour to the ark of God.

9, 10. *And when they came unto the threshing-floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God.*

I suppose that Uzza, through the ark having been so long in his father's house, had grown unduly familiar with it, and therefore touched it. Yet it was an express law that even the Levites should not lay a hand upon the ark. They carried it with staves; the priests

alone might touch it for necessary purposes. It was for this profanation that Uzza “died before God.”

11, 12. *And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzza; wherefore that place is called Perezuzza to this day. And David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?*

He was afraid lest he also might die.

13. *So David brought not the ark home to himself to the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obedom the Gittite.*

He must have been a brave, believing man, to be willing to receive the terrible ark into his house; but he probably knew that, so long as he behaved reverentially to it, he would have a blessing, and not a curse, through taking it under his charge.

14. *And the ark of God remained with the family of Obedom in his house three months. And the LORD blessed the house of Obedom, and all that he had.*

(This exposition consisted of readings from 1 Chronicles 13., And 15:1-4, 11-16, 25-29.)

1 CHRONICLES 15:1-4, 11-16, 25-29.

1; 2. *And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent. Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God; and to minister unto him for ever.*

It should not be carried upon a new cart, dragged by unwilling oxen but it should be borne upon the cheerful shoulders of the God-appointed bearers, the Levites.

3, 4. *And David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the LORD unto his place, which he had prepared for it. And David assembled the children of Aaron, and the Levites:*

Then follows the list of them, which we need not now read.

11-13. *And David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites, for Uriel, Asaiah, and Joel, Shemaiah, and Eliel, and Amminadab, and said unto them, Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord*

our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order.

They had sought him, but they had not done it “after the due order.” They had been in too great a hurry; and they had followed their own notions, instead of looking to the written law wherein everything was prescribed for them.

14-16. *So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the LORD. And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy.*

Before, there had been a great medley of musical instruments, but little singing, and there had not been a proper choice as to the persons who were to sing; but, now, this service was put into the right hands. Then follows a list of the singers and the players upon the various kinds of instruments that went forth to bear the ark. Let us pass on to the 25th verse.

25, 26. *So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the house of Obededom with joy. And it came to pass, when God helped the Levites. —*

For, though the ark was by no means a great load, yet they must have felt some measure of alarm at the very idea of going near to it; but when God strengthened them, they took up their burden with delight: “When God helped the Levites” —

26. *That bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams.*

There is no mention of any sacrifice on the precious occasion. If there had been a proper offering of beasts unto the Lord, there might not have been the death of Uzza; but, now, they do everything in the right order, and the sacrificial blood is sprinkled; without that, there is no acceptance before God.

27, 28. *And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song with the singers: David also had upon him an ephod of linen. Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of*

the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the cornet and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps.

David himself, while playing on his harp, leaping and dancing through the intensity of joy which filled his soul.

29. *And it came to pass, as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came to the city of David, that Michal the daughter of Saul looking out at a window saw king David dancing and playing: and she despised him in her heart.*

So have I known it, when a rich person has been converted, and has been found, in the first hush of his Christian joy, mixing with the poorest of the brethren full of delight, and somebody of his own rank has sneered at him. Yet Michal was less honourable than David, though she thought so much of herself. God forbid that we should ever blush to manifest enthusiasm even with the poorest of God's saints while we are glorifying the Lord! Let Michal sneer, if she will, it matters little what she does. We will only reply as David did, "I will yet be more vile than thus."

1 CHRONICLES 21:1-8.

1. *And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.*

Israel had greatly offended and grieved God, and it was to be punished. God punished one sin by another: the sin of David works for the chastisement of a sinful people.

2. *And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it.*

He had got proud, he had begun to depend upon the number of his people. In truth, it was a large population under his sway, five millions or more, and he, that had been a shepherd lad, that in his early youth had trusted in his God, now thinking himself a great man, somewhat in the spirit of Nebuchadnezzar, begins to say, "Behold, this great kingdom that I have gathered and founded."

3. *And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord, the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?*

It adds greatly to a wrong action if we are checked in it, and especially if we are checked in it by a man who has not any conscience to spare, but yet, notwithstanding his roughness, such as Joab had, nevertheless expostulates with you, “why do this?” The people generally understood that, when they were numbered, it was with a view to taxing them, it was with a view of showing David’s sovereignty over them. Now David was not their sovereign, the Lord God was their King; David was but the Viceroy, and when he began to count them as though they were his own, it was a source of great indignation to the most High. I am afraid when you and I begin to count up as we have done, begin to reckon upon how much we have given, or how much we have effected for God, we begin to appropriate a measure of glory to ourselves. We had better leave that alone, for although pride may not seem a great sin in the eye of men, it is assuredly that which bringeth the utmost wrath from the most High. He cannot endure pride, especially in those whom He has lifted up. He took David from the sheepfold, and if David has now become great, David must be brought down again.

4-6. Nevertheless the king’s word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all they of Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword; and Judah was four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword. But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king’s word was abominable to Joab.

So he did no more of it than he could possibly help.

7, 8. And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel. And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

We read that David’s heart smote him. Although he had gone wrong, he was nevertheless a good man, and when an ambitious man sins it is a great sin, but it is not long that he continues in it: his conscience is awakened; the Spirit of God is in him. David’s heart smote him. That is a terrible blow when your own heart smites you; if you never feel any other person smiting you, you will feel that.

1 CHRONICLES 21:7-30.

7. *And God was displeased with this thing;*

This numbering of Israel, which David had carried out in spite of Joab's protest: "God was displeased with this thing:" —

7-15. Therefore he smote Israel. And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. And the LORD spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying, GO and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things: choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man. So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men. And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand.

See the power of the mercy of God; even when the angel has drawn his sword, and is already executing the Lord's just judgments, God's mercy interposes, and holds back the blade of death. Should we not love the Lord for his great longsuffering toward us? "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."

15, 16. *And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.*

This was the very best clothing and the very best posture for men who were under the chastising hand of God; they had put on

sackcloth, and they had fallen upon their faces. O guilty sinner, if God's sword of vengeance is drawn against you, you cannot do better than put sackcloth upon your soul, if not upon your body, and prostrate yourself before the Most High.

17. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed, but as for those sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

Here we see David at his best; and what a true patriot he is! He interposes himself, willing rather that he should be destroyed than that the people should die. This was the spirit of Moses when he said to the Lord, "If thou wilt forgive their sin — — ; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." And this was the spirit of Paul, when he wrote, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." There are times when our great love for others will overflow all bounds of moderation, when we shall say, and say from our hearts, what we should not have dared to utter in cooler moments.

18-27. Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up as altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD. And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat. And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground. Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build as altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all. And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight. And David built there an altar

unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD, and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.

See what was done by David's intercession and sacrifice; and remember that there is a greater David who, with a richer sacrifice and mightier intercession, sheathes the sword of God, so that his people are spared.

28-30. *At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon. But David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.*

(This exposition consisted of readings from 1 Chronicles 21:7-30: And 22.)

1 CHRONICLES 21:9-30.

9-11. *And the LORD spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying, Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things: choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee—*

One of them, that I may do it unto thee. David was to choose where there was no choice, for everything proposed to him seemed to be equally bitter.

12, 13. *Either three years famine, or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee, or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand the LORD; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man.*

It shows how he was broken down. David's proud heart was humbled, he was entirely submissive to the will of God, he wished to fall into the hands of the Lord.

14, 15. *So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men. And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld,--*

It is a very beautiful word,-the Lord looked steadfastly on what was being done.

15. *And he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.*

One of the old inhabitants of the land, who had escaped destruction, and had his possession on the top of Mount Morah.

16, 17. *And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? Even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.*

Here the great heart of the man who had sinned comes out again: he is no tyrant after all, he is a worthy man to be the Viceroy of the Most High. He has the same spirit that Moses had, when he cried, "If not, blot my name out of the Book of Life." He offers himself, not the innocent for the guilty, but, indeed, the guilty for the guilty; as far as he can, he will bear the consequences of his sin.

18-20. *Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD. And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel;*

He was busy at his threshing, and he saw the angel standing by his own threshingfloor.

20. *And his four sons with him hid themselves.*

There are great caverns hard by the spot, and, no doubt, they ran into one of them.

20-23. *Now Ornan was threshing wheat. And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the*

ground. Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: Lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.

And as we are told in the other narrative, as a king giveth to a king, so did Araunah unto David. Probably he had been a king, and David had dispossessed him in his conquest of Jebus, but now he proves that he had a royal heart, and he offers to give all to King David.

24,25. *And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will no take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.*

Not paid there and then, for he did not carry that amount with him, but fifty shekels of silver were paid that moment to bind their bargain, according to the narrative in the 2nd Book of Samuel.

26, 27. *And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.*

That God had already done in his own intent and purpose, now he does it actually, just as before Jesus Christ, our great sacrifice, was offered. God, in the eternal purpose, had stayed the sword of vengeance from his redeemed people, and then actually did it when Christ their sacrifice was presented.

28-30. *At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon. But David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.*

1 CHRONICLES 21:25-30.

David was commanded to go to Ornan, or Araunah, the Jebusite, to rear an altar unto the Lord in his threshingfloor. There had been a terrible plague in Jerusalem, in consequence of David's great sin in numbering the people; and they were falling in thousands by the sword of the angel of vengeance David went up to the threshingfloor or Ornan on Mount Moriah. Ornan was willing to give it to him, but he determined to buy it. We read in the twenty-fifth verse; —

25-28. *So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight. And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof. At that time when David saw that the LORD has answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there.*

There was the place for the temple, where the angel sheathed his sword. Christ Jesus, in his great atonement, is the corner-stone of the temple where divine justice sheathes its sword. There let the house of God be built. Every true Church of God is founded on the glorious doctrine of the atoning sacrifice. It was a threshingfloor, too; and God has built his Church on a threshingfloor. Depend upon it, the flail will always be going in every true Church, to fetch out the wheat from the chaff. We must have tribulation if we are in the Church of God. The threshingfloor will always be needed until we are taken up to the heavenly garner above.

29:30. *For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place of Gibeon. But David could not go before it to inquire of God; for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.*

(This exposition consisted of readings from 1 Chronicles 21:25-30; And 22.)

1 CHRONICLES 22.

1 *Then David said, This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel.*

Now he knew where the temple was to be built; and of a certainty he had discovered that long-predestined site of which God

said, "Here will I dwell." This was the very hill whereon Abraham offered up his son Isaac; a hill, therefore, most sacred by covenant to the living God. He delighted to remember the believing obedience of his servant Abraham, and there he would have his temple built.

2. And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel; and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God.

Observe here a very gracious eye to us who are Gentiles. The temple was built on the threshingfloor of a Jebusite; Ornan was not of the seed of Israel, but one of the accursed Jebusites. It was his land that must be bought for the temple; and now David would employ the strangers who lived in the midst of Israel, but were not of the chosen race, to quarry the stones for the house of God. There was a place for Gentiles in the heart of God, and they had a share in the building of his temple.

4. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight; also cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar wood to David.

Here are the Gentiles again, the Zidonians and the men of Tyre; those that went down to the sea in ships, that had no part nor lot with Israel. They were to bring the cedar wood to David. What an opening of doors of hope there was for poor castaway Gentiles in that fact!

5. And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the LORD must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it.

This was beautiful and thoughtful on David's part. It might be too great a strain upon the young man to collect the materials for the temple as well as to build it; therefore David will take his part, and prepare the materials for the house of the Lord. If we cannot do one thing, let us do another; but, somehow, let us help in the building of the Church of God.

The Church today seems but a poor thing; but it is to be "exceeding magnificent." The glory of the world is to be the Church of God; and the glory of the Church of God is the Christ of God. Let

us do as much as we can to build a spiritual house for our Lord's indwelling.

5-7. So David prepared abundantly before his death. Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the LORD God of Israel. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God:

And it was well that it was in his mind. God often takes the will for the deed. If you have a large-hearted purpose in your mind, cherish it, and do your best to carry it out: but if for some reason you should never be permitted to carry out your own ideal, it shall be equally acceptable to God, for it was in your heart.

8. But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.

In very much of that fighting David had been faultless; for he fought the battles of the people of God. Still, there are some things that men are called to do, for which they are not to be condemned; but they disqualify them for higher work. It was so in David's case; he had been a soldier, and he might help to build the temple by collecting the materials for it, but he must not build it.

9. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest;

God's Church is to be a place of rest. God's temple was built by "a man of rest."

9. And I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days.

Then the house of the Lord would be built; no stain of blood would be upon it. The only blood therein should be that of holy sacrifices, symbolical of the great Sacrifice of Christ.

10, 11. He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever. Now, my son, the LORD be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of the LORD thy God, as he hath said of thee.

May such a blessing come upon every young man here! May the Lord be with thee, my son! May the Lord prosper thee, and may he make thee a builder of his house in years to come!

12. *Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God.*

How much wisdom will be wanted by the young brethren present who hope to be builders of the house of God! When the Lord says to you, “Ask what I shall give you,” ask for divine wisdom, ask to be taught of him, and ask that you may have grace to do his will in all things.

13. *Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfill the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses and concerning Israel: be strong and of good courage; dread not, nor be dismayed.*

It is a great thing for a Christian to keep his courage up; and especially for a builder of the Church of God to be always brave, and with a stout heart to do God’s will, come what may.

14. *Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD an hundred thousand talents of Gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto.*

We are unable to tell exactly the amount of precious metal prepared by David; we have to take into account the value of gold and silver in his day; it was probably not so great as it is now. We know this much; it was an enormous sum which David had gathered for the building of the house of God.

15. *Moreover there are workmen with thee in abundance.*

We must have the workmen; they are more precious than the gold. They cannot be put down at any sum of silver: “there are workmen with thee in abundance.”

15. *Hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work.*

God will find for his Church enough men, and the right sort of men, as long as he has a Church to be built; but he would have us pray him to send forth labourers. We forget that prayer, and hence we have to lament that there are so few faithful servants of God. Cry

to the Lord about the lack of labourers; he can soon supply as many as are needed.

16. *Of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron, there is no number. Arise therefore, and be doing, and the LORD be with thee.*

A very nice text for stirring up idle church-members, who are well content with being spiritually fed, but who are doing nothing for the Lord: “Arise therefore, and be doing, and the LORD be with thee!”

17, 18. *David also commanded all the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son, saying, Is not the LORD your God with you?*

What a good reason for working! What an admirable reason for giving! What an excellent reason for helping with the work! “Is not the LORD your God with you?”

18. *And hath he not given you rest on every side?*

If he gives you rest, you are to take no rest, but to get to his work. He is the best workman for God who enjoys perfect rest. It is always a pity to go out to preach or teach unless you have perfect rest towards God. When your own heart is quiet, and your spirit is still, then you can work for God with good hope of success.

18. *For he hath given the inhabitants of the land into mine hand; and the land is subdued before the LORD, and before his people.*

The fighting is over; now go ahead with your building.

19. *Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God;*

Do not go to build a house for God, and think that is all that is required. You want spiritual communion with God; and you will not do even the common work of sawing and planning and building aright unless you seek God, and are in fellowship with him.

19. *Arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD.*

May God teach us some lessons by this reading! Amen.

(This exposition consisted of readings from 1 Chronicles 21:25-30; And 22.)

1 CHRONICLES 22.

May the Lord instruct us while we read. Perhaps We shall understand it better if we begin in the 21st chapter at the 26th verse.

26, 27. *And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.*

“And David built there” — that is upon the threshing-floor of Ornan. The place of sacrifice was the place of salvation. The angel was smiting Jerusalem, but as soon as the sacrifice was offered the angel sheathed his sword.

28. *At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there.*

Then came a sacrifice of thanksgiving, as there always should be after prayer is answered. Remember how the Psalmist puts it, “Then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar” — after the sin is pardoned and the transgression is put away.

29, 30 and 1 Chronicles 22:1. *For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon. But David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD. Then David said, This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel.*

The place where God had answered him, where the angel had appeared to him, where the fire had come down from heaven, he felt to be holiest, and that the Lord had directed him to it as the spot where his temple was to be built. It is very significant that it should be upon a threshing-floor, for surely the Church of God is God’s threshing-floor, where he gathereth his sheaves together, and separates between the wheat and the chaff. “I will winnow,” saith he, “my threshing-floor.” Oh! that we might ever recognize that Christ is the temple of God, and Christ is the sacrifice; Christ is the appearance of God that is better to us than the appearance of angels, and Christ is God’s answer to us by fire, and where Christ is, there is the burnt-offering.

2. *And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel; and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God.*

It is very observable, not the Israelites, but the foreigners, the aliens, the strangers, the remaining Canaanites that were in the land, were set to hew the stones for the house of the Lord. I have heard very good people indeed object to the ungodly giving any money whatever to God's cause. This is all against it; here are the aliens employed to hew the stones for the house of God, and why should not they? It will do them good, at least, to do some good thing or other in their lives. Let them have an opportunity so to do. But I see here an indication of the calling of the Gentiles, for whenever the Jews said the Gentiles had nothing to do with God, why the very stones of their temple spoke against them. Were not the timbers brought from Tyro by the Tyrians along in floats? Were not the stones quarried by aliens and foreigners? Oh! the Lord would have his people follow a large, and liberal, and prophetic policy in their dealing with mankind. God forbid that we should shut anybody out from anything that looks like good. Oh! let us not repel them; it may be that in repelling their offerings we may be hardening their hearts. David was a wiser man than that.

3, 4. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight; Also cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar wood to David.

Here, again, was a kind of prophecy of what would happen in better days, when the poor Gentiles should be permitted to have a share in the building of the house of God. These Tyrians and Zidonians were amongst the worst of idolaters, and yet they were used in their due place and subservience to hew the trees and float them to the temple, as near as they could get by sea to Joppa.

5. And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the LORD must be exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it.

There is no way of helping young people to serve God like setting them a good example. Let the father feel, with regard to his son, that he is young and tender; he may not be able to begin, but if I begin, I shall get him in the mode of doing such things, and maybe he may carry out my design when I am sleeping in the grave. It was well, it was wise, it was splendid of David thus to make all

preparations that Solomon might afterwards go on with the good work.

5. *So David prepared abundantly before his death.*

If you cannot do everything yourself — and who can? — is it not well to prepare abundantly before our death for somebody else to go on with the work? Thus shall we live after we are dead — live in our sons, if God be so good to us, live in our grandchildren, who knows? — live in someone we were the means of bringing to the Saviour's feet by our ministry. Then he called to Solomon, his son. He had prepared everything, and now he speaks to him, and he charged him to build a house for Jehovah, the God of Israel.

6-8. *Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the LORD God of Israel. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God: But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.*

It was not an allusion to Uriah's blood, as some have thought, for God said this to David long before David's great sin. The wars in which David was engaged were honest wars for the defense and deliverance of the country, in which God had helped him, and yet even the best war is bad in God's esteem. When blood is shed, God delights not in it; and he sets his servant on one side without blaming him, and says, "No: a bloody hand is not fit for the building of my temple. Thou hast been called in the order of Providence to be a warrior and a conqueror; thou must be content with that; thou canst not build the temple to the God of Peace."

9. *Behold a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest.*

That is a very sweet name for Solomon, "A man of rest." I pray that many a believer here may be a man of that kind. Some believers have to be men of war. There they are, in a world of struggles, disputes, contentions, of their own ambitions — but happy is that man who is of a gentle and a tender spirit, a spirit of holy wisdom, and whom God gives the great privilege to be a man of peace.

9, 10. *And I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build an house for my name and he shall*

be my son, and I will be his father; and I will established the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever.

What a sweet benediction from an aged man's mouth.

11-13. *Now, my son, the LORD be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of the LORD thy God, as he hath said of thee. Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God. Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfill the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses with concerning Israel: be strong, and of good courage; dread not, nor be dismayed.*

This was addressed to a young man and tender by an old man who had displayed much courage. They who have been courageous themselves can safely encourage others to be so. God make us all in every good cause to be free from fear. Like Bernard, the knight, may we be "without fear, and without reproach," ever contending for God and his truth.

14. *Now behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD an hundred thousand talents of gold,*

Whatever sum that may have been, it could hardly have been a Babylonian talent, because that would have made him to have laid up one thousand millions sterling.

14. *And a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto.*

A capital text for a collection, whenever there has been a good sum given already, "Thou mayest add thereto." Next Sunday week we collect for the hospitals. Thou mayest add to the gold if thou canst; thou mayest add to the silver if thou canst; thou mayest add to the copper if thou canst not add to the silver or the gold.

15. *Moreover there are workmen with thee in abundance,*

David had foreseen all that was wanted, and had got a list of the men of skill and art throughout all his land.

15. *Hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work.*

You remember that text, "The Lord showed me four carpenters," and so when the Lord wants carpenters there will be carpenters. Whatever kind of men he requires for his service, that kind of men

shall be forthcoming in the day of need — “All manner of cunning men for every manner of work.”

16. *Of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron, there is no number. Arise, therefore and be doing, and the LORD be with thee.*

That is his word to Solomon.

17. *David also commanded all the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son, saying,*

What a grand thing it is when a man has true-hearted helpers, men who are ready to stint themselves, annihilate themselves, as it were, to help some other man to do the work of the Lord, quite satisfied to be themselves unknown, so long as the house of the Lord is built, and God’s name is glorified!

18. *Is not the LORD your God with you? and hath he not given you rest on every side? for he hath given the inhabitants of the land into mine hand; and the land is subdued before the LORD, and before his people.*

So then they had not to fight, but to work. If Jesus Christ has conquered all our foes, and routed all our sins; if sin, and death, and hell lie prostrate at his feet, what can we do but devote our rest and peace to his service?

19. *Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD.*

1 CHRONICLES 22.

1. *Then David said, This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel.*

From that moment, this place was set apart as the site of the future temple, and the center of the hopes of the people of God, and, dear friend, what better site could have been selected than the spot where the angel sheathed his sword, where prayer was heard, and where sacrifice was accepted? And now, today, you and I have only one temple, and that temple is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Well-beloved, for in him the sword is sheathed, in him the sacrifice is accepted, and in him intercession still prevails.

2-4. *And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings and brass in abundance without weight; also cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar wood to David.*

See, a great deliverance brings a great offering. Because God has bidden the angel sheath his sword, there is to be a temple commenced, and David is busy preparing for it. O you who have been saved from death and hell, what can you render unto God for all his benefits toward you?

5. *And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the LORD must be exceedingly magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death.*

If he might not build the temple, he would at least gather the materials for it. So, let us try to do all we can in the cause of God. There is said to have been a king, who felt so grateful to God for some special favor, that he determined to build a great temple, and pay for it all himself; no one was to help at all in it. One night, in his dreams, he was told that the honour of building that temple would not belong to him as he desired, and he thought within himself, "To whom then can it be, for I have not allowed any person to work for me without full wage, and I have done it all?" At last, he discovered that there was a poor woman in his kingdom, who also loved his God, and not daring to help in the temple building, she had brought little handfuls of hay to give to the horse that had dragged the stones, so hers was to be the greater honour. If you may not do all you would, do all you can; for God will accept it of you if it be rendered by a willing mind and a loving heart.

6-9. *Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the LORD GOD of Israel. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God; but the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. Behold, a son*

shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, —

That is, peaceful, or peaceable, —

9-14. *And I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his Kingdom over Israel for ever. Now, my son, the LORD be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of the LORD thy God, as he hast said of thee. Only the LORD give thee wisdom, and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God. Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfil the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses with concerning Israel: be strong, and of good courage; dread not, nor be dismayed. Now, behold in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver, and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto.*

At the very lowest calculation, David had laid up eighteen millions of money for the building of this house for the Lord. It was an enormous sum, and he must have been long in saving it, yet he gives Solomon leave to increase it: “Thou mayest add thereto.” I like that way of putting the matter; and when some of you see good help rendered to the cause of God by others who are able to do more than you can, do not therefore say, “I need not give anything,” but remember what David said to Solomon, “Thou mayest add thereto.” There is room in the treasury of God for your mite as well as David’s millions.

15. *Moreover there are workmen with thee in abundance, hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work.*

God will always find the right man in time for his own work, in his Church there are “all manner of cunning men for every manner of work.”

16-19. *Of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron, there is no number. Arise therefore, and be doing, and the LORD be with thee. David also commanded all the princes of Israel to help*

Solomon his son, saying, Is not the LORD your God with you? and hath he not given you rest on every side? for he hath given the inhabitants of the land into mine land, and the land is subdued before the LORD, and before his people. Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God, arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD.

(This exposition consisted of readings from 1 CHRONICLES 21:7-30: And 22.)

1 CHRONICLES 28.

1. *And David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that ministered to the king by course, and the captains over the thousands, and captains over the hundreds, and the stewards ever all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons, with the officers, and with the mighty men, and with all the valiant men, unto Jerusalem.*

David, in his old age, and soon to die, summoned a great representative assembly of the notables of his kingdom.

2. *Then David the king stood up upon his feet,*

He was ill, and obliged to keep his bed; but, he left his couch for this solemn occasion. He did not even remain seated, although extremely weak; but he stood up upon his feet.

2. *And said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people:*

Those who read carefully will notice the sweetness of David's style now that he is about to die. It was after the great sin of his life, and after he and his subjects had suffered because of his numbering the people, that he calls the men before him "my brethren." He had sometimes spoken of them as his servants; but now he adopts a very humble style, and putting himself on a level with them, he says to them, "Hear me, my brethren, and my people."

2, 3. *As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: but God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.*

Admire the frankness of David in telling the people what God had said to him. There is no other biography in the world like the

Bible, for it tells the faults and follies of those whose history it records. David was a man after God's own heart; yet, as he had been used as a sword, for the defense of God's people, and the destruction of their enemies, he could not be permitted to build the temple. He frankly tells the people all that God had said; it would not reflect any honour upon himself, but it was true, and therefore he kept nothing back. One falls in love with David for the frankness of his utterance. When a king, and an aged man, and just about to die, he tells the people all this story.

4. Howbeit the LORD God of Israel chose me before all the house of my father to be king over Israel for ever: for he hath chosen Judah to be the ruler; and of the house of Judah, the house of my father; and among the sons of my father he liked me to make me king over all Israel:

He delights to dwell upon the election of God. It was not by the right of primogeniture that he was chosen king; it was by the will and good pleasure of God. Judah was one of the younger tribes, and yet it was made the royal tribe. In Judah, the house of Jesse was of no great importance; yet God chose it as the royal family; and in the household of Jesse, David was the youngest, yet the Lord "liked" him, and chose him to be king over all Israel.

5. And of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel.

David seems to harp upon this sweet string of the divine choice. I wonder that so many good people are afraid of this blessed doctrine. They fight shy of it; they seem to run away at the very sound of the word "election." Yet is it the very joy of saints. God hath chosen them, and ordained them to be his servants.

6-8. And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chose him to be my son, and I will be his father. Moreover I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandments and my judgments, as at this day. Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the LORD, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the LORD your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever.

Thus he talked with the great number of the nobility and chief men of his kingdom who were gathered round him.

9. And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father,

God is very dear to us; but perhaps under no aspect is he more tenderly near us than as the God of our father: "My son, know thou the God of thy father."

9. And serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he wilt be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

What a covenant this was under which Solomon stood! Alas! he was not as true to God as he should have been; and though we hope he was not east away for ever, yet under his rule Israel began to decay, and he pierced himself through with many sorrows in his latter days.

10. Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it.

It is fine to hear this old man, in his weakness, stirring up the young man. We generally expect to see the youths full of zeal, and the old men somewhat slow; but grace can turn the tables against nature. Here the old man, feeble as to his body, is vigorous as to his spirit.

11. Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy seat,

He had it all ready in his mind; and before he died, he passed over the plans of that wonderful piece of architecture to his son Solomon.

12, 13. And the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, and of all the chambers round about, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries of the dedicated things: also for the courses of the priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and for all the vessels of service in the house of the LORD.

Everything was laid down, catalogued, and arranged so that Solomon had only to follow the plans given to him by his father, and all would be right. Think of the love of David to his God.

Though he might not build the temple, he would draw the plans for it; and though he might not live to see it completed, yet he would, in his own mind, arrange all the courses of the priests and the Levites, and every detail, even to the placing of the vessels of service in the courts of the Lord's house.

14, 15. *He gave of gold by weight for things of gold, for all instruments of all manner of service; silver also for all instruments of silver by weight, for all instruments of every kind of service: even the weight for the candlestick of gold,*

Or, the candelabra.

15. *And for their lamps of gold, by weight for every candlestick, and for the lamps thereof: and for the candlesticks of silver by weight, both for the candlestick, and also for the lamps thereof, according to the use of every candlestick.*

They were not for the burning of candles, but for oil lamps. There was a Lamp-stand, with seven lamps upon the stand; and there were ten of these in the temple. There was only one in the tabernacle; but there were ten in the temple. David arranged everything.

Those seven-branched golden candlesticks stood like pastors of the church; and the little silver candlesticks were carried about like evangelists, who go from place to place that the whole house of God may be served with light. Everything was by weight. God knows what he would have in his house, and he measures out to each one according to his need.

16, 17. *And by weight he gave gold for the tables of shewbread, for every table; and likewise silver for the tables of silver: also pure gold for the flesh-hooks, and the bowls, and the cups: and for the golden basons he gave gold by weight for every bason; and likewise silver by weight for every bason of silver:*

I like to think of David planning all these little things, first receiving instruction from God, then waiting upon God for further direction, and thinking not only about the great golden candelabra, but about the silver candlesticks, and the flesh-hooks, and the howls, and the cups, and the basons. They who love God love everything that has to do with him; they have a holy concern even for the smaller matters pertaining to the house of the Lord.

18-20. *And for the altar of incense refined gold by weight; and gold for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubims, that spread out their wings, and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD. All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern. And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it:*

Do not talk about it; do not sit down, and dream over the plans, and think how admirable they are, and then roll them up; but, “Be strong and of good courage, and do it.”

20. *Fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee;*

What a pretty touch that is! “The LORD God, even my God, will be with thee.”

20. *He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.*

Therefore, be of good courage, you that are working for God, for he will not fail you, nor forsake you, until you have finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord.

21. *And, behold, the courses of the priests and the Levites, even they shall be with thee for all the service of the house of God: and there shall be with thee for all manner of workmanship every willing skillful man, for any manner of service!*

God always finds men for his work. We sometimes see a lot of cowards run away, and we say to ourselves, “What will happen now?” Why, God will find better men than they are! And when there seems to be a paucity of really valiant men in Israel, God has them in training; and that awkward squad out there will yet become a band of brave men for the service of the house of God.

21. *Also the princes and all the people will be wholly at thy commandment.*

Thus the grand old man finished up his life by starting another to carry on the work which he was obliged to leave.

2 CHRONICLES

2 CHRONICLES 11:1-17

Let us read, for our instruction, part of the story of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon.

1-4. *And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam. But the word of the LORD came to Sheniuiah the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: for this thing is done of me. And they obeyed the words of the LORD, and returned from going against Jeroboam.*

So far, so good. There was some degree of the fear of God in the minds of men when, at the bidding of a single prophet, a king would disband his troops, and cease from war.

5-15. *And Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defense in Judah. He built even Bethlehem, and Etam, and Tekoa, and Bethzur, and Shoco, and Adullam, and Gath, and Mareshah, and Ziph, and Adoraim, and Lachish, and Azekah, and Zorah, and Aijalon, and Hebron, which are in Judah and in Benjamin fenced cities. And he fortified the strong holds, and put captains in them, and store of victual, and of oil and wine. And in every several city he put shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side. And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts. For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the LORD; and he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made.*

No wonder, therefore, that Rehoboam's kingdom was strengthened by the advent of these men, who were, doubtless, the

best men in the whole country, men who feared the Lord,-men who knew the law, and who knew how to teach the people what they should do.

16. *And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers.*

“Birds of a feather flock together,” so those in Israel who feared the Lord went where their ministers had gone; this movement would bring about an emigration of some of the best of the population, to reside near to the sacred shrine where Jehovah was worshipped; and it must have tended still further to the strengthening of Rehoboam’s little kingdom.

17. *So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three year: for three year they walked in the way of David and Solomon.*

That was well while it lasted; but, alas! it did not continue long.

This exposition consisted of readings from 2 CHRONICLES 11:1-17; 12.

2 CHRONICLES 12

1. *And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him.*

They prospered, at first, by adhering to Jehovah. The good people out of the neighbouring land of Israel emigrated to them, strengthening them but, as soon as they grew strong, they forsook the law of Jehovah.

2. *And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD,*

Shishak did not know that fact, nor did he care about Jehovah. God so ruled in providence that, when his people cast him off, he soon found a rod with which to chasten them. The king of Egypt determined to conquer them. You do not know, my friends, how God will smite you; but if you err from his statutes, he will never be long without a rod. You will bring chastisement on yourself if you depart from the living God. You will have yourself to blame if some dire affliction happens to you.

3. *With twelve hundred chariots, and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians.*

This vast crowd ate up everything. The rule was to quarter on the enemy.

They would devour every eatable thing throughout the whole country.

4. *And he took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem.*

When God means to chasten a people, he does not take long to do it neither can their weakened strength successfully oppose their enemy.

5. *Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak.*

The prophet gave them no invitation to repentance; but just an explanation of the sorrow which had come upon them.

6. *Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The LORD is righteous.*

That was well done. They had not yet become so confirmed in their rebellion as to reject the prophet of God, and to turn in willful, wanton, resolute disobedience against him.

7. *And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves,*

Though it was not in a spiritual way, yet

7. *The word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves: therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak.*

He shall not storm the city; he shall not destroy it.

8. *Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.*

The Lord's people were to know the difference between the service of God and the service of the kings of the countries round about them. It would be a very sharp contrast, and a very bitter one.

9. *So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD,*

The temple was always very rich. Shishak came and stripped it. Everything there that was really valuable was taken away.

9. And the treasures of the king's house; he took all: He could not very well take any more.

That is generally the way with the devil. God is satisfied with tithes; but Shishak and Satan take all.

9-11. He carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made. Instead of which king Rehoboam, made shields of brass, and committed them, to of the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king's house. And when the king entered into the house of the LORD, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them again into the guard chamber.

That was a come-down indeed, from shield's of gold to shields of copper; that is, I suppose, what is meant here by the brass. This is what the king suffered at the hands of Shishak; and it was an emblem of the condition of his people. The golden kingdom had become a brazen one.

12. And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, that he would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well.

Or, some behaved well. Even a measure of humiliation is acceptable with God; and though he did not save the nation from being plundered, yet he did rescue it from being altogether smitten. Alas for Rehoboam, he did a bad day's work when he turned away from God!

13, 14. So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned: for Rehoboam, was one and forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD.

He was one of that fickle sort, neither here nor there; a compromising gentleman, not very definite in anything; he would go right if he were driven that way, and he would go wrong if he were led in that direction. Oh, how many there are who never prepare their hearts to seek the Lord! They are not determinately bad; they have not enough backbone in them to be leaders in evil;

but they are never good for much, because they have never made up their minds to do the right at all costs; they have never had their heart prepared by the Holy Spirit to seek the Lord.

15, 16. *Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies? And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David: and Abijah his son reigned in his stead.*

So they pass away. One generation dies, and another follows. God grant that, when we fall asleep, it may not be with the sin of Rehoboam lying upon us, neither may we be succeeded by evil sons; but may we serve God in our day, and be followed by those who shall serve him still better! The Lord grant it! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 KINGS 14:21-24 AND 2 CHRONICLES 12.

2 CHRONICLES 12

1. *And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him.*

He was not able to endure the perils of prosperity. He forgot the Lord who had caused him to prosper; and, in the pride of his heart, he turned aside to idols.

2. *And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD,*

That was not Shishak's reason for coming up against Jerusalem. He had heard of the riches of Solomon; and doubtless, he came for the sake of the spoil which the palace and the temple would yield to him. But God often overrules, for the accomplishment of his own purposes, the lower motives of men. "I girded thee," said he of Cyrus, "though thou hast not known me." So did he gird Shishak for the chastisement of Israel, though Shishak knew him not.

3, 4. *With twelve hundred chariots, and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians. And he*

took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem.

How vain is man when he boasts in the strength of his fortifications! These fenced cities fell at once, like houses built of cards, before the power of the mighty king of Egypt, and the vast hordes that accompanied him. Rehoboam had spent his strength in making these defenses, but how soon they were proved to be worthless. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is;" but "cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord."

5, 6. Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak. Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The LORD is righteous.

Now, that is the very essence of true humility, the acknowledgment that God is righteous in whatever punishment he brings upon us on account of our sin. It is a very short sentence, but there is a great fullness of meaning in it: "Jehovah is righteous."

7, 8. And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.

That is a very instructive expression. I believe that, when God's people go astray from him, he sometimes allows them to fall into great bondage, in order that they may realize the difference between his happy service and the servitude in which they may be held by any other lord. All masters, to whom we surrender our minds and hearts, will turn out to be tyrants, except the blessed Prince of peace. His yoke is easy, and his burden is light; but all other yokes gall the shoulders sooner or later; and God has sometimes made his wandering people feel this so bitterly that they have longed to get back again to the service of their God.

9. *So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made.*

He did not plunder the people; he was contented with the loot of the temple and the palace. These were comparatively easy terms for the conquered nation, and one wonders how such a powerful king as Shishak should have been thus satisfied in those days; but God has the hearts of all men under his control, and even when he lets a powerful foe go forth against his people, he still restrains him when he pleases. What a mercy it is for us that, when God chastens us, there is an end to it! It is always in measure, he does not let loose the fullness and the fierceness of his wrath, as he will upon the castaways in eternity; but when he lays his rod upon us, he counts every stripe. Forty stripes save one was all that an Israelite might have to endure; and, surely, God often stops far short of that number when he deals with us. However, Shishak humiliated the king and his people by taking away the treasures of the temple and the palace; and, among the rest of his plunder, "he carried away the shields of gold, which Solomon had made."

10-12. *Instead of which king Rehoboam made shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king's house. And when the king entered into the house of the LORD, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them again into the guard chamber. And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, that he would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well.*

Or, rather, "things in Judah even went well." There was comparative prosperity; they were not altogether prosperous, for they were not altogether right with God; but there was a sufficient proportion of godly men, the Puritanic party, the Evangelical party, was strong enough in the land, for God still to look upon it with favor, yet not unmixed with disapprobation; for the party that worshipped idols, the party composed of the superstitious, the party belonging to the world was still very strong.

13-15. *So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned: for Rehoboam was one and forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his*

name there. And his mothers name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD. Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies?

Where are those books now? It is of no consequence whatever where they are. There are a great many other books that have perished because they were not inspired. They were books of genealogies, valuable in their day; but if they had been of any use to us spiritually, they would have been preserved. Now, as other ancient books have evidently been lost, let us devoutly bless God that the inspired Books have been preserved to us. By what a continuous miracle of Providence, every inspired letter has been continued in existence, it would be hard to tell; but we ought constantly to praise the Lord that, out of the Book of this prophecy, not a line has been removed.

15, 16. *And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David: and Abijah his son reigned in his stead.*

This exposition consisted of readings from 2 CHRONICLES 11:1-17; 12.

2 CHRONICLES 20:1-30

1-3. *It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.*

An angry God is to be sought. Even though he smite us, we must turn to him. It is from the hand that wields the rod that we are to expect deliverance, if it ever come at all.

4. *And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.*

The host of enemies were so enormous that they threatened to eat up all the land. The men of Judah could not keep them out. They

would soak and storm and burn and destroy right and left. You see the great peril. What a heavy chastisement it must have been to the king to see his land thus in danger of being destroyed. But they had begun to pray.

5-12. *And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, and said, O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? Art not thou our God who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom they wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.*

What a prayer it is! How argumentative! How it pleads his case as an advocate in a court of law, appealing to the mercy of God as logically as if it were to be argued out of the divine heart. Oh, how good it would be if we learnt to pray like this, — in this earnest, importunate fashion! Say the Lord teach us to pray as he taught his disciples!

13. *And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.*

It must have been a wonderful sight — the vast crowd — the pleading king — his voice heard afar, and the men and the women; but, to my mind, the most touching thing of all is the little children standing there, making their silent appeal to God that he would not let the babes be destroyed — that he would not suffer the young children to be slain by the cruel hosts that now threatened the land.

Young children's prayers are powerful. Little ones, may God teach you how to pray.

14. *Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation;*

Perhaps he had never delivered a prophecy before. This is his first sermon; but the Spirit of God was with him, and he could not hold his tongue.

15-17. *And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.*

Oh, how those words must have fallen on the weary ears of those who were in such trouble! And how glad those ears must have been to hear such a message of wondrous mercy, and so near at hand, too! "To morrow." Imminent danger brings eminent mercy, and when the lion is about to leap upon his prey, then comes the lionslayer and breaks his teeth, and delivers his lamb even from between his jaws. Glory be to God for such promises as he gives to his people in times of trouble, even such promises as he gave here.

18. *And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.*

What a sight! That is the kind of ritualism one likes — when the posture is suggested by the feelings — when the man feels that there is nothing else to do but to bow before the Lord. The king could not speak, he was too full of gratitude — too joyous at the thought that God had so appeared for him. And he felt that the only thing he could do was in silence to bow his head, and prostrate himself before God. Have not you sometimes felt so full of gratitude that you could not express yourself? "A sacred silence checks our songs and praise sits silent on our tongues." Now, while they were

worshipping, and just as they had finished that silent adoration, the joy-strains were heard. They had taken breath.

19. *And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.*

Here, again, we seem to be carried by great waves of excitement and devotion. One moment we are sinking down in adoration, now all rising up to listen to the loud voice of God's priests and Levites. But they have to wait for the morrow.

20, 21. *And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.*

So you can see them marching out of the city gate with the king at their head, and, as they go out, the army is marching with banners and with songs and hosannas. This is their style of going out to meet the foe.

22, 23. *And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and where they had made an end of the inhabitants of mount Seir, every one helped to destroy another.*

There were three or four nations, and some jealousy or mistrust must have manifested itself, or some mistake had been made, and the motley host divided itself into self-destroying bands. The Israelites had nothing to do but to sing. Perhaps their very singing was the cause of that disruption among the bands. They could not make it out. They had seen the people rush to battle with discordant cries; but these were marching along as if they were coming to a wedding-feast, singing hymns and chants. That was a new style of fighting. So the Moabites and the Ammonites thought that there must be something wrong. "Surely there must be some confederates

in the camp,” they would say. They suspected each other, as bad men very soon do, and so they fell foul of one another and spared the Israelites all the trouble of killing them.

24-26. *And when Judah came toward the watch tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped. And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away: and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much. And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed the LORD: therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berachah, unto this day.*

This is the Valley of Blessing: surely an appropriate name worthy of long remembrance.

27. *Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy;*

Another march of hosannas. What a wonderful sight it must have been! We have read of the Battle of the Spurs; but here is the Battle of the Song — the battle of praise. How wondrously it was won! Jehoshaphat is now in the forefront of those who go back singing. He feels he must sing the loudest who has had such signal mercy after his sin.

27-30. *For the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the LORD. And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about.*

Now, it is a long piece we have read, but I think it would not be complete if I did not read you the song which they sang. In all probability it was the 47th Psalm. You can almost hear them singing it as they march back.

This exposition consisted of readings from 2 CHRONICLES 20:1-30; AND PSALM 47.

2 CHRONICLES 24:1-25

This chapter gives us the story of the reign of Joash. He was the only one of the royal seed who was preserved alive when Athaliah sought to destroy all the family of Ahaziah. He was hidden away for some six years in the temple by his aunt Jehoshabeath, the wife of Jehoiada the high priest, who arranged matters so well that, when the child was seven years old, Jehoiada caused him to be crowned king, and he put to death the cruel she-wolf Athaliah, who had destroyed the royal family. You see, therefore, how much this young king owed to his uncle the high-priest. Now let us read the story of his reign.

1. Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem.

He might have reigned much longer had he not erred and turned aside from the right way, and so brought judgment upon himself.

1, 2. His mother's name also was Zibiah of Beersheba. And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest.

As long as his uncle lived, that truly devout statesman as well as priest of the Lord, "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord."

3, 4. And Jehoiada took for him two wives; and he begat sons and daughters. And it came to pass after this,

Probably, some three and twenty years after, —

4. That Joash was minded to repair the house of the LORD.

Jehoiada had with him broken in pieces the images of Baal, and battered down the temples of the idols; and now the young king is "minded to repair the house of Jehovah."

5. And he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, go out unto the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not.

It is a great pity when those who live in the house of God have not enough interest in it to see to its repair. The fact was, the offerings presented at the temple, like the tithes in modern times, were intended not only for the ministers, but for the maintaining of the fabric, too. But these priests and Levites would not allow anything to be deducted from their own income even for the repair

of the house in which they served. So Joash ordained that special collections should be made for the purpose.

6-9. *And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the Lord, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witnesses? For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the honour of God: and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Baalim. And at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the LORD. And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the LORD the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness.*

Everyone must give his half shekel by way of redemption money, and this had not been brought in.

10-14. *And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end. Now it came to pass, that at what time the chest was brought unto the king's office by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the high priest's officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to his place again. This they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance. And the king and Jehoiada gave it to such as did the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the LORD, and, also such as wrought iron and brass to mend the house of the LORD. So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them, and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it. And when they had finished it, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, whereof were made vessels for the house of the LORD, even vessels to minister, and to offer withal, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the day of Jehoiada.*

See the influence of one man. One man can sway a state. One man can check sin. One man can be the head of a host who shall serve God, and honour his name.

15. *But Jehoiada waxed old,*

It happened to him as it must happen to us all; for the best of men must grow old, and pass away. Let us value them while we have them. Too often we give them stones while they are alive, in anticipation of giving them bigger stones to keep them in memory when they die. "Jehoiada waxed old," —

15. *And was full of day when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died.*

An unusual age for that time; short enough as compared with the years of the antediluvian patriarchs, but still a great age for those days.

16. *And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house.*

That is the best kind of good which begins with doing good toward God, and then goes on to doing good towards God's house. The Church is to be served, but even it must be second to God's glory. God first, and then the very best must come next.

17. *Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them.*

These flatterers came with all their daintiest manners, and made obeisance to the king, and "the king hearkened unto them." All the days of Jehoiada, these princes had been afraid to set up the fashionable worship the worship of Baalim, that had been introduced by the Sidonian queen Jezebel, that wicked woman of strong and masterful spirit. This worldly and false religion had been put down by the strong hand of Jehoiada; but when its adherents thought they had a chance to get to the front again, they came and flattered the king, and "the king hearkened unto them."

18. *And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols:*

Or, "Asherah and idols." The word is mistakenly translated "groves." These were certain horrible and disgusting emblems of the heathen goddess Ashtaroth, or Astarte: "They served Asherah and idols."

18, 19. *And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear.*

“These old Puritans have come back again,” said they. “We will not listen to them.” The common people were still mostly worshippers of Jehovah; but the great ones of the earth had gone over to the idols, and they could not endure that one and another of the prophets, often very humble and unlearned men, should come and bear testimony for Jehovah.

20. *And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you.*

He spoke very temperately and affectionately. The warning was faithful; but it was delivered in the very best and kindest spirit. But now see what the wicked men did.

21. *And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the Lord.*

This is probably the prophet to whom Christ alludes when he speaks of Zechariah, “whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.” It was a crime most foul to murder the son of Jehoiada, one of those who had helped to put the crown upon the head of the king. To do this evil deed in the court of God’s house, when the prophet was engaged in his Master’s business, and delivering a divine message, was to heap sin upon sin.

22, 23. *Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it. And it came to pass at the end of the year, that the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus.*

God delayed not long the punishment of the evil-doers. When his servants are persecuted, he will speedily avenge his own elect. “They destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people.” Was not that remarkable? These were the authors of the sin; and they had chiefly to endure the penalty. It is not always that invaders lay hold upon the princes alone, and slay them; but these Syrians did so.

24, 25. *For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the LORD delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash. And when they were departed from him, (for they left him in great diseases,) his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed, and he died: and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings.*

When one set of executioners had gone, his own servants conspired against him and slew him. Here ends our reading. May it be profitable to us!

2 CHRONICLES 28:1-5, 16-27

1. *Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem:*

So that he died before he reached the prime of life; he was cut off by God in the very midst of his sin.

1. 2. *But he did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father: for he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, —*

They had set up the worship of God under emblems, there were the calves of Bethel, the representation of strength: it was the worship of God by imagery, and Ahaz imitated it, and went even further in sin, —

2. *And made also molten images for Baalim.*

If we worship the true God under some symbol, the next step is to worship a false God.

3. *Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.*

The worship of Moloch was one of the most horrible that can be imagined. A brazen image was made terribly hot, and then children were thrust into its burning arms to be consumed; and this king went to such a length that he gave his own children to death in that cruel fashion in the place commonly called by the Jews Topheth, or, the place of spitting, since it was so loathsome to them to think of this false God.

4. He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

According to the command of God, there was to be but one altar, and that one was to be at Jerusalem; but these people multiplied their altars; there could not be a high place but they must have an idol shrine set up upon it.

5. Wherefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter.

He received blow upon blow; God would not let him rest in his sin. Now turn to verse 16.

16. At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him.

The king of Assyria was the greatest potentate in that region, and all the little kings were afraid of him, and therefore sent to him for help when they were in trouble. Ahaz made no appeal to God, for the assistance he required, but he turned to the arm of flesh.

17. For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives.

The Edomites had been under subjection to Judah; but now that God had left her, Judah could not hold her position.

18. The Philistines also —

A people that one might have thought had become extinct, so weak were they that we scarcely hear of them; yet “the Philistines also” —

18-20. Had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Bethshemesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shocho with the villages thereof, and Timnab with the villages thereof, Gimzo also and the villages thereof: and they dwelt there. For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD. And Tilgathpilneser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not.

How vain it is to seek relief apart from God!

21. 22. For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the LORD, and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto

the king of Assyria: but he helped him not. And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz.

A black mark is put against his name, to show how greatly guilty he was. Those who rebel against divine checks, and will not be held in by the providence of God, are to be written down in capital letters as great sinners. They sin with emphasis who sin against the chastising rod.

23-25. *For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the LORD God of his fathers.*

He set up little shrines, so that every passer-by might worship which idol he pleased, and each man might present a little incense; thus the whole city was filled with idolatry.

26. 27. *Now the rest of his acts and of all his ways, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem: but they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel:*

There was a holy and reverent feeling amongst the remnant of God's people that a man who had lived as Ahaz had done should not lie with the good kings of Israel.

27. *And Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.*

Now turn to Isaiah, the second chapter, and the sixth verse.

2 CHRONICLES 28:1-16

1-3. *Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father: for he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of*

the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.

God had driven out the Canaanites because of these abominations; therefore, for his own people to practice them, was peculiarly provoking to him.

4. He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

He could not do enough of it; so many trees, so many altars. There are some men who use every opportunity for sin, with a diligence which should bring the blush into the face of Christians, who are not as diligent in obeying as these men are in sinning.

5. Wherefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter.

It did not look as if the captives would ever return; yet the prophet's son was named Shear-jashub, "The remnant shall return." Ahaz might have said to Isaiah, "Your child's name is a lie." We shall see.

6-11. For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah, the king's son, and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah that was next to the king. And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold, because the LORD God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and, ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you: but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the LORD your God? Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which ye have taken

captive of your brethren: for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you.

It was very wonderful that these wild fellows should listen to this prophet with all those captives round about them. It was a brave act on the part of the prophet Oded to go out, and utter his protest.

12-15. *Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war, and said unto them, Ye shall not bring in the captives hither: for whereas we have offended against the LORD already, ye intend to add more to our sins and to our trespass: for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the congregation. And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria.*

What a wonderful thing that was! Ahaz ought to have said to Isaiah, “Your child’s name is right, after all; for the remnant has returned.” Did it not seem as if Ahaz must now trust God? But notice what the next verse says.

16. *At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him.*

When men are determined to be unbelievers and disobedient, they will send anywhere for help but to the Lord. Israel and Syria were very little kingdoms; but Assyria was a great empire, the mighty nation of the period. Yet no help came to Ahaz from that quarter, for we read in the twentieth verse, “And Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not.” The twenty-first verse tells us that Ahaz bribed the king of Assyria; “but he helped him not.” That is always the dirge at the end of all efforts to secure human instead of divine aid.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 7:1-16, AND 2 CHRONICLES 28:1-16.

2 CHRONICLES 33:1-19

1, 2. *Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem: but did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord,*

Yet who could have had a better father than Manasseh had? He was given to Hezekiah during those fifteen years which God graciously added to that good king's life. Manasseh was, therefore, doubtless carefully trained, and looked upon as being one who would maintain God's worship, and the honour of his father's name. But grace does not run in the blood; and the best of parents may have the worst of children. Thus Manasseh, though he was the son of Hezekiah, "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," —

2. *Like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.*

It often happens that, when the sons of good men become bad, they are among the worst of men. They who pervert a good example generally run headlong to destruction.

3. *For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.*

One form of idolatry was not enough for him; he must have all forms of it, even rearing altars to Baal, and making the stars also to be his gods.

4. *Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, whereof the LORD had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever.*

Manasseh was worse than an ordinary idolater, for he polluted the very place which was dedicated to the service of the only living and true God.

5, 6. *And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom:*

Perhaps he gave some of them actually to be burned in honour of his false gods; or if not some of his children were made to pass through the fire and were thus dedicated to the idol deities.

6. *Also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.*

You cannot imagine, I think, a worse character than this Manasseh was. He seems to have raked the foulest kennels of superstition to find all manner of abominations. Like false-hearted Saul, he had dealings with a familiar spirit, he had entered into a covenant with Satan himself, and made a league with hell, and yet, marvel of grace! this very Manasseh was saved, and is now singing the new song before the throne of God in glory.

7-9. And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from out of the land which I have appointed for your fathers; so that they will take heed to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses. So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.

You see, dear friends, that he was not only a monster in iniquity himself, but he led a whole nation astray. Some people who, under the gracious rule of his father Hezekiah, had kept the passover in so joyous a manner, now, under this false son of so good a father, turned aside.

10. And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.

This was all that was necessary to fill up the measure of his guilt. He and his people were warned of God, but they would not hearken.

11. Wherefore-

Since words were not sufficient, and God intended to save him, he came to blows: "Wherefore" —

11. The LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

They very likely chastened him with thorns, for the kings of Babylon were very cruel; and it may be that, when his back was lacerated by thorny scourges, he was put in prison with heavy fetters upon him.

12, 13. *And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.*

There surely can be no person in this assembly who can say that he has sinned worse than Manasseh did. He seems to have gone as far as any human being could go; and yet, you see, when he humbled himself before the Lord, and lifted up his heart in supplication, God forgave his sin, and restored him to his former position in Jerusalem.

14. *Now after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah.*

This is not of very much importance, but what else did he do?

16. *And he took away the strange gods,-*

When grace comes into any man's heart, there is sure to be a change in his action. Manasseh "took away the strange gods," —

16. *And the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city.*

Sins which were before so pleasing to him are now abominations in his sight, and he flings them over the city wall like unclean things. In the very valley of the son of Hinnom where he had dedicated his sons to idols he now consumes his idol gods as foul and offensive things, to be cast away with all the refuse of the city.

16. *And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel.*

It was not possible for him to undo all the evil which he had wrought, as he soon found out.

17. *Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the Lord their God only.*

The work of reformation is slow; you can lead men to sin as rapidly as you like, that is down-hill work; but to get them to toil with you up-hill toward the right is not so easy.

18, 19. *Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his God, and the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel. His prayer also, and how God was entreated of him, and all his sins, and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up groves and graven images, before he was humbled; behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers.*

So we must remember that all the deeds that we have done, both good and evil, are written in God's Book of Remembrance.

2 CHRONICLES 33:1-20

1. *Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign,*

He was, therefore, born after the time when Hezekiah was raised up from the bed of sickness. That prolongation of life was not all mercy: I am not sure that we should be so eager for such an extension of earthly existence either for ourselves or for others. Had Hezekiah been able to foresee what would be the abominations of the first part of Manasseh's reign, should he come to the throne of Judah, methinks that the godly king might have been content to die at once rather than live any longer to become the father of such a sinner, and one who would prove to be such an enemy of the true faith. "Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign." It was too early for a youth to reign over any nation. It is a great temptation, and a serious peril, when an individual has too much power before he reaches his manhood. It would have been far better for Manasseh if his accession to the throne had been postponed for a good while. You who are very young, and are entrusted with wealth and position, may God keep you from going wrong! It will need great grace to preserve you in the right path.

1. *And he reigned fifty and five years, in Jerusalem:*

Manasseh's was a long reign, a varied reign, and at first a wicked reign of the very worst kind. Sometimes men are spared notwithstanding their sin. Manasseh's was one of the longest reigns on record: "He reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem."

2. *But did that which was evil in the light of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD, had cast out before the children of Israel.*

The Lord drove out the Canaanites for the very sins that Manasseh committed. If we follow in the sins of others, we must not wonder if we share in their doom. It is a sad thing, however, when the child of such a father as Hezekiah does evil in the sight of the Lord, “like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom Jehovah had cast out before the children of Israel.”

3. *For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down,*

These high places were at first built for the worship of God, the true God; but then the law of Jehovah was that there should be only one altar, namely, that at Jerusalem. This was not Popery, but Ritualism; it was adding something to the simple worship of God, and therefore it was wrong. He who goes a little way in sin will soon go a long way. It is always a mercy to stop where you ought to stop, and not begin going down. Hezekiah had broken down the high places, and his son Manasseh rebuilt them.

3. *And he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.*

He not only worshipped them, but he served them; he threw his whole strength into the propagation of this form of idolatry. They who build altars to God, contrary to the Lord’s law, will soon have false gods. First, men set up images to remind them of the true God; and then they go off to the worship of the idols, or false gods. Oh, that we may have grace to make no similitude of the Lord, and to set up nothing contrary to the simple teaching of the Word of God!

4-5. *Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, whereof the LORD had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.*

There was plenty of room elsewhere for them if Manasseh wanted them; but; nothing would do for him but that in the house of God itself must be built altars for the worship of the sun and all the host of stars.

6. *And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards:*

All which is imitated, nowadays, by certain persons who try to break through the veil which parts us from the spiritual world. Manasseh did this on a large scale.

6-11. *He wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from out of the land which I have appointed for your fathers; so that they will take heed to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses. So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel. And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken. Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.*

If you will not learn anywhere else, you will have to be taught among thorns, and in chains, and in exile. There are some men who will never go to heaven except through a sea of affliction and trial. Oh, for wisdom to yield to almighty grace at once!

12, 13. *And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.*

He had set up Baal and Ashtaroth; but now he knows who is the true God, and he bows before Jehovah.

14-17. *Now after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah. And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace*

offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel. Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places,

They do the same today, and we cannot get them away from them. Even some who love the gospel yet cling to the old Romish rites and ceremonies. Ah, men do love to multiply outward performances instead of spiritual worship! The one altar of Calvary is not enough for them; they must have many altars: “Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places.”

17. *Yet unto the LORD their God only.*

So far, it was well; but it would have been better if they had given up all those altars.

18-20. *Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his God, and the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel, His prayer also, and how God was entreated of him, and all his sins, and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up groves and graven images, before he was humbled: behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers. So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house: and Amon his son reigned in his stead.*

The short passage, which I am going to read from the first chapter of Isaiah, seems to get a fine illustration in this story of Manasseh.

This exposition consisted of readings from 2 Chronicles 33:1-20; And Isaiah 1:2-19.

2 CHRONICLES 34:14-33

14, 15. *And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD given by Moses. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD, And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan.*

This was a very remarkable find. Of all the discoveries that they might have made, they could have discovered nothing that would work so much good to all the people as this “book of the law of the Lord given by Moses.”

16-19. *And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servant,*

they do it. And they have gathered together the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen. Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes.

Such was his horror upon discovering how they had all sinned, and how many terrible judgments were to be inflicted upon them because of all that long time of sin, that he rent his clothes.

20, 21. *And the king commanded Hilkiyah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found:*

Oh, that all who read God's Book now would do as young Josiah did! If there be any difficulty in a book, the short way to get to understand it is to inquire of the author; and, surely, never is there greater wisdom than having read any of the deep mysteries or solemn threatenings in this Volume and feeling ourselves staggered by them, we inquire of the Lord concerning them. I believe that there is many a puzzling passage in the Bible on purpose that we may be driven to inquire of the Lord about it. If the Book were all so easy of understanding that, at the first reading of it, we could comprehend all its meaning, we might, perhaps, keep away from God; but he has purposely given us many dark sentences, and made the sense to be somewhat obscure in order that we may wait upon his enlightening Spirit and so obtain instruction, for the Spirit of God is more useful to us even than the Word itself is. Great as the blessing of the Book is, the blessing of the living Spirit is greater still, and anything is good that drives us to him. That which had influenced the mind of Josiah was the terror of the Book.

21-28. *For great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book. And Hilkiyah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college:) and they spake to her to that effect. And she answered them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to me, Thus saith*

the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah: because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched. And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard; because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again.

When God selects an instrument for his own service, how well he tunes it for the use to which it is to be put! Here is a woman, a married woman, and she is selected to be the Lord's prophetess to the king; but never has any man spoken more bravely than she did. Her opening words show a holy courage which is lifted above all fear of men: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to me," for before God kings are only men; and though Huldah was only a subject of Josiah, see with what real dignity God's ordination had invested her. Josiah was not to succeed in the reformation of Israel. He was true and sincere, but the people were steeped in hypocrisy, and formality, and idolatry, and they did not go with the king in all his root and branch reforms. They still clung in their hearts to their idols, and therefore they must be destroyed, and the nation must be carried away captive. It was, however, a very singular promise that God gave to Josiah "I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace." Yet he was mortally wounded in battle, so how could that promise be fulfilled? You know how it could be. However we may die, — if sword or plague or fire consume the saints among the rest of mankind, their very deaths and graves are blest. There was no fighting about Josiah's grave; he was buried in peace. Pharaoh-Necho had smitten him, but he did not destroy the land; and Josiah

was allowed to be buried amid the great lamentations of a people who only began fully to appreciate him when he was taken away from them.

29, 30. *Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the LORD.*

That was a grand Bible-reading, with a king for reader, and all his princes and all his people gathered to Listen to the Word of God. What could he have said better, had he been the greatest of orators ? To read out of this blessed Book must surely be to the edification of the hearers.

31-33. *And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the LORD their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their father.*

NEHEMIAH

NEHEMIAH 1

1, 2. The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, That Hanani, one of my brethren came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

This good man was, of course, one of the banished Jews, but he had greatly prospered. He had risen in the empire of Ahasucrus until he had come to be great—even to be one of the chamberlains of the empire; but his heart was towards his poor people—his brethren—that were in poverty. Now, whenever God exalts a Christian man in temporal position, he ought not to disown his poor brethren, but his heart should go out towards them to see what he can do for them. It is a shame for any man to forget his country. Does not the Pole still say, “No, Poland, thou shalt never perish”? And we admire such patriotism. But the like feeling should be in every Christian breast. We should love the church of God even as Nehemiah loved the chosen race, from which he had sprung. So when he met with Hanani, the conversation was all about the poor brethren that remained at Jerusalem.

3. And they said unto me, the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

A sad story they had to tell. Ezra had assisted in somewhat rebuilding the temple, but little had been done for the private dwellings, and for the walls and public buildings of the city. It was in a sad and wretched estate; and the Jews were despised and reproached. Nehemiah was a great man, but he was sorry to hear this. He felt as if he was a fellow-sufferer with his poor brethren.

4. *And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,*

Was it his concern? Was it any more his concern than that of other men? Yes, he felt it to be his: and the tender heart which he had towards the people of God made him feel it to be peculiarly his. If nobody else did anything, he must. And, oh! dear brothers and sisters in Christ, whenever you see the cause of God in a sad estate, lay it to heart: weep, lament, and pray: feel that you have an interest in it. Christ is your Saviour. Of the church you are a part. These blessed interests of sovereign mercy belong to you. Take them to yourself and say, “By God’s help, I will lay myself out for the progress of his cause. I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”

5, 6. *And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned.*

He seems to act like a priest for God, taking the sin of the people upon himself, and confessing it. If they were hard-hearted, and would not confess, he would, and pour out his complaint before God.

7-10. *We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: But if ye turn unto me and keep my commandments and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.*

You see what an admirable prayer this is. There is a full confession of sin—an acknowledgment of the justice of God in

having punished his people; but then there is a quoting of the divine word—a putting of the Lord in remembrance that he had made such and such a promise. That is the very backbone of prayer. If you go to the bank, the main part of the transaction is to put the cheque—the note of hand—upon the counter. You get no money else. So when you go in prayer, the main part of prayer must lie in pleading the promise, “Thou hast said it: thou hast said it.” Hold God to his word with a sacred daring of faith. “Thou hast promised: thou hast declared. Now be as good as thy word.” Then notice another plea he has. He says he is pleading for God’s servants—his redeemed—redeemed by great power. Oh! it should always make us feel strong in prayer when we recollect that God’s people are very dear to him, and he has done great things for them; therefore he loves them, and for those whom he loves, surely, he will work great deliverances. These are arguments. There ought to be great argument in prayer if we hope to prevail.

11. *O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.*

That was king Artaxerxes, whom he rightly viewed as a man, for, great as he was—all-potent king of Persia—yet still but a man. Nehemiah consoles himself in the prospect of having to go in before him to ask favor at his hands.

11. *For I was the king’s cupbearer.*

This exposition consisted of readings from NEHEMIAH 1.-2:1-8.

NEHEMIAH 1

1, 2. *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month, Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.*

Nehemiah was in a high office in Shushan the palace of King Artaxerxes, but his heart was at Jerusalem. He therefore remembered the very date, “in the month Chisleu,” when some of

his brethren came from Judah to visit him, for he was more interested in their coming than in any transaction of the court in which he was for a while employed. Observe the subject of this good man's conversation: "I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem." Whenever Christian people meet together, they ought to make the subject of their mutual discourse an enquiry as to the progress of the Kingdom of God in the place where they respectively dwell. If you have come up from the country, we want you to tell us about the work of God in your village, or in the town to which you belong; are there many conversions there? We also will tell you about the work in London. Thus should Christian brethren commune with one another, and ask concerning Christ's kingdom among men, and the progress that his gospel is making.

3. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in, great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

They gave a correct description of the real state of affairs in Jerusalem; they did not colour it, but they stated the actual facts. It is well, sometimes, to tell our Christian brethren about the low estate of Zion; where things are not prospering as they should, it is best to say so, and not to try to smother up the truth, and give a false report.

4. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

This good man was greatly affected by the sad news which he heard. He was not indifferent to, the condition of his countrymen; he did not say, "We are getting on very well here; I am a Jew, and I am in the palace of Artaxerxes, but I cannot do anything to help my brethren. You, who are away there at Jerusalem, must do the best you can." No; Nehemiah said no such thing; he looked upon himself as being part and parcel of the whole Jewish race, just as every true believer should regard all Christians as being near akin to himself. We are not twenty churches, brethren, nor two hundred; our Lord Jesus Christ is the head, and we are members of that one body which is his Church. We ought to sympathize with all who are in Christ; and, especially, if the cause of God is not prospering in any place, we should do as Nehemiah did, he wept, and mourned, and

fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven. He tells us what he said in his prayer; these are, as it were, the shorthand notes of his supplication.

5, 6. *And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.*

This is quite a model prayer. How earnest it is, and how truthful! Nehemiah recognizes the terrible side of God's character as well as his mercifulness. He evidently had right views of God. Some people try to explain away all the passages of Scripture which represent God as a terrible God; whether they know it or not, they will find this course of action to be a great source of weakness to them in dealing with the ungodly. Nehemiah calls Jehovah "the great and terrible God;" but he adds, "that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him." He tells us that he prayed before the Lord day and night. Of course, he had to attend to his daily duties, so that he could not always be upon his knees; but his heart was praying even while he was engaged with other matters; and as often as he could, he retired to his room, so that he might cry out unto God. Please to observe that he makes a confession of "the sins of the children of Israel." It is our duty as Christians, as it were, to take the great lead of the sins of the nation upon ourselves, and to make confession of them before God; if the guilty ones will not repent, we must repent for them; if they will not, confess their sins, we must confess their sins as though we stood in their stead. Nehemiah very pathetically says, "and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee:" and then coming still more closely home, he adds, "both I and my father's house have sinned."

7-9. *We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though*

there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

He quotes the covenant, and he pleads the promise of Jehovah. Now, there is no means of getting a man to do us a favor so powerful as this, to quote his own promise,” You said you would do it.” So, here, Nehemiah says, “Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses.”

10-11. *Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.*

That is, in the sight of King Artaxerxes to whom he was about to speak.

11. *For I was the king’s cupbearer.*

He counts this as a high privilege, that he would be able to speak for his people to the great king who would give him the opportunity to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

NEHEMIAH 2:1-8

1. *And it came to pass in the month Nisan,*

Three or four months after he began to pray.

1. *In the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king.*

We have in some of the old slabs and carvings some singular pictures of the dainty way in which the kings of Persia and Media were served by their cupbearers. They always spilled a little wine upon their left hand and drank first, for fear the king should be poisoned. So the greatest men of the different provinces of the empire were called by turns to act this part before the king. It was a piece of state ceremonial.

1. *Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.*

And there was a law—one of those stupid Median laws—that no man was to come before the king with a sad countenance. It was supposed that the king must be so serenely happy himself that none might come there unless they were happy, too. Nehemiah had been

able to observe this rule, but on this occasion he did not, because he could not.

2-6. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favor in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my father's sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,)

Who was, probably, queen Esther, and therefore abundantly agreeable that such a work should be done for her own nation. "The king said unto me."

6. For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me: and I set him a time.

He was a valued servant. They did not wish to part with him, and if he would go for a time to do this business, yet they take security that he should return. There are some servants that I know of, who, if they were to go away, their masters would not be particularly anxious that they should come back again. It is well when a man is so in favor with God that his piety acts upon his ordinary life, and he becomes in favor with men also. That is a poor, miserable religion that does not make its possessor a good servant. Yes, in whatever station of life we may be placed, we ought to be far more valuable to those round about us on account of our fearing God. May we always be of such a character that, if we were gone, we should be missed. "I set him a time."

This exposition consisted of readings from NEHEMIAH 1.-2:1-8.

NEHEMIAH 4:1-23

1. But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.

It was needful to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, which had been lying in ruins. They went on pretty briskly, for everyone had a mind

to work. There never was a good work yet but what there were some to oppose it, and there never will be till the Lord comes. Sanballat heard what the Jews were doing, and he was very angry. "He was wroth, and took great indignation." He was all on fire with anger that God's work was being continued.

2. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews?

The enemies of God's people generally take to sneering. It is a very easy way of showing opposition. Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? No doubt these questions were thought to be very witty and very sarcastic. The enemies of Christ are generally good hands at this kind of thing. Well, if it amuses them, I do not know that it need hurt us much; for, after all, it is their way of paying homage to God's power.

3. Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.

Such a man as Sanballat never lacks friends. If there is a bad man anywhere, there is sure to be another close at hand. The devil does not make a fire with one stick. When he has set the first one alight, he can generally find a fagot to put near it. Tobiah the Ammonite, who was tarred with the same brush as Sanballat the Horonite, was by him.

4, 5. Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity; and cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.

This was righteous indignation; but Nehemiah is not a perfect model for us. He was not only stern, but he mingled with his severity a measure of bitterness in his prayer that we must not imitate. Sometimes, when we have seen men plotting against God, seeking to ruin the souls of others, and trying to stop us in our endeavor to build up the church of God, we have felt such language as this trembling on our lips. It were better, however, for us to bow

the knee, in humble imitation of our Lord upon the cross, and cry, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

6. *So built we the wall.*

You half expected to read, “So we stopped building the wall, and answered Sanballat and Tobiah.” Not a bit of it. They kept to their work and let these two men scoff as they pleased.

6. *And all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.*

They built the wall as high as they meant it to be ultimately; but they carried it all round, and joined it well together. If we cannot do all we would like to do, let us do what we can; and let us endeavor, as far as possible, to finish off the part that we do, waiting for better times to carry the walls higher.

7. *But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth*

They were “wroth” before; now they were “very wroth.” If a work has no opposition from Satan, we may be half afraid it is good for nothing. If you cannot make the devil roar, you have not done him much harm; but the more he roars, the more cause is there for the angels singing the praises of God before the throne.

8. *And conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.*

It is wonderful how unanimous bad men can be. It has always struck me as a very startling thing, that you have never heard of any division among the devils in hell. There are no sects among the devils; they seem to work together with an awful unanimity of purpose in their wicked design. In this one thing they seem to excel the family of God. Oh, that we were as hearty and united in the service of God as wicked men are in the service of Satan!

9, 10. *Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. And Judah said,*

Judah, you know, was the lion tribe. Christ is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” But Judah, instead of being lion-hearted, made a noise more like a mouse than a lion, for Judah said, —

10. *The strength of the bearers of burden is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.*

Poor Judah! He ought to have been bolder and braver; but he was not. It is the same today; some who seem to be pillars, prove very weak in the hour of trial, and by their cowardice discourage the rest.

11. *And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.*

While some were discouraging the people within the city, their enemies, without the walls, were plotting to take them by surprise, and slay them.

12. *And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.*

These Jews ought to have been helping to build the wall; but they did not come to the help of the Lord's people. Still, they were sufficiently friendly to tell Nehemiah of the plot that was being hatched by his enemies. God knows how, when his enemies are sinking a mine, to undermine them. If secrecy is necessary to the success of evil, somebody speaks out, and tells the story, so that the plot is discovered.

13. *Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.*

When Nehemiah knew the danger to which the people were exposed, he took measures to guard against it. I like the common-sense of Nehemiah. He kept families together. "I set the people after their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows." Beloved friends, I have no greater joy than such as I had last Tuesday, when I received five children of one family, all brought to Christ. May the Lord make our families to be the guards of the church!

14. *And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not afraid of them.*

Fear may waken us, but it must never be allowed to weaken us. We should put on the armor, and take the sword and spear and bow

when there is cause for fear; we should never dream of running away.

14, 15. *Remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.*

There was no fighting after all. As soon as the enemy knew that their plot was found out, they did not make any assault. One commentator says: — “Some men, if they had been delivered from danger, would have returned every one to the ale-house; but these men returned every one to his work.” They went back to their building, and continued still in the service of the city.

16. *And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.*

They which builded on the wall, and they that bore burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. The sword and the trowel both guarded the city and builded the wall.

18. *For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.*

What the trumpet was for, we are told directly.

19, 20. *And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what places, therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.*

That is a grand sentence. The moment you hear the trumpet, you are to leave your place on the wall, and come to the point where the enemy is attacking us. But Nehemiah does not say, “You shall fight for us,” he puts it much better, “Our God shall fight for us.” So he will still.

21. *So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.*

They made long days. Christian people do not want merely eight hours a day for Christ. We can sometimes do eighteen hours' work for him in a day; and we wish that we could do twenty-four.

22, 23. *Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let everyone with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes.*

Nehemiah was a good leader. He did not say, "Go," he said, "Come"; and he bore the brunt of the service. Like Alexander, who went with the Macedonians into the rough places, and did the hard work, so did Nehemiah. He and those with him did not put off their clothes, even for sleeping.

23. *Saving that every one put them off for washing.*

Which was necessary; for cleanliness is next to godliness. The Lord sends us more Nehemiahs, and plenty of people to work with them, who can endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and who will also be good builders of the church of God!

JOB

JOB 1

1. *There was a man in the land of Uz,*

Job was a man indeed; a true man, a man of the highest type, for he was a man of God.

1. *Whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright,--*

Job was thoroughly true and sincere, and in this sense he “was perfect and upright,”-

1. *And one that feared God, and eschewed evil.*

He had both sides of a godly character, a love of God and a hatred of sin.

2. *And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.*

Job was highly favoured in having such a family of sons and daughters.

3. *His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.*

Job was not a poor man, yet he was a man of God;-one of those “camels” that manage to go through “the eye of a needle.”

4. *And his sons went and feasted in their houses every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters-*

Who were very modest and retiring, and would not have gone to the feast if they had not been sent for, but their brothers were kind and thoughtful, as all good brothers will be.

4, 5. *To eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them,*

Job did not go to the feast, perhaps he felt too old, his character was too staid for such a gathering, and he had higher joys, that were nearer his heart than any earthly feast could be.

5. *And rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my*

sons have sinned, and cursed God in their heart. Thus did Job continually.

He thought, “Perhaps, in their rejoicing, unholy thoughts may have intruded; they may have been unguarded and lax in their conduct. They may not have fallen into my cross sin; but, in their feasting, they may have sinned against God, therefore I will offer sacrifices for them.” “Thus did Job continually.” Not only occasionally, but every day, he sacrificed upon his altar unto God, and so sought to keep his household right before Jehovah.

6. *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.*

Into heaven? Oh, no! The presence of God is very widespread, and there was no need to admit the evil spirit again into heaven in order that he might be present before God.

7. *And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou?*

God is Satan’s Master, so he asks him where he has been. I wonder whether, if the Lord were to put that question to everybody here, “Whence comest thou?” each of us could give a satisfactory answer to it.

7. *Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.*

Uneasy, restless, ever active, like a roaring lion “seeking whom he may devour.” Ah! we little know how near Satan is to us now; and even in our hours of prayer, when we are nearest to God, he may come and assail us.

8. *And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job,-*

“He is an example to you, he may well chide you, he is so obedient, and you are so rebellious: ‘Hast thou considered my servant Job,’”-

8, 9. *That there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said,-*

We may be certain that, if there had been anything bad in Job, Satan would have found it out, and brought it against him. However excellent a man is, though there are none like him on earth, you can find fault with him if you want to do so. Satan found fault with Job because he had prospered, and his friends afterwards found fault

with him because he did not prosper; so you can make anything into a blot on the character of men if you have a mind to do so. "Satan answered the Lord, and said,"-

9, 10. *Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?*

The black dog of hell had been prowling around to see where he could get in, so he knew that there was a hedge right round Job, and round his house and all that he had. Notice how the devil insinuates that Job feared God for what he could get out of him. "His love is cupboard love," says Satan; "he is well paid by providence for his reverence to God."

10. *Thou hast blessed the work of his hands,-*

Even the devil dared not deny that Job was a working man, or say that he had come by his estate by oppression or plunder. No; he said to God, "Thou hast blessed the work of his hands,"-

10, 11. *And his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.*

Oh, what mischief Satan can imagine against the righteous! The mercy is that, although he is mighty, he is not almighty; he is very malicious, but there is One who is far wiser and stronger than he is, who can always circumvent and overpower him.

12-15. *And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: and there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.*

Job had not wronged these Sabeans, they were plunderers on the lookout for spoil; and when Satan moved them, they came and stole the patriarch's oxen and asses, and slew his servants.

16. *While he was yet speaking,-*

As if to give Job no time to rally his faith and encourage his heart,-

16. *There came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.*

This calamity must have distressed Job all the more because “the fire of God” had burnt up the sheep that he was accustomed to offer in sacrifice to Jehovah, and the blow had seemed to come directly from God himself, as it was lightning that had destroyed both sheep and shepherds too. Poor Job had not time to recover from that shock ere the next blow fell upon him;-

17. *While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.*

He had not time to think before the heaviest stroke of all came:-

18, 19. *While he was yet speaking there came also another, and said, Thy Sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: and, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and, they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.*

Satan had arranged to bring on the patriarch’s troubles so quickly one after another as to utterly overwhelm the good man; at least, so the devil hoped it would prove; yet it did not.

20. *Then Job arose,-*

With all his burden on him, he arose,-

20. *And rent his mantle, and shaved his head,-*

He did not pull his hair out as a Pagan, or a maniac, or a person delirious through trouble might have done; but he deliberately “rent his mantle, and shaved his head,”-

20. *And fell down upon the ground, and worshipped,-*

Grand old man, how bravely does he play the man here! He “fell down upon the ground, and worshipped,”-

21. *And said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither:*

That is, to the womb of Mother Earth.

21. *The LORD gave and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*

I think these are the grandest words in the whole record of human speech. Considering the circumstances of the man at the time, that he should thus speak was, I think, a miracle of grace.

22. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

JOB 1:1-5

1. There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

That was Job's character before the trial which made him famous; perhaps, if it had not been for that trial, we should never have heard of him; now, as the apostle James wrote, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job." God, by great afflictions, gave to his servant that usefulness for which he had possibly prayed, without knowing how it would come to him. A long-continued life, of prosperity may not so truly glorify God as a life that is chequered by adversity; and God, who intended to put honour upon his servant, did as kings do when they confer the honour of knighthood, they strike with the, back or flat of the sword, so God smote the patriarch Job that he might raise him above his fellow men. The Lord intended to make him Job the patient, but to that end He must make him Job the sufferer. From this Book I learn what gospel perfection is. We are told that Job was perfect and upright, yet I am sure that he was not free from tendencies to evil, he was not absolutely perfect. As old Master Trapp says, "God's people may be perfect, but they are not perfectly perfect;" and so it certainly was with Job. There were imperfections deep down in his character which his trials developed, and which the grace of God no doubt afterwards removed; but after the manner of speech that is used in Holy Scripture, Job was a "perfect" man; he was sincere, thorough-hearted, consecrated; and he was also "upright." He leaned neither this way nor that way, he had no twist in him, he had no selfish ends to serve. He was "one that feared God." Everybody could see that; and, consequently, he hated evil with all his heart.

2. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.

It was a great privilege to have such a family as this, but it brought to Job great responsibilities and many anxieties.

3. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

A man may be a good man and a rich man, but it is not usually the case. I am afraid that what Mr. Bunyan says is all too true, “Gold and the gospel seldom do agree; Religion always sides with poverty.” Yet it should not be so, for God can give a man grace enough to use all his substance to his Lord’s glory. I wish that it were oftener the case that we could see a holy Job as well as a godly Lazarus, a company of men who would prove their consecration to God by never allowing their wealth to become their master, but being master of all their substance, and realizing constantly that it is all the Lord’s. This, after all, is the noblest heritage a man has with the exception of his God. Job, in adversity, could possess his soul in patience because, in his prosperity, he had not let his riches possess him, but he had possessed them.

4. And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them.

This showed that it was not drunken riotousness, or they would not have wanted their sisters; the sweet, gentle, delicate influence of their sisters would tend to keep their feasting what it should be. Besides, they were the sons of a man of God, and so they would know how to keep their feasting within due bounds. Yet we are all mortal and fallible, and feasting times are dangerous times. The Puritans used to call fasting, soul-fattening fasting; but feasting, they might call soul-weakening feasting. Solomon truly said, “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting.” There is always a risk about feasting, and Job was therefore a little afraid about how his sons might have behaved.

5. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts, Thus did Job continually.

They might have spoken unadvisedly with their lips, they might have even taken God’s name in vain, there might have been something about their conduct which was not altogether proper; so

their father desired to put the sin of it; away. Observe Job's resort to burnt offerings. He lived before the Jewish law was given, yet he felt the instinct concerning the need of a sacrifice which every believing heart feels when it approaches the holy God. I pray you, never give up that idea of coming to God by means of a sacrifice, for there is no other way of access. We may think as we will, but there is nothing else that will ever quiet the conscience, and bring us near to God, but the divinely-appointed sacrifice. And Job knew this; he did not think that his sons could be cleansed by his prayers alone, but he must offer burnt sacrifices according to the number of them all, that they might, every one have a share in, the blessings which those sacrifices typified.

JOB 1:6-22

6. *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.*

Angels and all kinds of intelligent spirits had, as it were, a special, solemn, general assembly, — a great field-day, or levee. Perhaps, in stars far remote, in various parts of the universe, there was celebrated that day a high festival of honour unto Jehovah, but since sin has come into the world, since even amongst the twelve apostles there was a Judas, so in every assembly, even though it be an assembly of the sons of God, there is sure to be a devil: "Satan came also among them." If he is not anywhere else, he is sure to be where the sons of God are gathered together. Yet what impudence this is on his part, that he dares to come even into the assemblies of the saints! And what hardness of heart he must have, for he comes in as a devil, and he goes out as a devil! The sons of God offer their spiritual prayers inspired by the Holy Ghost, but the devil offers diabolical petitions suggested by his own malice.

7. *And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou?*

He is obliged to give an account of himself, he cannot go a yard from his door without divine permission.

7. *Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, from going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.*

Satan is always busy, never quiet; he cannot be still.

8. *And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, —*

You see, Job is a man whom God calls his servant even in speaking to the devil, “Hast thou considered my servant Job?”

8. *That there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?*

God himself gives Job that high character. He is a non-such, he stands alone amongst mankind: “There is none like him in the earth.” “Hast thou reckoned him up? Hast thou taken his measure, O thou accuser of the brethren?”

9. *Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?*

Even the devil could not bring a charge against Job’s conduct; so he insinuated that his motives were not pure.

10. *Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?*

“He finds that it pays, it answers his purpose to be devout.”

10-11. *Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.*

See, the devil measures Job’s cow in his own bushel; but, happily, it was the measurement of a liar, so he measured amiss. There are still some who say, “Yes, it is a fine thing to be good when you are rich; it is a very easy thing to behave yourself aright when all goes smoothly with you. Would the man, who is such a devout servant of God now, be like that if he were in poverty, or if he were cruelly slandered, or if he were tested with contempt? Would the grace of God carry him over those rough bridges? His religion is a fine thing, no doubt; but if he were tried and tested we should see what he would do.” Now, the Lord delights in proving the graces of his people, for it brings great glory to his name when experiments are made upon them, to test them and try them, and to let even their greatest adversary know how true they are, and what a divine work it is which God has wrought upon them.

12. *And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.*

Satan could go so far, but no farther, there is an “only” in the permission granted to him: “Only upon himself put not forth thine hand.”

12, 13. *So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house:*

That was a bad day for trouble to come. Satan selected that day because it was a joyful day, and therefore it would make the trials of Job the more startling. Moreover if Job could have had his choice, he would have preferred that his trouble should come when his sons and his daughters were praying, not when they were feasting.

14, 15. *And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.*

The bad news comes to him all of a sudden, just when he is thinking of something very different. There is only one servant left to tell the tale, he was spared that Job might know that the news was true. If that one other servant had been killed, the tidings could only have reached Job as a rumor, that might or might not be true, but now, one of his own servants tells him the sad story, so there is no mistake about it. Ah! the devil knows how and where to strike when he does strike; yet this was only the first blow for poor Job, and there were heavier ones to follow.

16. *While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.*

Now, if that lightning had fallen on the Sabeans while they were robbing and plundering, one might not have wondered; but to fall on the flocks of a man of God who had clothed the naked with the fleeces of his sheep, and had presented many of the fat of the flock unto God in sacrifice, — that did seem strange. This trial, too, comes right upon the back of the other, and this one would appear to be more severe than the former one because it seemed to come distinctly from God. “The fire of God” — the lightning, “is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep.”

17. *While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and*

have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the word; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

Three such heavy blows will surely be enough to test the patriarch, but a fourth messenger came with the direst news of all.

18-19. *While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.*

Did any other man ever have to endure such a complication of trouble, such agonies piled one upon another with no respite? Job must have felt well-nigh stunned and choked by these consecutive griefs.

20-22. *Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.*

Oh, the triumphs of almighty grace! May God grant us such patience, if he sends us such trials, and unto him shall be the glory evermore!

JOB 7

Job was sorely troubled by the cruel speeches of his friends, and he answered them out of the bitterness of his soul. What we are first about to read is a part of his language under those circumstances.

1. *Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling?*

Is there not a certain time for each one of us to live? Is there not an end to all the trouble and sorrow of this mortal state? "Woe is me," says Job, "will this sad condition of things never come to a close? Must it always be thus with me?"

2. *As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, —*

When the day shall close, and he can go to his home, —

2, 3. *And as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work: So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me.*

If that is the case with any of you, dear friends, you ought to be comforted by the thought that a better man than you are underwent just what you are enduring, and underwent it so as to glorify God by it. Remember what the apostle James wrote, “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” But if our case is not so bad as Job’s was, if we are in good health, and surrounded by God’s mercy, let us be very grateful. Every morning that you wake after a refreshing night’s rest, praise God for it, for it might have been far otherwise, for you might have had wearisome nights through pain and suffering,

4, 5. *When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome.*

Such was the dreadful disease under which this man of God laboured, for the worst of pain may happen to the best of men. Sometimes, God ploughs his best fields most; and why should he not do so? Do not men try to do most with that which will yield most? And so God may most chasten those who will best repay the strokes of his hand. It is no token of displeasure when God smites us with disease; it may be an evidence that we are branches of the vine that bring forth fruit, or else he would not have taken the trouble to prune us.

6. *My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and are spent without hope.*

His spirits are sunk so low that he had not any hope at all left; — at least, there was none apparent just then. O you poor tried children of God, I beseech you once again to see that you are only walking where others have gone before you! Mark their footprints, and take heart again.

7, 8. *O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good. The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more: thine eyes are upon me, and I am not.*

As if God only looked at him, and the very look withered him; or as if there was only time for God just to look at him, and then he disappeared as though, he had been but a dream, an unsubstantial thing. It is good, my brethren, sometimes to know what vanities we are; and if we complain that things around us are vanity, what are we ourselves but the shadows of a shade?

9-12. *As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more. Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?*

Am I such a big thing, such a dangerous thing, that I ought to be watched like this, and perpetually hampered, and tethered, and kept within bounds? Ah, no! Job, you are neither a sea nor a whale, but something worse than either of them. So are we all, — more false than the treacherous sea, harder to be tamed than the wildest of God's creatures. God does set a watch over us, and well he may. But hear Job's complaint: —

13-15. *When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions: So that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life.*

Were you ever in this terrible place, dear friend? Some of us have been there, and we have used the very language of Job; and yet, for all that, we have been brought up again out of the utmost depths of despondency into the topmost heights of joy. Therefore, be comforted, ye poor prisoners. Through the bars and grating of your soul-dungeon, we would sing unto you this song, — the Lord, that has brought us forth, can bring you forth also, for “the Lord looseth the prisoners.” The God of Job is yet alive, strong as ever for the deliverance of such as put their trust in him.

16, 17. *I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone; for my days are vanity. What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?*

Job seems to say, “I am too little for God to notice me; why does he make so much of me as to chasten me so sorely?”

18, 19. *And their thou shouldest visit him every ,morning, and try him every moment? How long wilt thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?*

Blow followed blow in quick succession. Pain came fast upon the heels of pain till Job seems to have had no rest from his anguish. This is the mournful moaning of a man on a sick-bed, worn out with long-continued grief. Do not judge it harshly. You may have to use such words yourself, one day; and if you ever do, then judge not yourself hardly, but say, "I am only now where that eminent servant of God, the patriarch Job, once was, and the Lord who delivered him will also deliver me."

20. *I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?*

We did not expect him to call God by that name; yet sorrow hath a quick memory to recall anything by which it may be cheered. "Thou Preserver of men," says Job, "I have sinned: what shall I do?"

20. *Why hast thou set me as a mark against thee,*

"Drawing thy bow, and directing all thine arrows against my poor heart. Hast thou no butts that thou must needs make me thy target, and test thy holy archery upon me?"

20. *So that I am a burden to myself?*

Oh, what heavy words, "a burden to myself!"

21. *And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.*

Speaking after the manner of man, he seems to think that, if God does not pardon him soon, the pardon will come too late; for if God comes in mercy by-and-by, he will be dead and gone, and God may seek him, but he shall not be found. This is how men talk when they get a little off their head through the very extremity of grief. We, too, may perhaps talk in the same fashion, one day, so let us not condemn poor Job. Now let us read a few Verses in the 3rd chapter of the Gospel according to John, that we may be comforted. If any of you are labouring under a sense of sin, I would take you straight away to sin's only cure.

This exposition consisted of readings from JOB 7, AND JOHN 3:14-17.

JOB 11

The words we are about to read were spoken by one of Job's three friends, — or what if I call them his three tormentors? These men did not speak wisely, and their argument was not altogether sound; but, for all that, in the instance before us, Zophar the Naamathite spoke that which was truthful. Although he made a great mistake in turning it against Job, yet what he said was in the main correct, and we may learn from it as we read it. Remember, dear friends, that whenever you read the words of these three men, you must take them with a good many grains of salt. They are not to be accepted as if they were God's Word, because they are not. Those three men were mistaken in many points, yet very much of what they said was weighty and valuable, and is still worthy of our careful consideration.

1-3. *Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified? Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed?*

This was a very bitter and cruel speech, and Zophar was not using the language of friendship, or even of common courtesy. First, he charged Job with being a great talker, "a man full of talk." No doubt Job did speak well and eloquently; but to retort upon him that he was a man abundant in words, was a very cruel thing, especially when he was in such a condition of distress and suffering. Yet, dear friends, it is an evil thing to be men of tongue, and not of hand; it is a dreadful thing to be men — or, for the matter of that, women either — who are "full of talk," and therefore have no room for anything else. There are some people who seem to think that, simply by their volubility, they can carry all before them. In such a case, we may say with Zophar, "Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified?" But he went beyond these questions, and charged Job with downright lying because he had pleaded his own innocence: "Should thy lies make men hold their peace?" Zophar also insinuated that Job fumed and frothed, as it were, and spoke folly, which he certainly did not do, for he spoke in solemn, sober earnest if ever a man did.

4. *For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes.*

Job did not say that; at least, he did not say it in so many words. He did endeavor to prove his own innocence of the false charges that were brought against him; but he never said that he was clean in God's eyes.

5, 6. *But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is!*

Oh, that God would enable you, dear friends, to see your sin, and make you perceive that there is a double meaning in his law, — a deep, underlying, spiritual meaning, as well as that which is apparent on the surface, so that a man may be guilty of transgression even when he thinks it is not so! Oh, that God would unveil the secrets of his wisdom so as to make you see that he is wiser than all his works, that his hidden wisdom is double that which you have been able to perceive in nature, or in providence, and infinitely greater than he has ever made to appear before men's eyes.

6. *Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.*

That was a hard thing for Zophar to say to Job; but, still, it was true, and it is true in the case of all of us: "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Even when a man sits down among the ashes, robbed of all his property, and bereaved of all his children, and when he has to scrape himself with a potsherd because of his many sore boils, even then it may be truly said to him, "God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth."

7. *Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection!*

What wonderful questions these are! How they ought to convict those who glibly talk of God as if they could measure him with a foot rule, and understood exactly what he ought to do and ought to be. We are constantly meeting with statements that such-and-such a thing, which is revealed in Scripture, cannot be true, because it is inconsistent with the modern idea of the benevolence of God. Our only answer to the cavil is, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?"

8, 9. *It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know! The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.*

God is incomprehensible by any finite mind; and he is omnipotent, too.

10. *If he cut off, and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder him!*

If he sees fit to destroy men, or for a while to make them prisoners; or if he pleases to gather them together, and multiply them like the hosts of heaven, who can hinder him?

11. *For he knoweth vain men he seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it?*

Wickedness hidden under the veil of night, God sees as clearly as in the blaze of noon. Wickedness which never comes out of the heart, but tarries there, and does not lead into overt action, God sees it: "Will he not then consider it?" Of course he will.

12. *For vain man —*

That is just what man is by nature; the best of men are vanity — emptiness:

"For vain man" —

12. *Would be wise,-*

He pretends to wisdom; he wishes to be thought wise; he likes to wear a wise man's title: "Vain man would be wise," —

12. *Though man be born like a wild ass's colt.*

As untamed, as ignorant, as willful as a wild ass's colt, are we by nature. Zophar seems to think that he has sufficiently rebuked Job for pretending to be wise, and for complaining that God was dealing unjustly with him; so now he begins to admonish him to repent: —

13-18. *If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear: Because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away: And thine age shall be clearer than the noonday; thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning. And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy rest in safety.*

It is a great mercy when God enables men to pursue their daily callings, and to take their nightly rest in safety; and it is a still greater mercy when they feel secure, whether they live or die, because they have a good hope concerning the hereafter. It is an unspeakable blessing when sin is washed away, and a man can lift up his face to God without spot, and walk in the light of Jehovah's countenance all the day long.

19, 20. *Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall make suit unto thee. But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, —*

Carefully notice this very solemn prophecy, — the eyes that have looked upon sin with pleasure, — the eyes that have flashed with lascivious desire, — the eyes that have dared to look towards God with defiance or derision, — “the eyes of the wicked shall fail,” —

20. *And they shall not escape, —*

To what place could they escape from God, when he is everywhere? During the days when the Roman empire extended all over the world, people said that the whole earth was one great prison for Caesar's enemies; and the universe itself is a vast prison for those who are condemned of God. Where shall they go to avoid arrest? Whither shall they fly to get beyond God's reach? They cannot escape anywhere. There is neither hole nor corner, even in the bowels of the mountains, or in the flinty hearts of the rocks, where a sinner can hide himself from the hand of God: “They shall not escape,” —

20. *And their hope —*

The last thing that ever dies, “their hope” —

20. *Shall be as the giving up of the ghost.*

Like death itself, their hope shall be. Then, if “their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost,” what hope is there for them? Let us not have our portion with them, else we shall be as hopeless as they are.

JOB 19

1, 2. *Then, Job answered and said, How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?*

They struck at him with their hard words, as if they were breaking stones on the roadside. We ought to be very careful what we say to those who are suffering affliction and trial, for a word, though it seems to be a very little thing, will often cut far more deeply and wound far more terribly than a razor would. So Job says, "How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?"

3. *These ten times have ye reproached me: ye are not ashamed that ye make yourselves strange to me.*

He means that they had reproached him several times over, and hints that they ought to have been ashamed to act so strangely, so coldly, so untenderly, towards him.

4. *And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself.*

"I have done you no harm. The error, if error there be, is within my own bosom, for you cannot find anything in my life to lay to my charge." Happy is the man who can say as much as that.

5, 6. *If indeed ye will magnify yourselves against me, and plead against me my reproach: Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net.*

Job seems to say, "I did not bring this trouble upon myself; it is God who has laid it upon me. Take heed lest, in reproaching me because of my trouble, you should reproach God also. "I suppose that we cannot, all of us, see into the inner meaning of these words, but if we are in very sore trouble, and those who ought to comfort us are bringing cruel accusations against us, we shall read the language of Job with no small sympathy and satisfaction.

7. *Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment.*

Poor Job! When our prayer is not heard, or we think it is not, then the clouds above us are dark indeed. You who are passing through a season of unanswered prayer, do not imagine that you are the first to traverse that dreary way! You can see the footprints of others on that desolate sandy shore. Job knew what that experience meant, so did David, and so did our blessed Lord. Read the 2nd verse of the 22nd Psalm, and hear Jesus say, "O my God, I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent."

8. *He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths.*

God had done this, and done it to Job, whom he called “a perfect and an upright man.” Then, how can you and I expect to escape trial and difficulty when such a man as the patriarch of Uz found his road blocked up, and darkness all around him?

9, 10. *He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head. He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree.*

That is, torn up by the roots, and carried down the stream, to be forgotten by the people who once knew it, and rejoiced in its welcome shade.

11. *He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as one of his enemies.*

Does God ever act like that towards his own children? Yes; there are times when, without any anger in his heart, but with designs of love toward them, he treats his children, outwardly, as if he were an enemy to them. See the gardener going up to that beautiful tree. He takes out a sharp knife, feels its edge to be sure that it is keen, and then he begins pruning it here, gashing it there, and making it to bleed in another place, as if he were going to cut it all to pieces. Yet all that is not because he has any anger against the tree, but, on the contrary, because he greatly values it, and wishes it to bring forth more fruit than it has ever done. Do not think that God’s sharpest knife means death to his loved ones; it means more life, and richer, fuller life.

12. *His troops come together, and raise up their way against me, and encamp round about my tabernacle.*

Troops of trouble, troops of Chaldeans and Sabeans, troops in which Job counted the stormy winds as terrible allies of the Most High, — all these had come up against Job, and he seemed to be like a country that is beaten down and devoured by powerful invaders.

13. *He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me.*

He looks on those so-called “friends” of his, and, remembering the bitter things they had said, he tells them that they are estranged from him.

14, 15. *My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight.*

What a long way a child of God may be permitted to go in trouble! Ah, brethren! we do not know how those, who are most dear to God's heart, may suffer all the more for that very reason: "for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."

16, 17. *I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I entreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife, though I entreated for the children's sake of mine own body.*

He mentioned to his wife those whom death had taken away, and asked her to speak kindly to him; but even she had hard words to throw in his teeth.

18-20. *Yea, young children despised me; I arose, and they spake against me. All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me. My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth.*

There is no skin upon the teeth, or scarcely any, and, therefore, Job means that there was next to nothing of him left, like the skin of his teeth.

21. *Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me.*

How pitiful it is that he has thus to beg for sympathy! This strong man — this most patient man — this perfect and upright man before God has to ask for sympathy. Do you wonder that it was so? HE, who was far greater than Job, ran back thrice to his sleeping disciples as if he needed some help from them, yet he found it not, for he had to say to them, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour? "Let this be a lesson to us to try and possess bowels of compassion towards those who are in sorrow and distress.

22. *Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?*

"If God smites me, why do you, who are round about me, do the same? Is it not enough that God seems to be turned against me? Why should you also be my enemies?"

23, 24. *Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!*

Inscriptions have been found, graven in the rocks, that may have been done in the time of Job, and it was common, in ancient days, to write on tablets of lead or brass; so Job desired that what he was saying might be recorded for future reference, for he was persuaded that he was being hardly dealt with, and unjustly judged.

25. *For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:*

“For I know,” What a splendid burst of confidence this is, right out of the depth of his sorrow, like some wondrous star that suddenly blazes upon the brow of the blackest night, or like the sudden rising of the morning sun!

26-28. *And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me. But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?*

Job seems to say, speaking about himself, though in the third person, “He is a devout man, can you not see that? He has faith in God, my friends, can you not perceive that? Wherefore, then, do you persecute him so?”

29. *Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath bringeth the punishments of the sword, that ye may know there is a judgment.*

Now Job carries the war into the enemy’s camp; and he says, “You charge me with all sorts of sin, and yet you cannot deny that the root of the matter is in me. Would it not be much wiser for you to be yourselves afraid lest God should cut you off for falsely accusing me, and slandering me, in the time of my sorrow? “There we may confidently leave Job for the man who can truly say what he has said about his Redeemer, will come out all right at the last.

JOB 23

Always remember, dear friends, that one of the great lessons of the Book of Job is this, — that we may never judge a man’s character by his condition. The best of men may have the most of suffering and of poverty, while the worst of men may prosper in everything. Do not imagine, because a man suddenly becomes very poor or a great sufferer, that therefore he must be a great sinner; otherwise, you will often condemn the innocent, and you will, at the

same time, be guilty of flattering the wicked. Job's friends had cruelly told him that he must be a hypocrite, or else he would not have lost his property, and have been smitten with such a remarkable sickness; so he appeals to God against their unrighteous judgment.

1, 2. *Then Job answered and said, Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.*

“Although my groaning is heavy, yet it is not so burdensome as my griefs might warrant.”

3. *Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!*

“To his judgment-seat, that I might plead my cause, and vindicate my character even there.”

4-6. *I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power?*

“Being the great God, will he silence me by a display of his omnipotence? Oh, no! he is too just to do that.”

6. *No; but he would put strength in me.*

“He would help me to argue my case; he would deal fairly with me; he would not be like you so-called friends of mine, who sit there, and exult over my weakness and my griefs, and torture me with your cruel words.”

7-10. *There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take:*

“If I cannot find him, or see him, he can see me, and he knows all about me.”

10. *When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

This is beautiful faith on the part of Job. It is very easy for us to read these lines, and to say, “No doubt, tried men do come out of the furnace purified like gold;” but it is quite another thing to be ourselves in the crucible, and to read such a passage as this by the light of the fire, and then to be able to say, “We know it is true, for

we are proving its truth even now.” This is the kind of chapter that many a broken heart has to read by itself alone. Many a weeping eye has scanned these words of Job, and truly blessed has that troubled one been who has been able to chime in with the sweet music of this verse: “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

11. *My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.*

It is a great thing to be able to say that, as Job truly could, for we have the witness of the Spirit of God that Job was “perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.” It was not self-righteousness that made him speak as he did; he had the right to say it, and he did say it.

12, 13. *Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. But he is in one mind, and who can turn him?*

“His mind is made up to chasten me; he means to afflict me again and again; so what can I do but yield to his will?”

13. *And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth.*

There is, on Job’s part, a reverential bowing before the supreme power an acknowledgment of God’s right to do with him as he wills.

14. *For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him.*

“More arrows to pierce me, more sorrows to grieve me.”

15-17. *Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him. For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me: Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face.*

He wished that he had died before those evil days had come upon him; and that is the way that a good man, an undoubted saint of God, is sometimes driven to speak. There are, perhaps, some who will say, “Then we don’t want to be children of God if that is how they are tried.” Ah! but that was only the sorrow of an hour. See where Job is now; think of what he was even a few days after he made this mournful complaint, when God had turned his sighing into singing, and his mourning into morning light. In the next chapter, Job speaks of those who were the reverse of himself, — wicked and ungodly men, who nevertheless prospered in this life.

JOB 23

We shall read, this evening, in the Book of Job. May the good Spirit instruct us during our reading!

Here we shall see Job in a very melancholy plight, grievously distressed in mind, and yet, for all that, holding fast to his God. We do not want any of you to get into this gloomy condition, but if you are in such a state as that, or if you ever should be, may you behave as well as Job did! It needs a deal of grace to travel all right in the dark, to keep in the good way when you cannot see it, to cling to God when you cannot even feel that he is near you; but the Lord can give grace even for such an emergency as that.

1, 2. *then Job answered and said, Even to day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.*

Job admitted that he groaned, but he claimed that he had good reason for doing so; that, indeed, the source of his grief was greater than the streams of his grief, so that he could not, even with his groans and tears, express half the anguish that he felt.

3, 4. *Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.*

Good men are washed towards God even by the rough waves of their grief; and when their sorrows are deepest, their highest desire is not to escape from them, but to get at their God. "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" Job wanted to spread out his whole case before the Lord, to argue it with him, to present his petitions to the Most High, and to find out from God why he was contending with him. It is all right with you, brother, if your face is towards your God in rough weather. It is all wrong with you, brother, if the weather be very calm, and your face is turned away from your God.

5. *I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me.*

I am not sure that Job would know and understand all that God said. the Lord says a great deal, even to men like Job, that they do not easily understand, and it is not for us to require that God should explain everything to us. He giveth not account of any of his matters. Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Our wisdom will be to plead with God our suit

for pardon and for mercy, and to ask him at least to make us understand the way of salvation, that we may run in it, and be at peace with him.

6. *Will he plead against me with his great power?*

“If I were to go to God, and urge my suit with him, would he crush me with the might of his majesty? Would he overwhelm me with his omnipotence?”

6. *no; but he would put strength in me.*

Such was Job’s faith in God, that he was sure he would rather help him than hinder him: “He would put strength in me.”

7, 8. *there the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there;*

“I look to the future, I try to forecast the clays that are yet to come, but I cannot see God there.”

8. *And backward, but I cannot perceive him:*

“I remembered the days of old; I turned over the pages of my diary; but I could not find him there.” there are cases in which one who is a true child of God cannot for a while find his father. do not condemn yourself because you are in the dark; on the contrary, recollect then that there are many who fear the Lord, yet who walk in darkness, and have no light. Let all such trust in the name of the Lord, and stay themselves upon their God, and in due season the light will come to them.

9. *On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him:*

If this is the case with you, be thankful that you want to see your God. Let your very desires after him, your anxiety because you miss him, and the sorrow of your spirit when you are, apparently, deserted by him, encourage you to believe that you are one of his children. Another woman’s child will not cry after you, dear mother; it is your own child that cries after you, and if you were not a child of God, you would not long and cry for the joy of his presence. If you were not his child, that presence would be no delight to you, it would be your dread.

10. *But he knoweth the way that I take:*

Oh, what a mercy that is! “I cannot see him, but he can see me; my grief hath blinded mine eyes with floods of tears, but nothing

blinds his eyes. Like as a father pitieth his children, so does he pity me, and regards me with the full observation of his gigantic mind: ‘He knoweth the way that I take.’”

10. *When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

It is grand to be able to say that while you are in the fire. It is very easy to say it about another man who is in the furnace; but when you are in there yourself, then to say, “I shall come forth as gold,” is the sublimity of faith! It is a very simple matter to say, “If I were again put into the fire, I know I should come forth as gold;” but it is when the burning heat is melting you, when you seem yourself to be shriveled up in the crucible, and so little of you is left, then is the time still to say, “When the Lord hath finished his work upon me, when he hath thoroughly assayed me, I shall come forth as gold.”

11. *My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.*

You cannot talk like that in the time of trouble if you have not led a sincere, and upright, and gracious life. Those battles into which men come in the Valley of Humiliation, are often brought about by their tripping when they are going down the hill. Our sins find us out at length; but if God enables us to walk uprightly, then we feel very confident, — not in our own uprightness, but in God’s love and grace.

12, 13. *Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. But he is in one mind, and who can turn him?*

Job looks at his grief, and says concerning it, “It is according to God’s mind that I should have this grief, and who can turn him?” there may be times when God wills that his servant should be in trouble; and when God lets down the iron bar, who can lift it up? When he shutteth up a soul in doubting Castle, how shall it escape until he wins its deliverance?

13-15. *And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him. Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him.*

Yet he longed for him. So, sometimes, we long for the presence of God, yet that presence strikes us with a solemn awe whenever We

are favored with it. We ask to see our Lord, yet when we do see him, we have to say, with John, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." Or perhaps we are like Peter who, when the Lord Jesus was in his boat, fell down before him, and cried, "depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." the majesty of Christ's pure presence was too much for poor imperfect Peter; so is it for us.

16, 17. *for God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me: Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face.*

Now you see where you might be if you had Job's experience. If you are not there, be very grateful; and if you are there, say, there is a better man than I am who has been this way before me. I can see his footprints on the sands of time, and I am encouraged by his example to trust my Lord in the darkest hour." You are not the only man who has been in the coal- cellar; there have been better men than you in the dark places of the earth before now; therefore, still have hope, and be confident in God that in his own good time he will deliver you.

JOB 23

Job is in great physical pain through the sore boils that cover him from head to foot; he is still smarting under all the bereavements and losses he has sustained; and he is somewhat irritated by the hard speeches of his friends. We read, in the second chapter of this book, that "they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him." "Job's comforters," even to this day, are regarded as those whose room is preferred to their company. As the result of all the trials through which Job was called to pass, there is, in this chapter, somewhat of bitterness. We need not wonder at it; the wonder is that there is not more. You ought, in estimating a man's actions or words, to judge of his circumstances at the time. Do not take Job's words by themselves; but consider in what condition he was; think what you would have done if you had been in his place, and you will not censure him, as you might otherwise have done.

1, 2. *Then Job answered and said, Even to day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.*

He could not express all his pain. He felt that he did not complain too much. His stroke was heavier than his groaning. His words had bitterness in them; but he thought that they were justified by his affliction.

3. *Oh that I knew where I might find him!*

Job longed to find his God; he wanted to come to him. He had been slandered by men; so he turns from the court of injustice below to the divine Court of King's Bench above, where he is sure of a righteous verdict: "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

3. *That I might come even to his seat!*

To his mercy-seat, and even to his judgment-seat. Job was willing to appear even there.

4. *I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.*

He felt that he dared plead before God. He was not guilty of the things laid to his charge; so he would be bold to speak even before God's judgment-seat. If Job had known a little more of God, as he did before his life ended, he might not have talked so glibly about ordering his cause before him, and filling his mouth with arguments. We remember how he afterwards spoke to the Lord, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Who among us would desire to come and argue our case with God without our heavenly Advocate?

5. *I would know the words, which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me.*

He was willing to hear God's side of the argument, patient and anxious to understand the mind of God with whom he desired to plead. So far so good. There are some who do not wish to know what God would say unto them; so long as they may express their own passionate desires, they have no ear and heart waiting to hear the voice of God. Very beautiful is the next verse:

6. *Wilt he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me.*

He has confidence in the Lord that, if he could have an audience with him, God would not use his power against him; but, on the contrary, would strengthen him in order that he might state his case. Do I speak to a troubled heart here? Come to God with your burden.

He will not use his power against you; but he will help you to plead with him. Trembler, come and bow at his feet! He will not spurn thee, he will lift thee up. Despairing one, look to the Lord! He will not turn his wrath upon thee; but he will help thee to plead with him. “Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me.”

7-9. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.

Job had done his best to find his God. Forward, backward, to the right, and to the left, he had gone in all directions after him; but he could not find him. I know there are persons here tonight who are in that condition; and you will never rest, I hope, until you do find the Lord. He is not far from you. I trust that with many of you, tonight is the happy hour in which your long searching shall end in a delightful finding.

10. *But he knoweth the way that I take:*

If I do not know his way, he knows mine. If I cannot find him, he can find me. Here is my comfort: “He knoweth the way that I take.”

10. *When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

Here the true Job comes to the front. You get the gracious man once more on his feet. He staggered a little; but he stands firm now: “When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” So will you, my tried sister, my afflicted brother. The trial of your faith is but for a time; there will come an end to this furnace-work; and when God has tried you, tested you, and taken away your dross, he will bring you forth, and you will be pure gold, meet for the Master’s use.

“In the furnace God may prove thee,
Thence to bring thee forth more bright;
But can never cease to love thee:
Thou art precious in his sight:
God is with thee,
God thine everlasting light.”

11. *My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.*

Happy Job, to be able to say that, and to speak the truth; but there is a touch of self about it which we cannot quite commend. Be holy; but do not claim to be holy. Be thou steadfast before God, firm in thine obedience to him; but do not mention it; for thy hope lies somewhere else. Yet we cannot condemn Job for declaring that he had kept God's way. His friends were pleading against him, so he felt that he must defend himself.

12. *Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.*

Job was a happy man to be able to say that. I hope that many of you could say the same. If you were tried with great bodily pain and depression of spirit, you could say, through divine grace, "I have not turned away from God." These are days when we want men of principle; men who can put their foot down, and keep it down, men who cannot be turned aside. They call this firmness, "bigotry." It is, however, only another name for Christian manliness. If you dare to do right, and face a frowning world, you shall have God's commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

13. *But he is in one mind, and who can turn him?*

God has one mind, and he will carry out what he wills. It is vain for any man to think of turning him from his eternal purpose.

13, 14. *And what his soul desireth, even that he doth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him.*

You will find that men who are much tried fall back upon the granite foundation of the divine decree. God has ordained it, so they yield to it; they acquiesce in it because it is according to the eternal purpose of the Most High. Though we say little about it now, there may come a time when some of you will have to say, as Job does, "For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him."

1. *Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him.*

It is a bad sign when a man of God becomes afraid of God. Yet is there a holy awe which may degenerate into a servile fear which hath bondage; but even this may be the foundation of a holy confidence which will keep us in obedience to the Lord.

16. *For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me:*

Are you saying that tonight? If so, I am glad you are here. I have, for many years, been compassed about with a large number of persons who come from the ends of England and Scotland, and from longer distances, too, in despair of soul, and seeking comfort; but I think that never in my life have I had more than I have had this week, persons unknown to me before, who are under conviction of sin, and feeling the hand of God heavy upon them. Hard tugs have I had to bring them out of Giant Despair's Castle. The Holy Ghost alone can do this work; but he sometimes makes use of a sympathetic brotherly word to give light to those who are in the dark. I am praying that he may do so tonight; for there may be some here who say with Job, "God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me."

17. Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face.

He wished he had died before he came to such trouble, or that by some means such trouble had been turned away from him. May the Lord, if he sends you Job's trouble, send you Job's consolation! May he glorify himself by your patient endurance, if he lays upon you his heavy hand!

JOB 24

1. Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him not see his days?

"Why do they live so long? Why do they appear to have such prosperity?"

2-4. Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof. They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow's ox for a pledge. They turn the needy out of the way: the poor of the earth hide themselves together.

"They are hard-hearted enough to rob even poor widows and orphan children."

5. Behold, as wild asses in the desert, go they forth to their work; —

Like wild asses, their work consists in going forth to do mischief.

5. Rising betimes for a prey: the wilderness yieldeth food for them and for their children.

For there are some so hard that they would skin a flint, and out of the wilderness would manage to get food. Yet such hard oppressors of others sometimes seem to prosper for awhile.

6-12. *They reap everyone his corn in the field: and they gather the vintage of the wicked. They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of a shelter. They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor. They cause him to go naked without clothing, and they take away the sheaf from the hungry; Which make oil within their walls, and tread their winepresses, and suffer thirst. Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: yet God layeth not folly to them.*

He lets them alone, leaves them to do as they please. So it seems; but this is not the day of judgment, and this is not the place of final retribution. Now and then, God flashes forth his anger against some gross sinner or some national crime; but as for the most of men's sins, he beareth with them till that tremendous day shall come, which draweth on apace, when he shall hang the heavens in sackcloth, and hold the last assize, and every man shall receive according to his works.

13-17. *They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof. The murderer rising with the light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death.*

These are the men who plunder secretly, who rob, yet cannot bear to be known as thieves.

18. *He is swift as the waters; their portion is cursed in the earth:*

There was no curse upon Job, and no curse can come near the true child of God; his scanty portion is still blest. But the large portion of the ungodly is cursed even while he is in the earth.

18-20. *He beholdeth not the way of the vineyards. Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so doth the grave those which have*

sinned. The womb shall forget him; the worm shall feed sweetly on him;

What a sarcastic utterance! This man, who lorded it over others, — how glad the worm shall be to get at him! This fat worldling shall be a rich feast for the worms.

20. *He shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be broken as a tree.*

It shall snap off, and be brought to an ignominious end.

21-24. *He evil entreateth the barren that beareth not: and doeth not good to the widow. He draweth also the mighty with his power: he riseth up, and no man is sure of life. Though it be given him to be in safety, whereon he resteth; yet his eyes are upon their ways. They are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all other, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn.*

In the East, they generally reap their harvest by just taking off the tops of the ears of corn, and leaving the straw. Thus will the wicked be cut off.

25. *And if it be not so now, who will make me a liar, and make my speech nothing worth?*

Job challenges all men to contradict what he affirms, — that the righteous may be greater sufferers, and the wicked may for awhile prosper, but that God will, in the end, overthrow the ungodly, and establish the righteous.

This exposition consisted of readings from JOB 23, AND 24.

JOB 27

Remember that Job's friends had accused him of having committed some great sin; which would account for his great sorrows. The good man is naturally very indignant, and he uses the strongest possible language to cast away from himself with horror the charges which they brought against him in the day of his grief.

1-4. *Moreover Job continued his parable, and said, As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul; all the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.*

He felt that; it would be wicked for him to confess to what he had never done; it would be deceit for him to acknowledge crimes which he had never committed. Therefore he most solemnly asseverates, by the living God, that he never will permit the falsehood to pass his lips. He had not transgressed against God in the way his friends insinuated, and he would not own that he had.

5. God forbid that I should you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me.

We are bound to keep to the truth. No man is permitted, with mock humility, to make himself out to be what he is not. Job was right, so far, in standing up, for the integrity of his character, for he was a man of such uprightness that even the devil could not find fault with him. He was such a holy man that God could say to Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one, that feareth God and escheweth evil?" And all that the devil could do was to insinuate that he had a selfish motive for his goodness. "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that; he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." Job was upright, yet we are never so right but what there is a mixture of wrong with our right. A man may very easily become self-righteous when he is defending his own character; there may be a lack of admissions of faults unperceived; there may be a blindness to faults that ought to have been perceived; and something of that imperfection, doubtless, was in the patriarch.

6. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.

There he went too far, for he had not yet seen God as he afterwards saw him. Before man, there was nothing with which he needed to reproach himself; but how he changed his tone when God drew near to him! Then he said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." IF we knew more of God, we should think less of ourselves. If those who consider themselves perfect had any idea of what perfection is, their comeliness would be turned in them to corruption.

7, 8. *Let mine enemy be as the wicked, and he that riseth up against me as the unrighteous. For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his so.*

That is a very solemn, searching question; if a man does try to play fast and loose with God, if he be a hypocrite, and if he should gain by his hypocrisy all that he tries to gain, namely, repute among men, “what is his hope when God taketh away his soul?” Then, his hope is turned to horror, for he has to stand before him who cannot be deceived, but who reads him through and through, and casts him away because he has dared to insult his Maker by attempting to deceive omniscience. Oh, may you and I never play the hypocrite’s part! There cannot be a more foolish thing; and there cannot be a more wicked thing.

9. *Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him?*

That is one of the tests of the hypocrite: “Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him?” Will the hypocrite cry to God at all? Will he not give up even his profession of religion when he loses his prosperity? And if he does cry, will God hear the double-tongued man?

10. *Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?*

These questions, while they condemn those who are hypocrites, are comforting to many a sincere heart. Dear friend, do you delight yourself in God? Do you really admire him, love him, and seek to glorify him? Then you are no hypocrite, for no hypocrite ever found delight in religion, and especially no hypocrite ever found delight in God himself. “Will he always call upon God?” No, there are certain times when he will cease to pray. Pleasure enchants him, and he will not pray; or perhaps he is so discouraged and despairing that he cannot pray. There are times when the hypocrite gives up praying, but the Christian cannot give it up; it is his vital breath, he must pray. No sorrow is so deep as to take him off it; no joy is so fascinating as to seduce him from prayer; but as for the hypocrite, “Will he always call upon God?” No, you may rest assured that he will not.

11. *I will teach you by the hand of God:*

Or, better, as the margin runs, “I will teach you being in the hand of God.” Being himself chastened, and experiencing the teaching of God, Job says to his friends, “I will teach you.”

11-14. *That which is with the Almighty will I not conceal. Behold, all ye yourselves have seen it; why then are ye thus altogether vain? This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive of the Almighty. If his children be multiplied, it is for the sword: and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread.*

If God does not visit the hypocrite with punishment in his own person, it will certainly fall upon the next generation.

15-18. *Those that remain of him shall be buried in death: and his widows shall not weep. Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; he may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver. He buildeth his house as a moth, and as a booth that the keeper maketh.*

“He buildeth his house as a moth,” which makes its home in the cloth, but the servant’s brush knocks it all out, and destroys the moth’s children, too. “And as a booth that the keeper maketh.” The hypocrite’s house is no better than that little shanty which the keeper of a vineyard puts up with a few boughs or mats, to sit under it from the heat of the sun. God saved us from being such poor builders as this! May we build a house that is founded on the rock!

19. *The rich man shalt lie down, but he shall not be gathered: he openeth his eyes, and he is not.*

He has grown rich by oppression, he has become great in the land by his hypocrisy; but he speedily goes down to the grave. God looks at him, and he is gone.

20. *Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night.*

This is a parallel passage to that word of our Lord, “But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.”

21. *The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth: and as a storm hurleth him out of his place.*

These are your great ones, your proud ones, your strong men that fear nothing, and would insure their own lives to a certainty for the next twenty years; see how they go. Shadows are not more evanescent, a poor moth is not more easily crushed.

22. *For God shall cast upon him, and not spare: he would fain flee out of his hand.*

The man would escape from God if he could. It was Job's glory, as we read just now, that he was in God's hand; but the hypocrite would fain flee out of God's hand, yet that is altogether impossible.

23. *Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place.*

Such ignominy shall be poured upon the hypocrite at last that all mankind shall endorse the sentence of God which condemns him; and shame and everlasting contempt shall be his portion. The Lord save all of us from such an awful doom, for Christ's sake! Amen.

JOB 33

This is a speech of young Elihu, who had sat quietly listening to the taunting words of the three "candid friends" of Job, and to the somewhat exasperated replies of the patriarch. At last, the young man breaks the silence, and with some dignity, and quite sufficient of self-content, he thus addresses himself to Job: —

1. *Wherefore, Job, I pray thee, hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words.*

"I am but a young man, but I speak because I cannot be quiet. An impulse moves me; I am as a vessel wanting vent. I desire to speak impartially; therefore, hear me, but hear all that I have to say; do not listen merely here and there to a part of my speech, but hearken to all my words." Sometimes, it is very necessary to beg our hearers not to run away with only one sentence, or even with one sentiment. "Hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words," for there is a proportion in truth, and one truth has to be balanced with all the others. A statement may be all the better for being unguarded, more forcible because it stands alone; and yet it may need that another statement should be heard with it, lest it should be misunderstood. Wherefore the preacher also says to his hearer, "I pray thee, hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words."

2. Behold, now I have opened my mouth, my tongue hath spoken in my mouth.

That is to say, “I speak with much solemnity, not as one who chatters without sense, or without due consideration, but I have opened my mouth deliberately, as one who has something to say; and I speak with my best powers of speech, as one who wishes to persuade those who hear him.”

3. My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart: and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly.

What a lesson this is to those of us who preach to others, — that we speak out of the uprightness of our heart, and feel that, however others may judge us, we are sincere before God in what we say! How necessary also is it, especially in these days, that we should speak plainly, so as to be easily understood! Some men never think clearly, and therefore they never speak clearly; and, oftentimes, the darkness of a man’s speech is only the result of the darkness of his mind; he has no clearly-defined notion of what he has to say. Let every young man who has to teach others resolve that this utterance of Elihu shall be his also, “My lips shall utter knowledge clearly.”

4. The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.

That is to say, “I am as much the creature of God as these three old gentlemen are, these three wise friends who have spoken so tartly. I am as much endowed with the Spirit of God as thou art, O Job, and therefore I speak to thee in his name.” Should not this be a lesson to every one of us to try and do all that we can for God? Every Christian may say, “The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.’ Therefore let me use my very existence, the life that is breathed into me, for that Almighty Creator who has made me what I am.”

5. If thou canst answer me, set thy words in order before me, stand up.

He who speaks reason is ready to hear reason. It is only the unreasonable talker who will not allow others to have a word to say in reply. “If thou canst answer me,” says Elihu to Job, “set thy words in order before me, stand up.”

6. Behold, I am according to thy wish in God’s stead: I also am formed out of the clay.

Job had wished that someone would stand up and speak for God, someone without the terror that seemed inseparable from the Infinite, someone without the power of Omnipotence, someone who would be more nearly his equal, with whom he could debate the questions which perplexed him, so Elihu says, "I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay."

7-11. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee. Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy, he putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths.

Elihu did not make this excuse for Job, that he had been slandered by his friends, and that his statement of innocence was not so much absolute towards God as it was defensive towards men. Still, there is no doubt that Job had gone too far in this direction. Perhaps, for this very reason, his troubles had come upon him, because he was in a measure self-righteous. In some small degree, at any rate, he may have prided himself upon his personal excellence. Elihu does well, therefore, in all faithfulness, to point out the blot in what Job had said.

12, 13. Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters.

This man seems to have the very spirit that rested upon the apostle Paul when he was arguing with an objector against the Lord's way of working, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" The greatness and grandeur of the Eternal should prevent our raising objections against anything that he does. Who are we, the moths of a moment, the creatures of an hour, that we should interrogate the Infinite and question our Maker? What he does must of necessity be right; though we cannot understand how it is so, we must believe it, and meekly bow to the will of the Lord.

14-17. For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men,

and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man.

It is ever one great object of the divine dealings to make and keep us humble. It is strange that creatures so insignificant as we are should be perpetually infected with the foul disease of pride; this form of mental scarlet fever continually breaks out in puny man, and therefore God deals with him that he may “hide pride from man.”

18, 19. *He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain:*

Pain of body is usually looked upon as a great evil, and doubtless it is so in some respects; but it wraps up within itself great mercy. There are some who can scarcely be taught at all except through physical pain; and if it were possible to abolish sickness and suffering, whither would men go in the wantonness of their strength? Does not this very affliction often chide man, and bid him think, and cause him to return to his Maker, when, otherwise, he would be as thoughtless as the beasts that perish?

20-24. *So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness: then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.*

Happy is the messenger who comes with such a message as that. Such was the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah when the king was sick unto death, such is the minister of God’s Word when he comes with glad tidings of redemption, and God through him says of the spiritually sick man, “Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.”

25-28. *His flesh shall be fresher than a child’s: he shall return to the days of his youth: He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.*

See the easy terms of God's love and mercy. The man does but confess that he has sinned, he owns that he has perverted the right, he confesses that he has gained no profit thereby; and God, seeing him in such a state of heart as this, delivers his soul from going down to the pit, and his life shall see the light. What a gracious God we serve! How cruel to continue to offend him when he is so ready to forgive!

29, 30. *Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.*

The chastisement of sickness and the flagellation of pain whip the sinner back to him who alone can save him. These are the black dogs of the Great Shepherd wherewith he brings back wandering sheep till they come again under his crook, and he leads them into green pastures.

31-33. *Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I will speak. If thou hast any thing to say, answer me: speak, for I desire to justify thee. If not, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I shall teach thee wisdom.*

May the Lord graciously apply to all our hearts this instructive portion of Old Testament Scripture! There is a message in it to each of us as well as to the patriarch Job, to whom it was specially addressed.

JOB 33:6-33

This is part of the speech of young Elihu, who had listened with much patience, but also with great indignation, to the harsh speeches of Job's three friends and to Job's self-righteous answers.

6, 7. *Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee.*

Job had wished that he could argue his case with the Lord himself. If God would only withdraw the terror of his presence from him, he would like to come even to his seat, and plead with him. "Oh!" said he, "that there were one who would stand between me and God, that I might plead with him!" "Here am I," answered Elihu, "I am the man you want. God has sent me, now come, and

plead with me. There is no terror in me to make thee afraid; neither have I any heavy hand to crush you.”

8-10. *Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy.*

Elihu puts the case very plainly. “There, Job, you have said that you are perfectly innocent, and yet you are made to suffer. You have brought a charge against God, that he seeks occasion against you, and treats you, who have always been his faithful friend, as though you were his enemy. You said,” —

11, 12. *He putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths. Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man.*

Here is the core of the whole matter. Whenever you and I begin to impugn the justice of God, we ought to remember who we are, and what he is. There is no comparison between us and the great God over all, blessed for ever; and for us to begin to charge him with injustice, or unkindness, is a desperately wicked action, of that we may be quite sure at the very outset.

13. *Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters.*

It is not for us to summon God to appear before us, as if he were our servant, and we were his master, or to arraign him before our judgment seat, and to sit there as if the Holy One of Israel were a felon, who must answer for his crimes. It is high treason, and blasphemy against the Most High, for us to think of sitting in judgment upon him. This was Paul’s way of putting the matter when someone raised a question about the divine decree. Paul did not answer the objector, except by saying, “Nay; but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” Let the moth contend with the flame, let the wax fight with the fire, let the stubble strive with the whirlwind, but as for us who are less than nothing let us have no disputes with God. The fact is, God’s dealings with us have an object, he treats us sometimes with stern severity for our good. We cannot always see the end from the beginning; but God has an end, and a gracious end, too, in all his dealings with his people.

14-22. *For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers.*

Yet in all this, God is dealing with man in love and mercy. Man is a strange creature; he will not go in the right way by being drawn, so full often he must be driven. There is a whip for a horse, and a bridle for an ass, a rod for a fool's back, and we are such fools that we must often feel that rod, and sometimes to a very painful extent, till our soul draweth near unto the grave, and our life to the destroyers.

23, 24. *If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand to show unto man his uprightness: Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.*

Oh, what precious words! There is One with God, One of a thousand, the Chief among ten thousand, the Messenger of the covenant, the Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. When he comes in, and makes man to see God's wondrous mingling of justice and mercy, then God turns in infinite grace upon the starving, dying sinner, and says, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."

25-28. *His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth: He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.*

Some Thursday nights ago, there strayed into this place one who had long hated God, and who had openly expressed his hatred of him. He was much prayed for by friends, but he was desperate in his

wickedness. He little dreamed, when he left his home, that he would come into this place; but so he did, and here in this house God met with him, and renewed his heart, and made him to rejoice in the God he once despised. Here was a fulfillment of this text, and I pray that it may be fulfilled again tonight.

29-33. *Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.*

Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I will speak. If thou hast anything to say, answer me: speak, for I desire to justify thee. If not, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I shall teach thee wisdom.

JOB 34

1-3. *Furthermore Elihu answered and said, Hear my words, O ye wise men; and give ear unto me, ye that have knowledge. For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat.*

I wish that verse was always true, especially concerning those who hear what purports to be the gospel; I only wish they would test and try what they hear, just as, with their mouth, they taste what they eat. But, as there are some persons who will eat anything that is set before them, so there are some who will accept anything that they hear, without exercising any spiritual discernment whatever. "It is cleverly put," they say, and therefore they receive it; yet they would scarcely be foolish enough to eat unhealthy food simply because it was skillfully carved.

4-5. *Let us choose to us judgment: let us know among ourselves what is good. For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment.*

Yes, Job had said something like that, yet not quite that. He had denied the charges of gross sin which his friends brought against him, and he had, in that sense, declared that he was righteous, and so he was. There may have been in Job a little of the spirit which Elihu here denounces; he may, perhaps, have thought that God had not dealt well with him, in letting him fall into so much trouble, seeing that he was a righteous man. This notion, Elihu will not permit to pass unchallenged. Mistaking Job's meaning, he denounces it, just as I have heard preachers sometimes give a description of Calvinism

such as it never was, and then they have proceeded to burn the man of straw which they have themselves made. It is one of the easiest things in the world to misquote or misinterpret your opponent's statement, and then denounce it, and think you have confuted him, whereas you have only dissipated the chimera of your own brain. Elihu proceeds to deal with Job in this fashion.

6-9. *Should I lie against my right ? my wound is incurable without transgression. What man is like Job, who drinketh up scorning like water? Which goeth in company with the workers of iniquity, and walked with wicked men. For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.*

He did not mean that Job did really go into the company of the wicked; but that, in his saying that it had been no profit to him that he should delight himself with God,—which Elihu declares that Job said, though I do not remember that he ever did say so,—he was making himself the associate of ungodly men. Any of us would be doing so if we, in our sorrowful moments, should say that we had derived no profit from delighting ourselves with God. It would not be true; it would be a rebellious and wicked speech, and, in some degree, it would be an atheistic speech.

10. *Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding : far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity.*

That was well spoken. Let us never, even for a moment, imagine that God can do anything that is unrighteous or unjust. God is a sovereign, and therefore he may do as he wills with his own grace; but there is never any injustice in any of the acts of his sovereignty. He is infinitely wise, and just, and merciful, in all that he does. He does as he wills, but he never wills to do anything that could possibly be better done. His own will is the best that can be.

11-17. *For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment. Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. If now thou hast understanding, hear this:*

hearken to the voice of my words. Shall even he that hateth right govern?

Do you suppose that it could be so,—that the Governor of all the earth should hate that which is right? This would be rank blasphemy.

17. *And wilt thou condemn him that is most just?*

Wilt thou, poor puny mortal, arraign the Most High, and dare to condemn him who is most just?

18-19. *Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly? How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands.*

This is the same kind of argument as Paul used in writing to the Romans: “Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” Shall the potter’s clay resist the power of the potter, who assuredly has the right to do what he wills with his own clay? And if we do not speak lightly against princes, much less should we speak against the King of kings and Lord of lords, whose infinite majesty filleth all things, What, after all, are princes, and rich men, and great men, in comparison with the great God who made them all? “They all are the work of his hands.”

20. *In a moment shall they die, and the people shall be troubled at midnight, and pass away: and the mighty shall be taken away without hand.*

An invisible power takes away the strength of which they boasted, and then, what does the prince become, with all his glory, or the warrior, with all his victories? What, but so much corruption that must be buried out of sight?

21, 22. *For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.*

How gloriously is this great truth put! This Elihu was a man of real eloquence; what a weighty sentence is this! How worthy to be treasured up in the memory! “There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” Not even in the grave can they be concealed from the eye of God; and if it were possible for them to hide beneath the skirts of death himself, yet would God perceive them, and drag them forth to judgment.

23. *For he will not lay upon man more than right; that he should enter into judgment with God.*

For, if man were ill treated, and more were laid upon him than ought to be, he would have cause to enter into judgment with his Maker. But God will never compromise his own eternal holiness after such a fashion as this. He will not lay upon man more than is right. You who are greatly afflicted, and in sore distress, ought to believe this; and if the Spirit of God shall give you a full conviction of the truth of it, it will afford you great comfort. The waves of your distress will come just as far as God wills, but at his bidding they must stay, as stays the sea in the fullness of its pride when Jehovah says to it, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." Therefore, leave thy case in his hands, for he will not lay upon thee more than is right.

24-28. *He shall break in pieces mighty men without number, and set others in their stead. Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth them in the night, so that they are destroyed. He striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others; because they turned back from him, and would not consider any of his ways: so that they cause the cry of the poor to come unto him, and he heareth the cry of the afflicted.*

It is a dreadful thing for princes and great men when the poor begin to cry unto God against them. God will soon take up that quarrel; for, while the cries of mere politicians and partisans are unheeded by him, the cry of the afflicted always commands his attention, and he will, in due time, rectify all that is wrong.

29. *When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?*

This is a most comforting question; for, if God gives quietness to the spirit, nobody can really trouble you. When Christ has once spoken peace to our heart, and given us a holy calm, then are we glad because we be quiet, and who is he that can raise a storm in our soul again? "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding," also passeth all distraction. It cannot be broken by all the devils in hell. Oh, how blessed is this assurance!

29. *And when he hideth his face, who then can behold him?*

If God will not be seen, who can possibly see him? If he grows wroth with a man, and leaves him, what can that man do? When even his own beloved people no longer see his face, what joy can be

theirs? What can make day when the sun is gone? What can make joy when Christ is gone?

29, 30. *Whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only: that the hypocrite reign not, lest the people be ensnared.*

God has ways of dealing with his children by which he weeds out hypocrites, lays them low, and does not suffer them to have rule over his people.

31. *Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more:*

That is the spirit of the true-born child of God: “Father, I know that what I have suffered is a chastisement from thy hand, and I accept it as such. ‘I will not offend any more,’ I quit the sin that grieved thee.”

32. *That which I see not teach thou me:*

“Show me wherefore thou contendest with me. Point out to me the evil which thou wouldest have me put away.”

32-35. *If I have done iniquity, I will do no more. Should it be according to thy mind? he will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose; and not I: therefore speak what thou knowest. Let men of understanding tell me, and let a wise man hearken unto me. Job hath spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom.*

This man is getting proud and conceited, I think. He spoke well when he was defending God against all charges and complaints; but now that he turns upon Job, the patriarch is a wiser man and a better man than he is. Elihu is not fit to unloose the latchets of Job’s shoes, yet he begins to accuse him. It sometimes happens that dogs bark at their masters, yet the masters are not to be blamed; and it is not always the best man who reproves others. Sometimes, a very foolish man will be the loudest in his rebukes of those who are wiser and better than himself, and will find fault with those whom he ought to commend. It was so in the case of Elihu and Job.

36, 37. *My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end because of his answers for wicked men. For he addeth rebellion unto his sin, he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God.*

Well, thank God, we are not going to be judged by Elihu, nor by any other of our fellow-creatures; to our own Master we stand or

fall, and if we trust in him, he will make us to stand even in the great day of judgment itself, blessed be his holy name!

PSALM

PSALM 2

1-3. *Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.*

This was what they did when they took the Lord of life and glory, dragged him to the judgment seat, and then nailed him to the accursed tree. "This is the heir," said they, "let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." They thought that they had destroyed the power of Christ, the appointed and anointed King, and that he would never reign among the sons of men.

4. *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.*

God might well laugh at their folly, for they were really executing his will all the while they were rebelling against him. They were really laying the foundation stones of his mediatorial throne in fair colors, and cementing them with his own most precious blood, for it was by his cross that he climbed to his crown. Well did Peter say to the Jews, on the day of Pentecost, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

5, 6. *Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*

In the resurrection, God lifted up the head of Christ above all the sons of men, and made them see that all their craft and cruelty had been displayed in vain.

7, 8. *I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*

The risen Christ is pleading, and pleading successfully, before the throne of God on high; and his plea is that the heathen may be

given to him for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.

9. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

He does this even now in the working of his providence; but he will do it still more manifestly at the second advent, when Christ will not allow the kings of the earth any longer to set themselves against him, but he will finally destroy their power, and prove himself to be the King of kings and Lord of lords even here below.

10-12. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son,-

That is the Lord Jesus Christ: "Kiss the Son,"-

12. Lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 2., AND 110.

PSALM 2

1, 2. Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,

This raging company of the Jews was but a specimen of the universal opposition which there is to the reign of Christ; for it is not alone in Israel, but among the heathen, and among all people, that there is this opposition to the Christ of God.

3. Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

The bands of Jehovah, and the bands of the Christ, his Anointed.

4, 5. He that sitteth in the heaven shall laugh: the lord shall have them in derision. Then, shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

His word, it seems, vexes them; there is no need of sword or javelin. The weapons of God's warfare are his words.

6-12. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy

possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron: thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

This exposition consisted of readings from JOHN 18:28-40; AND PSALM 2.

PSALM 2

1-3. *Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.*

The conspiracy was both strong and influential, The kings and the rulers combined against Jehovah and against his Christ. They were very determined; they set themselves with resolute purpose; they took counsel together. They were full of a horrible enthusiasm; they raged; they thought the work as good as done, but they imagined a vain thing. The fight was against Jehovah, and against his Anointed, the Christ, the Messiah. What came of it all? Did they break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from them? Listen: -

4. *He that sitteth in the heavens shalt laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.*

For what can mortals be as compared with the Eternal? The fire can readily enough consume the tow. Shall men set themselves in opposition to omnipotence, and hope to prosper? And when God determines to glorify his anointed Son, shall worms of the dust prevent him from doing so? What can come of all their opposition? God simply laughs at them, Jehovah has them in derision.

5. *Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.*

He scarcely needs to lift his hand, he has only to speak; and when Jehovah speaks in wrath, his words are thunderbolts. Men's hearts are indeed troubled when God's words come hot with anger into their spirits. This is what God said:-

6. *Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*

“You have raged, you have deliberated, you have resolved; but it is all nothing. There is my Son, the crowned King.” And such is the Anointed tonight; the Christ is on the throne, let his enemies say what they will, and he must reign, nothing can prevent it. He must be King of kings and Lord of lords, for thus is it written concerning him.

7. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

This is the seal of the Anointed. He is the Son of the Highest, the only begotten Son of the Father, who says to him, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.”

8. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

Christ is asking of his Father; even he cannot have what he desires without asking for it. Prayer is so essential to the progress of the kingdom of Christ that even Christ himself must ask. But then God has promised to give to Christ the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth to be his possession. This is the great strength of all missionary enterprise. Dear friends, we may be quite sure that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord when we read such a text as this: “I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” If men will not yield to the Lord when he is made known to them, if they resist the drawings of divine love, what will happen? Listen:-

9, 10. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces, like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.

“Ye rulers, ye magistrates, ye senators, ye governors of the earth, be wise, be instructed.”

11. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

“If you are wise, you will obey the superior King; you will yield obedience to the great Lord of all.”

12. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the Way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.

The kings and rulers are bidden to do this; let each one of us do the same, let us give the kiss of homage to him whom God has made

to be our King, and take him to be our Lord and Ruler for ever and ever.

12. *Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*

It is so; those of us who have tried it can bear witness that it is so, there is no life like a life of trust in God. The nearest approach to heaven that we can live in this mortal body is a life of simple confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now let us read concerning our Lord's first coming and appearance amongst the sons of men. Turn to the Gospel according to Matthew, at the third chapter

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 2., AND MATTHEW 3.

PSALM 3

These may be called very properly morning and evening Psalms. The third Psalm is the morning Psalm. A psalm of David when he fled from Absalom, his son. A dark hour that for David, preceded by the shadows of his own sin, and now deepened by the horrible hatred of his own favorite child, who conspired to take his kingdom and his life.

1. *LORD how are they increased that trouble me!*

As if he could not measure his troubles. He stands amazed. He makes his appeal to God.

2, 3. *Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.*

That is the worst of all, when they begin to ridicule his religion. He was a man who had said much of his faith in God; and in former days he had done great marvels by trusting in the living God; and now one and another dared to say openly that God had cast him off.

3. *But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.*

The word in the Hebrew is a bigger word than the word shield. It is a buckler — a kind of guard above, around, beneath, an all-surrounding defense. "Thou, Lord, art a shield for me. They cannot harm me. They cannot kill me. I am still guarded by God; and, what is more, thou art my glory. Though my glory is taken away, yet I glory in thee. Whatever else I have not, I have a God, a God that I dare glory in too, for there is no such God as he is. And thou art the lifter up of my head." My head is still above water. I do not yet sink, and my head shall rise again. Though I bow it down like a bulrush

now, I shall one day praise him. I know that I shall, for he is the health of my countenance.

4. *I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.*

He means that he loved to pray alone, but to use his voice in prayer. I have heard many Christians say that they can pray better when they can hear their own voices; they are better able to collect their thoughts. The voice is not necessary to prayer. It is the mere body of prayer. Still, a right healthy body may help the soul, and sometimes the use of the voice may help the spirit. David says that he cried to God; and then it happened to him, as it always happens to us: "He heard me out of his holy hill."

5. *I laid me down and slept;*

Far from the palace, and from the place of worship where he loved to meet with God.

5. *I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.*

I was kept through the night watches; through restless anxiety I slept. Now God sustains our hearts, even when we are asleep, for else we should not sleep. We should be restless and wakeful. But God gives us a peace ere we fall asleep, which abides with us as a blessed balm of rest, and so we sleep.

6, 7. *I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about. Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.*

They were like fierce lions threatening to devour him. They had already rent him in malice. God came and smote them on the jaw, so that they lost their strength to injure him.

8. *Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah.*

That is a sweet morning hymn. Sound Calvinistic doctrine that. "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord." It is he that saves man. It is he that delivers those that are saved. And here is the speciality and peculiarity of his grace.

"Thy blessing is upon thy people." Oh! to be remembered with them! Then, even if an Absalom should persecute us, the blessing is not withdrawn, for this is entailed upon the children of God.

"Thy blessing is upon thy people."

Now for the evening hymn.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 3 AND 4:1-6.

PSALM 4

1. *Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.*

Good men want to be heard when they pray, they are not satisfied with merely praying, they must have God's answers to their supplications. See how David pleads the past mercy received from God: "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress." Cannot my own heart look back to God's lovingkindness to me in days gone by? Oh, yes! Then, as he is the same God, what he has done in the past is an argument for what he will do in the future. There are some of us here who can adopt the psalmist's language, and say, "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer."

2. *O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame?*

How long will you slander me, how long will you slander God, how long will you turn the gospel into ridicule, how long will you resist the Spirit of God?

2. *How long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing?*

That is, after falsehood, after lying? Why do men seek after falsehood?

What attraction can it have for them? Why, only this attraction, that it suits a fool's heart to feed on falsehood.

3. *But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself:*

You cannot hurt him, for God has hedged him about. You may say what you please against him, but God loves him, and will take care of him.

3. *The LORD will hear when I call unto him.*

What a sweet assurance! O brethren, the mercy-seat is always open to us! It will be a blessed thing if every one of us can say, with David, "The Lord will hear when I call unto him."

4. *Stand in awe, and sin not:*

This is good advice to ungodly men; let them feel aright the awe of God presence, and they must turn from sin. Holy reverence is a great preservative from sin.

4. *Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.*

Hold private communion with yourself, in a private place, at a private hour. “Be still.” We are far too noisy, most of us talk too much. It would often make men wiser if they were stiller. If a still tongue does not make a wise head, yet it tends that way.

6. *Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.*

This is a capital rule for the whole of life. Serve God, and trust in him; do what is right, and rest in the God of right.

6. *There be many that say, who will shew us any good?*

We all want to see anything that is really good, we do not care who shows it to us, even if it be the devil himself. “Who will shew us any good?” That question may have another meaning, for there are some who have no desire for spiritual good, for such good as God calls good.

6. *LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.*

David began the Psalm with a personal petition, “Hear me when I call,” but now he begins to glow in spirit, and as his prayer burns more vehemently he prays for others also: “Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.” This is our highest joy, this is our greatest good, to walk in the light or God’s countenance. If we have the favour of God, and know that we have it, we need ask for nothing else, for every other blessing is assured to those who have the favour of God.

7. *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.*

The harvest and the vintage were the two seasons of greatest joy in the East, they shouted “Harvest Home” with gladness that the fruits of the earth had again been ingathered, and they drank the new wine, and danced for joy; but David says to the Lord, “Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. “When God puts gladness in the heart, it is real gladness, for God is not the Giver of a sham joy; and it is lasting gladness, for God does not give temporary gifts. David says, “Thou hast put gladness in my heart,” and then he compares it with

the gladness of the sons of men, and he says that his joy was greater than theirs when their earthly stores were increased. Boaz went to sleep on the threshing-floor, but he that sleeps upon the bosom of God has a far softer bed than that.

8. *I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.*

He who has Jehovah as his God is at home even when he is abroad, he is well guarded even when he has none upon earth to protect him, and he can go to sleep in calm confidence when others would be disturbed in mind and too timid to close their eyes.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 4, AND 5.

PSALM 4:1-6

1. *Hear me, when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.*

Past experience is a sweet solace in the hour of trouble. "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress." Think of what God has been to you, you tried ones, for he will be the same still. And can he have taught you to trust in his name, And thus far have brought you to put you to shame? Is this God's way — to be gracious to his people, and then to turn against them? God forbid. Pray, then, with the grateful memory of all his loving-kindness. "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress. Have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer."

2. *O ye sons of men, how, long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah.*

How long will ye take to lies? How long will you abuse a character which deserves not your censure? How long will you pour contempt upon God, whom you ought to serve? But know He talks to them as if they did not know, while they thought themselves the most knowing people in the world.

3. *That the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself:*

He has marked him out to be his own peculiar treasure. "The Lord's portion is his people. Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." Now if God has marked out his people to be his own, he will defend them. He will guard them against every adversary. They shall not be destroyed.

3. *The LORD will hear when I call unto him.*

The sweet assurance that prayer will prevail is one of the best comforts in the cloudy and dark day.

4. *Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.*

Tremble and sin not. Unhappily, there are many that sin and tremble not. They reverse the text. A trembling saint is often all the more saint because he trembles. Tremble and sin not. If there is not a mixture of prayer with our hope and our confidence, it is like meat without salt in it. It is apt to grow corrupt in prosperous sunny weather. Oh! for the fear of God in our hearts! Stand in awe, and sin not. Commune with your own heart. A man ought to be the best of company to himself. It is one reason why we should be well acquainted with the Word of God — that if ever we are left alone, we may be good companions to ourselves. “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.” Hush that babel. Let God speak. Get to your bed, away from the noise of the streets and the roll of the traffic. “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.” Some men cannot bear stillness. The quiet of their own hearts disturbs them. There must be something very rotten in the state of the man’s life who loves not some seasons of solitude. Some of us are less alone when we are alone, and most at home even when others count themselves abroad. “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.”

5. *Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,*

Bring your prayers, your praises. Present to God your hearts, your love, your trust.

5, 6. *And put your trust in the LORD. There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?*

Gaping about for some good thing; thirsting — they know not what they are thirsting for. “Who will show us any good?” Come from the east, or the west, or the north, or the south; only bring us something that promises pleasure, and we are your men. There be many that say, “Who will show us any good?” But we say not so. Our saying is another sort.

6. *LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.*

Is not that what many of you are saying tonight? You know what you want. You know that there is nothing else that will satisfy you. “Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.” We are not

well. Lord, we ask thee that it may be well between our souls and thee.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 3 AND 4:1-6.

PSALM 5

1. *Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation.*

Sometimes we pray right off, as David did when he cried to the Lord, “Hear me when I call.” At other times, we sit down to meditate, and think over what we want to say to the Lord in prayer, as David did when he said, “ ‘O Lord, consider my meditation.’ What I have considered do thou consider.” A well-considered prayer is very likely to succeed with God.

2. *Hearken unto the voice of my cry,-*

“When I have not confidence or comfort enough to present a well-ordered prayer to thee; but, like a child in pain, cry unto thee, ‘Hearken unto the voice of my cry,’”-

2. *My King, and my God:*

What! will a king hearken to a cry? Men generally prepare elaborate petitions when they come into the presence of royalty; but, although the Lord is far greater than all earthly sovereigns, he is far more condescending than they are.

2. *For unto thee will I pray.*

I trust that we all pray; I am sure that all believers do; but let us pray more, let us pray much more than we have done and let us each one truly say to the Lord, “ Unto thee will I pray.” He is a King, so serve him with your prayers. He is God, so adore him with your prayers, and if you can put both your hands on him, and say, as David did, “ My King, and my God,” what abundant motives you have for abounding in prayer to him

3. *My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD;*

“When the dew is on all nature, and on my spirit too, then shalt thou hear my voice in prayer. Before I go out into the world, my first thoughts shall be of thee.” Never see the face of man, beloved, until you have seen the face of God.

3. *In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.*

Adjust your prayer as the archer fits his arrow on the bow, look up as you shoot it, and keep on looking up and looking out for an answer to your supplication. You cannot expect God to open the

windows of heaven to pour you out a blessing if you do not open the windows of your expectation to look for it. If you look up in asking, God will look down in answering. It is well always to take good aim in prayer; some prayers are like random shots, they cannot be expected to hit the target; but David's prayer was well aimed, and he expected it to prevail with God: "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up."

4. *For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee.*

In both of these Psalms there is a clear line drawn between the righteous and the wicked, this is a line which still needs to be kept very clear, and we must all seek to know on which side of that line we are.

5, 6. *The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.*

These are strong words, but not too strong, God is not tolerant of evil and those who are most like him in other respects will be like him in this matter also.

7. *But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy:*

"I will be like a child who goes in and out of his father's door as often as he pleases because he is at home. I will not go there on my own merits, but 'in the multitude of thy mercy.'"

7. *And in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.*

There was no temple on earth when David wrote this Psalm, but God was his temple; and so the pious Jew opened the window, and looked towards Jerusalem, so do we look towards God upon the throne of grace in heaven, and seek to worship him in the beauty of holiness.

8. *Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face.*

David does not say, "Make my way straight," he does not want to have his own way, but he wants to walk in God's way. Thus sweet submission blends with a desire for perfect obedience: "Make thy way straight before my face."

9. *For there is no faithfulness in their mouth;-*

You cannot expect ungodly men to speak that which is right: “there is no faithfulness in their mouth; “-

9. Their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulcher;

Pouring out foul, putrid gas. They cannot speak without using filthy or blasphemous expressions, or if they do, there is falsehood lurking behind their words, for deceit and evil of all kinds are in their hearts.

9. They flatter with their tongue.

Always beware of people who flatter you, and especially when they tell you that they do not flatter you, and that they know you cannot endure flattery, for you are then being most fulsomely flattered, so be on your guard against the tongue of the flatterer.

10. Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee.

“It does not matter what they do against me; but, O Lord, ‘they have rebelled against thee.’” David speaks here like a judge pronouncing sentence upon the guilty, -not out of malice, but out of loyalty and devotion to God,

11, 12. But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 4, AND 5.

PSALM 6

Here the psalmist asks for a visit from God, for he is sick at heart, heavy and depressed. Be very thankful if that is not your case; but if it is, be very grateful that here is a prayer ready-made for you. Here you are taught how to cry to God, and what to expect from him. If you are very sick and sad, you are not worse off than David was. Send for David’s Physician; you cannot have a better doctor than the royal Physician. He who waited on King David is prepared to wait on you.

1. O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger,

“Rebuke me; it will do me good; I need it; but not in anger. Be gentle and tender with me: ‘Rebuke me not in thine anger.’”

1. *Neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.*

“Chasten me; it may be that the rod will be very curative to me; but let not the chastening be given in thy hot displeasure. Be not very angry with thy poor sinful servant. If thou dost not turn away thy rod, yet turn away thy wrath. It is a sweet prayer. Some people cry to God about their sickness; it is much better to cry to God about the cause of it; that is to say, if it be a chastisement for sin, get rid of the sin, and the rod will then be removed.

2. *Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed.*

“Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak.” This was a sweet reason for David to urge: “For I am weak.” He could not say, “For I am worthy.” He would not have dared to say that. He could not say that when he said, “Have mercy,” for mercy is for the unworthy. Justice is for the good; mercy is for those who are guilty. “Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed.” Plead the greatness of your disease as a reason for the remedy. Do not come with your self-righteousness; that will hinder you. Come with your sorrow and your sin, your weakness and your pain, and plead these before God.

3. *My soul is also sore vexed:*

That is worse than the bones being vexed. “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?”

3. *But thou, O LORD, how long?*

There is the pith of the prayer. David is troubled because God is away from him; he has lost communion with his Lord; he has got out of fellowship with his God, and here comes the most necessary cry of all: —

4. *Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake.*

Will not that prayer suit you who are here tonight, you who are full of sin, and are heart-broken about it, and dread the wrath to come? I put this prayer into your mouths, and pray the Holy Spirit to put it into your hearts: “Oh save me for thy mercies' sake.”

5. *For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?*

As much as to say, “If thou lettest me die, thou wilt lose one singer out of thy earthly choir; but if thou wilt let me live, I will

remember thee; I will praise thee; I will give thee thanks.” Do you feel like saying tonight, “Lord, if thou shalt destroy me, thou wilt gain nothing by it; but if thou wilt save me, there will be one who will give thee thanks for ever”? I have told you sometimes of that old woman who said, “If the Lord does save me, he shall never hear the last of it.” And you and I can also say that if he saves us, he shall never hear the last of it; we will praise him throughout eternity for his great salvation.

6. *I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.*

David was in a very sorry case when he wrote these words. So great was his pain, so acute his sorrow, that all the sluices of his eyes were pulled up, and he seemed to float his bed in tears, and to be like George Herbert when he wrote: —

“O who will give me tears? Come, all ye springs,
Dwell in my head and eyes: come, clouds and rain:
My grief hath need of all the watery things,
That nature hath produced. Let every vein
Suck up a river to supply mine eyes,
My weary, weeping eyes, too dry for me,
Unless they get new conduits, new supplies,
To bear them out, and with my state agree.”

7. *Mine eye is consumed because of grief;*

He had almost wept his eyes out; they grew red with his weeping, so that he could not see.

7. *It waxeth old because of all mine enemies.*

His eyesight grew dim, like that of an old man. A cataract of grief had put a cataract of blindness into his eyes.

8. *Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity*

He wants his God to come to him, so he bids God’s enemies clear out. If we keep company with the wicked, we cannot invite God to our house, and expect him to come. “Depart from me,” says David, “all ye workers of iniquity.” “You who are singing what you call a jolly song, be off with you. You who are merry with your jokes against religion, begone far from me.”

8. *For the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping.*

“And if he has heard my tears, I do not want you to be here. I cannot associate with God’s enemies now that he has heard the

voice of my weeping.” Is not that a beautiful expression, “The voice of my weeping”? Why, there was no sound, was there? Yet there are songs without words, and there are voices without sounds.

9. *The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer.*

“I thought at first that he would not take my petition; but I see he stretches out his right hand, he receives my prayer; and if he receives my prayer, I shall soon receive his answer.”

10. *Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return and be ashamed suddenly.*

Now let us read the eighth Psalm, in which David expresses great wonder that God, whom he had asked to visit him, should deign to do so. I think I see him sitting with his window open. It is night, and he is feeling better; and he bids them throw open the window, and he sits and looks at the stars, glad of the cool, fresh air.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 6. AND 8.

PSALM 8

8:1. *O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.*

They are very high, but thy glory is higher than the heavens.

2-4. *Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

He, whose voice rolls the stars along, who makes those bright worlds to fly like sparks from the anvil of his omnipotence, how can he stoop so low as to regard his fallen creature, man, who is so small, so insignificant?

5, 6. *For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:*

Man is God’s viceroy. He reigns over God’s works in God’s name. Let him not set up to be a king, and try to usurp the honour of his great Lord, the Emperor, the Universal Governor.

7, 8. *All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.*

What a king man is! Let him not be cruel to the beasts of the field; let him not be a tyrant; God did not make him for that purpose. Let his reign be generous and kind; and if the animals must suffer, yet spare them as much suffering as possible. O man, be thou a generous viceroy, for thou art under a most generous King, who is himself the happy God, and who delights in the happiness of all his creatures!

9. *O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!*

Thus does the psalmist finish as he began the psalm, by praising the name of the Lord.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 6. AND 8.

PSALM 9

This Psalm has a dedication which is very difficult to understand: "To the chief Musician upon Muthlabben. A Psalm of David." Either "Muthlabben" is the tune to which the Psalm was to be sung, or some musical instrument that is now forgotten, or else it alludes to Ben, who was one of the Levitical singers mentioned in 1 Chronicles 15:18. In all probability, however, the true translation of the title is, "A Psalm on the death of the son," or "on the death of the champion," and it is thought by some that it was composed by David after the death of giant Goliath. If it be so, I think you will see, as we read the Psalm, that it well proclaims the victory which God had wrought.

1. *I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works.*

It will be well if we also resolve that we will praise the Lord. Most people have something or someone to praise, so let us select the Lord, even Jehovah, as the subject of our song. Let us resolve that we will praise him continually, for it may be difficult sometimes to do it. The heart may be very heavy; it may even be inclined to rebellion and murmuring, but let us make this strong resolution, in the power of God's grace: "I will shew forth all thy marvellous works." Here is room for great variety of praise, and here are abundant topics for praise, for there is no work of God which is not marvellous, and worthy of being praised with our

whole heart. So, Lord I will not be dumb. Thou hast given me a tongue, I am not like the brute beasts that cannot speak; my tongue is the glory of my frame, so with it I will show forth all thy marvellous works.

2. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High.

Get thee up, then, my soul, out of the dark places of thy despondency. Rise, my drooping spirit, to something higher and better. If thou canst not be glad in anything else, be glad in thy God, — be glad that thou hast a God, and such a God, and that he is thy God still. Whatever else thou mayest have lost, thou hast not lost him. “I will be glad and rejoice.” The reduplication of the words indicates a double joy, — a double gladness, as the apostle says, “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.” Be glad twice over, for you have double cause for rejoicing in the Lord.

3. When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence.

As much as to say, “The presence of God is quite enough to make my adversaries flee, — yea, and utterly to cut them off.” As John Wesley said, “The best of all is, God is with us;” and if God be with us, it matters little to us who are against us.

4. For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right.

One of our noblemen has this for his motto, “I will maintain it;” but the Christian has a far better one: “Thou hast maintained my right.” If David sang thus after he had hurled the stone from his sling into Goliath’s skull, he might well magnify the name of the Lord, who had maintained the rights of his people, and put the uncircumcised champion of the Philistines to confusion and death.

5, 6. Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever. O thou enemy, —

You can conceive of David, standing on the prostrate form of his fallen foe, and looking on that gigantic countenance and those mighty limbs, crying out, “O thou enemy,” —

6 7. Destructions are come to a perpetual end: and thou hast destroyed cities, their memorial is perished with them. But the Lord shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment.

“Thou hast destroyed cities,” but thou couldst not destroy God. When thou didst defy the armies of other nations, thou couldst easily put them to rout, but when thou didst defy the living God, then there was an end of thee, for thou couldst not overcome him, nor overcome his people. Blessed be God for this, our faith is founded upon a rock that never shall be removed, and our confidence is fixed upon One who can never fail us, and whose truth must stand fast for ever.

8-10. *And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness. The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee:*

The basis of faith is knowledge, and there is no knowledge like that which comes from experience. If you know the name of God as Jehovah, — the self-existent and ever-living God, — you will have good reason for trusting him; and then, if you know his many precious names, — such as Jehovah-Tsidkenu, the Lord our Righteousness, Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord my banner; Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide, Jehovah-Shalom, the peace-giving God, and Jehovah-Shammah, the God who is there where his people are — yea, if any one name of God be fully understood by you, you will put your trust in him.

10-12. *For thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee. Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings. When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them:*

When the great Coroner’s inquest shall be held upon all who have wrongly suffered, the commission will open by an enquiry concerning the blood of the martyrs: “When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them.” His suffering ones, who laid down their lives for the truth’s sake, shall find that their blood was precious in his sight.

12. *He forgetteth not the cry of the humble.*

Is there not consolation in these words for some of you? You have been humbled, and brought down from your high place; now then, is your time to cry; and when you do so, you will prove that “he forgetteth not the cry of the humble.” There are many, who give heed to the petitions of their needy fellow-creatures, and feel their

force, for a time; but they are engaged in business, or occupied in other ways, and they soon forget. Other things crowd out the needy one's petition, and so he is left unhelped. But it is never so with God: "He forgetteth not the cry of the humble." Notice, in the next verse, how David avails himself of that truth. He seems to say, "Is it true that God does not forget the cry of the humble? Then I will cry unto him, and my humble cry shall go up to his ear, and to his heart."

13. *Have mercy upon me, O Lord; —*

What a blessed prayer that is, — a prayer useful on all occasions, — under a sense of sin, or under a load of sorrow, — burdened with labour, or crushed with despondency. It is a prayer which is like the cherubim's sword, which turned every way; you may use it as you will: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord;" —

13. *Consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that lifted me up from the gates of death:*

What a lift that is, — lifted up from the gates of death into life, and ultimately into heaven! What an almighty God our Lord proves himself to be at a dead lift! When every other arm is paralyzed, he comes to us, and lifts us up from the gates of death.

14. *That I may shew forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion:*

From the gates of death to the gates of Zion, is the lift which God gives to his poor suffering people.

14, 15. *I will rejoice in thy salvation. The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made:*

If you picture David with the carcase of the giant before him, the Philistines put to ignominious flight, and the Israelites in full pursuit after them, you can understand his saying, "The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made."

15, 16. *In the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The LORD known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaion. Selah.*

The probable meaning of these words is, "Consider and pause." They are musical rests, perhaps; but they also suggest to us how well it is, in our reading of the Scriptures, sometimes to stop a while, and inwardly digest the words that we have read.

17. The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.

Even if they are not outwardly as wicked as other men are, yet their forgetfulness of God is the highest form of injustice to him; it is treason against the majesty of heaven; it is robbing God of what is his right; it is a combination of everything that is evil.

18-20. *For the needy shall not always be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever. Arise, O LORD, let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight. Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men.*

They boast that they are men, and that they quit themselves like men. Yet let them know that, although they are men, they are only men, with all the infirmities and imperfections of men, and that there is a God who will, in due time, let men know that they are but men, and that the best of men are but men at their best.

20. *Selah.*

Pause again, think over what we have been reading, and lift up your heart in prayer to God, seeking the aid of the Holy Spirit to apply the truth to your soul.

PSALM 12

1. *Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.*

One might have thought that David still lived among us, his cry is so timely, so exactly true to the position of affairs today. What a prayer he offers! Driven away from confidence in men, he cries, "Help, Lord! Thou mighty One, put forth thy power! Thou faithful One, display thy truth! 'Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.'"

2. *They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.*

They speak vanity; there is nothing in it. It is all froth, no reality; vain speech about vain subjects, having no real spiritual power to help the man that heareth: "They speak vanity." "With a double heart do they speak:" saying one thing, and meaning another; trifling with words; orthodox to the ear, heterodox to the heart. Oh, how much there is of this falseness in these days! Still are there many who "speak with flattering lips and with a double heart." It is some

comfort to us to know that no new thing has happened unto us; we are merely going through an old part of the road which David traversed long ago.

3, 4. *The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?*

There is the point in dispute. Man will be lord of himself, and God will be Lord of all and everything; and there can be no compromise between these two. Not even a man's lips are really his own. Who gave the gift of speech? Who created the mouth? Who is LORD over us? Why, the answer is simple enough! He that made us, he that redeemed us, he should be Lord over us. Let us willingly put ourselves in subjection to him.

5. *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD;*

God takes notice of the oppression of poor men, and especially of poor saints when they are tried by the wickedness of the age: "Now will I arise, saith the Lord."

5, 6. *I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him. The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.*

There is no mistake about the words of this blessed Book. The very words themselves are as accurate, as infallible, as silver is pure when it has been seven times refined by the most skillful artist. There is no improving upon God's words. We dare not leave one of them out. We would not presume to put one of our own side by side with them: "The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."

7, 8. *Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.*

When sin gets into the high places of the earth, then it becomes very abundant. Every evil man takes liberty to creep out into public life when some great leader in vice occupies the throne. God save the people when such is the case!

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 12., 13., AND 14.

PSALM 12

1. *Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.*

The Psalm speaks of a very discouraging time, and records a very dreary fact, but the psalmist is wise, and turns to God with that short, sententious prayer, "Help, Lord."

2, 3. *They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things:*

They will not be able to continue speaking falsely and proudly for ever; a shovelful of earth from the grave-digger's spade will silence them, and a terrible display of God's justice will make them speechless for ever.

4, 5. *Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us? For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.*

That is all it is, only a puff, — the biggest brag of the wicked, the most tremendous threat against the Lord's people, is but a puff after all; and God will set his people high above all those who puff at them.

6-8. *The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. The wicked walk on every side when the vilest men are exalted.*

Now let us read in Jeremiah's prophecy, chapter **8**. Remember, dear brethren, that Jeremiah had the very sorrowful task of warning a people who would not give heed to his warnings. He prophesied evil, — evil which began to come upon the people even while he prophesied, yet they would not turn to God. I sometimes think Jeremiah was the greatest of all the prophets, because, in the teeth of perpetual opposition, with no measure of success whatever, he continued to be faithful to God and to deliver the message with which he was sent, weeping the while over people who would not weep for themselves.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 12.; AND JEREMIAH 8., AND 9:1.

PSALM 13

1, 2. *How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?*

When you and I have to spread our complaints before God, we are not the first who have done so. When we complain of God's forsaking us, we are not alone. There was a greater than David who, even in the article of death, cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

3. *Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;*

When it is dark, very dark, we get drowsy. Sorrow induces sleep. Remember how the Saviour found the disciples sleeping for sorrow. Therefore David asks for light. Light will help him to keep awake, and he fears to sleep, so he prays, "Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death."

4, 5. *Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and these that trouble me rejoice when I am moved.*

But what a precious "but" this is! You can hear the chain rattle as the anchor goes down to hold the vessel.

5, 6. *I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.*

What a climb there is, in this Psalm, from the abyss of sorrow up to the summit of joy! "I will sing unto the Lord because he hath dealt bountifully with me." I hope many of us know what this blessed change means. If any of you are in great sorrow tonight, may my Lord and Master lighten your eyes!

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 12., 13., AND 14.

PSALM 14

1. *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.*

He was a fool to think it. He was not fool enough, however, to say it except in his heart. Fools have grown more brazen-faced of late; for now, they not only say it in their heart, but they say with their tongues, "There is no God." Oh, no; I have made a mistake!

They do not call them “fools” now; they call them “philosophers.” That, however, is often exactly the same thing.

1. *They are corrupt,*

It is always so. When they will have no God, they will have no goodness “They are corrupt.” That is the secret of infidelity. The psalmist has put his finger on it: “They are corrupt.”

1, 2. *They have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.*

David represents God looking from the battlements of heaven upon our fallen humanity; and at the time when he looked, he could see none that understood him, or sought him. By nature we are all in this condition. Until the grace of God seeks us, we never seek God. Even God looked in vain. He was no stern critic; he was no hypercritic: “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.”

3. *They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

“That was in old Testament times,” says one. If you turn to the Epistle to the Romans, you will find that Paul quotes it as being true in his day. It is always true, and it always will be true, apart from the grace of God: “There is none that doeth good; no, not one.”

4. *Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?*

Are they all so foolish?

4. *Who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the LORD.*

They think nothing of God’s people. They could swallow them at a mouthful, they so despise them. Notice, that, whenever a man despises God, he soon despises God’s people; it is only natural that he should do so. Meanwhile, he himself will not call upon the Lord.

5. *There were they in great fear:*

What, these very people who would not call upon God! Were they in great fear? Yes, God can bring great fear upon the men who seem most bold. It is noticed that the boldest blasphemers, when they become ill, are generally the most timid persons. These are the people who begin to cry, and give up what they boasted of, when they get into deep waters: “There were they in great fear.”

5. *For God is in the generation of the righteous.*

He is with his people, he always will be with his people, and when he makes bare his arm, fear takes possession of his enemies.

6. *Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the LORD is his refuge.*

They mocked at the idea of a mans trusting in God for his daily bread, or trusting in God for his eternal salvation; but, mock as men may, there is no other refuge for a soul but God. When the floods are out, there is no safety but in the ark with God. Oh, that men would trust in him!

7. *Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.*

May that time soon come! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 12., 13., AND 14.

PSALM 16

1. *Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.*

Ah, brethren! When we think of our daily dangers, and when we remember the sinfulness of our nature, this petition may well be our frequent prayer: "Preserve me, O God;" and this may well be our plea, as well as the psalmist's: "for in thee do I put my trust." We do trust in the name of the Lord, for we can never expect to be preserved except by his protecting grace.

2, 3. *O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; but to, the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.*

"My God, I would fain prove my gratitude to thee if I could; but what can I do for One so great as thou art? Thou art infinitely above me; thou needest nothing at my hands. What, then, can I do to show my love to thee? By my care for thy people I may prove what I would do for thee if I could. Are they hungry? I will feed them. Are they sick? I will visit them. If my goodness cannot reach the great Head of the Church, it shall at least wash the feet, for I do love thee, O my God; and I want, in some practical way, to show that I love, thee!"

4. *Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.*

He who sincerely loves the true God cannot have any regard for his rivals; he will have no communion with false gods in any shape or form.

5. *The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup:*

That is the believer's portion,—his God. The Levites, as a tribe, had no inheritance in the land of Canaan; but God was their portion, and who shall dare to say that they had not the best of it? Now, child of God, if you could have your choice, what would you choose,—goods or God? Earthly wealth, or the God who is the source of all good things?

5. *Thou maintainest my lot.*

One of our great men has for his motto, "I will maintain it." But the psalmist's is a much better one: "Thou maintainest my lot." It is better to have God for our Guardian than to have all possible human strength with which to defend ourselves.

6. *The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.*

The Jewish rulers stretched the measuring or dividing lines over the plots of land that fell to the different members of the family; but here the man of God declares that, since God was his portion, the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places. There is no choice of places, or times, or circumstances, with the man who thoroughly loves his God. He can find God in loneliness, and so enjoy the best company, if he has God in poverty, he has great riches, O happy man, who has God to be his all!

7. *I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel:*

"He has talked with me, checked me, rebuked me, instructed me, encouraged me: 'I will bless Jehovah, who hath given me counsel.'" That does not, at first sight, look as if it were one of the choicest of blessings, yet the psalmist mentions it immediately after he has declared that the lines have fallen unto him in pleasant places,—as if he felt that one of the choicest blessings of the covenant was that God had been his Counsellor.

7. *My reins also instruct me in the night seasons.*

"God makes my heart, my conscience, my inmost being, to give me instruction. What a blessing that must have been to David! A man who has no inward monitor, because he has stifled his conscience, so that it no longer holds him by the ear, and speaks

with him, is poor indeed; but blessed is he who has his God and his conscience to counsel and instruct him.

8. *I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand,*

I shall not be moved.

Brother, have you always acted on the straight? Have you so conducted your business that you need not be ashamed for God himself to look at it? Then do not be afraid of anything that may happen to you, for you will come out all right at the last. There may be great trouble in store for you, and you may be stripped of all that you possess; but you shall never be ashamed.

9. *Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.*

Every good thing belongs to the man who belongs to God. He need not be afraid even of the grave, for he can adopt the language which is here prophetically used for Christ himself. He is not afraid to die, for he can say:—

10. *For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell;*

“Sheol”—the place of the departed, the intermediate state into which the soul passes at death.

10. *Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*

In the fullest sense, this verse belongs to Christ alone; but, still, what belongs to the Head is also the portion of the members of his mystical body.

11. *Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 16., AND 63.

And this is the portion of every believer. “Here little, but hereafter much,” says Bunyan; but I will venture to alter it, and say, “Here much, but hereafter more shall be our inheritance from age to age.”

PSALM 16

1. *Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.*

Notice how the psalmist urges the prevailing plea of faith. A trusted God will be a preserving God. If thou, believer, canst truly say that thou art trusting God in any time of trouble or danger, thou wilt be safe enough in his keeping.

2, 3. *O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, is whom is all my delight.*

“I cannot do thee any good, thou art too great to need anything from me; but I may be the means of blessing to thy people, thy saints may reap some little benefit from what I do. They are the company I keep, they are the choicest friends I know, and if thou wilt but help me to do something for thee which shall bring blessing to them, I shall indeed rejoice”

4. *Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.*

We must be faithful to God, to the God revealed to us in the Book of God, the God of the Old Testament of the New Testament, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must keep to him, not make another god after our own imagination. It is practical idolatry even to conceive of God otherwise than he is revealed in Holy Scripture. This we must not do, but say, concerning the God of the Bible, “This God is our God for over and ever.”

5. *The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.*

One of the great houses of nobility has for its motto the words, “I will maintain it.” But David’s is a better one: “Thou maintainest my lot.” God is the best Defender that his people can ever have.

6. *The lines are fallen into me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.*

Many of us have proved this to be true in our experience. May we continue gratefully contented and more than contented, delighted with whatever God appoints for us!

7, 8. *I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons. I have set the LORD always before me?*

“In my acts by day, and my thoughts by night,”

8. *Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

Now across the sacred page there comes the wondrous revelation of a glorious One who speaks in the very words that are recorded here. Though, possibly, we have not recognized him, these words that follow apply specially to Jesus Christ our Lord.

9. *Therefore my heart is glad,*

Because, in the night watches, he had sought his Father, and found help in him, he could say, "Therefore my heart is glad."

9, 10. *And my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell;*

Or, rather, Hades, the abode of the dead.

10. *Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*

Now David was gathered to his fathers, and his body saw corruption, as the apostle Peter rightly observed, so it is clear that he is not speaking of himself here, not in the first place, at any rate, but of "great David's greater Son," our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: "Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

11. *Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hands there are pleasures for evermore.*

PSALM 17

1. *Hear the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips.*

Good men are often slandered and misunderstood; and, at such times, the first verse of this Psalm will well fit their lips: "Hear the right, O Lord." And, at all times, it is a great blessing when a supplicant can say to God, "Give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips." It must be a dreadful thing to pray with lips that do not speak the truth. When men's thoughts are far away from their prayers, and they are muttering pious words but their heart is absent, what a mockery it must be in the sight of God! A dead prayer, — who will own it? It is like the child that was overlaid in the days of Solomon, which neither of the two mothers would own to be hers, Beware of dead prayers. You may dress them up as finely as you like; but, if there is no life in them, what good are they?

2. *Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal.*

It is the appeal of a slandered man to the highest court; he takes his case into the Court of King's Bench, and asks God himself to give the verdict concerning what he had done. It is a good case that will bear to be so investigated.

3. *Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.*

Happy is the man who is not afraid for God to come to him suddenly in the night, or to pounce upon him, as it were, at any hour of the day, for, whenever he comes, he will find his servant so acting that he will not mind who examines his conduct. He is keeping his lip, purposing that it shall not transgress God's law, and he is ruling his whole body in like manner. Only the grace of God can enable us to do this.

4. *Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.*

Notice that verse, young man! There is much-needed teaching there for you. There are many "paths of the destroyer" in this wicked city of London, and all over the world; and it is only by taking heed to our ways, according to God's Word, that we can hope to escape from them. How pleasant those "paths of the destroyer" often appear to be! How smooth and how alluring they are! All sorts of supposed delicacies and beauties will tempt you to go that way, and the foolish heart readily inclines to these indulgences; but happy is the man whose judgment is enlightened by God's Word so that he avoids it, and passes by "the paths of the destroyer."

5. *Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.*

"I know that I am in thy way; but, O Lord, hold me up! I am like a horse that needs a careful driver, else I shall trip and fall, in rough places or in smooth, 'Hold up my goings in thy paths,' for I may fall even there. There are the sins of my holy things, so 'hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.'"

6-12. *I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech. Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings, from the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about.*

They are enclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly. They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; like as a lion that is greedy of

his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places. Many godly men have such cruel enemies as David had, so they will do well to pray as he did: —

13-15. *Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: from men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. As for me,—*

“What do I possess? What is my portion? Am I full of substance, like the men of the world, or have I little of this world’s wealth? It is of small consequence, for, ‘as for me,’” —

15. *I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.*

That is our portion. God grant that we may prize it more and more! Amen.

PSALM 18

1-3. *I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength in whom I will trust; my buckler, and my horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I shall call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.*

At first he says, “I will love thee” then, “I will trust thee,” now he says “I will call upon thee,” and that calling upon God is specially in the sense of praising him; and when you have just experienced a divine deliverance, how full your spirit is of sacred gratitude!

4-7. *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.*

God was angry with Saul and with all David’s persecutors because they hunted that good man like a partridge upon the

mountains. The prayer of the poor suppliant called down the anger of God upon his adversaries.

8. *There went up a smoke out of his nostrils and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.*

This is a wonderful picture of the anger of God. The Hebrews always connected manifestations of anger with the nose and mouth just as they ascribed various passions and feelings to the different members of the body. So David says, "There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured." Does someone ask, "Can prayer move God in this way?" Yes, it seems so. Of course, David had to speak after the manner of men; there is no other way in which men can speak, so he describes God as being thus stirred by the cry of his poor child when it came up into his ears. Nothing brings a man's temper into his face like an injury done to his child, and God, as a father, cannot endure to have his children hurt. "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."

9, 10. *He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.*

So quick is God to come to the deliverance of his persecuted people.

11-13. *He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire. The LORD; also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail storms and coals of fire.*

Behold the dread artillery of heaven as God turns his terrible guns against the enemies of his people, and pours out hot shot from his lofty bastion: "hail stones and coals of fire."

14, 15. *Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.*

The psalmist is evidently describing the passage of the Red Sea, and likening the descent of God to his individual help to that memorable descent of God to the rescue of his entire people. And indeed, God is as great in his help to one as in his help to all; he is never little. When God helps you, my brother, he is a great God, and

greatly to be praised, as greatly so as when he comes to the rescue of an entire nation. Therefore sing unto the Lord, whose arm is lifted up for you, even for you, as truly as it was lifted upon Israel when he brought them out of Egypt “with a strong hand, and with a stretched-out arm, and with great terror.”

16. *He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters.*

The Lord made another Moses of him. Pharaoh’s daughter gave the name of Moses, that is, one drawn out, to the child who was brought to her, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

17. *He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me; for they were too strong for me.*

Is that the reason why God interposed on David’s behalf? Then let all his weak children find comfort in the fact that, when our enemies are too strong for us, God will come and deliver us. Let us be thankful for burdens that are too heavy for us to bear, and cast them upon the almighty shoulders that can easily sustain them. If we could do without God, we should do without God; but as we cannot, God will come to us, and help and deliver us.

18, 19. *They presented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.*

What a sense of divine love God’s gracious deliverance brings! Perhaps David would never have known how greatly God delighted in him if he had not been in such dire distress, and had not had such a great deliverance.

20-24. *The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me. I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight.*

If God gives you grace to be honest, and upright, and true, and steadfast in the time of temptation, you may be quite sure that he will deliver you; in fact, he has already wrought the greater part of your deliverance in thus keeping you from sin. The worst thing that

a trouble can do for a Christian man is to carry him off his feet, and make him forsake his integrity.

25-27. *With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the forward thou wilt shew thyself forward. For thou wilt save the afflicted people; but wilt bring down high looks.*

If your faith cannot endure testing and trying, it is but poor faith. It will not do to die with if it will not do to live with. But if you cry to the Lord, and he enables you in the time of your distress to be faithful to him then he will certainly give you deliverance sooner or later.

28-30. *For thou wilt light my candle: the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness. For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall. As for God, his way is perfect:*

If you practice self-reliance, but not God-reliance, you will be sure to fail. What poor strength that is which does not come from God! Is it worthy of the name of strength at all? Is it not impotence and impudence combined? May God keep us from imagining that we can do anything apart from him! At the same time, may his gracious Spirit work in us the sure confidence that we can do everything he bids us do when he is our Helper! David had that confidence, for he goes on to sing, —

30-37. *The word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. For who is God save the LORD? or who is a rock save our God? It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip. I have pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them: neither did I turn again till they were consumed.*

Remember that this is a soldier's song,-a song under the old covenant when men might fight as they may not fight now. We must, therefore, spiritualize this ancient war-song as we read it.

38-45. *I have wounded them that they were not able to rise: they are fallen under my feet. For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me. They cried, but there was none to save them: even unto the LORD, but he answered them not. Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind: I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets. Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; and thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people whom I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me. The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid out of their close places.*

So it came to pass that the Philistines were afraid of David, and he delivered his people from the attacks of all invaders, and brought them that blessed peace which Solomon enjoyed with them.

46-50. *The LORD liveth, and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God that avengeth me, and subdueth the people under me. He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man. Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. Great deliverance giveth he to his king; and sheweth mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed for evermore.*

PSALM 18:1-19

1. *I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.*

“I do love thee, and I will love thee yet more and more. I bind myself to thee for the future as well as the present.”

2. *The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*

Note how David delights to heap up poetic imagery to describe his God.

They who glory in the Lord would fain speak worthily of him; and because there is no one object in nature that can fully set him forth, they mention many, as David does here. Like him, if we would convey even a faint idea of what God is to us, we must think

of all things that are strong, and worthy of our confidence, and putting them all together, we must say that our God, our strength, in whom we trust, is all this, and much more,

3. *I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.*

Prayer brings salvation. Prayer must, however, be mingled with praise, for prayer and praise make up the breath of the Christian life. Have I not often reminded you that we breathe in the air of heaven by prayer, and then breathe it out again in grateful praise?

4, 5. *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.*

“They were before me, behind me, all around my path whichecker way I turned.”

6. *In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.*

What a difference there is between this living God of David, — our living God, — and that impersonal nonentity which, nowadays, is regarded by many as God. The god of the pantheist, — what is he? A nobody and a nothing; but our God made the heavens; and our God heareth the prayer of all who truly cry unto him.

7. *Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.*

The cry of one of his oppressed children stirred him to anger. Nothing moves the heart of God like an injury done to his people. You remember how the prophet Zechariah wrote to the captive Jews in Babylon, “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.”

8, 9. *There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under his feet.*

In this wonderful poetic description, Jehovah is represented as descending from his throne at the cry of one of his children in distress.

10. *And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.*

So swift is prayer to reach the ear of God, and so swift is God to come and answer his people's prayers.

11. *He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.*

Like an Oriental king, who travels beneath his royal canopy, the Lord is pictured as coming to earth with the bursting clouds and opening heavens as the pavilion of the Deity.

12. *At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire.*

These are some of the weapons with which he assails the adversaries of his people. With this dread artillery, he smote Pharaoh of old, when he rained wrath upon the land of Egypt, and fire mingled with the hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground.

13, 14. *The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them.*

God himself came forth on his people's behalf, and fought for them from heaven. As we read that "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera," so did God make the very tempests in the skies to be like an invincible legion, sweeping before it the enemies of his anointed servant.

15-18. *Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils. He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me. They prevented me in the day of my calamity:*

They went before him, they blocked his way.

18, 19. *But the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.*

Oh, how sweetly this record continues! Never was there a poem more lofty in its diction. Even Milton can not equal the language of this Psalm. This inspired writing rises superior to all human compositions, even if regarded only from the poetic point of view. But what must have been the psalmist's experience when he was delivered after this wonderful fashion? And if God has delivered you and me in a quieter and gentler way, yet he has quite as surely

delivered us; and blessed be his name from this time forth, and even for evermore!

PSALM 18: 1-20

1. *To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord, who spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul: And he said,*

Notice that, though David was a king, he does not say so, but he prefers the higher title, "The servant of Jehovah." He served his God by his song. Oh, that all who led our psalmody would serve God in it! It should always be with deep devotion that we sing the praises of God. "Who spake unto the Lord the words of this song." He did not speak them to us; he spoke them to the Lord. Singing is peculiarly an address unto God; but neither prayer nor praise should be addressed to men. David "spake unto the Lord the words of this song, in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies." It is always well to sing when a deliverance is yet new; if we do not praise the Lord in the day of our deliverance, we are not likely to praise him many days afterwards. We remember how it is written that, when the Lord delivered Israel at the Red Sea, "Then believed they his words; they sang his praises." So do thou time thy psalm as God times his mercies.

1. *I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.*

Not only, "I do love thee," but "I will love thee." Some resolutions are rash, and should not be made; but this is a resolution that we may well make. We are bound to make it if we have experienced the lovingkindness of the Lord. If God be our strength, then in the strength of God we may say, "I will love thee, O Lord. I will love thee, if others do not. Whatever else I may have to love, I will love thee. My relation to thee shall never be a cold one: 'I will love thee.' My whole nature shall go out towards thee."

2. *The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer;*

"My rock in which I hide; my fortress in which I am secure; my deliverer who in a thousand ways brings me out of every peril." What a text those two words would make! I would like to preach from them: "My deliverer." Why, that is a name that runs through the whole story of redemption, and the whole history of providence.

it is a title which we may use toward God in heaven as well as upon earth: "My deliverer." And now, as the psalmist advances in his song, he gives a very sweet title to the Lord,—

2. *My God,*

At first, the Lord was to him, "Jehovah"—a name of awe and majesty; but now on covenant terms with God, he uses a name of bold affectionateness, and near approach: "My God."

2. *My strength,*

That is the second time he has used that title; it is one that will bear repeating again and again: "My strength."

2. *In whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*

What a blessing it is that we can look upon God under so many aspects, and in every aspect feel him to be ours! "My God, my strength, my buckler, my salvation, my high tower." To set those personal pronouns side by side with every blessed metaphor, and to call God ours under every emblem which we can heap together, this is the way to be indeed cheered and comforted. Calvin says, on this verse, that the saint is armed from head to foot, and even above his head, for he has given to him the horn of salvation to lift on high. God is everything to us, beloved. We want nothing outside of him; if we think we do want it, it is better to want it than to have it.

3. *I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised:*

David first said, "I will love," now he says, "I will call." The "I wills" of the Psalms have furnished various writers with an admirable subject; and they may supply you with a profitable line of meditation: "I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised." "I will mix praise with my prayer. There is no praying like that; if you have prayer in one hand, have praise in the other. The mixture of these two perfumes will make an exceedingly sweet incense to present unto the Lord. To praise and pray, to pray and praise, is an admirable way of living. Have I not often told you that it resembles our breathing? By prayer we breathe in, and by praise we breathe out.

3. *So shall I be saved from mine enemies.*

Saved singing, saved praying; what a happy way to be saved,—calling upon God, and magnifying his name! Now follows a marvelous passage descriptive of the psalmist's deliverance, one of

the most wonderful pieces of poetry ever composed in any language. David begins by describing his previous position.

4. *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid.*

Death had tied him round with the ropes of pain; they compassed him about. He seemed like one who was shipwrecked, struggling for his life; or he stood like a hunted stag in the midst of a pack of hounds.

5. *The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.*

He could not stir a step without falling into a trap of some sort or other. What an awful

picture this is! I can hardly imagine that the case could be painted in much blacker colors. None but God could help him, it is evident; for his

sorrows were the sorrows of death. The floods that surged around him were the floods of ungodly men; and there are no wild beasts so much to be dreaded as ungodly men. They can do more harm to us than can lions in their dens. David's sorrows were the sorrows of hell, and the snares that lay in his pathway were the snares of death.

6. *In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God:*

He puts together the two names, "Jehovah" and "my God." He says that he called upon Jehovah, and he cried unto his God. He began with calling, and he went on to crying. The longer we pray, the more intense our prayer becomes. David prayed thus in his distress. Every way except one was shut up, so that he could not escape; but there was a way open upward. Our enemies can never block up that way; you can always run the blockade, my brethren, if you know the way of sailing upward. You can never be shut out of the port of prayer, you will always find a harbour of refuge by crying unto God.

6. *He heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.*

The music from all the harps of the redeemed and from the songs of cherubim did not so engross those blessed ears that they could not hear David's cries. A child's cry will get to a father's ear. It was so with the psalmist; his was a cry full of anguish, and it

entered into the ears of God. It did not go to the saints, and round about through human mediators; but it went direct to God's ears.

7. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.

Nothing touches God's heart like an injury done to a child of his. "He was wroth," and he did but stamp his foot, and the solid earth began to rock and tremble. He who laid the

foundations of the universe can soon shift its corner-stones if he pleases; and even the hills that send their roots so deep are easily moved by him.

8. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.

Oriental imagery representing the indignation of the Most High. He is not subject to passions like ours, but he is thus described in order that we may understand his action. It is a high strain of poetry to teach us how God is moved by the affliction of his people. As when the hot breath comes from a man's nostrils, so is it represented as if a smoke came from God's nostrils; and as when a man opens his mouth to speak in anger, God is represented as so speaking that a fire issued from his mouth to devour the enemies of his people.

9, 10. He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And

he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He trod on the arch of the sky, and bent it beneath his divine weight. The cherubim are represented as standing over the mercy-seat, as though waiting there to perform errands of mercy; and the Lord is here said to ride upon a cherub, and to fly upon the wings of the wind. God comes swiftly for the deliverance of his people. Thou countest him slow ; but he is not slow in the fulfillment of his promises as men count slowness. When thou shalt understand all things,-if ever that shall be,—thou wilt see how speedily he flew to thy rescue.

11. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.

Nobody can see God in the sunlight; but faith can see him in the dark, and can realize that the darkest providences are but the pavilion of Jehovah's love.

12. *At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire.*

The psalmist heaps together all the terrors of nature to show how God stirreth all things up for the rescue and the defense of his people. Over the head of all this blackness and these flames of fire you hear a voice

13. *The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire.*

Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! See how readily, when the Lord comes forth as a man of war (Jehovah is his name), he scattereth all his adversaries.

14, 15. *Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.*

He had not to stretch out his hand: it was but his breath that shook the earth, and set the heavens on fire.

16. *He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters.*

The psalmist saw another Moses, whose name signified. "I drew him out of the water"; and this is one of the names of Christ. Out of many waters was he drawn, our glorious covenant Head, and all his people are to be baptized into his name.

17. *He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me.*

They were not too strong for God, and it almost seems as if he would not have come upon the scene if they had not been too strong for David. While David could fight them, he might fight them; "but what if they were too strong for me," saith he, "he delivered me." Oh, what a glorious thing it is to be put where you cannot help yourself, because then it shall be written, "he delivered me"! Let the heroes of the earth boast of all their mighty deeds; as for us, we will glory even in infirmity, for then the power of God doth rest upon us.

18, 19. *They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.*

There is another wonderful text for a sermon: "He delivered me." The first I gave you was "my deliverer." Now here is the

explanation of his assuming that title: “He delivered me, because he delighted in me.”

20. *The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me*

For David had been slandered; they laid all manner of evil to his charge, and God therefore came forth for his defense, because his heart was right with the Lord. It was God’s grace that made him right, and the grace that had preserved him from sinning now delivered him from being slandered.

PSALM 18:1-35

1. *I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.*

What a blessed “I will”: “I will love thee”! He does love the Lord, and he declares that he will continue to do so. He feels that he must do so, for the Lord has been his strength. There are many aspects under which the love of our heart is most justly and fitly given to God, and this is one of them. If the Lord has been the strength of our heart, then let our heart love him.

2. *The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*

How David heaps up the epithets! When the believer once begins to praise the Lord, there is no end to it. He can never even satisfy himself; much less can he hope to rise to the height of this great argument. Notice how many of those little pronouns there are. Luther used to say that the very marrow of divinity lies in the pronouns. Certainly, the sweetness—the honey of it lies here. Let me read the verse again, putting the emphasis on the pronouns: “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.”

3. *I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.*

Calling upon him in prayer, and rendering praise to him, “so shall I be saved from mine enemies. You remember how the army of Jehoshaphat marched forth into the valley of Berachah, singing and praising the Lord; and they had no need to strike a blow, for the Lord gave them a glorious victory, when they began to sing and to

praise; and we might have more victories if we had more praise and more prayer. Now David goes on to tell us what had happened to him, and what happened to the children of Israel when they came up out of the land of Egypt, and went into the wilderness.

4, 5. *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.*

That is, “went before me,” “lay in my pathway.” Did you ever have a window opened in your heart, so that you could see all the ruin of your nature,-all the possibilities of evil that lay asleep within your soul? Did you ever feel, as you gazed upon that sight, as if you were looking over the edge of the bottomless pit? Ah, then! you have been just in the condition which the psalmist here describes: “The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death lay in my pathway.”

6. *In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God; he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.*

That is a wonderful expression: “My cry came before him, even into his ears.” That is, of course, speaking after the manner of men, and we cannot speak in any other manner. God appeared to hear David’s cry as you and I hear a thing when we say, “It seemed to ring in my ears, I could not get rid of the sound of it.” What happened then?

7. *Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.*

The Lord was wroth with those who had made his child cry, as a father is angry with one who injures a beloved child of his, or as a mother is wroth with one who puts her babe to pain. The Lord made the earth to tremble because he was angry at the oppressors of his servant.

8. *There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.*

That is David’s graphic and striking representation of the indignation of God on his behalf.

9. *He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet.*

This is a wonderful description of the interposition of God on behalf of his people. The scene referred to by David is probably the destruction of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, and the deliverance of the children of Israel from their cruel enemies.

10. *And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.*

So swift is prayer to reach the heart of God; and so swift is God to come to the help of his people.

11, 12. *He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire.*

For all the dread artillery of heaven shall be used for the defense of the faithful. God will hold nothing in reserve when his people are in danger.

13. *The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire.*

What made God speak in those terrible tones? It was the faint and feeble cry of his poor servant down below. Can you and I make thunder? Yes, we can. If we can thunder at the gates of heaven by prayer, God will thunder in the heavens in his omnipotence; he will quickly respond to his children's cries. The first Christians, who were employed in the Roman armies, were called the thundering legion, because it was said that, once upon a time, when they prayed, God sent a thunderstorm to destroy their enemies; and, truly, a living Church of God, that is full of prayer, may be called a thundering legion.

14. *Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightning's, and discomfited them.*

What a wonderful picture this is,-as if the Eternal had taken down his bow, and aimed his shafts of lightning against the foes of his people!

15. *Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.*

At the Red Sea, Moses sang, "Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters; "but, here, David does not represent God as sending forth a great wind,

but as if, in his eagerness to help his servant, his very nostrils gave forth such a mighty blast as made the sea to divide, so that “the channels of the waters were seen.” It is one of the most vivid pieces of poetry that ever fell from the pen of inspired or uninspired man.

16, 17. *He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me.*

When a child of God is in such a condition that he cannot help himself, and he cries to his Heavenly Father, then the Lord always helps him. Our proverb says, “God helps those that help themselves;” that is true, but there is something better than that. God helps those who cannot help themselves. That proves the greatness of his mercy, which endureth for ever. David said of his foes, “They were too strong for me,” but they were not too strong for the Lord to overthrow.

18. *They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay.*

“I leaned on him; I rested on him; I relied on him; and so I was made peaceful, calm, quiet, confident in him: ‘The Lord was my stay.’”

19. *He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.*

What sayest thou to that, believer? That God delights in thee,- that he finds something in thee, which he has put there by his grace, which is the object of his complacency? Is it not your likeness to his dear Son, whom he loves so much that, wherever he sees his image, there his love flows forth?

20. *The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me.*

For when God gives a man holiness, he will give him happiness. Holiness and happiness usually go together; and if, for a while, they seem to be divided, they shall soon be united again.

21-24. *For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me. I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight.*

The godly never see any merit in their own works, they never have any trust in them for salvation; yet they cannot help observing, with pleasure, that, when God enables them to walk uprightly, he sooner or later delivers them. If you come into any trouble because you fear God, and serve him, you will come out of it again; ay, and come out of it like the three holy children came out of the furnace, with not so much as the smell of fire remaining upon you.

25, 26. *With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward.*

If a man walks in a froward way, and opposes God, he will soon find that God treats him in a similar fashion. Sinners shall surely smart for their sin. Rebels shall yet sing another tune, however loudly they may boast today, and scoff at God and his people.

27. *For thou wilt save the afflicted people;*

There is comfort there for any of you who are his people, and who are under his afflicting hand.

27. *But wilt bring down high looks.*

Pride excites the indignation of Jehovah; it is to the humble that he has regard.

28. *For thou wilt light my candle the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness.*

Plead that promise if you are in the dark at this moment. If you are God's child, he will bring you out into the light ere long.

29. *For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall.*

God's warriors have to fight in various ways, and in all they must quit themselves like men, and ascribe all their triumphs to their Lord.

30. *As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.*

No armor of proof or shield of brass so well secures the warrior as the covenant God of Israel protects his warring people. He is himself the buckler of trustful ones.

31. *For who is God save the LORD? or who is a rock save our God?*

Where can lasting hopes be fixed? Where can the soul find rest? Where is stability to be found? Where is strength to be discovered? Surely, in the Lord Jehovah alone can we find rest and refuge.

32- 35. *It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great.*

I think you will see that David has given us, in this Psalm, the reasons why he began by saying, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength."

PSALM 19

This Psalm has the same subject as Psalm **119**. Both of them are full of praise of God's Word. God has written two books for us to read,-the volume of the Creation and the volume of the Sacred Scriptures,-and these two are in complete harmony. Happy are they who can read both these books, and see the same vein of teaching running through every page.

1. *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.*

The heavens are always declaring God's glory; if we gaze up to them by day or by night, we always read in them the power, the wisdom, the goodness, the greatness, the immutability of God.

2. *Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.*

If we have but ears to hear, and hearts to understand, how much of God may we see in that vast volume of nature which is spread out above us both by day and by night!

3, 4. *There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard, Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*

All men must hear God's voice in nature if they are only willing to do so.

Paul wrote to the Romans, "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the

things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead;” so that those who will not see “are without excuse.”

4-6. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a Strongman to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof:

The sun has his place, and keeps it, so let us keep ours. The sun is glorious in his goings forth,—"as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,"-glad himself, and making all things glad in his gladness; the whole world rejoices at the sight of the face of the sun. The sun is strong to go through his appointed orbit, and fulfill his ordained course. So may it be with us; may we not only have the gladness of our conversion, when we are "as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber," but may we have strength and grace to run the race set before us from the start to the finish. The sun makes his influence felt wherever he goes: "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." So also may it be with us; may our influence be felt wherever we go! The sun is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness; but he is also a type of what every Christian should be, for "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day; " and there should be nothing hid from the fervent heat of our Christian character. We ought so to serve God that our influence should be felt everywhere. May God give us more of his light and his heat that we may shine and burn to his glory!

7-9. The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

Six sentences, according to the parallels of Hebrew poetry, all in praise of God's Word. Let us always regard this holy Book as the Word of Jehovah; let us never look upon the Bible as being on a level with other books. The Word of the Lord is our ultimate Court of Appeal; we accept its teaching as infallible, we obey its commands, we desire to reflect its purity.

“The law of the Lord is perfect.” Nothing may be taken from it, and nothing added to it, for it is perfect as it is. It is without admixture of error, and without adulteration of falsehood; and it proves its supernatural power by converting men from the error of their ways. What other book can convert the soul of man except so far as it contains Biblical truth?

“The commandment of the Lord is pure.” There is no other code of morals so pure as that revealed in the Bible. The gospel reflects glory on all the perfection’s of God; and, therefore, it makes wise the simple. Poor simple-hearted folk, conscious of their own ignorance, come to this Book, and not only find wisdom in it, but are themselves made wise by it. It is also “sure” as well as “pure.” There is no question about its teaching; it is certainly true. If we learn only what is sure, we may be sure that we shall not have to unlearn it.

“The statutes of the Lord are right,” and they will set us right if we obey them. They will also rejoice our heart, for unrighteousness brings sorrow, sooner or later; but rightness in the end brings joy.

“The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” There is a close connection between the eye and the heart. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” Sin in the heart puts dust in the eye; we cannot see right unless we feel right.

“The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever.” When you come to know God, and the power of true religion in the form of holy, childlike fear, you never lose it, it is yours for ever. Time cannot destroy it, eternity will but develop it.

“The judgments of the Lord are true;” there is no alloy of falsehood here.

Whatever destructive criticism may be brought to bear upon it, no part of sacred Scripture will ever be destroyed:

“The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

10. *More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold:*

Or, the very best gold. No riches can so enrich the mind and heart as the Word of God does. A man may have tons of gold, and yet be utterly miserable; but he who is pure in heart, he who hath

God's Word and the love of it in his heart, is truly rich, however poor he may be in temporal things.

10. *Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.*

As I read those six poetic lines in praise of the Word of God, I could not help thinking how the bees build their honeycombs in hexagons of six-sided combs, all full of honey. Such is this portion of the Word of God with its hexagons of commendation, every part of which is full of sweetness to the true believer.

11, 12. *Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors.*

While David is speaking of the Book that has no errors in it, he is reminded of his own errors; and they strike him as being so many that he cannot understand them. Every sin is really an error, a mistake, a blunder, as well as something a great deal worse. It is never a wise thing to do wrong. At the end of a book, we sometimes find that the printers insert a list of "Errata,"-errors made in the printing of the volume. Ah, me! we shall need to have a long list of "Errata" at the end of the volume of our lives. How many mistakes we have made! Augustine, in his "Confessions," amended what he had written amiss in his previous books. The best of men need continually to confess their errors, but God's Book has no error in it from beginning to end.

12. *Cleanse thou me from secret faults.*

"Cleanse me from the faults which I cannot see, and which no mortal man has ever seen. Thou, Lord, seest them; be pleased, therefore, to cleanse me from them." This view of the omniscience of God is very comforting to the believer; because he perceives that, even if he cannot see his sin, so as to own it, and confess it, yet God can see it so as to forgive it, and cleanse it.

13. *Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;-*

If we indulge in secret sins, we may gradually slide down an inclined plane until we come to presumptuous sins, sins committed willfully, sins known to be sins, daring. God-defying sins. Lord, keep me back from such sins as these! If others urge me to advance in this wrong direction, O Lord, do thou keep me back! "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;

13. *Let them not have dominion over me:*

For, when a man once sins presumptuously, the tendency is for him to become a slave to that sin, it gets dominion over him. The worst slave-owner in the world is sin; and presumptuous sin is a tyrant with many a cruel whip in its hand.

13. *Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.*

“That greatest transgression of all, that sin against the Holy Ghost which shall never be forgiven;-if I am kept from presumptuous sin, I shall never fall into that fatal pit.”

14. *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*

David does not hope to be accepted till he has first of all been pardoned; but when the Lord has forgiven him, and sanctified him, then he comes with both mouth and heart to serve his God; and his prayer is that he may be acceptable in the sight of God, to whom he owes the strength to worship, and through whom he hopes to be accepted because he has a Redeemer: “O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer.” May each one of us be thus acceptable in the sight of God, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

PSALM 19

This Psalm teaches us the excellence of the two revelations which God has made to man. The first is the revelation which he has made in nature, and the second is that which he has made in his inspired Word. The psalmist first sings of God as he displays himself in his works in creation: —

1. *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.*

So much is this the case that it has been well said that “an undevout astronomer is mad.” There are such traces of the Infinite and the Omnipotent in the stars, and especially the more thoroughly they are studied, and the science of mathematics is brought to bear upon them, in order, in some degree, to guess at the incalculable distances and mighty weights of the starry orbs, that a man must perceive in them traces of the divine handiwork if he is only willing to do so: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.”

2. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

Every day speaks to the following one, even as the day that went before it spoke to it, and each day has its own message. Its history is an echo of the voice of God, and if man had but ears to hear, he would perceive that the things which happen from day to day proclaim the presence and power of God. And even night, with her impressive silence, reveals the Most High in the solemn hush and stillness. In the great primeval forests, the winds seem, with songs without words, to declare the presence of the Most High. There is something there, in the stillness of the night, as weird-like and so solemn, which has made unbelief retreat, and caused faith to lift up her eye, and see more in the heavens at night than she had seen by day: "Night unto night sheweth knowledge."

3, 4. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Though nature does not speak, yet its words go to the ends of the earth; and, silently, they sing the praises of God. To the inner ears of an enlightened man, there is a measure of spiritual teaching ever going on.

4-6. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

All this is emblematical of the spread of the gospel; so Paul tells us in the Epistle to the Romans: "Their souls went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world." Our Lord Jesus, upspringing from the couch whereon he slept awhile, has sent his light even to the ends of the earth.

"Nor shall his spreading gospel rest,
Till through the world his truth has run, —
Till Christ has all the nations blest,
That see the light, or feel the sun."

There are brighter days yet to come to us. The strength of Christ, as he daily runs the gospel race, has not diminished, indeed, he puts it out yet more and more, and the day shall come when, as the full sunlight makes the perfect day, so shall the full revelation of the

gospel to the eyes of all men fill the whole earth with the praises of God. Now let us read concerning the Book of God. We have read about his works, now let us read about his words.

7. *The law of the LORD is perfect, —*

“The doctrine of the Lord (as it may be read,) is perfect,” —

7. *converting [or, restoring] the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure,*

Oh, what a mercy that is! What could our souls do with ifs and buts and perhapses? But the teachings of God’s Word are certain, positive, infallible.

7. *Making wise the simple.*

No matter how foolish, how childlike, we may be to begin with, so long as our minds are free from guile and craftiness, and as are simple and sincere, this Book will make us truly wise.

8. *The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart:*

You know they do. Oftentimes has your heart leaped for joy when the statutes of the Lord have been made known to you.

8-11. *The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned:*

Do you not find it so, — that, oftentimes, a test of scripture comes to your mind just at the moment when you were about to suffer spiritual shipwreck? When you would have done something that would have caused you lifelong grief and vast damage, the Word of God has stepped before you with the flaming danger signal, and you have been stopped in time.

11. *And in keeping of them there is great reward.*

Not, for keeping of them, for it is not of debt; but, “in keeping of them.” It is always best to do as God bids you. You never forget a duty, or refuse to do it, without suffering loss, and every mistake you make, with regard to your Lord’s will, is a damage to yourselves. The keeping of his commands is most soul-enriching. The most profitable business that a child of God can carry on in the business of obedience to his Lord’s commands: “In keeping of them there is great reward.”

12. *Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.*

The man who searches his heart most will yet leave some sin undiscovered;

and he who says, "I have no sin; I am living without sin," has surely never seen into his own heart at all, he must be an utter stranger to the condition it is in. Let this be the prayer of each one of us: "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

13. *Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;*

"Let me never dare to do what I know to be wrong. Let me not say, 'I will go just so far, and then stop.' Let me not tempt the Holy Spirit of God. Oh, let me never tempt the devil to tempt me, and put myself into a dangerous position under the notion that God will keep me if I am his child: 'keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;'" —

13. *Let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.*

You will never go into apostasy if you are watchful against presumption. Those men who, like Judas, commit the great transgression, and utterly perish, are men who knew nothing about watching their own hearts, but who presumed, and were sinfully bold and self-confident, and so came to an ill end. You know where John Bunyan says *Heedless and Too Bold* went to; and there are many like them.

14. *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight; O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*

PSALM 20

The 20th Psalm is a prayer for the King; not only for David or Solomon, but for "great David's greater Son," the true King of the Church. As if the Church saw Jesus going forth to his work, she offers up a prayer for him.

1. *The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee;*

And so it came to pass; in that dread night in Gethsemane, Jesus "was heard in that he feared." The God of wrestling Jacob heard the cries of his dear Son, and defended him, or supported him, as it is in the marginal reading.

2. Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion;

And you know how there came, from yonder heavenly Jerusalem, an angel strengthening him. The celestial messenger stood. at his side amidst the gloom of the olive garden, and brought him comfort and succor from God's right hand.

His earnest prayers. his deepening groans,
Were heard before angelic thrones;
Amazement wrapt the sky:
'Go, strengthen Christ!' the Father said:
The astonished seraph bow'd his head
And left the realms on high.

3. Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah.

And so he did; there was never such acceptance given to any burnt sacrifice as was given to our Divine Lord when he covered up himself.

4. Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfill all thy counsel.

Is it not written, "Prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised"? Here, then, is a suitable prayer for you to present on behalf of the Lord Jesus,— that God would grant him according to his own heart, and fulfill all his counsel.

5. We will rejoice in thy salvation,

Come, brothers and sisters, let us make this verse true; and even if we have anything to sigh over, let us lay it aside while we now devote ourselves to the happy work of rejoicing in the glorious salvation of our Lord and King.

5-9. And in the name of our God we will set up our banners: the LORD fulfill all thy petitions. Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven, with the saving strength of his right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright. Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call.

What a blessing it is that our King does hear us when we call upon him ! He is full of sympathy with all his people, for, in the time of his sojourn on earth, he often knew what it was to plead with his Father; and as God heard him then, so does he himself hear us

now. All glory be to his blessed name! The 21st Psalm views the King as having ended his battle, and achieved his victory.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 20. AND 21.

PSALM 20

The 20th Psalm is a prayer for the king going forth to the conflict, — a prayer for David; better still, a prayer for great David's greater Son. The 21st Psalm is a song of victory for the returning conqueror, it is a Te Deum, as the king has triumphed, and has returned from the conflict to enjoy the congratulations of his loyal subjects.

1. The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; —

This is a prayer for David, a prayer for Jesus, and a prayer for every child of God: "Jehovah hear thee in the day of trouble." What dost thou want? Remember that the Lord gives thee this promise, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." "The name of the God of Jacob defend thee." The God that took care of Jacob when he slept with a stone for his pillow; the God that guarded him when he was a stranger in a strange land, and brought him home again; the God that wrestled with him at Jabbok, the God that made all things work for him, instead of against him, as he feared, — "the name" — the character, the attributes, the glory — "of the God of Jacob defend thee;" —

2. Send thee help from the sanctuary, —

"Help from the holy place, help from the sprinkled blood, help from the mercy-seat, help from the golden pot that had the manna, help from Aaron's rod that budded, help from him that shone between the cherubim, — send thee help from the Holy of Holies,"

2. And strengthen thee out of Zion; —

That is to say, with his own power, his own glory, which he manifests in the midst of his people.

3. Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah.

This God did to his dear Son, and this he is prepared to do to all his people. Whenever we give anything to the cause of God, we ought to do it with all that solemnity and all that willingness which was seen in God's own people in the olden time; remembering that

it is to him we bring it; and the chief point for our consideration is, "Will he accept it?"

4. *Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfill all thy counsel.*

We cannot pray this for everybody. We do pray it for Christ, and we pray it for the Lord's sanctified people, that he may grant them the desire of their heart, and fulfill their counsel.

5. *We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners: the LORD fulfill all thy petitions.*

What a wonderful prayer this is! May it be granted to each of you! "The Lord fulfill all thy petitions."

6-9. *Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright. Save, LORD:*

Or, "Hosanna."

9. *Let the king hear us when we call.*

Now turn to the Psalm of victory. It corresponds very beautifully with the litany which we have just been reading.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 20. AND 21.

PSALM 21

1, 2. *The king shall joy in thy strength, O LORD; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. Selah.*

God gave to Jesus the strength needed to accomplish the work which he came to do, and he is daily giving him to see of the travail of his soul that he may be satisfied.

3. *For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness:*

They go before him, like scouts or forerunners. Wherever Jesus comes, the blessings of goodness fly before him to the sons of men.

3. *Thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head.*

Let us crown him afresh tonight with our poor garlands of praise, while God sets a crown of pure gold upon his head.

4. *He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever.*

And because he lives, we shall live also; the Father hath given to him to have life in himself, and hence he communicates of that life to us who believe in him.

5. *His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him.*

Heaped it on him. There is no one so worthy of honour as our Lord Jesus is; none are so majestic as the Man of sorrows who once bowed his head to death on his people's behalf.

6. *For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance.*

The Father rewards him for all his service: "Thou hast made him most blessed for ever." We cannot imagine how great is the joy of Christ as his Father smiles upon him: "Thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance."

7, 8. *For the king trusteth in the LORD, and through the mercy of the most High he shall not be moved. Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies:*

Oh, what a wonderful prophecy that is! Christ's hand shall find out all his enemies. If they hide themselves, he shall discover them. If they cover themselves with chain armor, yet still his hand will find out their vulnerable parts, and touch their very souls until they melt with fear: "Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies." Are there any of these enemies of Christ here tonight? If so, not only will his eye find them out, but his hand will find them out, too.

8-13. *Thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them. Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children, of men. For they intended evil against thee: they imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform. Therefore shalt thou make them turn their back, when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings against the face of them. Be thou exalted, LORD, in thine own strength: so will we sing and praise thy power.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 20. AND 21.

PSALM 21

1. *The king shall joy in thy strength, O LORD; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!*

See how greatly Christ rejoices, how full his heart is of gladness as he sees God's power put forth, and God's salvation accomplished among men.

2, 3. *Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast, not withholden the request of his lips. Selah. For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness:*

That is to say, "Thou goest before him," as you have seen, in pictures, some great conqueror preceded by those who strewn his path with roses, so has God strewn the pathway of Christ with innumerable blessings.

3. *Thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head.*

Is he not of royal race? Has he not achieved a mighty conquest? Is he not King of kings and Lord of lords?

4. *He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever.*

"Thou gavest him a resurrection from the dead as our Mediator, and as such he lives."

5. *His glory is great in thy salvation:*

It is the distinguishing mark of God's salvation that Christ's glory is great in it. In the beginning, and the middle, and the end of it, everywhere you see the name of Jesus written large in letters of light. In his salvation, the Father has glorified his Son.

5-8. *Honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him. For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance. For the king trusteth in the LORD, and through the mercy of the most High he shall not be moved. Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies:*

That very hand that was nailed to the tree shall find out all the adversaries of the cross.

8. *Thy right hand shall fall out those that hate thee.*

"Hide wherever they may, thou wilt find them out. They may stand in the high places, and defy thee; but thou wilt hurl them down."

9. *Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger:*

“Not only shall they be cast into the fire, but they shall themselves be as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger. They shall torment themselves, and shall be their own destruction.”

9-11. *The LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them. Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children of men. For they intended evil against thee: they imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform.*

But that did not diminish their sin. When a man has devised an evil tiring,

even if he cannot carry it out, he is guilty of it.

12. *Therefore shalt thou make them turn their back, when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings against the face of them.*

As if God would single out the enemies of Christ to be targets for his arrows, and fill them with the darts of his displeasure; who would wish to be in such a plight as this?

13. *Be thou exalted, LORD, in thine own strength: so will we sing and praise thy power*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 20. AND 21.

PSALM 22

You will not need any comment on this Psalm if, while we read it, you see Christ on the cross, and you think that you hear him uttering these sacred words. This Psalm is dedicated” to the Chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahaar, or, the hind of the morning,” for Jesus brings the morning with him whenever he comes.

1. *MY God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

It was not morning with Jesus when he uttered these words; it was midnight, but his midnight is our morning.

1. *Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

The prayer had come to be almost inarticulate, like the dying moan of a wounded beast in the forest.

2. *O my God,*

This is the third time he has cried out, “My God,” note that.

2. *I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.*

The worst grief of a child of God is not to be heard in prayer. Think, then, what it must have been for the Well-beloved to have to say to his Father, "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent."

3. *But thou art holy,*

He would bring no charge against God even though he forsook him.

3-6. *O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man;*

Think that you hear your Lord saying this, and comparing himself to a little red worm, which when crushed seems to be nothing but just a mass of blood.

6-8. *A reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, he trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.*

What scorn! How it must have entered like vitriol into the veins of Christ, a strong corrosive of dreadful sarcasm without a drop of pity mixed with it!

9-11. *But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.*

God had taken care of Christ in his infancy; that miraculous birth of his was under the divine control; will not the Lord care for him now that he is even more weak and nearer to the gates of death than in the first morning of his infant weakness?

12. *Many bulls have compassed me:*

There they stood, the strong legionaries of Rome, proud priests of Judea, and the princes of the people, all thirsting for his blood.

12-14. *Strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water,*

Dissolved, separated, like drops of water poured out of a vessel.

14. *And all my bones are out of joint my heart is like wax;*

"The very fountain of my strength is turned to weakness."

14, 15. *It is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

Fever had wrought upon him; the hanging in the midday sun, the excruciating pains in his hands and feet, the dragging weight of his body, the tearing of the nails, and the continually increasing agony of his wounds, had brought him into the very dust of death.

16. *For dogs have compassed me:*

The many, the vulgar multitude, like a pack of hounds, crowded around the Saviour on the cross.

16. *The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.*

David could never say this of himself; no one else but our Lord Jesus Christ could talk after this wondrous fashion. Yet this Psalm was written hundreds of years before Christ came here among men; and the Jews treasured it up, little understanding that it described their Messiah and ours, and described him literally, too.

17. *I may tell all my bones:*

Jesus could look down upon his own emaciated person as he hung there naked upon the cross.

17. *They look and stare upon me.*

Their cruel inquisitive gazing galled his delicate sensitive nature.

18-21. *They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.*

He had been heard in past years, and he pleads for similar acceptance now. He encourages his faith by a retrospect of God's preserving power in former dangers.

22. *I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.*

A gleam of sunlight now comes over the cross; the thick darkness is melting away, and the Saviour is triumphing even in his dying hour. He is passing away from the agonizing cry, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" to his last victorious utterance, "It is finished." A wonderful change comes over the Saviour's expressions from this point.

23, 24. *Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.*

Here is the testimony of One who suffered more than all of us put together will ever suffer. He endured the hiding of God's face, and yet he lives to declare the faithfulness of God; he says that, when he cried unto his Father, he heard him.

25. *My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation:*

It is so here this evening; Christ is praising God in this congregation. As we read these words of his dying testimony, we too are encouraged to believe that the God who heard him will hear us and deliver us.

25, 26. *I will pay my vows before them that fear him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.*

He is talking the matter over to himself, and comforting himself with the prospect of the results of his suffering. He sees the vast numbers of people who will be saved through his atoning sacrifice, he sees the meek ones coming to his feet, and he is happy. Because of the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame.

27. *All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.*

He talks of the LORD, and he talks to the LORD: "Before thee." He talks about God's glory, and about the salvation of the heathen, and about all nations worshipping the one true God.

28-30. *For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations. All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul. A seed shall serve him;*

He himself was like a seed about to be put into the ground that he might bring forth fruit unto God, and he cheers his heart with the prospect.

30, 31. *It shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come,*

How he rolls it like a sweet morsel under his tongue! “They shall come.” Those great sinners, those far-off ones, “they shall come,”-

31. *And shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.*

Or, “It is finished.” There the Psalm endeth, and that was the Master’s dying cry.

PSALM 22

This Psalm is a sort of window, through which we can look into the heart of our crucified Saviour. We see all the external part of the crucifixion through the four windows of the Gospels; but this 22nd Psalm brings us into the King’s innermost chamber, and here we perceive the secret sufferings of his soul. You can very well conceive of the Lord Jesus Christ, when he was on the cross, beginning to speak in the language of the first verse of this Psalm, and closing with the last words of the Psalm: “He hath done this,” which might properly be interpreted, “It is finished.” I have often read this Psalm with you, especially on the evenings of our great communion services. If we are spared, we will read it together many more times. It is a very wonderful Psalm; the Lord give us to understand it as we read it!!

1. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me! why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

That was the very climax of our Lord’s grief upon the cross, that it was necessary that the Father himself should forsake him. The penalty of sin is that God must leave the man who has sin upon him even by imputation; and God left this wondrous Man, this perfect Man, in whom was no sin, but upon whom the sin of his people had been laid. He “his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree,” and therefore the Father must forsake him; but it was a bitter experience for our Saviour that even his prayers should not be heard when they had become so hoarse as to resemble rather the roaring of a wounded beast than the articulate utterance of a man: “Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?”

2, 3. *O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*

Notice that the Lord Jesus, in his greatest agony, does not impugn the justice of his Father's treatment, in his bitterest sufferings he still adores the holiness of God: "Thou art holy." It was because God was holy that therefore his Son must suffer so, in order to save the unholy.

4-6. *Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; —*

There is a little red worm, which seems to be nothing but a mass of blood, and the Saviour compares himself in his agony to that tiny creature: "I am a worm, and no man;" —

6-8. *A reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.*

What vinegar and gall that mockery poured into the Saviour's wounded heart! How these cruel words must have stung his sensitive spirit! It was necessary that God should leave him while he was bearing his people's sin, but how shameful it was that evil men should turn that stern necessity into a ground of accusation against him! Yet they did so; they taunted him with it: "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him."

9, 10. *But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breast. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.*

Our Saviour remembers his own marvellous birth, which differed from ours in some respects; and he thinks of how the Father took care of him then. Did he not preserve him when Joseph and Mary fled into Egypt from the wrath of Herod? Was there not a singular power that controlled the movements of the wise men, and warned them to return to their own country another way, so that the infant Christ should not be discovered and destroyed? Jesus on the cross remembers that remarkable preservation; and I suggest to you who are getting old that you may draw comfort from the fact that when you were infants, and could not help yourselves, the Lord took care of you; and if you come to a second childhood, — if you should live to be as helpless as when you were infants, — the God who

watched over you in the beginning will watch over you to the end. Remember how he has said, “Even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.”

11. *Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.*

Peter, James, John, and all the disciples had fled. “There is none to help.” The women could weep, with pitying eye and sympathetic heart; but they could not help. “There is none to help.”

12. *Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.*

There stood the chief priests and the rulers, and the Roman soldiery with their massive bulk and brute strength.

13. *They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.*

There was nothing but cruelty and spite and fury all round the louder heart of that lonely Sufferer. Ah, me! was there ever sorrow like unto his sorrow?

14. *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint:*

This was caused by the rough dashing of the cross into the ground when they lifted it up, and plunged it into its place.

14. *My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.*

It was a living death, a deadly life. Christ’s very heart, which is the center of life, had become dissolved by pain and weakness and sorrow.

15. *My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

The terrible death-thirst was upon him, through the fever generated by his wounds.

16. *For dogs have compassed me: this assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.*

The common multitude, with ribald jest and execrable mockery, stood there taunting him. He was encircled by them, like a poor hunted stag surrounded by the hounds.

17. *I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.*

They stood mocking at his nakedness, jesting at his emaciated form.

18-19. *They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be thou not far from me, O LORD:*

That is still the very center of our Saviour's suffering, so he turns his pleading in that direction. He does not ask that the dogs may be called off, nor that the bulls may be driven away; but his cry is, "Be not thou far from me, O Lord."

19-21. *O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.*

He recollects former days wherein God had helped him, and he prays that the Lord will help him still, and bring him safely through this terrible trial, as indeed he did.

Now the tone of the Psalm changes. A gleam of sunlight plays across the scene. The agony is over, the life is poured out, and now the Saviour begins to contemplate the result of his suffering. Think, dear brothers and sisters, how the Lord thought of you; he says, —

22. *I will declare thy name unto my brethren in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.*

The risen Christ is in the midst of us; he has come hither to tell us of his Father's love; he has told it to us by his death, and now he bids us praise the Lord, and himself leads our song. This is the reward of his passion, that he and his brethren should bless and praise the Lord for ever and ever.

23, 24. *He that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye, the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.*

Is not this delightful? Your Lord has gone through the black darkness, and has come out into the light, and when your turn comes to go through the darkness, you, too, shall come out into the light even as he did. Therefore, rejoice in his name. If the Head has conquered, the members shall conquer, too. You shall all share in your Saviour's joy, as you are partakers of his sufferings.

25, 26. *My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied:*

He thought of you, poor, timid, trembling ones, you who are humbled before God under a sense of your sin. Because he died, because he accomplished your redemption, you "shall eat and be satisfied."

26, 27. *They shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.*

See what solace Christ derives from the spread of the faith, the conquest of the world by his death.

28-30. *For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations. All they that be fat upon earth shalt eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul. A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.*

This is in accordance with Isaiah's prophecy: "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed."

31. *They shall come, —*

The passion of Christ shall work for a certain deliverance for his people; what he has purchased, he shall surely have: "They shall come," —

31. *And shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.*

Or, "it is finished." When our Lord had uttered these words, "he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost."

PSALM 22

This Psalm is headed, "To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar," — or, as the margin renders it, "the hind of the morning," — "A Psalm of David," It begins in the very depths of the Master's sorrow, when this great and bitter cry escaped his lips, —

1. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Every word is emphatic: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "All others may forsake me, and I need not be greatly troubled at their absence; but 'why hast thou forsaken me?' " "Why hast thou forsaken me?" I understand why thou dost smite me, for I am the Shepherd predestined to be smitten for the flock, but 'why hast thou forsaken me?' " "Why hast thou forsaken me? — thine only-begotten, thy well-beloved Son, — 'why hast thou forsaken me?'"

1. *Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

“Why have I no inflowings of thy love, — no enjoyment of thy presence, — no whispers from thy heart? I am left alone, — left utterly, — left on the cross, — left in my direst need.” God’s adapted children do not usually talk like this; such a lament as this has not often come even from the martyrs for the faith, for, as a rule, they have had God with them in their hour of deepest agony; but here was One, who was far greater than they, who yet had to endure suffering from which they were exempted; — the only perfect One was forsaken by God. You know that if it was because he stood in our stead that the Saviour had this preeminence in suffering and sorrow.

2. *O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.*

Think of what a weight that unanswered prayer was upon the soul of the Well-beloved. Have you ever felt such a burden as that? Then, you are not alone in that experience, for he who is infinitely better than you can ever be had to think over his day prayers and his night prayers which, for a while, were not answered.

3. *But thou art holy, O thou, that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*

Follow the example of your Lord, poor troubled soul. Find no fault with thy God, even though he should forsake thee. Call him holy, even though he should leave thee; and when he seems not to hear thy prayers, yet do not thou forget his praises.

4-6. *Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.*

Think of our Divine Lord thus taking the very lowest place, and becoming, as it were, something less than man, — just that little crimson worm which has simply a life made up of blood. Christ likens himself to it as he says, “I am a worm, and no man.”

7, 8. *All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.*

Oh! these were cruel and cutting words. Like a sharp razor, they cut to the very heart of our Divine Master as he heard his enemies exulting even over his faith, as though it had come to nothing, for now Jehovah himself had forsaken him, and left him to die alone upon the tree.

9, 10. *But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.*

Sometimes, we also may derive great comfort from this truth to which our Saviour here refers. When we could not help ourselves in the least degree, the Lord preserved us, so will he not again help us when we are at our worst? You who have reached your second childhood may reflect with gratitude and hope upon the way in which God took care of you in your first childhood. Then, you certainly were entirely dependent upon him, yet you fared well; and so you shall if each sense shall fail you, — if the power of moving shall be taken away, and the power of sight, and the power of hearing, yet the Lord, who blessed you when you were just born, will still preserve you right to the end. You remember how the Lord puts this truth in Isaiah 46:4: “Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” Our Saviour, having comforted himself thus, falls to praying again: —

11, 12. *Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help, Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.*

These were the Pharisees, the chief priests, and the strong Roman soldiers that compassed our Saviour when he was upon the cross.

13, 14. *They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.*

Can you not see your Saviour hanging on the accursed tree, — every particle of him as it were loosened from its fellow by the fever raging in his whole being, and the anguish and deep depression of his spirit?

15. *My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;*

Such was the intensity of his anguish that the fever within him turned his mouth into an oven, and his tongue was so dried up that it could scarcely stir.

15. *And thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

As if his whole body were prepared to go back into its primary elements. He feels in himself the sentence pronounced upon the first Adam, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,"

16. *For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me:*

These were the common people, the rabble, the multitude that thronged around, barking at him like a pack of hungry hounds.

16. *They pierced my hands and my feet.*

This little sentence shows that this Psalm must relate to the Lord Jesus. Truly did David see him in vision. It happened not to David to have his hands and feet pierced; but this was the portion of David's Master and Lord; he could indeed say, "They pierced my hands and my feet."

17. *I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.*

He is emaciated through his fasting and all the agony he has endured, and his bones seem to break through his skin by reason of the cruel scourging to which he had been subjected.

18, 19. *They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, —*

That is, El, — the name he gave to God in the first verse: "O my strong One," —

19-21. *Haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.*

Did you notice that flash of light gleaming through the darkness, "Thou hast heard me?" Perhaps it was at that moment that the sun again shone forth; at any rate, it is clear that the lost light had returned to our suffering Lord, for the rest of this divine soliloquy is full of comfort and confidence.

22. *I will declare thy name unto my brethren:*

His first thought, even in his agony on the cross, was about them; and he seemed to say, "When I have risen from the dead, I will tell them all about this time of trial; and through the ages to come, I will tell my people how thou didst help me, — the greatest of all sufferers, — and that thou wilt help them also. I was left for a time, and yet I was not finally left. I cried, 'Lama sabachthani,' and yet I triumphed, even then, and so shall they. They shall do as I have done, — confide and conquer."

22. *In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.*

And you know that he did so; he stood in the midst of his people, and told them what God had done; and, spiritually, he stands in our midst at this moment, and he leads our songs of praise unto Jehovah.

23, 24. *Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the, seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.*

What a change of note! If men could hear us speak when we are in the depths of sorrow, they might conclude that God had forsaken us; but when we get out again, how quickly we eat our words, and how soon we begin to tell the goodness of the Lord! Then we lift up the joyous strain, "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."

25. *My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.*

Christ still praises God in the great congregation. On my way to this evening's service, I called to see one of our dear brethren who is very ill, and I was much refreshed with a sweet thing that he said: — "When we all get to heaven, we shall feel quite at home there, for you know, sir, we have worshipped in a great congregation for these many years." And so we shall. There is something most exhilarating and refreshing in going with a multitude to keep holy day; the more, the merrier; but what shall be the joy in heaven, where the number of the redeemed cannot be counted, and all shall be continually praising God? This was one of the joys that was set before Christ, for which "he endured the cross, despising the shame."

26. *The meek shall eat and be satisfied:*

Even in the time of his great agony, our Lord was thinking of you hidden ones, you little ones, who think yourselves worth nothing. Christ says that he was finding bread for you, for he gives us his flesh to eat, that flesh which is meat indeed.

26. *They shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.*

Because he died, all who trust in him shall live for ever. Oh! how sweetly does he die, with the thought of their eternal bliss upon his mind!

27. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.

He sees the result of his death; he beholds the fruit of his soul-travail; and his heart is glad within him.

28-31. For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations. All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul. A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.

The Psalm really ends with almost the last cry of our Lord upon the cross: "It is finished." So the whole Psalm is a window through which we can see into the inmost heart of Christ when it was being rent upon the cross.

PSALM 22

This Psalm so sweetly and so accurately pictures the inward griefs of our Divine Saviour that it might have been written after the crucifixion rather than so many hundreds of years before it. I call your attention to the fact that this Psalm is followed by the 23rd, which begins, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want;" to remind you that you and I would never have had that sweet 23rd Psalm to sing if our Divine Shepherd had not been made, with groans and tears, to weep out the 22nd Psalm, which begins with our Saviour's saddest cry from the cross.

1. My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?

Every word here is emphatic. Take the first two words "My God, my God." These reveal our Saviour's claim upon God as his God. Why hast thou forsaken me? I can understand that others should leave me, but why hast thou done so?" Then lay the stress upon the last word: "'Why hast thou forsaken me, — thine only-begotten Son, thine ever-obedient Son thy well-beloved Son?"

1,2. Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

See our Saviour hanging on the cross, hear him utter these sorrowful words, and remember that he had come up from

Gethsemane, all crimson with the bloody sweat which had oozed from every pore as he had agonized in prayer; yet no deliverance had come to him, for God had left him to die in accordance with the covenant into which he had voluntarily entered.

3. *But thou art holy, O thou that inhabit the praises of Israel.*

He will not bring any charge against God, even though he has left him; and, beloved, in your bitterest griefs; never lay any blame upon your God. Like Job, said, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

4-6. *Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man;-*

So low did Christ stoop, for our sake, that he became less than man. There is a little crimson worm, to which this passage alludes, which seems to be made altogether of blood; and Christ felt as if he were nothing but a mass of suffering, a poor trodden "worm, and no man;" —

6-8. *A reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.*

It is very easy to read these words, or to hear them read, but it is not so easy to realize the sorrow they must have caused to Christ. He was dying, in unutterable agonies, yet his cruel enemies thrust out their tongues at him, hissed their bitter taunts, and made a jest even of his prayers. If you have ever been in great suffering and have then been ridiculed, you know something of the acute anguish that must have been felt by our Saviour when he was dying amidst mockery and scorn without a friend to help him.

9-11. *But thou art he that took one out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.*

Men recollect how God took care of them in the time of their infancy; and when they are brought very low, they look to him who guarded them in the times when they could not lift a finger to help themselves. The Saviour did so. He was peculiarly born of God,

there was a specialty about his birth which entitled him to plead it when he was in his death throes.

12. *Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.*

He was looking on the Scribes and Pharisees, and the strong Roman soldiery who made a ring round the cross.

15. *They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.*

There was no look of pity, no token of sympathy; they were all eager for his death. The mighty men of the day and the religious men of the day were not content until they had slain the one and only Saviour of men.

14. *I am poured out like water,-*

He feels as if he were being dissolved; there is such a sense of faintness upon him that every muscle, every ligature, seems to be turning to liquid, and he cries, "I am poured out like water," —

14. *And all my bones are out of joint:*

The jarring of the cross when they dashed it into its place had dislocated our blessed Redeemer's bones. What must his pain have been!

14. *My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.*

Now the terrible death-faintness comes over him. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity;" but when his heart melts, how can he bear the strain any longer? Yet our Saviour speaks of himself again: —

15. *My strength is dried up like a potsherd;*

The wounds in his head, and hands, and feet and all the tortures of the crucifixion had brought a raging fever upon him, so that he was dried up like the burnt clay of which men make potsherds.

15. *And my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

He felt as if every particle of his body was beginning to separate itself from the rest, and he was turning into dust again while yet alive. It is a fearful picture of pain, and they who understand what the effect of crucifixion is tell us that this is a very graphic, minute, and accurate descriptions of the agonies of one dying as our Saviour died.

16. *For dogs have compassed me:*

There is the ribald crowd, the common multitude, howling at him, and eager for his blood.

16, 17. *The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.*

They had stripped him, and this was no small part of the Saviour's grief and shame that he hung there a spectacle of scorn to ten thousand cruel eyes that looked and stared at him.

18. *They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.*

Now he returns to prayer: —

19-21. *But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul, from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.*

He had been delivered before, and he expected deliverance again, and he had it; but he had to pass through the iron gates of death to get it, and to win the victory over death by his own death. Now there is a change in the Psalm. The Saviour's griefs are drawing to an end, and he begins to look at the result of his passion. He sees what is to follow from his crucifixion, and he talks thus to himself: —

22. *I will declare thy name unto my brethren:*

“I shall live again, I shall see Peter and James and John, and many more whom I have loved, and I will talk with them about my Father.”

22. *In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.*

He knew that he would rise from the dead, and that he would praise God in the midst of his brethren.

23, 24. *Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.*

He is telling to himself, in the little quiet interval just before he breathed out his soul, what his testimony would be concerning God,—how he did hear him and help him at the last.

25, 26. *My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him:*

He is still talking to himself about what would happen after his death and resurrection,-how gracious men would praise the Lord, and how he himself would live again to praise God among them. He so realizes the existence of those whom he has redeemed that he seems to talk to them as if they were actually present; he says: —

26. *Your heart shall live for ever.*

“I die, but by my death you shall live for ever.” He sees them, as if they were gathered around his cross, and he congratulates himself upon the fact that he has bought eternal life for them.

27. *All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.*

The conversion of the nations shall be the fruit of his death.

28. *For the kingdom is the LORD’S: and he is the governor among the nations.*

See how he distributes crowns, and talks of thrones, just as he is about to die,-so sure is he that his soul shall not rest in hades, neither shall his holy body see corruption, but that he shall rise again, and be for ever “King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

29-31. *All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul. A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come,-*

I should have liked to hear those syllables fall from those dear lips of his. “They shall come,” he says to himself; “They shall come,” —

31. *And shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born,*

He sees the great host of the regenerate, the twice-born, who shall be saved through his death.

31. *That he hath done this.*

It would be a very literal translation if I read these last words thus “It is finished.” Thus the Psalm ends, and so ended the great sacrifice of Christ upon the cross:

“It is finished.” “It is finish’d!”
-Oh what pleasure Do these charming words afford!
Heavenly blessings without measure
Flow to us from Christ the Lord:
‘It is finish’d!’
Saints the dying words record.”

PSALM 22

This marvellous Psalm is a wonderful prophecy, which might seem as if it had been composed after the suffering of our Lord; yet it was written many hundreds of years before his incarnation and death. It is “a Psalm of David”, and is dedicated “To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar,” or, as the margin renders it, “the hind of the morning.” We know who that hunted hind of the morning is; we seem to see him panting, his flanks white with foam, pressed by the dogs, almost torn to pieces by the cruel enemy. The Psalm begins with words that, in all their fullness, belong to nobody else but our Well-beloved.

1. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Every word is emphatic; you may put the stress where you please, upon every single word. “My God, my God.” With two hands he takes hold on God, crying, “My God, my God,” “Eloi, Eloi, my Strong One, why hast Thou forsaken me? “Or read it, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” “Why hast thou forsaken me?” “Why hast thou forsaken me?” You get a different shade of meaning each time, but each meaning is true.

1. *Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

The Saviour’s prayers had ceased to be articulate. They had become in his own judgment like the pained crying of a wounded beast. He calls them “my roaring.” Oh, what prayers were those of our Lord on the cross! Sometimes we too feel as if we could not pray; we can only sigh, and sob, and groan. Well, if it even came to roaring, we should have a fuller sympathy with Christ, for he could say, “Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?”

2, 3. *O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*

Jesus will find no fault with God. Even if in his dire extremity God forsakes him, yet he will not utter even a whisper against him: "Thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel"

4-6. *Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man:*

The allusion here is to a little red worm which, when it is crushed, seems to be all blood, and nothing else; and the Saviour compares himself to that little red worm, "and no man."

6. *A reproach of men, and despised of the people.*

They would not let him be numbered with them; they accounted him as an offcast and an outcast.

7, 8. *All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, he trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.*

Will you try to picture the Saviour saying all these words as he hangs upon the cross? That is the best commentary upon the Psalm. Hanging there, nailed to the cruel wood, in terrible bodily and mental anguish deserted of God, he soliloquizes after this sad fashion. You will understand it all so well if you have him in your mind's eye as we are reading.

9-10. *But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.*

We could not help ourselves then; at the moment of our birth, everything depended upon God; so it does in the moment of our death. It is well to remember those years of helpless infancy, when we could not feed ourselves. We were taken care of then, when we hung in absolute impotence upon our mother's breast, then surely, if a second childhood should come, if all our powers should fail us, and we should be once more as weak as we were at our birth, he that helped us in the beginning will help us in the end. Thus the Saviour comforted himself as he went on praying: —

11. *Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.*

Oh, the bitterness of that cry, “None to help”!” They have all gone. The disciples have all fled. Judas has betrayed me. Peter has denied me. There is none to help. Be not far from me.” There stand the Roman soldiers, and the high priest, and the Scribes and Pharisees; and Jesus says: —

12-14. *Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint:*

They were no doubt dislocated by the dreadful shaking and jarring that our Saviour must have suffered when they dashed the cross into the hole dug for it.

14. *My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.*

When the heart goes, everything goes, when the heart fails, and begins to melt, then it seems as if everything is loosening, and the man is in the anguish of death.

15. *My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;*

Our Lord was parched with the fever brought on by the terrible anguish and strain upon the hands and feet, which are full of nerves and very tender. A slight wound of the thumb has brought on lockjaw, but what the wounds of the Saviour’s delicate and sensitive body must have been we cannot possibly tell: “My tongue cleaveth to my jaws.”

16. *And thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

He felt as if his very frame was all turning to the dust of which the body is made. So complete is the breaking of the whole manhood when a strong fever is upon one.

16. *For dogs have compassed me:*

There was the ribald crowd; not this time the bulls of Bashan, the great ones, but the mob, the masses of the common people hooting at him: “Dogs have compassed me.”

16. *The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they forced my hands and my feet.*

Can anybody else be speaking here but Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, the King of the Jews? Now is this bind of the morning hunted till the dogs and the hunters have made a circle round him:

“The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me.” Here is Christ’s crucifixion beyond all doubt: “They pierced my hands and my feet.”

17. *I may tell all my bones:*

He is so emaciated that, as he looks down upon his body, he says, “I may tell all my bones.”

17. *They look and stare upon me.*

The delicate modesty of the Saviour is shocked. They have stripped him, and hung him up, and there they stand and gloat their cruel eyes upon his matchless body: “They look and stare upon me.”

18. *They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.*

How accurate is this description even to the least detail! How wondrously was this poet-prophet inspired when he thus drew the portrait of the crucified Christ! “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

19-21. *But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword: my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion’s mouth: for thou hast heard me from the home of the unicorns.*

So far, you see, the Psalm describes the sufferings of our Divine Redeemer and then it changes. The light of the sun has broken out from the midday darkness. God has smiled on him once more, and the Psalm changes its tone altogether as the Saviour congratulates himself upon the result of his passion. The Psalm ends with these memorable words, “It is finished.” Our version puts it, “He hath done this.” It might just as well be rendered, “It is finished,” for the sense is precisely the same; and when Jesus had said this, he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

PSALM 22

Stand and look up at Christ upon the cross, and look upon these words, as his. He himself is the best exposition of this wondrous psalm.

1, 2. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.*

Gethsemane!—there is the key—a prayer unanswered at that time: “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” It was not possible. He must drink it. “In the night season I am not silent.”

3. *But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*

No hard thoughts of God, even when he was forsaken. A forsaken Christ still clings to the Father, and ascribes perfect holiness to him.

4-6. *Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man: a reproach of men, and despised of the people.*

How low did Christ descend for our sakes not only low as man, but lower still! Never was godly man forsaken of God, and yet Jesus was; so he is lower than we are while he hangs upon the tree “a reproach of men, and despised of the people.”

7, 8. *All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him, let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.*

Was not this just what they said at the cross? Ah, little did they know that he saved others; himself he could not save, because a matchless love held his hands there, as with diamond rivets.

9, 10. *But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.*

He remembers his wonderful birth. He was God's, indeed, from the very first.

11. *Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. They have all gone. Peter and all the rest have fled. There is none to help.*

And there stand the Scribes and Pharisees, and the great men of the nation.

12-14. *Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water,*

All dissolved—nothing could hold together—quite spent and gone.

14. *And all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax:*

He felt the inward sinking fever brought on him by the wounds he had upon the cross. "My heart is like wax."

14-16. *It is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd: and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws: and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me:*

There they are—the cruel multitude—thrusting out the tongue and hooting at him. "For dogs have compassed me."

16. *The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me:*

The hind of the morning is now surrounded by the dogs. He cannot escape.

16, 17. *They pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.*

Horrible, to the tender, modest soul of Jesus, were those vile stares of the ribald multitude as they gazed upon him.

18-22. *They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.*

The sun that was darkened, now shines again.

The Saviour's griefs are o'er.

A calm is spread over his mind. He is about to say, "It is finished!" and his heart is comforted. We leave that passage there.

PSALM 22:1-9

1. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

What a dolorous cry! How terrible it must have been to have heard that cry, but how much more terrible to have uttered it! For the dear Son of God, the Well-beloved, with whom the Father is always pleased, to be forsaken of his God, was indeed grief unfathomable.

1. *Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

It seems as if the Saviour's voice, and almost his mind, had failed him, for he calls his prayer "roaring" likening himself to a wounded beast. When any of you cannot pray, or think you cannot, remember these words of your Lord. If he, the ever-blessed Son of God, speaks of his own prayer as a "roaring", what must ours be! You know that Isaiah spoke of his own prayer as being like the chattering of a crane or a swallow, or the mourning of a dove, as if there were no articulate utterance about it; but to the ear and eye of God, there is music in a sigh, and beauty in a tear. As our Lord had to pray like this, do not wonder if we, sometimes, should feel that God has forsaken us. If there were such dark clouds for Christ there may well be some for us also.

2. *O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.*

If we remember Gethsemane, and think how Jesus prayed there, even to an agony and a bloody sweat, shall we wonder if, sometime, our prayers seem to be put on one side, and we do not immediately receive answers of peace to them? Yet, you see, our Lord kept on crying to God both day and night.

3. *But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*

Settle it in your hearts that, whatever God does, he is holy. Never harbour a thought against his, never imagine that he is hard, or unjust, or unfaithful.

That cannot be, so, if the worst comes to the worst, never let your faith have any question upon this point.

4, 5. *Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.*

Look back, and see how God helped our ancestors. Recall how, in the past ages, the Lord always was the Deliverer of all those that trusted in him. Was a righteous man ever finally forsaken of God? Since the world began, has not the Lord, sooner or later, appeared to deliver his children? It is wonderful to hear our Divine Master pleading in this fashion; but most wonderful of all is that next verse:

6. *But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.*

There is a little red worm which seems to be nothing else but blood when it is crushed, it seems all gone except a blood-stain; and the Saviour, in the deep humiliation of his spirit, compares himself to that little red worm. How true it is that “he made himself of no reputation” for our sakes! He emptied himself of all his glory; and if there be any glory natural to manhood, he emptied himself even of that. Not only the glories of his Godhead, but the honours of his manhood he laid aside that it might be seen that, “though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor.”

7, 8. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

Or, as the passage is quoted in Matthew, “Let him deliver him now, if he will have him.”

9. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts.

This is a very wonderful thing. I do not think we remember as we ought that, for years after our birth, we could do nothing to help ourselves, yet we were taken care of even then. He who has passed safely through his infancy need not be afraid that God will not help him through the rest of his life, and if we should live so long that we to a second infancy, the God who carried us through the first will carry us through the second. He has already done so much for us that we are bound to trust him for all the future. Now let us see, as I reminded you just now, how this passage is referred to in the Gospel according to Matthew.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 22:1-9; AND MATTHEW 27:33-44.

PSALM 23

We shall view Christ in the office of a shepherd and the first passage we read sets before us faith proving Christ in that office — accepting him, trusting him, following him.

1-2. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

Can you say that for yourself, dear friend? There is the sweetness of it. The words in themselves are noble, but it is the experimental acquaintance with their meaning which is the real honey of life. If thou canst use these words, and lay the emphasis

upon the personal pronoun, thou art one of the happiest out of heaven.

3-6. *He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his namesake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

There is the believer realizing Christ in that gracious office as the shepherd of his people. Now let us see how our glorious Shepherd is set forth in prophecy.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 23., ISAIAH 40:9-11, EZEKIEL 34:11-25.

PSALM 23

Did you ever notice that the 22nd Psalm exhibits “that great Shepherd of the sheep” as laying down his life for the sheep; that the 23rd Psalm exhibits “the good Shepherd” with all his sheep around him happy and restful, while the 24th Psalm represents “the chief Shepherd” who shall appear in due time; and when he does appear, then shall his sheep also appear with him in glory?

1. *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

How can a sheep want when it has a good and wise shepherd able and willing to provide for it: and how can a believer want when he has God himself, the ever-gracious and omnipotent Lord of all, to forestall his needs and to prevent him from ever knowing what want means? David does not say, “I shall have all I wish for because the Lord is my Shepherd;” but he does say, “I shall not want. Not only have I no want now, but I never shall want while my Shepherd lives. Though I am only one out of his countless flock, yet he cares for me, and therefore I shall not want.” Why should a believer think that he shall ever want? Let him look at his present condition.

2, 3. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake.*

Here are four blessed things that the Lord does for the believer. “He maketh me to lie down:” he gives me rest, perfect rest and he

gives me so much spiritual provision that I am unable to take it all in, so I lie down and rest in it as a sheep does in the deep pastures where it seems lost in the provender. There are such deep doctrines, such glorious privileges, such wondrous revelations of the heart of God in this blessed Book, that you and I cannot comprehend it all, but we can lie down in it; “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” Take a good stretch, brethren and sisters in Christ. Some are afraid to lie down in the green pastures of the Word. I know some of God’s saints who seem to be afraid of being too happy; they do not like to be too restful. Let no such fear ever cross your mind. “He maketh me” — and he would not make us do what was not good for us, — “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” Then come those three sweet words, “He leadeth me,” which in themselves are full of music.

“He leadeth me. He leadeth me.

By his own hand he leadeth me.”

You know how our song makes these words ring out over and over again and it is truly charming. “He leadeth me.” The Holy Spirit is our Guide, and as the softly-flowing river of grace marks our trackway, we sing, “He leadeth me beside the still waters.” You and I sometimes go wandering by the noisy brooks that ripple over the stones, and make such a noise because they are so shallow; but when the Spirit guides us, it is beside the deep rivers, the deep still waters, that he leads us. “He restoreth my soul.” Is not that a blessed little sentence? When my soul gets empty, he stores it again, restores it. When it goes wandering away from him, —

“He brings my wandering spirit back.

When I forsake his ways.”

And when I get spiritually sick, he gives me a sweet restorative, and renews my health: “He restoreth my soul.” Blessed be the name of the great Restorer.” “He leadeth me” — here comes those sweet words again, — He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.” They are very pleasant paths, for nothing is more pleasant to a believer than to be walking in “the paths of righteousness.” God has so constituted his people that, if they get out of the right way, they get out of the way of peace. He has so re-made us that our peace and our righteousness agree together; and as long as we are led in the paths of righteousness, we are a happy and a restful people. The Lord does all this for us “for his Name’s sake.”

4. *Yea, though I walk-*

Yes, though I walk, not only though I shall walk, but though I do walk now-

4. *Through the valley of the shadow of death,*

Though, long before I die, I seem to learn what death means in the cold chill that takes hold upon my spirit, and freezes all my joy,
—

4. *I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

Some seem to think that God's people would have no distress of mind, and no trouble, if they were trusting in God; but it is not so. Even they "walk through the valley of the shadow of death," but they "fear no evil" even there. When all is dark around you, remember that verse, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." There would be no room for faith if it were always summertime and always noontide. But Christians are called sometimes to pass through that gloomy experience which Mr. Bunyan has so beautifully pictured under the symbol here used, "the valley of the shadow of death." It is a terrible journey, yet there is no cause for fear to strike the Christian's heart even there; for, let the worst come to the worst, he can say to his Lord, with David, "Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" Now look back to the 14th and 15th verses of the 22nd Psalm, and you will see how fully Christ can sympathize with his people, because he also walked through the valley of the shadow of death even as they have to do. Hear him crying there, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws, and thou hast brought me" — remember that this is the Saviour speaking here,—"thou hast brought me into the dust of death." Well then, there is great comfort for the sheep in the fact that their Shepherd has been along that gloomy way before them.

5. *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:*

See what cool, calm courage David here displays. Usually, when a warrior is in the presence of his enemies, he just eats a bit of bread, or something that he can swallow while getting ready for the fight that is impending. But David took matters much more quietly than that. Though his enemies were all around him, there was a table prepared for him, that is to say, there was everything ready for a feast, just as if it had been a holiday instead of the day of battle. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." You may grin or howl, you devils, you may do what you like; but the true believer takes no notice of you. His table is being prepared by his God while you, armed to the teeth, are seeking to slay him. What a contrast there is between the rage of the believer's enemies and the quiet, calm confidence of the man himself!

5. *Thou anointest my head with oil;*

A sweet savour shall be upon the man who is thus anointed by his God.

5. *My cup runneth over.*

"I have more than I expected, — more than I ever asked for, — more than I desired, — more than I am capable of holding; 'My cup runneth over.'" If ever your cup does thus run over, be sure to call your poor neighbours in to catch the overflowing mercy. If ever you have more blessing than you can hold, ask some other Christian to share it with you. Recollect what Peter and his companions did when, at Christ's command, they let down the net, and caught more fish than their net could hold without breaking: they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. "What! Come and help them fish? Oh, no; come and help them share the fish! Many persons say, "You are kindly invited to come to such-and-such a meeting," because they want to get something out of you; but it is a better kind of invitation when you are asked because there is something to be given away, and those who have an overflowing cup want you to share the blessing with them.

6. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:*

I shall never be able to outrun the goodness and mercy of my God. I shall always have closely attendant upon me his goodness to supply my needs, and his mercy to forgive my sins.

6. *And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 23, 24.

PSALM 23

We will first read that choicest of all the Psalms, — the twenty-third. It is like a precious pearl shining with a mild lustre. This Psalm is, among the other Psalms, what the lark is among the other birds; it soars and sings till it is lost in the heights to which it ascends.

1. *The LORD is my Shepherd; —*

What a precious title the psalmist used in speaking of his God! It is right to call the Lord a Shepherd. “The Shepherd of Israel” is a very blessed and true title for him, but “my Shepherd” is best of all. I wish beloved, that each of you would truthfully say, with David, “‘The Lord is my Shepherd.’ He owns me; and as I am his property, he will preserve me, protect me, provide for me, guide me, and be everything to my weakness, and folly, and necessity, that a shepherd is to a sheep.” “The Lord is my Shepherd;”—

1. *I shall not want.*

Not only do I not want at the present moment, but I never shall want. I may sometimes foolishly fancy that I shall come to want; but I never shall as long as God provides for me. How could such a Shepherd as he is almighty and all-sufficient, ever suffer one of his sheep to lack any good thing? No, ‘I shall not want.’ All the world beside may want, but I shall not while Jehovah is my Provider. Famine may be sore in the land, there may be neither dew nor rain, and even the brook Cherith may at last be dried up, but since Jehovah is my Shepherd, ‘I shall not want.’ As a guarantee of his care of us in the future, we turn to our experience in the past and the present What is our experience of our great Shepherd even now?

2. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:*

Here is blessed rest, and here is also gracious provision for the needs of the sheep. The pasture is sweet and tender, and there is so much of the green grass that it cannot all be eaten, and the superabundance makes a soft bed for the tired sheep: “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” Repose, O believer, in the abundant provision of God’s grace! A sheep needs sometimes to lie down. It is as necessary for its health that it should have time to

digest its food as that it should have proper and sufficient food to eat. May the Lord graciously give to each of you the sweet rest of meditation and contemplation, — that blessed rest, to which faith attains when it grows into firm confidence and full assurance, so that you may be able to say with David, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” But our spiritual life is not to be all spent in lying down; there must come a time for going forward, so David adds: —

2. *He leadeth me* —

What a peerless Guide he is, since infallible wisdom is his! And how gracious and condescending it is, on his part, to go first in the way which he means us to take! David does not say, “He driveth me,” but “He leadeth me” —

2, 3. *Beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness* —

“In each one of them; he is my Exemplar in every virtue, for he himself has endured all temptations that are incident to my life’s pathway; and, all the way, ‘he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness’” —

3. *For his name’s sake.*

“Not because of any goodness in me, but because of the goodness that is in him, and for the glory of his holy name, ‘he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.’”

“Also, ‘He restoreth my soul.’ When I wander, he restores my soul to the right road. When I become empty, he stores my soul again with good things; he restoreth my soul.”

4. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:*

“Not only shall there be none, but I will fear none.” A sense of the Lord’s presence lifts a Christian above even fear. You know how often it is true that we “feel a thousand deaths in fearing one.” But if we have a sense of our Saviour’s presence, when we do really walk through the valley of death-shade, not a trace of fear shall come across our peaceful souls.

4. *For thou art with me;*

The presence of Christ is all that his people can ever want. The all powerful, ever-faithful, infinitely-compassionate One being with us, what cause for fear can possibly remain?

4. *Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

“To see thy scepter, and even to feel thy chastising rod, — to know that thou art a King, and that thou rulest over Israel, — to know that, as a Shepherd, thou carries “a crook to guide thy flock; shall be enough to comfort my heart, and to sustain my spirit.” How sweet is the next verse!

5. *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:*

How calmly the psalmist writes! He realizes that he has enemies, yet he means to sit down to a feast; he is not going to snatch a hurried mouthful or two, but “a table” is “prepared” for him as though for a banquet. His enemies may look on while he is feasting, but they cannot take away his enjoyment of the feast.

5. *Thou anointest my head with oil;*

He receives a fresh anointing for new service, even the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

5. *My cup runneth over.*

“I have all I want, and even more than I need, so that others, not so favored as I am, may come and catch some of the droppings from my overflowing cup. It is so full O Lord, that it cannot hold all that thou givest me till thou dost enlarge my capacity, I shall still have to say, “My cup runneth over.” The psalmist’s next word also has much meaning and force in it: —

6. *Surely* —

There are no ifs, no doubts, no fears about the matter: “Surely” —

6. *Goodness and mercy shall follow me* —

“These two holy angels shall watch over my footsteps and track me wherever I go; — ‘goodness’ to preserve me and ‘mercy’ to pardon me! — ‘goodness’ to supply my needs, and ‘mercy’ to blot out my sins.” And these angels shall follow me —

6. *All the days of my life:*

“Not merely now and then, but all my days; — my dark days as well as my bright ones; — these heavenly messengers will never forsake me,”

6. *And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

This life begins here, for this earth is but the lower part of God’s house; and when the time shall come for us to leave this earth, we,

who are the Lord's own children, shall only go upstairs to the higher rooms, to "dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

This, then, is the portion of the children of God; but there are some to whom David's language will seem strange. They cannot sing this sweet Psalm, for their life is as restless as the waves of the sea, No quiet pastoral poem could set forth their joy, for the sound of war is heard in the streets of their city of Mansoul. If any such souls are seeking rest and peace let them hearken to the voice of God as it speaks to them from the Book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter fifty-five.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 23 and ISAIAH 55.

PSALM 23

I hope we all know this Psalm by heart, may we also know it by heart-experience! It is a sweet pastoral song just suited to our Sabbath evening worship. There is here no din of arms, no noise of war; but there is a delicious hush, only broken by the gentle tinkling of the sheep-bell. God give us that sweet rest tonight!

1. *The LORD is my shepherd;*

All true rest begins with Jesus, as all the comfort of the sheep is provided for their by their shepherd.

"The Lord is my shepherd." Is it so? Canst thou look up, poor defenseless sheep, and say, "The Lord is my shepherd"? Then comes the blessed inference: —

1. *I shall not want.*

I do not want, I cannot want; I never shall want with such a Shepherd as I have. He will provide for me; nay, more, God himself is my provision. All I need I have, for "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." I cannot provide for myself, but I shall not want. Famine may come, and others who have no God to go to, may pine and perish, but in the worst season I shall not want, for "The Lord is my shepherd."

2. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:*

I am so weak that I even need God's help to enable me to lie down, but "He maketh me to lie down." Yes, the rest of the soul is so hard to attain that nobody ever does reach it except by the power of God. He who made the heavens must make us to lie down if we are really to rest. What delightful rest it is when we lie down in his

pastures, which are always green! Did you ever find them dry? Our Shepherd makes us not only to feed, but so to feed that we lie down in the midst of the pastures. There is more than we can eat, so the Lord makes a couch of it for us: “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:”

2. *He leadeth me beside the still waters.*

There is, first, contemplation: “He maketh me to lie down.” Then there is activity. “He leadeth me.” There is also progress, and there is provision for our advance in the heavenly way: “He leadeth me.” He leadeth me beside the waters of quietness, not by the rushing torrents of excitement, nor by the place of noisy strife. “He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.” “He leadeth me beside the still waters.” Not, he drives, or drags; but he himself leads, going first to show the way. It is for me to follow, happily to follow, where “He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

3. *He restoreth my soul:*

He can do it at once. He restoreth now. He is a restoring God. “He restoreth my soul.” He brings my wandering spirit back when I forsake his ways; and having done that, he leads me, even more carefully than before, for a second time we have the psalmist’s declaration, “He leadeth me.”

3, 4. *He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:*

Though death’s shadow hovers all around me, and damps my spirit, though I feel as though I must die, and cannot bear up under present trial any longer, “Yea, though I walk,” for I do walk I will not quicken my pace, I will not be in a flurry, I will not run for it. Though death itself shall overshadow me, I will keep up my walk with God. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” There is none, therefore I will not fear any. We often feel more afraid through our fear itself than through any real cause for fear. Some people seem to be ever on the lookout for fear where there is none. Do not you see any, nor let any enter your heart; gay with the psalmist, “I will fear no evil.” —

4. *For thou art with me;*

Should a sheep fear when the shepherd is with it? What cause has it to fear if that Shepherd is omniscient, omnipotent, and full of tenderness?

4. *Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

Thy rule and thy correction: thy rod, with which I sometimes am made to smart; thy staff, with which I am supported. These are my comforts; why should I fear? Are you drinking in all this precious truth, dear friends? Are you feeling it in your soul's deepest experience? This Psalm is very good to read, but it is far better to write out from your own experience. Make it a song of your own; not merely a song in the Book, but a song for yourselves.

5. *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:*

There is a fight going on, and there are enemies all around. You do not generally have tables set in the hour of battle; but God keeps his people so calm amid the bewildering cry, so confident of victory, that even in the presence of their enemies a table is spread with all the state of a royal banquet. "Thou preparest a table." There is a doth on the table, there are the ornaments on it, and there are all the accompaniments of a feast: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." They may look on if they like; they may grin, they may wish they could devour, but they cannot sit down at the table, and they cannot prevent me from sitting down at it. Let them blow their trumpets, let them fire their guns: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." It is the very acme of security and repose that is here described. I know of no expression, not even that of lying down in green pastures, that is more full of restfulness than this: "Thou preparest table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

5. *Thou anointest my head with oil;*

At some feasts, they poured perfumed unguents on the heads of the guests, so God will leave out nothing that is for the joy and comfort of his people. "Thou anointest my head with oil." You shall have delicacies as well as necessaries; you shall have joy as well as safety; you shall be prepared for service as well as preserved from destruction.

5. *My cup runneth over.*

I have not only what I wish, but I have more; not only all I can hold, but something to spare: "My cup runneth over." If this is the case with your cup, dear friend, let it run over in thankful joy, and if you have more of this world's substance than you need, ask the poor and needy to come and catch that which flows over.

6. Surely —

This is another of the psalmist's inferences, and a very sure one. He does not say, "Peradventure," but, "Surely"

6. Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

Here is a prince of the blood royal of heaven attended by two body guards, — goodness and mercy, — which keep close behind him. These are the grooms that ride on the horses of salvation: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me." "Goodness" — to provide for me; "mercy" — to blot out my sin. "Goodness and mercy shall follow me,"-not only now and then, but, "all the days of my life." When I get gray-headed and feeble, and have to lean heavily upon my staff, these twin angels shall be close behind to bear me up, and bear me through.

6. And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Even while I am here in this world, I will be—"No more a stranger or a guest But like a child at home," dwelling with God; and by-and-by, in the fullest sense, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." I always compare this Psalm to a lark. It begins on the ground among the sheep, but up it goes till you may hear its blessed notes echoing among the stars: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." It has its nest in the grass of the green pastures; but it flies up like the strains of sweetest music rising even to the skies: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." God grant that this may be the portion of every one of us, for his great name's sake! Amen.

PSALM 24

1. The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof,

And therefore it is also the believer's. The real fullness of the earth belongs to the Christian. "The meek shall inherit the earth."

1, 2. The world, and they that dwell there in. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.

So, child of God, you are in your Father's house even while you are down here on earth. Still, that question in the next verse is very suggestive. Albeit that the earth is the Lord's, yet we do not want to stop in it for ever.

3. *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?*

This is the portion of the Lord's people to ascend the hill of the Zion that is above, to enter the New Jerusalem, and to stand in the immediate presence of God. But who shall ever be able to do that?

4, 5. *He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully; he shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the blood of his salvation.*

The man who will go to heaven is the clean man, the man who has been washed from his sins in the blood of the Lamb; and he is clean just where he was most likely to be foul, he has "clean hands." Grace has enabled him to touch the things of the world without receiving a stain from them, and to touch holy things without defiling them. This expression — "clean hands" — refers to his outward life; but he is also clean inside, for he has "a pure heart." If a man were clean as to his actions, but not clean as to his motives, he would not be fit to enter heaven, but the man described here is a true man. He has not followed after vanity, neither has he uttered a lie, but he has followed the truth, and he has spoken the truth. He is the man whom God will bless, but he has no righteousness of his own, so we read that "he shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." So he needed to be saved, and he needed a righteousness better than his own, and this God will give him.

6. *This is the generation of them that seek him, that see thy face, O Jacob. Selah.*

It is a wonderful thing that Jesus Christ should take his people's name but he does. He gives his Church his own name in that remarkable passage in Jeremiah **33:16**, "This is the name wherewith she shall be called The Lord our righteousness;" and now, to make the union complete, he takes her name as his own, and Christ is here called Jacob.

7-10. *Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this*

King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.

Now, if Christ is our Shepherd in the meadows down here where he makes us to lie down in the green pastures of his grace, he will also be our Shepherd in the heavenly pastures up there on the hill-tops of glory, where the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed us, and shall lead us unto living fountains of waters, and we shall delight for ever to “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.”

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 23, 24.

PSALM 25

1. *Unto thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul.*

It is down; and I would fain lift it up; yet I am powerless to do so if I am left to myself. When the soul cleaves to the earth, who but God can lift it up? Yet it must be our desire and object to seek to lift up our soul unto God.

2. *O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me.*

Whatever happens to me, I trust in thee. Down goes the anchor; that ship will never drift far out to sea. “O my God, I trust in thee.” Can you say that, dear friends? Then, if you are in the dark, you are as safe as if you were in the light, for still this anchor holds: “O my God, I trust in thee.” “Let not mine enemies triumph over me.” They will do so, if they can get me back into the world. If they can seduce me from the paths of holiness, what shouts of joy there will be in the camp of the enemy! “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.”

3. *Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause.*

When good men are in earnest on their own account, they soon begin to pray for others; and the evil which they dread for themselves, they are sure to dread for their brethren. David first prayed, “Let me not be ashamed;” and then he added, “Let none that wait on thee be ashamed.” The only shame that is worth having is a blessed shame,— the shame of true repentance, which sorrows over past sin, of which it is ashamed. Alas!

there will be an eternal shame, which shall cover those who choose the ways of sin.

4. *Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths.*

That is the prayer of one who is tigh of the Spirit, for, by nature, our desire is to have our own way; and if we can have our own way, we are satisfied. But when the Lord has taught us better, our prayer is, “Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths.”

5. *Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.*

We need not only to have the path shown to us, but to be led into it, for we are like babes just learning to walk, we must have a finger that we may hold, or a hand that we may lean upon: “Lead me in thy truth, and teach me.” That is the second time that David has prayed for the Lord to teach him; and as long as we are here, we also shall each one need to pray, Teach me. What is a disciple but as learner? His daily cry must be, “Teach me: for thou art the God. of my salvation.” There is another grip of the hand of faith. I have taken thee to be my salvation, O my God! I trust nowhere else, “On thee do I wait all the day,” expecting everything from thee,—tarrying thy leisure, but tarrying hopefully, expecting to be blessed.

6. *Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old.*

Thy saints knew them before I was born, and I have known them since I have been born again. By the constancy of thy kindness to me hitherto, continue still to bless me, for art thou not an unchanging God?

7. *Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD.*

In this verse and the preceding one, there are three “remembers”—erst, that God would remember his tender mercies and his lovingkindnesses; next, that he would not remember our sins and our transgressions; and, then, that he would remember us according to his mercy and goodness.

This last request may remind us of the prayer of the dying thief, “Lord, remember me;” and it may serve for us as a repenting prayer: “According to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.”

8. *Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way.*

If good men endeavor to make others good, much more will the good God do so. A good man will seek to lead sinners in the right way; and much more will our good Saviour, and God, and Helper do so. Only let us be willing to be taught, and come to him confessing our ignorance, and

asking to be led and instructed. This Psalm, you see, dear friends, is all about teaching; and as David needed instruction, so also do we. The next verse deals with the same subject:

9. *The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.*

Not the proud man, but the meek,— the learners,— the teachable ones; those who, like little children, are willing to believe what they are told upon true authority. Oh, that we all may be among the meek! The tender-mouthed horse is easy to drive; but some people are so stubborn and obstinate that they are “as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle.” Oh, that we were sensitive to the slightest touch of the divine hand, and always ready and anxious to be instructed by the Lord.

10. *All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.*

Do you believe that, you who have been sorely tried? If you are resting in covenant love, and find your hope in covenant blood and covenant promises, you must believe that everything God does to you is done in mercy and truth. Ay, though he strikes till every blow of the rod leaves a blue wound behind, yet we rejoice in these tokens of his fatherly love and desire for our highest good, for he has said, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” The word “love” in that passage conveys the idea of a very tender and ardent affection.

11. *For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.*

Those who are not taught of God pray very differently from that, for their prayer is, “O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is little;” but he who is graciously instructed confesses the greatness of his guilt, and out of that he draws a plea for mercy, for is not God a great

God, and is it not greatly to his glory to pardon great sinners; and when they are pardoned, are they not filled with a great love, and a great zeal, so that they are greatly serviceable to their Lord and Master?

12. *What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.*

True reverence for God, a holy fear of him, is a quality that God delights to see; and wherever he finds it, there he gives further instruction.

13. *His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth.*

The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.

Are you one of those trembling ones who fear to offend God? Well, I daresay that you sometimes envy those who are very boisterous in their joy. Do not envy them; you have something better in having that holy, filial fear that trembles at God's Word; and you shall have the secret of the Lord with you, and he will show you his covenant.

14, 15 *The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant. ine eyes are eyes toward the LORD; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net.*

When they get into it, he will pluck them out of it. When Satan seems to cast a net over me, God will come and pull me out. There is force in that word "pluck"— denoting swiftness and energy; perhaps, also, there is a little idea of roughness, but God's roughness is true tenderness.

16. *Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted.*

If you pass that dish round, there are some who will not help themselves from it, for they are not "desolate and afflicted." But I know that there are some, even here, who are both "desolate and afflicted." Be sure, dear friends, that you make this prier your own: "Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted."

17, 18. *The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of any distresses. Look upon mine affliction and my pain;*

And what follows? "Take the affliction and the pain away"? No.

18. *And forgive all my sins.*

David will be quite content if God will but look with pitying eyes upon his sufferings; but, as for his sins, he must be clean rid of them, he cannot be happy until he has the answer to this petition, "Forgive all my sins."

19. *Consider mine enemies; for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred.*

The better the man, the more bitterly is he hated by the ungodly. It is not by holiness that you will escape the hatred of the world, it is by that very thing that you will arouse its malice. Do not wish to have it otherwise; but remember your Lord's own words, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." But, "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets." If we live near to God, and are truly the seed of the woman, the seed of the serpent will be constantly nibbling at our heel; some little viper or other will be sure to be there. As the great serpent seeks to do us injury, so will his seed.

20. *O keep my soul, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust in thee.*

Do you notice how David gets back to his key-note? Almost at the beginning of the Psalm, he said, "O my God, I trust in thee;" now he says "I put my trust in thee." Let faith in God be the key-note of your life-psalm.

At another time, David wrote, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." That is the motto for all Christians,—“Trust, trust, TRUST.” When there is nothing to be seen, when you are in thick Egyptian darkness, let Job's confident declaration be the resolve of your spirit, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

21. *Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee.*

The child of God cannot hope to pass through the world safely unless he is careful to keep his integrity and his uprightness. There are some who profess to be Christians, who try to get on in trade by various tricks, and they hope to win the favor of men by just

bending a little to their ways. Never do so, beloved; if you give way an inch, you will have to give way a yard or a mile before long.

22. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.

God did so to Israel himself. Jacob, whose name was also Israel, said, "All these things are against me;" yet God redeemed him out of his troubles; and so will the Lord do for all his people in due time, glory be unto his name, world without end! Amen.

PSALM 26

No doubt this Psalm was written by David when his cruel persecutor Saul, the more effectually to stab at him, spread false reports concerning his character. When the wicked can use no other weapons, they always have their quivers full of slanderous reports. Let us learn here that the best of men must expect to be misrepresented, and to have the worst of crimes laid to their charge. Let us learn, also, from the example of David, to carry our case to the highest court at once, not to meddle with the lower courts of earth, but to go at once to the Court of King's Bench in heaven, and there plead our cause before the eternal throne.

1. Judge me, O LORD;

As if he turned away from all other judges, bribed and false as they had proved themselves to be in his ease, and put himself on trial before God: "Judge me, O Lord; "-

1. For I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide.

He pleads two things: first, the outward life and second, the inward faith, which, as it is the main-spring and source of the outer life of integrity, is also the more important of the two. Remark, that as the case is between himself and his accusers he pleads his life, for though we are justified before God by faith and not by works, yet before men we must be justified by our works, rather than by our faith. It is in vain for me to plead my faith when I am slandered. The only answer that can effectually shut the mouth of the adversary, is to point to a blameless life. Hence in this case he not only brings his faith before his God, but he also brings the fruit of his faith. Note, the inference which he draws from God's mercy to him in enabling him to walk uprightly and to trust him-" therefore I shall not slide." He rests for the future upon his God. His position was slippery, his

enemies were always busy trying to trip up his heels, but saith he-“ I shall not slide.”

2. *Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.*

This is a wonderful verse. One would hardly dare to pray it. Here are three kinds of trial. According to the etymology of the Hebrew the first is the trial by touch-“ Examine me “; the next is the trial by smell- “ Prove me “; and the next is the trial by fire-“ Assay my reins and my heart.” You see how anxious he is really to have the matter decided by God. “Lord, search me through and through; thou knowest I am not a hypocrite.” Now who dares to say this but that true man of God whose soul is wholly fixed upon the Lord? The reins and the heart are mentioned because those were believed to be the seat of the affections, and when the affections are right the whole man is right. The heart is the fountain from which issue streams of life, and if the fountain be pure, the streams cannot be impure; hence he asks chiefly that the examination may be directed to his reins and to his heart.

3. *For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes:-*

Right straight before his eyes, he had God’s lovingkindness. Some people appear to have their miseries, their sorrows, their sins, before their eyes but happy is that believer who always has God’s lovingkindness before him! Come, my brother, forget for a little while the burden of your business cares; now for a little season let the sickness that is in your house be left in the hand of your God, and let his lovingkindness be before your eyes. Lovingkindness-pull the word to pieces. Remember the ancientness of it, the constancy of it, the variety of ways in which it shows itself, and the lavish bounties which it bestows upon you. Do not turn your back to God’s goodness, but now, right straight before you set the lovingkindness of your God.

3. *And I have walked in thy truth.*

By which he may mean two things, first that he endeavored to hold fast to truth both in doctrine and in practice; or, secondly, that by God’s truthfulness in giving him the promised grace, he had been enabled to walk uprightly.

4. *I have not sat with vain persons,-*

I never took counsel with them; they never were my choice companions.

4. *Neither will I go in with dissemblers.*

He makes a vow for the future that all crafty, lying, and foolish men shall never have his companionship.

5. *I have hated the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked.*

By which he does not mean that he does not associate with them in any way for we must needs go out of the world if we will not have communion with sinners; but he means that he did not seek their company, found no pleasure in it, and never went in it to abet them in their evil deeds.

6. *I will wash mine hands in innocency:*

Pilate did this, but alas! the water was very dirty in which he washed his hands. This was an old Jewish rite when a man was found murdered; if the people in the valley in which he was found would be free from the crime of murder they took a heifer, slew it, and then washed their hands in water over the head of the victim. They were then clear. So here he says- “ I will wash mine hands in innocency: “

6. *So will I compass thine altar, O LORD:*

He is innocent far as men are concerned, but he still confesses that he is a sinner, for he goes to God’s altar. Perfect men need no altars. It is the sinner that needs a sacrifice. So let the saint ever know that though he can plead innocency against the charges of men yet before God, his hope lies in the blood-besprinkled altar of which Jesus Christ is the great High Priest.

7, 8. *That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.*

I am sure many of us can say this, that when the Sabbath comes round, it is the best day of all the week, and that hour in the week-night when we can get to the house of God-what an inexpressible relief is that! It is to us like a green oasis in the midst of the sandy desert. There are no beauties in nature and no changes to be perceived in traveling that I think can ever compensate for the loss of the constant means of grace, after all God’s house is the fairest spot of earth. Zion, I will prefer thee above my chief joy! If I forget thee let my right hand forget her cunning. “I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where shine honour dwelleth.”

9, 10. *Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men: in whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes.*

See, he so loves God's house that he cannot bear the thought of being shut in with sinners; and this is our comfort, that if we have loved God's house on earth we shall dwell in his house for ever.

11. *But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me, and be merciful unto me.*

See again, my beloved, how in the Christian's practice good works and faith are seen happily blended. He declares that he will walk in his integrity, but still, still note, he prays as one that is conscious of a thousand imperfections—"Redeem me and be merciful unto me." We do rest on Christ alone, but still we desire to walk in holiness with as much exactness as though our salvation depended upon our good works.

12. *My foot standeth in an even place: in the congregations will I bless the LORD.*

PSALM 27

1. *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*

If a man has a light that can never go out, — a sun which will never set, — and a salvation which must always save, — and God is all that and more to everyone who trusts him, — then what ground has he for fear

1. *The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

If I live in him, and he lives in me, who can kill me? Who can hurt me? If he is my strength, what duty will be impossible? What suffering will crush me? "Of whom shall I be afraid?"

2. *When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.*

They were both wicked in character, and fierce in disposition, for they had resolved to eat him right up, as wild beasts might have done. They were successful as far as they were permitted to go, for he says, "They came upon me." Yet he needed not to lift either sword or spear against them, for "they stumbled and fell" of themselves. Such is the power of God that he soon discovers the weakness of the adversaries of his people.

3. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; —

It is then that we mostly do fear, before the fight begins when the enemy lies encamped against us. We do not know how strong is the foe, nor what mischief he is going to do to us, and the uncertainty often brings a dread with it; yet, says the psalmist, “though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.”

3. Though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.

Let my enemies begin the battle, let the noise and the smoke and the dust of the fight surround me, I will still be —

“Calm ‘mid the bewild’ring cry,
Confident of victory.”

4. One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; —

It is a grand thing to get your heart so focused that it has but one desire, and then to be aroused to the practical pursuit of that one object.

4. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

Is it possible for a man to live in God’s house all his days? Oh, yea Good men do not desire impossibilities. “But,” say you, “we cannot always be in the church or the meeting-house.” No; and even if you were, you might not be in God’s house any the more for that; but to be like a child at home with God wherever you may be, to live in him and with him wherever you are, this is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of your life. You may begin dwelling in the lower rooms of that house even now; and, by-and-by, he will call to you, and say, “Friend, come up higher,” and you will ascend to the upper room where the glorified dwell for ever with their God. It is my one desire always to be—“No more a stranger or a guest, But like a child at home,” — at home with my God all the days of my life, that I may behold his unutterable beauty, and that I may inquire in his temple what is his will, and what are the exceeding great and precious promises which he has made to me in his Word.

5. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:

If you live in God, it matters little whether you have trouble or delight, for you shall be hidden in his pavilion.

5. In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.

There is the pavilion of sovereignty; there is the tabernacle of sacrifice; there is the rock of immutability; and he who can get in or on those three places is the safest man under heaven. Hidden in God's royal tent, secreted in the innermost shrine of Deity, — the holy of holies, — and set up by the Lord himself upon an uncrumbling rock, what more can he desire?

6. *And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me . ' therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.*

David always comes back to his God; nay, he does not go away from him.

Trusting him, praising him, adoring him, — this is the very life of this Psalm, as it ought to be of our whole life. The psalmist says, "I will sing;" but the next verse is, —

7. *Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice- have mercy also upon me, and answer me.*

One moment he praises, and the next moment he prays. That is quite right.

I have often said to you that we live by breathing in and breathing out; we breathe in the atmosphere of heaven by prayer, and we breathe it out again by praise. Prayer and praise make up the essentials of the Christian's life.

Oh, for more of them, — not prayer without praise, nor praise without prayer! Prayer and praise, like the two horses in Pharaoh's chariot, make our Christian life to run smoothly and swiftly to God's honour and glory.

8. *When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.*

As if it were an echo, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." And he did seek it, and seek it at once. But, oh! there are many who have long been called to seek God's face, who have never obeyed the summons; are you among that number? If so, the Lord have mercy upon you, and call you yet again! When he says, "Seek ye my face," answer, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

9. *Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.*

This is grand praying on the part of David; he pleads the past as a reason for mercy in the present: "Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." It is a very bad thing to hire on past experiences alone; we want fresh visitations from God. Old manna and old experiences soon become corrupt; but you can make some use of your past experience, as you may have seen the bargeman down on the canal, you may push backward to send your boat forward. Sometimes, when you have but little hope within you, you may recollect what God did for you in the past, and then you can plead with him to do the same again: "Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation?"

10. *When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.*

"My father and my mother are the last to forsake me; they were the first to love me, and they will be the last to leave me, but if they do leave me, then Jehovah will take me up, and he will be both father and mother to me." Just as it was said to Naomi concerning Ruth, "Thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, is better to thee than seven sons;" so may the Lord say to his bereaved people, "Am I not better unto you than father, or mother, or sister, or children, or wife, or husband? Am I not better than all beside? Can you not find all in me?" "The Lord will take me up." What a beautiful figure this is! The child seems deserted, but God takes it up, and carries it in his bosom. "Oh, I am no child!" says one. But do you not recollect that precious text, "Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you," — you old ones as well as young ones, — "I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." It is well to be bereft of every earthly confidence that we may be taken up by God alone.

11. *Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.*

"Make it clear what I ought to do; make it so clear that I shall do it. Let me not try to excuse myself, but may my way be so plainly upright and true that even my enemies cannot say anything against me! 'Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.'"

12. *Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty.*

"Cruelty is their very breath. Lord, save me from their cruelty!"

13. *I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.*

“I had fainted, unless I had believed.” You have the choice between these two things, you must either faint or have faith. Faith is the blessed smelling-bottle that will often prevent a fainting fit. Get but a sniff of the promises, do but know how strong they are, and your poor flagging spirit will revive. “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see.” What? “Believed to see?” That is David’s way of putting it. Many want to see to believe; that is our carnal way, but the faith-way, the gracious way is, “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of Jehovah in the land of the living.”

14. *Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.*

He is worth waiting upon. God help us all to wait on him, for his dear name’s sake! Amen.

PSALM 27

1. *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*

If all your light comes from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, you need not be afraid of losing your light. “The Lord is my light and my salvation.” If your salvation comes from the God of salvation, if it is wrought out by the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, you need not be afraid that you will ever be robbed of that salvation, and you may confidently sing, “Jehovah is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”

1. *The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

“He puts his own force into me; and if he who is omnipotent is the strength of my life, who can stand against me? If my strength were in myself, I might well be afraid; but if it be in God alone, if ‘the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?’” Dismiss your fears, then, whatever may be the cause of them, all ye who are trusting in the Lord Jehovah. The causes of fear are many; but the cure of fear is one, namely, faith in the living God.

2. *When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.*

This is the record of the psalmist’s past experience. David was a soldier, and he had a soldier’s dangers and a soldier’s deliverance’s; and here he writes the history of his battles. These are dispatches

from the field. When the psalmist's enemies rushed upon him, like hungry lions, seeking to eat him up, they stumbled and fell; he had not to fight, or even to sound a trumpet, for the Lord fought for him.

3. *Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.*

The past gives him confidence both for the present and for the future. Happy is the man who can fall back upon his past experience, not to make of it a bed to lie upon, but to make of it a lever with which to lift his soul out of the slough of despond. I think I have sometimes said that we may use our past experiences as the bargemen use their oars when they push backward to drive the boat forward. You must never lie down upon past mercies, and say, "I am satisfied with all that has happened;" but use the past to help you in the present and the future.

4. *One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.*

David wanted to spend his days in the house of his God, and we also may do the same, not only in the place that is used for public worship, but wherever we may be. The great house of God is everywhere, and his children can always be at home with him. That is the ideal of a Christian's life, to be always in God's house,—"No more a stranger or a guest, But like a child at home." David desired not only that he might dwell in God's house, but that he might spend his time in adoring contemplation of the beauty of his God: "to behold the beauty of the Lord." Did you ever think of the wonderful beauties that there are in the character of the Most High? If you want to see them, behold him who is altogether lovely, in whom the Father is to be most clearly seen, though veiled in human flesh. This should also be our lifelong work, to study, to understand, and to enjoy the beauty of the Lord, "and to inquire in his temple;" not only to see him, but to speak with him, and to hear him speak. A Christian is one who makes enquiries of his God; he is an enquirer when he begins, and he should be an enquirer till he ends.

The apostle Peter tells us that the angels belong to the honourable company of enquirers concerning "things that accompany salvation": "Which things the angels desire to look into." Christian men should go to God with their enquiries; and

when they come to public worship, this should be one great end of it, “to inquire in his temple.”

5. *For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:*

“For”-and this is a reason for dismissing all our fear,-“in the time of trouble he shall hide me.” “I am so little that I may easily be hidden away by one so great as God is. ‘He shall hide me in his pavilion,’ in his own royal tent; and beneath the majesty of his sovereignty my soul shall find perfect security.”

5. *In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;*

“In that most holy place, where none can come and live but those whom God brings there, in the sacred spot where the security must be absolute, in the tabernacle of sacrifice besprinkled with the blood of atonement, shall he hide me.” Oh, what a hiding-place is this for one who is in trouble!

6. *He shall set me up upon a rock.*

What perfect security the child of God has; first, in the pavilion of sovereignty; next, in the secrecy of sacrifice; and thirdly, on the rock of immutability! “He shall set me up upon a rock.”

6. *And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.*

If an ungodly man’s head were lifted up above his enemies, he would begin to denounce them, and to curse them; but when a believer’s head is thus lifted up, he begins to praise his God. Then are his songs louder and sweeter than ever they were before; “I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.”

7. *Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me.*

I thought you were going to sing, David; but you are at prayer, I see. This is how we live spiritually; we breathe in the air by prayer, and we breathe it out by praise; this is the holy respiration of a Christian’s life. Prayer and praise must be mingled in a divinely wise proportion, and then they make a sweet incense, acceptable to God. I hope we can say that we have never done praying but that we feel we must begin singing, and that we have never done singing but that we must begin praying. What a blessed interchange this makes for the whole of life! “I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the

Lord. Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me.”

8. *When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.*

The child of God knows his Father’s voice, and responds to it. God’s Word is like a seal, and we should be like the wax, ready to take the impress of it. “Seek ye my face.” “Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” It is the same expression reversed, just as it is when the seal makes an impression.

9. *Hide not thy face far from me;*

I do not know why the translators put in that word “far.” It is printed in Italics, but it should not be there at all. “Hide not thy face from me at all, my Lord. I do not ask thee not to hide it far from me, but I pray thee not to hide it at all. Make no break in my sunlight. Let me always see thee; this is all I ask. hide not thy face from me.”

9. *Put not thy servant away in anger:*

“Put not thy servant away.” God will not put away his children; but he does sometimes put his servants away. I know that this is often a prayer of mine, I wonder whether it is yours also,-“Dismiss me not thy service, Lord.” We may remain his children, and yet we may scarcely be fit to be employed any longer in his service. Let this be your prayer as well as David’s, “Put not thy servant away in anger.”

9. *Thou hast been my help;*

“Ay, that thou hast, O Lord! Thou hast been my help.”

9, 10. *Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.*

There is a poor child, and his father and mother have both gone away and left him; but the Divine Father comes along, picks the child up, and clasps him to his bosom: “Then the Lord will take me up.” It is a wonderful thing to be taken up by God. A man prospers in business, and people say, “Oh, yes, he may very well get on, for such and such a great man has taken him up!” But how much better shall you and I prosper who can say, “The Lord will take me up”! If he has taken us up, what a wonderful Patron we have! There is no other like the Lord.

11. *Teach me thy way, O LORD,*

“I am only a child; teach me, Lord. I am fatherless and motherless; take me into thine orphanage, and teach me thy way, O Lord!”

11. *And lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.*

“Make my way to be very straightforward! May my life be such that I never have to apologize for it! May there be no places in it about which unpleasant questions can be asked! Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies. If they can find fault with me, they will do so; and if they cannot rightly find fault with me, they will make up some accusation against me, therefore, O Lord, lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.

12, 13. *Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty. I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.*

Men say that “seeing is believing,” but that is not true; but believing is seeing. So David says, “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see.” It is by believing that we see “the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

14. *Wait on the LORD:*

I think I hear David say this short sentence to each one in this great assembly tonight, “Wait on the Lord.”

14. *Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say,*

David says it from his own experience, and thus, as it were, puts his name and seal at the end of the Psalm: “Wait, I say,”-

14. *On the LORD.*

Everyone who has ever proved the power of prayer may use the same words as David did; the preacher certainly does so, and with the psalmist he exclaims, “Wait, I say, on the Lord.”

PSALM 27

1. *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

A sort of trembling seems to have been creeping over him, so he argues thus with his own heart, “Why should I be dismayed? Am I afraid of coming darkness? ‘The Lord is my light.’ Do dangers

surround me? The Lord is my salvation. Do I expect stern labour or severe suffering? ‘The Lord is the strength of my life. Are there many enemies watching for my halting? Yet, ‘of whom shall I be afraid’ since he is on my side?’ Then he falls back upon his past experience: —

2. When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.

“They were very fierce. Like cannibals, they meant to eat me right up. They would not have spared me. They ‘came upon me’ in such a fashion that I was taken at a disadvantage. I seemed to be altogether in their power, but ‘they stumbled and fell.’ I had not to lift a hand against them, but the mysterious power of God entirely overthrew them. They stumbled and fell then, so shall I be afraid of them now?”

3. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.

“God has not changed. My enemies are not more powerful than they were; and if they should become so, omnipotence will still overmatch them. I will therefore be confident, and calm, what may.”

4. One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,

“That, wherever I am, I may be at home with God, — that I may feel, in every place, that I am still in his house, — never away from home, — whether in the wilderness or in the city, still dwelling like a child at home with its parents.”

4, 5. To behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:

“Will not a father take care of his own children? Does not even the feeble hen cover her chickens with her wings, and will not God cover me with his feathers, and cause me to rest in safety under his wings? Ay, that he will. ‘In the time of trouble he shall hide me’ away from it, so that it shall not hurt me. I shall be hidden right away in his pavilion, in his royal tent, which is pitched in the very center of his army. Around me shall lie all the forces of divine providence to protect me, since I am the honoured guest of the Commander-in-chief himself. In the pavilion of his sovereignty shall he hide me.”

5. In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me:

That is, in the holy of holies, into which no man might come. “There shall God hide me, — in the tabernacle of sacrifice, — behind the atonement of Christ.” Thus David had the two blessed protections of sovereignty and sacrifice.

5. *He shall set me up upon a rock.*

“His lofty power shall lift me above the turmoil, and his immutable fidelity, like a rock that never moves, shall make me to stand fast.”

6. *And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me:*

“They may surround me, and threaten me, but they cannot hurt me, for I am living with my God, abiding like a child in my Father’s house.”

6, 7. *Therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD. Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice:*

He has not done praising before he begins to pray. We are scarcely out of one trouble before we enter into another. This is what keeps Christian people alive, because, escaping from one trial, they begin to praise, and falling into another, they begin to pray; and prayer and praise make up a Christian’s life breath. May we abound in both!

7, 8. *Have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.*

“So I answered thee when thou didst speak. Now answer me, O Lord, when I speak to thee.” It sometimes happens that God speaks to us, and we make no reply to him, and for that reason he refuses to hear us when we speak to him. You must have an opened ear to God if you expect him to have an opened ear to you. Notice how David pleads: “Hear, O Lord when I cry. When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.”

9. *Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger:*

David has a jealous fear lest he should have provoked the Lord to hide himself from him, so he prays as one who is dependent upon his Heavenly Father’s smile, and cannot live without it. “Put not thy servant away in anger.”

9. *Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.*

That is sweet pleading; cannot you, who are cast down, use it as David did? “Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.” And then, as if to show that he does not pray this out of unbelief, but out of earnest and true faith he says: —

10. *When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.*

“The Lord never will forsake me. Though I pray, ‘Leave me not,’ I know that he will not. Father and mother retain love for their child when that child has lost every earthly friend; but, Lord, if nature should change, and mothers should turn to monsters, still, when my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.”

11. *Teach me thy way, O LORD,*

This is a sweetly practical prayer. Our heart often says, “Lord, let me have my own way;” but when grace has done its work, it talks in another fashion, “‘Teach me thy way, O Lord.’ Only let me know what thou wouldst have me be, and do, and feel, and I submit myself to thee, joyfully.

But, Lord, I am so weak that, even if I am taught thy way, I fear I shall not go in it unless thou shalt do more than teach me.”

11. *And lead me —*

“Put thy finger out, as mothers do to tender infants: ‘Lead me’”

—

11. *In a plain path, because of mine enemies.*

“Do not let it be a difficult way, in which I shall hardly know which it the right road; but let it be a very plain path. And, Lord, help me so to walk in my daily life that there may be no mistake about my being upright and honest before men: ‘Lead me in a plain path.’” Oh, there are some, even among professing Christians, who have many tricks, and shifts and schemes, and dodges, just like worldlings or foxes, but the sheep of Christ must take care to follow the Shepherd’s plain footprints. There was no graft in Christ. In him was no guile; and if we are Israelites indeed, the same thing will be said of us. Oh, that we would each one cultivate a transparent character, and not have to live so that our life is one perpetual

apology for an attempt to hide something! Wear your heart upon your sleeve, and let your soul show itself distinctly in your actions, not being afraid if all the world should see you.

12. *Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty.*

It is their delight to be cruel, to say unkind, unjust, untruthful things which lacerate the heart; and the more some people can tear good men's reputations to pieces, the more pleased they are. I must say that it is hardly less than a miracle, that any true servant of God should for any length of time escape even from the vilest slander, so base is the tongue of men.

13. *I had fainted, unless I had believed —*

That is the smelling bottle for a fainting soul: "I had fainted unless I had believed." You must do the one or the other; you must either believe or else faint, but if your faith is strong you cannot faint. O thou who art of feeble faith, it is little of a marvel that thou faintest! Would God that thy faith were stronger! Notice what David says, "Unless I had believed"—

13. *To see —*

Some say, "Seeing is believing," but it is not: it is the very opposite of believing. Some people must see in order to believe, but the true followers of our Lord believe to see. If thou wilt believe it, thou shalt see it; but if thou wilt not believe it till thou hast seen it, then thou shalt never believe at all. "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see" —

13, 14. *The goodness of the LORD is the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.*

Why did David put that little sentence in and say, "Wait, I say"? It is a repetition, but not a vain one, for it is his own personal testimony, as much as if he had said, "I have waited on the Lord, and I have found that he helps me, so, wait, I say, on the Lord." Oh, but my brethren and sisters, we wait so much upon men, we wait so much upon ourselves, if we could get into that holy quietness in which God's voice could be heard within our souls, — if the voice of man could be hushed, and we were content that the Lord should speak to us, how much more blessed would our lives become! Now hast thou any burden at this moment? Hast thou any ears? Hast thou

a knot which thou canst not untie? Hast thou into a labyrinth of which thou canst not find the clue? “Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.”

PSALM 27

David is in the darkness of sorrow, his enemies are many and mighty, and they make a dead set against him, and seek utterly to destroy him; but he finds his comfort where every true believer must ever seek his solace; that is, in his God. Thus sweetly does the psalmist sing.

1. *The LORD is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

David leaves the broken cisterns of the earth, which can hold no water, and goes directly to the divine fountain-head. He does not say, “Ahithophel is my light, Uzzia, the Ashterathite, is my friend and my joy; but he says, “Jehovah is my light.” Candles soon burn out, but the sun shineth on; and, eventually, “the sun shall he turned into darkness” but Jehovah, our God, is “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” David does not say, “Joab is the strength of my life; Benaiah and the Cherethites are my body-guard;” but he says, “Jehovah is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? “It is the height of Christian faith to find everything good in God, and it is an evil hour for us when we begin to trust anywhere but in him. Build thy foundation for eternity on a firm and unyielding soil, O believer and let every stone that is laid thereon be quarried from the Rock of ages.

2. *When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.*

If we are on the Lord’s side, discomfiture of our enemies shall be total and final; they shall fall to the ground. They may be very many, and very varied, so as to be described under two names, — enemies and foes; they may be very ferocious, so that, like the wild beasts of the forest, they are ready to tear the flesh of their prey, and devour it; and they may be able to make such attacks as actually to come upon us; but, just at the moment when they think they shall be able to swallow us, our God will interpose for our deliverance. It is marvellous how near to the edge of the precipice of ruin the Lord

sometimes lets his people go, yet he always delivers them just at the right moment, and causes their enemies to stumble and fall.

3. *Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.*

True and simple faith in God alone always begets courage. It is the man who is trusting in the creature who is the coward; but he who truly trusts in the Creator becomes a hero. Faith is the food upon which God would have his children fed; so, if you would do deeds of daring, lean only upon God, and then you shall have your heart's desire.

4. *One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after;*

A true Christian is a man of one idea, but that one idea is the noblest that ever possessed the human mind, or influenced the human heart. This idea is one which not only finds a lodging in his brain, but he carries it on in the practice of his daily life: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after." And what is that one thing?

4. *That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.*

That is, to gaze upon the mystery of God in Christ, for is not Christ "the beauty of the Lord?" He is rightly called "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" So all that we need on earth, or in heaven, is a perpetual vision of Jesus Christ: "to behold the beauty of the Lord," and constantly to be enabled to present our petitions in his temple, and to receive gracious answers of peace to our supplications.

"Father, my soul would fain abide
Within thy temple, near thy side;
But if my feet must hence depart,
Still keep thy dwelling in my heart."

5. *For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion.*

The pavilion was the many-colored tent of the king, embroidered with needlework, and richly furnished. It was always placed in the center of the encampment, so that, if there were a night attack, the enemy must first break through the ranks of the armed men before reaching the royal pavilion. So, the Christian is put into the very center of the Lord's host. God's sovereignty encloses him, and God's angels surround him; and the enemy must first break

through the angelic guard, and overcome all the heavenly powers, before any one believer can be destroyed.

5. *In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;*

“The secret of his tabernacle” was the Holy of holies, into which no man but the high priest ever entered, and even he only entered it once a year but, now, the Christian is admitted into the holiest place of all, through the sacrifice of Christ, and Christ’s atonement and the sovereignty of God conjoin to make the Christian’s position absolutely safe for ever.

5. *He shall set me up upon a rock.*

The Rock of ages is immovable; it stirs not in the fiercest storm that ever rages. God is immutable, he abideth the same for ever; so that we have three firm grounds of confidence, — God’s sovereignty, Christ’s sacrifice, and God’s immutability.

6. *“And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy: I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.*

As David’s trust was in his Lord, all his praise was to his Lord; and where we place our confidence, there let us also display our gratitude. If we trust in men, it is not surprising if we worship and praise men; but if we trust alone in God, our homage and gratitude will be laid at his feet.

7, 8. *Hear, O LORD, When I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee Thy face, Lord, will I seek.*

Happy is the man who has a tender conscience, — whose heart is like the waves of the sea, which are easily moved by the breath of heaven; — so that, when God breathes upon him by his Holy Spirit, his soul is moved and controlled by that Spirit.

9. *Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger:*

The sharpest trial a Christian can know is to be forsaken of his God. As the very pith of the agony of Christ upon the cross lay in his being deserted by his Father, so the extremity of a believer’s anguish is found when he also has to cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? “Send us any other trial that thou wilt, O Lord; but let us never lose the light of thy countenance! We are rich in poverty, we are strong in weakness, we are healthful in sickness,

we are living even in death while we have our God with us; but if our Lord shall once hide his face from us, we are in trouble indeed.

9. *Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.*

Beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, use your past experience to encourage you for the present; draw arguments from your past experience to use with God in prayer, even as David did: “Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my soul was burdened with sin, thou wast my Helper. Thou didst enable me to look to Christ when I lost friend after friend, when I passed through fierce conflicts with the devil; when I was sick, and health and strength failed me, thou wast my Helper.” Many of you can thus look back upon a long life, and say to God of it all, “Thou hast been my Helper;” and this gives you a foothold in your wrestling with the great Angel of the Covenant; so mind that you grasp him firmly, and say, “Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

10. *When my father and my mother forsake me,*

They are not likely to do that; yet, if they should do so, what then?

10, 11. *Then the LORD will take me up. Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.*

This is a prayer which all Christians have good need to pray, for there are so many enemies who will, if they can, cause us to stumble, so many who watch for our halting, that we need to pray, “Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.” Yet let me also say to you that it matters not how carefully and warily you may walk, nor how holy you may be, you will be sure to be slandered, ay, and sometimes by Christian people, too. There are always some to tell the lie, and others to repeat it, and some to believe in it, and even to rejoice in it. It would be a mercy if some people had no tongues; for, if they had none, they would commit far less sin than they do now.

12. *Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty.*

David found enemies, and as will you, and the holier you are, the more shall you have of them. Birds pick the ripest fruit; the highest towers cast the longest shadows; and so is it that the highest

holiness is generally the object of the most cruel attacks. Well, what are they to do who are passing through this trial? Do? Why go to their God about that as well as about everything else.

13. *I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.*

With troubles without, and fears within, and slanderers and enemies of all sorts around him, the Christian had almost fainted; but faith puts the divine smelling-bottle to his nose, and as soon as ever the nostril perceives the sweet perfume of God's faithfulness, the man is revived: "I had fainted, unless I had believed." So, you see that you must do either the one or the other; you must either believe or faint, for, by unbelief and sin, a spiritual fainting fit will soon come on.

14. *Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.*

Wait on no one else; wait only on him, and then you shall not be discouraged or faint-hearted; wherefore, "wait, I say, on the Lord."

PSALM 27

1. *The Lord is my light and my salvation;*

First comes light, and then salvation. We are not saved in ignorance; the knowledge of our sinfulness is revealed to us, we discover our true condition in the sight of God, and then we perceive the mercy and the love of God. We see first the light and then the fullness of salvation, for this is not a matter of the past only, but of the present. At this very hour, each believer can say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation." Can you say that, dear friend? If so, there is more real eloquence in that little sentence than in all the orations of Cicero.

1. *Whom shall I fear?*

"There is nobody that I have any need to fear. I need not fear the powers of darkness, for 'the Lord is my light.' I need not fear damnation, for 'the Lord is my salvation.' Then, 'Whom shall I fear?'"

1. *The LORD is the strength of my life;*

Is not that a wonderful expression? Ordinarily, a man lives by the strength of his constitution, but the spiritual life lives by the strength of God within the soul.

1. *Of whom shall I be afraid*

“For, if God be my strength, then am I strong as Samson, and I may slay the lion or the Philistines with equal ease.”

2. *When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.*

Good men have enemies because they are good men. There are two classes in the world, — the righteous and the wicked, — the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; and you know that, even in Eden, the Lord said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.” We must expect, then, if we are among the righteous, that we shall be attacked by the wicked; but, when they come against us, we may believe that they shall be overcome even before we strike a single blow in our own defense.

3. *Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.*

You know that, usually, we do fear just before the battle begins, — when we see the enemy encamped against us. We do not know what they are going to do, and we are sure to imagine the very worst; but such was David’s confidence in his God, that he said, “Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.” There they lie, their legions marshalled against him in all their dread array; but says the psalmist, “In this will I be confident.” Oh! the joy of the man who has received this confidence from God; and who is, therefore, —

“Calm ‘mid the bewildering cry,
Confident of victory.”

4. *One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.*

Did David refer to any special spot, or to any one sacred shrine? I think not. He meant that he wished to be always at home with God; and that, you know, we also can be in our own houses or in the fields, on the land or on, the sea. This was David’s great desire, that he might always dwell with God, like a child at home, wherever he was; and that he might have such communion with God that he might “behold the beauty of the Lord,” and that he might ask of God guidance in all his difficulties: “and to inquire in his temple.” Those

are two things, dear friends, for which I hope many of us have come here, — that we may behold God’s graciousness and loveliness in the ordinances of his sanctuary, and that we may ask and receive of him help in all our difficulties, and guidance in all our dilemmas. How often, in this house, has God spoken so personally to his dear children that they have thought that the preacher knew all about them, when he really knew nothing whatever of them, though God did, and sent a message by his servant, straight to their souls!

5. *For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.*

If I dwell with God, he will hide me away in the pavilion of his sovereignty; and, so long as he is King, — and that will be for ever and ever:, — he will not let me perish. His sword and shield shall be stretched out for my defense. Then God has also a tabernacle as well as a royal pavilion; as of old he had the holy of holies, into which no man could enter, on pain of death, save only the high priest on the appointed day. “In the time of trouble,” the Lord himself shall take us, and hide us there by the mercy-seat, near the ark of the covenant, where his glory shall shine upon us, and where none can intrude to hurt us. We have the protection of the pavilion of sovereignty and the tabernacle of sacrifice; what two places can be safer? We have also the rock of God’s immutability; his people shalt stand on that high mount, beyond the reach of their adversaries, where their feet shall never slide.

6. *And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.*

This is a blessed resolution; oh, that you and I would carry it out more and more! David says twice that he will sing the Lord’s praises: “I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord.” Come, all ye who sigh, change that word, and say, “I will sing.” Come, all ye who make a mourning noise, and ask the Lord to help you to make a joyful noise before his face. Is not praise comely and fitting in the presence of such a God as he is who has dealt so well with us? Let each individual who knows the goodness of God say, “I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord.”

7. Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice I have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

The psalmist has only just begun praising when he takes to praying; and that should be a Christian's double occupation, — praising and praying. I have often said that, as our life is made up of breathing in and breathing out, so we should breathe in the atmosphere of heaven by prayer, and then breathe it out again in praise.

“Prayer and praise, with sins forgiven,
Bring down to earth the bliss of heaven.

8. When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

David springs forward to accept the divine invitation; the invitation was general: “Seek ye my face;” but the response was personal: “Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” Whether others would do so, or not, David resolved and declared that he would seek the face of the Lord; let every one of us, dear friends, do the same.

9. Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger:

“Dismiss me not thy service, Lord.” You know how masters do sometimes discharge their servants in anger; but what a gracious Master you and I have, beloved, or else he would have sent us adrift long ago! “Get you gone,” he would have said, “you disgrace my house, you mar my work, you do not perform your service well; begone!” But he does not speak or act in that fashion.

9, 10. Thou, hast been my help y leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake we, then the LORD will take me up...

“They carried me when I was a child, and he will carry me now: ‘The Lord will take me up.’ When they steel their hearts against me, because I become a Christian, he will love me, and more than make up my loss of their love.”

11. Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.

“Lord, do not let me get into difficulties, so that I shM1 not know what to do, for my foes are so sharp-eyed that, if they can find a fault in me, they will; and even if there be no fault, they will make one. Therefore, Lord, ‘lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.’”

12. *Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty.*

Am I addressing anyone who is being slandered? Has somebody borne false witness against you? Well, be very thankful that it is false. I do not quite understand why it is so often said, "You see, it is such a downright falsehood, and that is what grieves me so." But, dear friend, it is much better that it should be false than true. If anyone brings an accusation against me, I shall be glad to find that it is false. Let not that be the sting of the trouble which really is the sweetness of it; be glad that they cannot say anything against you unless they speak falsely. However, if you expect to go to heaven without being slandered, you expect what you are not likely to get; for God himself was slandered in Paradise; our Lord Jesus, in whom was no fault, was slandered when he was upon the earth; his apostles and followers in all ages have had the same treatment; sad here is David saying, "False witnesses are risen up against me."

13. *I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

That is the point to be noted; there is no getting over fainting except by believing, for believing saves us from swooning, and makes us strong: "I had fainted, unless I had believed."

14. *Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart:*

Here is a man of God giving us the benefit of his own experience; he waited upon God, and now he bids us do the same, that we may be blessed as he was. At our prayer-meeting before we came in here, one dear friend thanked the Lord that, for more than sixty years, he had been enabled to rest upon the divine promises, and he had never found one of them to fail in the hour of need. These testimonies are very precious. I recollect, in my early Christian days, how my soul was greatly sustained by hearing a blind man say that he had lived on God by faith for more than sixty years, and he had found the Lord faithful to his promises all that time. Those of you, dear friends, who are younger than others of us, may be comforted by the experience of your seniors; but if we were to live to be ten times as old as Methuselah, we should never find God backward in keeping his promises: he must be true whatever happens.

14. *Wait, I say, on the LORD.*

Now let us read just a few verses to remind us of our union with our suffering Lord.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 27 AND ROMANS 8:14-17.

PSALM 27

Very much of the language of David used here, I trust, we can make our own. May the Spirit of God lead us to understand, by experience, what he has written.

1. *The LORD is my light and my salvation;*

I find no comfort anywhere else but in him, and expect salvation from none but himself. “The Lord is my light and my salvation.”

1. *Whom shall I fear! the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid!*

Who can stand against him? What strength can resist his strength? What darkness can baffle his light? What foes can prevent his salvation?

2. *When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.*

“They wanted to destroy me altogether — to eat me right up.” If they did not destroy me, it was not from want of heart to do it, nor even from want of power, for there were many of them. But I had not to fight, for they fell before they reached me. “They stumbled and fell.”

3. *Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.*

Let them come on. They fell before: they will fall again. Let them come on. God was strong enough to meet them and overthrow them once. He will do it again. Therefore, why should we fear? Ah! dear brethren, those that have had the most experience of the divine fullness will rest most confident that nothing can harm them.

4. *One thing have I desired of the LORD that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.*

He only wished to be always like a child at home — live in God’s house — no temporal structure; but wherever he was he wished to feel that he was near to God — that all places were the mansions of the great Father, so that he might always have his eye

fixed upon the beauty of the Lord, and his ear always open to listen to the voice of the Lord. Ah! if we can once get ourselves wholly given up to God, it will take our thoughts off the various oppositions we can meet with, and we shall no more be afraid.

5, 6. *For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.*

It is a blessed resolution, not always easily carried out, but still it ought to be. Our life ought to be singing. It used to be sinning: it ought now to be singing, since the sin has been put away. Oh! happy are the men that know their God. If the whole world lye full of storms, yet may they rest in peace. Get near to God: acquaint thyself with him, and be at peace. The remedy for all trouble is dwelling near to God.

7, 8. *Hear, O LORD. when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD will I seek.*

Are we always mindful of divine monitions? When the still small voice in the heart says, “Seek ye my face,” brothers and sisters, do we always at once respond and say, “Thy face, Lord, will I seek”? I am afraid we are often as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding, and need to have the bit, and the bridle, and the rod. But happy are those who have a sensitive nature — quickly feel the movements of the Spirit of God.

9, 10. *Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help: leave me not, neither forsake me. O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.*

He prayed, you see, and it looked a little unbelieving when he said, “Leave me not, neither forsake me.” But it was not so, for at once he confessed that he did not think that God would leave him, even when our father and mother, who are the last to leave us, should do so. “Then the Lord will take me up.”

11-14. *Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies. Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as*

breathe out cruelty. I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say on the LORD.

I suppose he meant that last sentence to be his own personal recommendation, derived from his own experience. “Wait, I say, on the Lord.” He had tried it — proved its wonderful power — as the restorative to his heart, and so he says, “Wait, I say, on the Lord.”

PSALM 28:1-6

1. *Unto thee will I cry, O LORD my rock: be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.*

Oh! if God did not hear prayer, we should become like dead men — ay, like lost men. Our fall or despair would be terrible indeed. “Lest, if thou be silent to me, I become Like them that go down into the pit.”

2. *Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle.*

Is that the way you pray, dear friend? I know there are some that, if they have uttered certain good words — got through a form of prayer — are perfectly satisfied. As to whether God hears them or not, that does not trouble them. But if you are a true child of God, it will be your main thought in prayer, “Will he hear me? Will he hear me? Will he answer me.” And you will think nothing of a prayer at all unless you have the comfortable, believing persuasion that yore’ prayer has reached the ear and heart of God. Oh! believe us, for some of us do know, by experience, that prayer is a real thing. It is no repetition of words. It really is the heart speaking into the ear of God; and God does graciously respond when prayer is truly offered.

3. *Draw me not away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity, which speak peace to their neighbours, but mischief is in their hearts.*

We are often afraid lest we should get numbered with them.

“Oh! were it not for grace divine,

Their fate so dreadful had been mine.”

“Gather not my soul with sinners,” is the prayer of many a godly man. When he looks within and sees the sin that is there, and what he deserves from the hand of God, apart from the blood and

righteousness of Christ, he begins, indeed, to pray, “Draw me not away with the wicked. O Lord, do not let me wander into doctrinal error or into errors of life, or into laxity of behavior, or into backslidings, but keep me fast, for unless thou hold me fast: —

“I feel I must, I shall, decline,
And prove like them at last.’

Draw me not away with the wicked.”

4. *Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors: give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert.*

And a just mind feels that such ought to be the case. God is a judge, and he will punish sin, and gracious men do not wish that it should be otherwise. Even to that terrible side of God’s character, which is seen in his vengeance upon the ungodly, the Christian trains the loving eye. He is not reconciled to half a God, or to a God with half the attributes of God, namely, love and tenderness: but he loves God as he finds him. He loves that God who is a consuming fire. I should be afraid if I could not love God under any aspect in which he is presented to me, because just as I should feel that I did not love a man truly if I said, “In such a character I cannot endure him,” I should feel that there was some difference between him and me. We must love God in every character — upon the throne of justice, as well as upon the seat of love.

5, 6. *Because they regard not the works of the LORD, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up. Blessed be the LORD, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications.*

Can you say this? Excuse me putting the question again and again to all now present, for it is a very vital question. If you never knew what answered prayer means, God help you to begin to pray, “Blessed be the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications.”

This exposition consisted of readings from COLOSSIANS 3; 4:1-4. PSALM 28:1-6.

PSALM 30

May the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writer of this Psalm, now lead us into its inner meaning! It is entitled “A Psalm and Song at the dedication of the house of David; “or, rather, “A Psalm; a song of dedication for the House. By David.” It was a song of faith, since

David did not live to witness the dedication of the temple, for which he had planned in his heart, and for which he had laid by in store. Though he knew that he would not be permitted by God to build it, he took delight in writing a Psalm which might be sung at the opening of the temple. Thus it begins: —

1. *I will extol thee, O LORD; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me.*

“I will exalt thee, for thou hast exalted me. I will lift up thy praise, because thou hast lifted up my spirits. I will bless thee, for thou hast blessed me,” Our song of praise should be the echo of God’s voice of love. “Thou hast not made my foes to rejoice over me.” You remember that this was one of the three things put to David as a chastisement for his great sin in numbering the people: “Wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? “He here praises the Lord that such calamity as that did not come upon him.” Thou hast not made my foes to rejoice over me.” Sorrows averted should be the occasion of grateful songs of thanksgiving.

2. *O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me.*

The king and the people had been sorely smitten with darkness on account of his sin, but the Lord, in mercy, bade the destroying angel sheathe his sword when he “was by the threshing-place of Araunah the Jebusite,” —the very place which afterwards became the site on which the temple was built. It was well, therefore, at its opening, to praise the God who heals his people. We ought to praise the Lord more than we do for our recovery from sickness. Employ the physician if you will, but, when healing comes to you, magnify the Lord for it, and ascribe the glory of it to his holy name.

3. *O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.*

Here is a double mercy to sing of, — not dead, and not damned. Life spared is something for which to praise the Lord, but to have the soul saved from going down to the pit is a cause of still greater thanksgiving. Oh praise the name of the Lord, ye who love him, and trust in him, for he has delivered you from going down into the pit!

4. *Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.*

David seems to say to the saints, "Do not let me sing alone, but all of you join in the chorus." He does not invite reprobates to praise the Lord, but he says, "Sing unto Jehovah. O ye saints of his." I think it is very wrong to have the praises of God sung in public by ungodly men and women, as there sometimes are; the singing should not be left to a godless choir. Oh, no; "sing unto the Lord, all ye saints of his," for you only can sing sincerely unto him. "Give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness," — at the very memory of him; at the remembrance of the whole of him, for that is his holiness, his wholeness, the entire, perfect character of God. O saints below, sing as they do in heaven, for their song is "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.

5. *For his anger endureth but a moment;*

Notice that the words "endureth but" are inserted by the translators, and very properly so; but see how the passages reads if you leave them out: "For his anger a moment," That is long enough for him to display it, for it is his strange work; and long enough for us to endure it, for it might crush us if it lasted longer.

5. *In his favour is life:*

Life came to Jerusalem, in David's day, as soon as God smiled upon it; and life comes to us as soon as we taste of his favor, even though we have been ready to die of despair.

5. *Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*

As the dews are appropriate to the night, so is weeping seemly for us when Jesus hides his face from us. The children of the bride-chamber may well mourn when the heavenly Bridegroom is taken from them, but it is only for a night. Morning will end our mourning. Our night-sorrow is for the night, but our joys are for a day that will know no evening.

6. *And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.*

It is a pity to say too much; very few people fall into the opposite fault of saying too little. It is always a pity to be counting with certainty upon the future, and presuming, because of the hopefulness of the present, that this state of things will last for ever. David was not wise when he said, in his prosperity, "I shall never be moved."

7. *LORD, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.*

When God is at cross purposes with his people, they are troubled at once.

There is no need for blows, no need for angry words: “Thou didst hide thy face; and I was troubled.” That is enough for a child of God; let him but miss the light of God’s countenance, and it breaks him down at once.

8. *I cried to thee, O LORD; and unto the LORD I made supplication.*

What should the child of God do, when he is in trouble, but cry? And to whom should he cry but to his Father?

9. *What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth?*

So his prayer was an argument, and that is the very bone and sinew of prayer, — to reason and argue with God. He seems to put it thus, — “Lord, if I lose my soul, thou wilt be a loser, too, for thou wilt lose a singer out of thy choir, one who would be glad enough to praise thee, and whose very life it is to magnify thee. Oh, do not cut me down! When I am dead, when I am lost, there can be no praise to thee from me, so spare me, my gracious God?”

10. *Hear, O LORD, and have mercy upon me: LORD, be thou my helper.*

What a handy prayer this is, a prayer to carry about with you wherever you go! “Lord, be thou my Helper.” That is a minister’s prayer when he was going to preach. That is a Sunday-school teacher’s prayer when going to the class. Is not that a prayer for the sufferer when the pain upon him is very severe? “Lord, be thou my Helper.” Art thou working for him? Art thou cast down in soul? This prayer will suit thee: “Lord, be thou my Helper.”

11. *Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness.*

What a transformation scene in answer to prayer! Notice that David does not say, “I hope that thou hast,” but he puts it thus, “Thou hast — thou hast,” He is quite sure about it; and, being sure of this great mercy, he gives God all the glory of it. What a wonderful change it is! Not merely from mourning into peace, but into delight, — delight expressed by dancing; not merely from sackcloth into ordinary areas, but from the sackcloth of sorrow in the satin of gladness. God does nothing by halves; he not only

chases away the night, and gives us twilight, but he goes on to gladden us with the full glory of noontide; and sell this he does with a, definite end and purpose: —

12. *To the end that my glory-*

Or, “my tongue” —

12. *May sing praise to thee, and not be silent.*

God ought to have praise from us. It is the quit-rent which we pay as tenants to the great Lord of all; let us not rob him of his revenue.

12. *O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.*

PSALM 31

1. *In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust;*

Can we say as much as that? However else this Psalm of David may end, it strikes a grand key-note, that which should be the first indication of our spiritual life, — confidence in God. Here is an ancient weather-beaten saint who, in the very midst of the storm, can say, “In thee, O Jehovah, do I put my trust.” There will the anchor of his soul find a sure hold.

1. *Let me never be ashamed:*

“How canst thou let me be put to shame after having trusted in thee, O my God? I shall be ashamed, if thou dost forsake me, if thy promises be not kept to me, O my Lord! Therefore, ‘let me never be ashamed.’”

1. *Deliver me in thy righteousness.*

David dares to appeal even to the faithfulness, and truth, and justice of Jehovah, that he should keep the promise upon which his servant had placed his trust.

2. *Bow down thine ear to me;*

“I am very weak, I am also very unworthy; it will be a great instance of thy divine condescension if thou dost hear me; yet I cry unto thee, ‘Bow down thine ear to me;’”

2. *Deliver me speedily:*

We may not set the time for God to answer our petitions, yet may we expect that his sure mercies will be swift mercies when our necessities are very urgent. So the psalmist pleads, “Lord, come not

late to me, lest thou come too late to me, for I am in sore distress; my case is urgent, therefore help me now, ‘deliver me speedily.’”

2. *Be thou my strong rock, for an house of defense to save me.*

He remembered Adullam and Engedi, and he worked these places into his supplication. A man’s prayer should be the index of his life’s history. The scenes to which he has been most accustomed should rise up vividly before his spirit when he is at the throne of grace; it was so with David: “My God, be thou an immutable, immovable, impregnable rock to me, and let me dwell in thee. Be not merely a refuge for the moment, but be ‘a house of defense to save me.’”

3. *For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name’s sake lead me, and guide me.*

David is of a logical turn of mind, notice the “therefore” in this verse. What a singular “for” there is here! “Be thou my strong rock,” “for thou art my rock.” What God is already, we may ask him to be. What we believe him to be by faith, we ask him to be in our experience. Observe that David’s appeal is not in any degree to his own merit; but “for thy name’s sake,”-“because I trust in thy name, and if thou dost not do as thou hast said, thy great name will suffer dishonour. How can I believe in thy veracity if thou dost not do for me according to thy promise and covenant? ‘Therefore, for thy name’s sake, lead me.’ ‘Guide me,’ too, even when I do not think of thy presence. Lead me like a child, and guide me like a traveler.” There are shades of meaning here, so that there is no redundancy of expression in the words, “Lead me, and guide me.” But even if the two words meant the same it would be quite lawful for the psalmist to repeat the prayer, since he felt his need of leading and guiding to be so great. “Lord, I am so foolish, and the way is so difficult, ‘therefore, for thy name’s sake, lead me, and guide me.’”

4. *Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength.*

“Lord, my enemies have entangled me; or ever I was aware of it, I was taken in the meshes of their net; wilt thou not pull me out, O Lord? It will need a strong pull, but then, ‘thou art my strength.’ ‘Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength.’” Sometimes our strength is crippled, and we are baffled, by the net in which we are enclosed. We feel ourselves

hampered, we cannot use the strength we have; but God's strength is always available. There seems to me to be a very blessed turn in the expression here used: "Pull me out of the net: for thou art my strength."

5. *Into thine hand I commit my spirit:*

You notice that this Psalm is dedicated to the chief musician. I have studied these Psalms, not only by the hour, and by the day, but sometimes by the month together. Some of these Psalms have been the pillow for my head at night; others of them, like wafers made of honey, have lain in my mouth till I have sucked out of them their divine sweetness. I have often noticed that, when one of these sacred songs is dedicated to the chief musician, The Chief Musician generally appears somewhere in the Psalm; he, from whom comes all the music that ever makes bleeding hearts glad, usually shows some traces of himself within the Psalm itself. In this instance, the living word of David was the dying word of David's Lord: "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." What David did, and what the Lord Jesus Christ did, let us do, and do it every day; let us commit our spirit into the hands of our God.

5, 6. *Thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth, I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD.*

Men are sure to have some kind of trust or other on which they rely. In David's day, some trusted to false gods, others relied upon their own strength; the psalmist does not speak in soft tones concerning these people, but he says, "I could not bear them. 'I have hated them that regard lying vanities.' I would not come into their secret, or have any connection with them. I was astonished at them, that they should turn away from God; but as for myself, 'I trust in Jehovah.'" See how he comes back to the note with which he started: "In thee, O Jehovah, do I put my trust;" and now he repeats it, "I trust in Jehovah." It is an unfashionable thing, many will not do it yet David says, "I trust in Jehovah," as if he dared to stand alone, and did not mind how singular he seemed to be.

7. *I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy:*

What a grand faith! Should there not sometimes be the sounding of the cymbals even in the midst of our supplications? Though we must often put on sackcloth, yet we must lift up our song of praise

whenever we can: “I will be glad and rejoice,” — there shall be a reduplication of my delight, —

“I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy.”

7. For thou hast considered my trouble;

“Thou didst not send it without due consideration; thou didst weigh it, and now thou lookest upon me and thou dost study my trouble, then knowest all about it.” You know what is meant by human consideration; but how wonderful must divine consideration be! When a single glance suffices for Jehovah to know all that is transpiring in the whole universe what must his consideration be! “Thou hast considered my trouble.”

7. Thou hast known my soul in adversities;

“When others did not know me, thou didst; thou wast familiar with me, and sympathetic towards me, especially in the day of adversity. ‘Thou hast known my soul.’” God knows his own children, even when they are in rags, and when their faces are stained with tears, and their spirits are depressed almost to despair: “Thou hast known my soul in adversities.”

8. And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy:

“No; I may get into the enemy’s prison, but there is no bar to it. ‘Thou hast not shut me up.’ I may seem to get into my enemy’s hand; but he cannot shut that hand.” Truly, it must be so, because David had already put his soul into the hand of God: “Into thine hand I commit my spirit.” How, then, could he be shut up in the hand of the enemy?

8. Thou hast set my feet in a large room.

“Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage.”

Wherever the child of God is when his faith is in active exercise, his feet are in a large room, by faith he walks at liberty.

9. Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble:

In this short sentence of four words, — “I am in trouble,” — David gives the text of which the next few verses are a kind of sermon, with divisions and subdivisions.

9. Mine eye is consumed with grief,

“My eyes seem burnt up with scalding tears.” The salt of our tears wears out the very strength of our life: “Mine eye is consumed with grief,” —

9. *Yea, my soul and my belly.*

Or, “‘body,’ The inward part of my being seems washed away with the deluge of my tears.”

10. *For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing:*

Better spend them in sighing than in sinning; yet it is a sad case when we seem to measure our days by the bars of our grief.

10. *My strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed.*

Now he sees to the bottom of his sorrow: “My strength faileth because of mine iniquity.” We can bear those sorrows which have no connection with our sins, but, alas! where are they to be found? It may be that David’s great sin seemed to him to lie at the very root of all his grief.

11. *I was a reproach among all mine enemies,*

They had found something to fling at him, and they were delighted to throw it with all their malicious force: “I was a reproach among all mine enemies,” —

11. *But especially among my neighbours,*

Those that are nearest can stab the sharpest. Those who knew David the best, endeavored to find some silly tale to use against him.

11. *And a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me.*

This Psalm may have been written after Absalom’s rebellion, when Shimei cursed the king, and when everybody seemed to be forsaking him. Then was David brought into a low estate indeed.

12. *I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel.*

This was the same David who slew the Philistine giant; this was the great deliverer of his country; yet the people had forgotten all that. Earthly popularity is the most fleeting thing under heaven. The world is a hard and cruel master; it forgets its servants when they grow old, it has nothing good to say of them when there is nothing further to be got out of them. So David laments, “I am like a broken vessel,”—a potsherd that can hold nothing, and is flung away upon a dunghill.

13. *For I have heard the slander of many:*

To have one slanderer attacking your character, is bad enough, but to have many such cruel enemies about you, to have a whole brood of hell's hornets, as it were, stinging you, oh, what misery is this! You who, happily, have never experienced this torture, cannot imagine what agony it causes; I hope you never may know it.

13, 14. *Fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. But I trusted in thee, O LORD.*

Here he is back on the old rock, and rejoicing as his feet stand once more on this firm foundation: "I trusted in thee, O Jehovah."

14, 16. *I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand:*

"My enemies cannot do anything against me without thy permission." Divine providence is a downy pillow for an aching head, a blessed anodyne for the sharpest pain. He who can feel that his times are in the hand of God, need not tremble at anything that is in the hand of man.

15, 16. *Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake.*

"If thy face shines upon me, Lord, they may look as black as they please. If thou wilt but deliver me, I care not how cruelly they persecute me. If thou wilt save me, who can destroy me?" O you who are in trouble at this time, hasten to your God! Whither should the little bird fly, when pursued by the hawk, but to its shelter in the rock? Whither canst thou go, O sheep of Christ's flock, but to thy Shepherd?

17. *Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave.*

There is something of the harshness of the old dispensation about that prayer; so we will turn it into a prophecy, and say, "The wicked shall be ashamed; they shall be silent in the grave."

18,19. *Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous. Oh how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee;*

Is not that a blessed expression to be used by the man who said that his life was spent with grief, and his years with sighing?

19. *Which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!*

Not only has the Lord abundant goodness stored up for his children, but his goodness is brought out for others to see, and for his people to feed upon even in the presence of their enemies.

20. *Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.*

They shall not be wounded by all the malice of their adversaries; they shall be preserved in the King's royal pavilion.

21-23. *Blessed be the LORD: for he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city. For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee. O love the LORD, all ye his saints:*

See what a fount of happiness there is in the psalmist's heart; he longs for all the saints to love the Lord.

23, 24. *For the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.*

In this Psalm, we have heard the wail of the sackbut, and the clashing of the cymbals; but we finish with the blast of the silver trumpets.

PSALM 31

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. This Psalm was meant to be sung, therefore it was dedicated to the chief musician; yet it is a Psalm of which at least half is very sorrowful. All our hymns were not meant to be joyous ones; God permits us to take a wide range in our psalmody, and to express the feelings of our heart whatever they may be. You will see here and there the light of Christ shining on this Psalm. If it does not shine on him, at any rate he shines on it.

1. *In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust;*

Is that true of you, dear friends? Never take your trust upon trust, but be quite sure that you do trust in God; if it is so, avow it, and never be ashamed to say, "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; "

1-3. *Let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock,*

for an house of defense to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.

See how logical David is with his “for” and “therefore.” It is the very essence of prayer to be able to urge pleas with God, and to say to him, “Do it for this reason,” or, “Therefore, do it for such another reason.” I would that we all of us studied more fully this blessed art of pleading with God, bringing forth sound arguments as we approach him.

4. *Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength.*

How sweetly and blessedly he pleads! “‘Thou art my strength.’ I cannot get out of this net, I am entangled in it; but thou canst pull me out, for ‘thou art my strength.’”

5. *Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.*

This is a blessed prayer,— a holy resolution, which we may use every day in the week all through our lives.

6. *I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD.*

“In Jehovah.” David had no patience with those who trusted in gods of wood and stone; he knew very little indeed of that spurious charity which leads some men to speak respectfully even of idolatry. David was “a good hater”; and there is something gracious about that when the thing hated is really hateful, and something which ought to be hated.

7. *I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy:*

David makes the cymbals clash together: “I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: “

7. *For thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities;*

It is said to be the highest wisdom to know yourself; but, to my mind, it is a much better thing for God to know you. You may know yourself, and fall into despair; but if God knows you, and you know God, there is abundant room for you to hope in his mercy.

8. *And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a large room.*

“Thou hast given me a broad place to live in, and thou hast given me abundance to eat there.” So David praises and blesses his

God; but now see how the note falls. From the highest point of the scale he suddenly descends to the very lowest. "We spend our years as a tale that is told f" and such a tale is sometimes very joyful, and anon it is full of woe.

9, 10. *Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing:*

Sighing is better than sinning any day. Though we may deplore that our life melts away in sighs, it is better that it should go so than that it should be wasted in sins.

10, 11. *My strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me.*

He was in such a sorry plight that men would not own him. They were afraid that they should be disgraced by being found in his company. It is a sad condition for a man of God, like David, to be found in, for others to be afraid to be seen speaking to him.

12. *I am forgotten us a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel.*

An old pot, flung on the dunghill, as of no further use.

13, 14. *For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: awhile they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. Bet I trusted in thee, O LORD:*

Now the strain will mount again. It is faith that tunes the royal singer, so that he rises to heights of joy though just now he had sunk so low.

14, 15. *I said; Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand:*

He had put his spirit there: "Into thine hand I commit my spirit;" and now he says, "My times are in thy hand."

15-19. *Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake. Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave. Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous. Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee;*

If he was not tasting of it just then, he blessed God that it was laid up for him, put by in store.

19, 20. *Which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.*

What a blessing that is,— to be separated from the noise and strife and the malignant calumny of wicked men! God has a blessed way of keeping his servants away from all such evils.

21, 22. *Blessed be the LORD: for hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city. For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee.*

“If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” The psalmist was full of doubts, and he said, “I am cut off;” but, nevertheless, God heard the prayer of his poor mistrusting servant, and brought him out of his distresses.

23, 24. *O love the LORD, all ye his saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.*

PSALM 31

1. *In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust;*

This is a good beginning; this is the fulcrum which will give us the necessary leverage for lifting any weight of sorrow or trouble that may be burdening us: “In thee, O Jehovah, do I put my trust.” Can each of us truthfully say that to begin with? If so, we may go on with David to the petitions that follow: —

1. *Let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness.*

It would be to us the shame of shames if God, in whom we put our trust, could fail us. Then, indeed, might the scoffers say, “Where is now their God?” and what should we then be able to say of the righteousness of God? He has pledged himself that he will never fail nor forsake anyone of his people; so, if he ever did fail them, what would become of his honour?

2. *Bow down thine ear to me;*

“Listen to me, O Lord! Stoop down out of thy glory to catch the faint accents of my sorrowing, almost expiring spirit.”

2. *Deliver me speedily:*

“My case is urgent, Lord, for I am in deep distress. Delay will be dangerous, and may be even fatal: ‘Deliver me speedily.’ “

2. *Be thou my strong rock, for an house of defense to save me.*

David was so accustomed to hide in the rocks of Engedi, and similar fastnesses, that we do not wonder that he found such a comparison as this come naturally to his mind: “Be thou my strong rock, for an house of defense to save me.”

3. *For thou art my rock and my fortress;*

Why did David just now pray God to be to him what he here says that God is? It was, surely, in order that he might know experimentally what he already knew doctrinally; he wanted the truth, in which he already believed, to be proven in his own experience, so he prayed to the Lord, “Be thou my strong rock, . . . for thou art my rock and my fortress;” —

3. *Therefore for thy name’s sake —*

“For thy glory’s sake, for thy honour’s sake,” —

3. *Lead me, and guide me.*

“Lead me, as a child needs to be led. Guide me, as a traveler in a foreign land needs to be guided. I need thee both to lead and to guide me.”

4. *Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength.*

Sometimes the believer gets so entangled that he sees no way of escape. He is caught like a bird in the fowler’s net, and he is so surrounded by it that he cries to the Lord, “Pull me out of the net.” He feels that he can only be delivered by the putting forth of God’s power, and that is the reason why he adds, “O Lord, use thy strength on my behalf; give a desperate tug, and pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me; for thou art my strength.”

5. *Into thine hand I commit my spirit:*

The dying words of Jesus may well be the living words of each one of his redeemed people. We ought continually to commit our spirit into our great Father’s hands, for there is no other place that can be so safe and blessed as between the strong, almighty, never-failing hands of the eternal God.

5. *Thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.*

Redemption is such a blessed ground for confidence in God. Even the ordinary redemptions, such as David had experienced when the Lord had redeemed him out of the hand of his enemies, and redeemed him out of troubles of many kinds, were great sources of consolation to David; but what shall we say of that rich, full, free redemption which Christ accomplished for his people upon Calvary's cross? Think you that God will not keep those whom he has purchased with the blood of his own dear Son? Will he suffer those to perish who have cost him so dearly? Oh, no! none shall pluck them from his hand. This is a sound argument that David uses: "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

6. *I have hated them that regard lying vanities:*

That is, those that trusted in their idol gods, which he calls by this contemptuous name, "lying vanities." David was not very respectful to false religions; he called them vanities and lies, and said, "I have hated them that regard them;"

6, 7. *But I trust in the LORD. I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities;*

" 'Thou hast considered my trouble;' — thou hast looked at it, weighed it, understood it." When a wise man gives his consideration to a thing, we respect his judgment; but what shall we say of the consideration of God? This is a wonderful expression: "Thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities." "When I hardly knew myself, and could not make out what I was or where I was, thou hast known all about me; and thou hast known me when I was in rags and tatters, when I was so down at the heel that nobody else would own me, thou didst not discard me: 'Thou has known my soul in adversities;' " —

8-10. *And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a large room. Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing:*

That is better than spending our years in sinning; yet it is a painful experience when every breath seems to be drawn with a

pang, and the effort to live is itself a struggle, as it is in certain trying diseases.

10, 11. *My strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours,*

They were the nearest to him, and therefore could smite him the most keenly.

11. *And a fear to mine acquaintance:*

They did not like to own him even as an acquaintance; they were afraid of him. Yet what a light this verse throws upon David's previous declaration, "Thou has known my soul in adversities"!

12. *I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind;*

The very man, in whose honour, in the former times, the women out of all the cities of Israel sang, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands," now had sorrowfully to say, "I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind."

12. *I am like a broken vessel.*

"Men think me of no more value than a piece of broken crockery that is flung away on the dunghill as utterly useless."

13. *For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side:*

The very best of men have had to smart under the wounds caused by that cruel, accursed thing slander. No quality of purity, no degree of piety, can screen a man from the tongue of slander; in fact, as the birds peck most at the ripest fruit, it is often the best of men who are most slandered.

13, 14. *While they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God.*

That is a grand utterance of the psalmist; now he is coming back to the point where he began; the Psalm is now in harmony with its keynote.

15. *My times are in thy hand:*

My times are not in the hands of my enemies; they cannot hurt me without God's permission.

15, 16. *Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant:*

Oh, for the shinings of God's face! How blessed and glorious they are! I is heaven on earth to dwell within the circle of that light; and if we get out of the range of those rays, what joy can we have?

16. *Save me for thy mercies' sake.*

That is a prayer for a sinner, and a prayer for a saint; a prayer for every day in the year: "Save me for thy mercies' sake."

17 —19. *Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave. Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous. Oh, how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee;*

Then, be off good courage, you tried ones; think of all the god things that are laid up in store for you, the treasures that are put away for the present.

Nor is this all: "How great is thy goodness," —

19. *Which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!*

So there is goodness in the present as well as goodness in the future, goodness wrought out as well as goodness stored up.

20. *Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.*

There is nothing much worse than the strife of tongues. A pack of wolves would not be half so bad as a pack of tongues let loose upon a man. Wolves do but tear the flesh; but tongues devour a man's character, and eat up his very life. Oh, how blessed it is to be kept secretly in God's royal pavilion from the strife of tongues!

21. *Blessed be the LORD; for he hath showed me his marvelous kindness in a strong city.*

He has kept me in safety, and preserved me from every foe, blessed be his holy name!

22, 23. *For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee. O love the LORD, all ye his saints;*

It seems as if David felt that he could not love the Lord sufficiently by himself, so he calls upon all the saints to bring their hearts full of love, and yield their treasure unto God.

23. For the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.

He gives him a sharp blow with the back of his hand, but he gives to the righteous a full-handed mercy.

24. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.

Your heart is faint, but the Lord will put strength where now there is weakness; wherefore “be of good courage.” Cowardice weakens, fear saps a man’s strength; so “be of good courage,” for your strength shall be equal to your day, and you shall yet win the victory, “all ye that hope in the Lord.”

PSALM 32

A Psalm of David. You can see David all through this Psalm; here we have David’s sin, David’s confession of sin, David’s pardon. It is a Psalm of David. Oh, that we might each one make it our own! It is entitled- Maschil. This is an instructive Psalm. The experience of one man is instructive to another. We learn the way in which we should walk, and sometimes the way in which we should not walk, by observing the footsteps of the flock.

The Psalm begins with blessing.

1. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

I think I hear a sort of sigh of relief, as if the man had been burdened with a load of guilt, and now at last his sin is put away; and his sigh has more solemn joy in it than if it had been a song: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Beloved, you must know the bitterness of sin before you can know the blessedness of forgiveness; and you must have such a sight of sin as shall break your heart before you can understand the blessedness of the divine covering, that sacred coverlet which hides sin effectually, blots it out, and even makes it cease to be. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Would you not think so, dear burdened heart, if it ever came to your lot? I hope that it will be so tonight. Do not we think so, who remember the day when almighty mercy forgave us our transgression, and covered our sin? Indeed we do. This is one of the greatest blessednesses out of heaven. Perhaps, for a sort of still soft melody

with much of the minor in it, this is the sweetest music in the whole Book, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Now David must put the same truth in another form. He loves to reduplicate, to repeat again and again a truth which is very precious to him.

2. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

Here are two reasons for the man’s blessedness: sin is not laid to his charge, and he is no longer deceitful; he no longer tries to palliate and to excuse his sin; he makes a clean breast of it; and God, in a higher sense, gives him a clean breast. He acknowledges the justice of God, and God displays his infinite mercy to him. Now David tells us how he learned this sacred blessedness; what were the ways by which he went, which ended at last in this divine sweetness.

3, 4. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

I understand this to have been the feeling of David after his great sin, before he confessed it. He tried to excuse it to his conscience. It has been thought by some that David was, for at least nine months, in a very insensible state; but he does not appear to have been so. All the time until his sin was confessed and acknowledged, he was miserable. Because there was divine grace in his heart, sin could not dwell there with comfort. As he would not own his sin before the bar of God, pleading guilty, and waiting for judgment, as he kept silence, it preyed upon him so, that he seemed to grow prematurely old, and that, not only in his skin and his flesh, but his very bones were affected: “My bones waxed old.” Those solid pillars of the house of manhood trembled and were shaken under his awful sense of sin. You cannot be a child of God and sin, and then be happy. Other men may sin cheaply, but you cannot. If you are a man after God’s own heart, and you venture into uncleanness, it will sting you as does a viper it will burn within your bones like coals of juniper.

“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.” David did pray, but he did not dare to call it prayer. It was like the moaning and groaning of a beast that is wounded, and faint, and near to die; and this terrible pain was upon him always: “For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me.” God

has a heavy hand for his sinful children. Other fathers may spoil their children with indulgence; but the Lord will not spoil his children. If we sin, we shall feel the weight of God's hand. We ought to thank him for this; for though it brings great sorrow, yet it brings great safety to us. The worst thing that can happen to a man is to be allowed to sin, and yet to be happy in it. One of the best things for an erring believer is a taste of his Father's rod. "Thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." All David's joy was squeezed out, pressed out, by the heavy hand of God. His flowers ceased to bloom; his fruit was withered; his experience was nothing but a hard drought, without a drop of moisture. When David had gone so far, and had played only on the bass strings so long, he said, "Selah," that is, "Screw up the harp strings, let us put them in tune again. We are going up to something better now."

5. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Oh, how swift is the divine compassion! Quick upon the heels of confession came that word from Nathan, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." I can fancy David standing there, with the hot tears in his eyes, never so broken down as when his sin was all forgiven. Before he knew that he was pardoned, he stood tremblingly fearful, brokenhearted before God; but when Nathan had said (I will repeat those gracious words), "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die," oh, what gratitude he felt, and what tenderness, and what hatred of sin! Dear hearer, if you are burdened under a sense of sin, go and make confession to God straight away. If you feel very heavy tonight at the recollection of some great and grievous offense, if some scarlet spot is on your hand, and you cannot get rid of it, go and show it to God. With penitential honesty confess the sin, and it shall be forgiven you. "Selah." Now David puts the harp strings right again. They still seem to suffer from the previous strain; and so he says "Selah" once more. "Sursum corda." Lift up the heart; let the whole soul go up to God.

6, 7. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place;

He had talked, in the first verse, of his sin being covered. Now he not only hides his sin beneath the divine covering, but he hides himself beneath the divine shelter: "Thou art my hiding place." Thus does the believer sing Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee."

7. Thou shalt preserve me from trouble;

Lord, if thou hast taken away the greatest of all troubles, that is, guilt on the conscience, if thou hast really forgiven me, what trouble have I to be afraid of? "Thou shalt preserve me from trouble."

7. Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah,

If thou hast pardoned me, there is the making of all manner of music in the fact of my pardon. He that is washed by the precious blood of Jesus is the man to sing. Has not God made a chorister of him? John tells us, in the Revelation, that one of the elders said to him, concerning the white-robed throng, "These are they, which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple." "Selah." David must tune the strings of his harp again, for now he wishes to exult in God, and to magnify his holy name, as he listens to his Lord's gracious words.

8. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way, which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.

Here is another blessing. The God who has forgiven the errings of the past, will preserve us from erring again. God's flowers always bloom double. He gives us justification; but he adds sanctification. He pardons our sins; but he also makes disciples and scholars of us, and teaches us the art of holiness, which is the noblest art that man can learn: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way, which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." When we are willing to be guided, we hardly need a word from God; a look is enough, just a glance of his eye: "I will guide thee with mine eye."

9. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.

Do you want bits and bridles? If you want them, you shall have them. If you will be a horse or a mule, you shall be treated as horses and mules are. There are some Christians that need to be driven with

a very sharp snaffle; and they need to have their mouth made very tender, for now they are hard-mouthed; and, sometimes, they take the bit between their teeth, and try to run away instead of doing God's bidding. Usually, the rods with which God scourges us are made of reeds grown in our own gardens. When God hides his face from his people, it is almost always behind clouds of dust, which they have themselves made. You will have sorrow enough in the ordinary way to heaven; do not make an extra rod for your own back.

10. *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked:*

This refers to you who are outside the family of God, who do not come under his rod, you are not in his love and favor, for you have no faith in his dear Son. Do not think that you will escape punishment. If the Lord "scourgeth every son whom he receiveth", what will he do with his enemies? "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked."

10. *But he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.*

He always wants mercy; for he is a sinner still. He shall always have mercy; for his Saviour lives still. "Mercy shall compass him about."

11. *Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.*

Be demonstrative; let men see that you are happy: Shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." The Psalm is a joyful one, after all. David's experience has taken him through a deep sense of his own sin; but it has brought him out into an elevated sense of God's mercy; so he closes the Psalm with the jubilant exhortation, "Shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." So let us do this night, and for ever. Amen.

PSALM 32

A Psalm of David, giving instruction. The thirty-second Psalm is a gospel benediction. It belongs not to the law; it is a word which can only come of sovereign grace to the guilty. The very first sentence tells us that, —

1. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

Blessed would have been the man who never transgressed, who never sinned; but, be encouraged, O sinner, there is blessedness even for the likes of you! Blessed is he who, though he has transgressed, has had his transgression forgiven; — who, though he has sinned, and sinned often, and sinned foully, yet, nevertheless, has had his sin covered. There is such blessedness in this forgiveness that scarcely can the bliss of an unfallen spirit excel it. There is a tenderness, a delicacy, a fragrance, a love, about the dealings of God with pardoned sinners, that even angels can scarcely tell the excessive sweetness of it. They have never known the joy of redeeming grace and dying love; and although they are blessed, yet peculiarly and especially is he blessed “whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin, is covered.”

2. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

He is blessed twice over; God multiplies the blessing, He blesses him effectually, he blesses him emphatically, he blesses him in body, he blesses him in soul. He is blessed; he has iniquities, but God does not impute them to him. They have been of old imputed to Another, who stood in the sinner’s place, and bore the sinner’s guilt, and put it all away by his own expiatory sufferings. Therefore, as these deeds were put to Christ’s account, they are not laid to the account of the Lord’s people: “Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity.” But even pardon and deliverance from guilt would not be sufficient; to make a man blessed if they stood alone, for, as long as our heart is full of sin and deceit, and follows crooked ways, there can be no true rest to us. Renee the blessedness comes to the man “in whose spirit there is no guile,” — no falsehood. The guile and the guilt have gone together, and the gall is gone, to, Now the man is truthful, so he confesses his sin; he is also trustful, so he lays hold on the sinner’s Substitute, and thus he finds peace. Dear friends, do you all know this blessedness? If you do not, I pray that you may, for it is heaven begun below, — the heaven of a poor sinner whose sin is covered, and whose heart is purified from guile. Now see the way by which we come to this blessedness: —

3. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

Sin was in his heart but he would not confess it. He was silent before God in hardness of heart; and then his sorrow grew worse and worse, till not only his flesh began to fail, but his bones — the most solid part of his frame, began to grow old, too. He felt like a man prematurely aged, melting away into the grave.

4. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

When a man gets God's hand on him, I warrant, you that he will want no other burden. This hand of God goes with him wherever he goes, it is like his own shadow. Whenever you meet with persons who are self-righteous, you may pray God to lay his hand on them; that will drive the rife and unbelief out of them. David says that he was so pressed under God's hand that the very essence of his soul was squeezed out of him.

5. I acknowledged my sin, unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sins. Selah.

“And thou forgavest” — blessed “and.” How very simple it was! The floods of divine wrath were swelling; he just pulled up the sluices of confession, the floods ran away, and all was quiet. Oh, what a simple plan this is! But; pride cannot brook it; to humble oneself, and confess before God that one is utterly undone and ruined and sinful, is what our proud spirit will not bring itself to do if it can help it. Yet, that is the way of peace. Down, down, down, flat on your face! “He that is down need fear no fall.” But we do not like that going down, that acknowledgment of transgression. Still, we must come to it: and the sooner, the better. The Lord bring; every proud soul here to a full acknowledgment and confession of sin, and then forgiveness will surely follow.

6. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.

The fact that God hears us at the first and gives us a great deliverance when we, are; under a sense of sin, makes us pray to him as long as ever we live. We shall never forget how God heard us then; and something whispers into our heart, “its heard you then; he will hear you now.” One thing I know, if you do not. I never can come to God again in such a plight as I came to him at the first.

Whatever happens to me, — if I am bereaved a thousand times, — if I am covered, from head to foot with sores, and sit like Job on a dunghill, — I can never be brought so low as I was when, in my despair, I was ready to lay violent hands on myself rather than live any longer under a sense of sin. I looked unto him, and I was lightened; and that first grand deliverance ensures that, in every other time of trial, in every other flood of great waters, when I cry unto God, he will deliver me.

7. Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.

Here is a threefold declaration: “Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.” “Yes,” says God, “I will;” and now he speaks to his servant. When we speak to God, we may expect that God will speak to us; and what a happy dialogue it is when a soul can pray, and praise, and magnify the Lord, and then the Lord condescends to speak to his poor servant after this fashion!

8. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go

“I have led you so far; I have brought you up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay; I will not let you perish now; I will not leave you to your own folly.”

8. I will guide thee with mine eye.

It is a very gentle way of guidance when a mistress just turns her eye towards her servant, who understands her without a word. So God is quite willing to guide his people with his eye, if they are willing to be so guided.

9. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.

Alas! there are some hard-mouthed Christians; they will not take a hint from God. They do not watch God’s eye, and so do not learn by that gentle means; and therefore they require to have a bit and a bridle, and such things are not at all nice in one’s mouth. Some Christians must always be in trouble, or else they would be in sin. It seems as if some could never be allowed a furlough from sorrow, or else they would spend it in the tents of wickedness: “Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule.” Be tender-mouthed; be willing to be

guided; yield to the gentle admonitions of the Divine Spirit that you may have a truly happy life.

10. *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked.*

It is all merriment with them now; they “count it one of the wisest things, to drive dull care away.” But hark to this knell of all their joys, “Many sorrows shall be to the wicked.” If not today, or tomorrow, yet by-and-by, and in that day, it shall be so. All the future is dark to the wicked; the further they go, the worse they will grow.

10. *But he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.*

“He that trusteth in the Lord,” — he is the very opposite of the wicked. Do you trust in the Lord, my friend? If not, you will have to be put among the wicked, for there are only two sorts of people in the world, — the wicked, and those that trust in the Lord. If you are not a believer in Christ, you must go with the other company. “He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.” Mercy shall go all round him, before him, behind him, above him, beneath him, within him, and around him everywhere. As you see the moon sometimes with a halo around it, so shall you be; you shall have brightness within and round about you, mercy shall compass you about.

11. *Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.*

If anybody has a right to be glad, you have; so indulge the gladness, and magnify the name of the Lord.

PSALM 32

1. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

The Lord can bless the man who is full of sin only when his sin is covered by the atonement — the propitiation — which hides his sin even from the sight of God; and he is a truly blessed man who, although he knows himself to be a sinner, also knows that his sin is forgiven and covered.

2. *Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.*

He is an honest, truthful, guileless man. A man cannot be a blessed man while he is double-minded, while he has graft, or what is here called guile, within him. A sincere and guileless heart is an evidence of grace, so “blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” But, David, how did you obtain this forgiveness? Let us hear the story of your experience.

3, 4. *When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.*

He tells us that he had such a sense of guilt that he could not rest; and until he made confession of his sin to God, he became sick in body as well as in soul. It seemed as if his very bones, the most solid part of his frame, were beginning to decay under the influence of his grief, and he was getting worse and worse in the brokenness of his spirit till he seemed like a dried-up country in which there is no dew. His moisture was turned into the drought of summer. Yes, David; but how did you get rid of your sin? We see how deeply you felt it; how did you get clear of it?

5. *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*

You see, as long as he covered his sin, God did not cover it, but when he no longer tried to hide it, but made an open confession of it, then God blotted it out, and covered it up for ever. There but a believing confession of sin, and David’s heart was at rest at once. Shall we not try the same remedy? Will we not go to God and say, “Father, I have sinned”? Is there any better course than that? Is it not right to acknowledge a wrong? Is it not the simplest and safest way to go at once to him who blots out sin, and ask for mercy?

6, 7. *For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place: thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.*

Surely, if God has given us the pardon of our sin, he will give us everything else that we need. If he has delivered us from hell, he will certainly deliver us from trouble.

8. *I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.*

The forgiven man is afraid of going wrong again; he is as anxious about his future life as he was about his past sin. So the Lord meets him, and gives him the gracious promise contained in this verse.

9. *Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.*

Do not be hard-mouthed, be obedient to God's will, be tender of heart, and willing of spirit. The Lord will make his children go in the right way somehow or other, he will put a bit into their mouths if nothing else will do it, but it would be much better for them if they would be of tender and gentle spirit, and would yield at once to his gracious and holy will.

10. *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked:*

Godly men also have many sorrows, but then they always have sweets with their bitters, but "many sorrows shall be to the wicked," and there will be no sweets to go with them.

10. *But he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.*

He shall have mercy all round him. He who trusts his God shall find that the golden compasses of divine mercy shall strike a circle of gracious protection all round him: "mercy shall compass him about."

11. *Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.*

Godly men ought to be glad men. They have a right to be happy. They recommend the gospel when they are so, and they are the true sons of the King of kings when they do not go mourning all their days.

PSALM 32

In this Psalm we have the gospel of the peace of God as David knew it for himself, and wrote it for the benefit of others.

1. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

Hear this inspired declaration, you who have transgressed the law of your God, you who cannot plead a righteousness of your own, you who are conscious that you are sinners in the sight of God, — here is a door of hope for you. Here is a possibility of blessing even for those whose lives have been full of sin and transgression. This is not a blessing of the law, but a blessing of the gospel: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”

2. *Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, —*

Even God does not keep it recorded against him. The man has committed iniquity, but it is no longer laid to his charge, even by him whose all-seeing eye has witnessed it: “Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity,” —

2. *And in whose spirit there is no guile.*

No shuffling, no deceit. He deals honestly with God, and with himself, and with his fellows; and God deals righteously with him, and yet covers his sin, forgives his transgression, and imputes not to him his iniquity.

3, 4. *When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.*

While under a sense of sin, David could not pray; or his prayer, if he did offer one at all, turned into a kind of roaring, like the cry of a wounded beast. He was so heavy in heart, his whole being was so scorched and parched by the fire of God’s righteous anger because of his sin, that the very ducts of his tears refused to supply him with any further streams, and he had to cry, “My moisture is turned into the drought of summer.” Oh, what a burden sin always brings with it, and what a dreadful thing it is to be crushed under the almighty hand of God when he convinces us of our guilt by the effectual working of his Holy Spirit. When David was in that condition, what did he do in order to get peace with God, and to find rest for his soul? Listen : —

5. *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid, I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*

He made to the Lord a full, childlike confession of his sin, iniquity, and transgressions, evidently putting his heart’s trust in the

mercy of God; and, soon, all the burden that oppressed him was removed, and the fierce burnings of divine vengeance within his spirit were quenched, and his storm-tossed heart was at rest in his God: "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

6, 7. *For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place ; —*

See where alone a sinner can find a safe shelter, in his God. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, is the appointed Judge of all mankind, yet it is to him that we fly for refuge, crying, —

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee !"

It is strange that he, from whose lips the storm of wrath against sin comes, is the hiding place of his people. He draws the sword of infinite and infallible justice against all iniquity, and then he himself furnishes, in his own great heart of love, the sheath into which that sword of justice is plunged. So the believer today says to him in a fuller sense even than David understood the term, "Thou art my hiding place; " —

7. *Thou shalt preserve me from trouble: thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.*

The once heavy heart shall dance for joy. The spirit that was so grievously burdened shall take up the note of glad thanksgiving when the Lord's free sovereign mercy brings forgiveness to his repenting children.

8. *I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.*

A good servant frequently does not need even a word from her mistress to guide her as to some duty to be performed, or some fault to be avoided; a look is all that is necessary, just a glance of the eye gives the needful guidance. So the Lord says to his watchful servant, "I will guide thee with mine eye ;" but, like the attentive servant, we must be keenly on the watch for this indication of our Lord's guiding eye.

9. *Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding : whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.*

If you will be like a horse or a mule, do not be surprised when you are made to feel the bit and bridle which are appropriate for such creatures, and if a whip and spur are added, remember that you brought such treatment upon yourself. Nay, do not be so foolish, but give heed to the divine injunction: "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee."

10. *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked:*

The backsliding child of God will smart under the strokes of his Father's chastising rod; but sterner treatment still will fall to the lot of "the wicked." On another occasion, David wrote, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."

10. *But he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.*

What a number of blessed ring fences there are around a believer! Just now, David wrote, "Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance;" and now he says of himself or his fellow-believer, "He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about." What more can he need?

11. *Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.*

The Psalm began with blessedness, and it ends with holy gladness. It was needful to go down into the Valley of Humiliation for a while, but the Lord brought the psalmist up to the mountain top again, so that he felt that he must have others to join him in his gladsome song: "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." May all of us be fitted by God's grace to join that singing and shouting company, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PSALM 32

"A Psalm of David, Maschil," that is to say, an instructive Psalm. I suppose that David wrote it after he had been forgiven and restored to divine favour. I think we may read it as a part of our own experience either of conversion or when restored after backsliding.

1, 2. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.*

Twice he says “blessed.” He had felt the weight of sin; he had been sore troubled, and now that Nathan is sent to him with the word of pardon, “The Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die,” he counts himself doubly blessed,-blessed not the man who has never sinned, blessed is he who having sinned is forgiven, not the man who has no sin, but whose sin is covered. Wonderful word! Both in English and Hebrew it sounds very much alike, the sacred kopher, the cover which covers sin so that it is hidden even from the eye of God himself! A wondrous deed! Blessed is the man who knows that divine covering! “Blessed,” says he, “is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile.” All along after David’s sin he became very crafty and very cunning, full of guile.- You know the dodges that he had to cover up his sin; he tried to play some of his tricks on God himself, but he felt it was a mischievous thing to do: he was uneasy, he was unhappy. We have sometimes heard it said that after David sinned he remained insensible for nine months until he received the divine rebuke, but it was not so. He remained very sensitive, very depressed, very unhappy, and he was trying this way and that to cover up his sin and guile. He could not do it; he sought to make a clean break of it and confess it before God and give up his crooked ways and his ideas of excusing himself, and when he had done that, when he had given up his guile and his guilt too, then he got the double blessing: “blessed, blessed!” If there are any of you who are treading crooked ways with God and man give them up. I know of nothing that will make you give them up like knowing free, full, perfect pardon through the precious blood of Christ and the free grace of God. The two things go together, guilt and guile; the two things go out of us together; when guilt is pardoned guile is killed. Now hear how David felt while he was conscious of his sin and yet was not right with God.

3. *When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.*

A wanton glance, the sin with Bathsheba, where was the pleasure of it when it cost him all this? Such groaning that his very bones got old as if they were rotten, and his heart was heavy as if he wished to die.

4. *For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me.*

God was with his hand pressing him heavily, forging his sin home upon him, making him say, My sin is ever before me.” Oh! the misery of sinning to a child of God. Do not dream that we can ever have any pleasure in sin; the worldling may, but the believer never can. ‘To him it is a deadly viper that will fill his veins with burning poison.

4. *My moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.*

When he tried to pray, it was a dried-up prayer; he tried to make a Psalm but it was a dried-up song, he tried to do some good, for he was still a good man, but it was all withered without the Spirit of God. His moisture was gone out of him, turned into the drought of summer, and summer in David’s country was a very droughty thing indeed. Every human thing despaired, the grass seemed to turn to dust, it was so with him. If you go into sin, this is what will happen to you. If you are a true child of God, you will have all the joy of God taken from you, all the moisture of your heart dried up, and you will be like a parched, withered thing. “ Selah.” It was time to have a pause in the music, he was on so base a key; he had need now to screw up the harp strings and rise to something a little sweeter.

5. *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*

He must come to confession, full, spontaneous, unreserved: there must be a resolution. “ I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, “ a firm determination to hide nothing, to see the sin yourself, and to tell the Lord that you do see it, and to confess it with great grief and sorrow. What a wonderful word that is: “ I said I will confess and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” God took away the sin; ay, the very pith and marrow of it,-“ the iniquity of my sin,” taking the bone away and the marrow of the bone too: “ thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin,”-it has all gone, wholly gone; by one stroke of God’s divine grace the sinner was pardoned. “ Selah “ again.

6. *For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the flood; of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.*

For this (because of this), and for this blessing, “ shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found.”

The pardoning God must be sought. There is an attraction in the greatness of his mercy. They that are godly, even though they have offended and gone astray, must come back and seek for pardon in a time when thou mayest be found. “Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.” The godly man is safe when the floods are out. There are times when great waters prevailed in David’s country, the brooks sometimes turned to rivers, and came down with a rush when they were least expected; and here he says that when such a thing as that shall happen yet God’s people shall be saved. They shall come, but they shall not come nigh unto them. Let me read those words again. If you have gone to God in the day of your sin, and have found pardon, he that took away the sin will take away the sorrow. ‘Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.’”

7. Thou art my hiding place;

Precious words! “Thou art my hiding place,” not “thou art a hiding place,” but “Thou art my hiding place.” A man who is beset by foes does not stand still and say, “Yes, I can see there is a hiding place there,” but he runs to it. Beloved, run to your hiding place this evening, each one of you who can have a claim and interest in Christ, run to him now, and say,-

7. Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.

He has come up to us out of the roaring to the singing; all the day long he roars, and now all the day long he sings; he sees songs everywhere; he lives in a circle of music: his heart is so glad. Well may he put another “Selah,” for he has smitten the strings very joyfully, and they need tuning again.

8. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.

Here the Speaker is changed.

“I will instruct thee,” I have forgiven thee. “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go.” I have prayed thee back to the way, now I will “teach thee in the way thou shalt go.” “I will guide thee with mine eye,” thine own might lead thee astray. “I will guide thee with mine eye;” I will be on the path, I will fix mine eye upon thee. “I will guide thee with mine eye.”

9. *Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.*

“Be ye not as the horse,” not only David, but all of you. If God will guide you, be guided; if he will teach you, be teachable; if he will be gracious to you, be gracious towards him.

10. *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.*

“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked.” David had found that out, his sin had brought him a transient pleasure, but a lasting misery. He shall have a bodyguard of mercy, God will be gracious to him, tender to him, and will not leave him if he is trusting in the Lord.

11. *Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.*

“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous.” Be glad. Well, but you cannot always be glad, says one. “Be glad in the Lord: you may always be glad in him. Here is an unchanging source of joy. “Rejoice, ye righteous, and shout for joy.” Here, the man that was silent has gone as far as shouting now. Is it not enough to make him? Twice he was blessed, in the first and second verses: and now, he has been pardoned, he has been delivered, he has been compassed about with mercy. Why, he must be glad! “Shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart.” God bless you in the reading of his Word.

PSALM 32

This is a great psalm of grace, a psalm in which a sinner, cleansed by sovereign grace, adores and blesses the mercy of God.

1. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

This is not a blessing for the man who says he has no sin; this is not a benediction for the innocent, who talk about their own good works; but blessed is the man who, having sinned, is pardoned, whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered: in a word, it is a gospel blessing, it is the blessing of free grace.

2. *Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.*

He had a thousand iniquities; he transgressed in all sorts of ways. The Lord does not impute these things to him. He has set them down to the account of another, who has ventured to stand in the sinner's stead, and be made sin in the sinner's place, but to this man, this blessed man, God doth not impute iniquity, and in his spirit there is no guile — he confesses his sin with honesty, he is pardoned with certainty, and in his spirit there is no cunning concealment.

3, 4. *When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.*

This is the experience of those men whom God saves. Till they confess sin, that sin rankles in them like venom; it boils their blood, it eats into their bones, it makes life worse than death, it makes them dread the wrath to come; their days are nights, and their nights are hells; they cannot bear themselves. This was David's experience, and it has been the way by which God has led thousands of his redeemed ones that he might bring them to himself. As long as we cloak our sin and conceal it, and pretend that we are innocent, the fire burns within us; but when we just confess the sin, then it is that we are dealing with God aright, and God deals with us in grace.

5. *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*

All gone, gone for ever, gone at a stroke. Oh! what a mercy this is, that, when once we will take the place of sinners and plead guilty, then it is that we are absolved at once. We have but to own that we deserve the punishment, and straightway that punishment is remitted. This is the way of grace, the plan of infinite condescending love.

6. *For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.*

The man that has so prayed as to find complete forgiveness, he is the man that will never leave off praying as long as he lives. The one gain which covers everything, the gain of conscious forgiveness, inspires a man to pray about anything, and about everything, as long as ever he lives. "For this shall everyone that is

godly pray unto thee.” “Thou art my hiding-place.” You see God was his hiding-place when he was in a storm of sin, and now he takes God to be his hiding-place in every time of trouble, from all the afflictions of his life, all the sorrows of the way. “Thou art my hiding-place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble.” Shall he not, since he has blotted out our sins? Oh! if God has preserved us from the wrath to come, what is there to be afraid of? “Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.” I shall live in a ring of music. I shall march onward to heaven as in the center of song. Why, it may well be so, when once God has freely blotted out our sins — “Thou shalt compass me about with sings of deliverance.” Ay, saith God, that I will, and I will do more.

8. *I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.*

I have not blotted out thy sins to leave thee to wander back into them again — I will be thy teacher, thy folly shalt not be thy ruin, thine ignorance shall not be thy destruction. I will guide thee — look at me! — “I will guide thee with mine eye.” A glance, a look, shall be enough for thee. I will give thee such a heart that thou shalt understand the least motion of my finger.

Nay, I will guide thee with mine eye.

9. *Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.*

A pardoning God may well ask this of us, that we would be tender. Oh! let us be very willing to do the Lord’s will, plastic in his hands like clay in the hand of the potter. It is a great pity, brothers and sisters, when we won’t be guided by the gentle leadings of God, and must be whipped and spurred, and tugged at. For God will govern us if we are his people. If one bit will not do it, he will get a tougher bit that shall cut us and hurt us, but he will rule us, and so he ought to do, blessed be his name.

10, 11. *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.*

PSALM 32

1. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

That is a wonderful word, — almost the same in Hebrew as in English, —covered, hidden, concealed, put away, removed, dismissed for ever.

2. *Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.*

For, when sin is gone, men become honest before God. The fear of punishment makes them endeavor to evade the truth concerning sin; but, when they see sin pardoned, then are they honest before the Lord.

3. *When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.*

I have heard that certain diseases, when they are suppressed, are all the more terrible and deadly; and, certainly, suppressed sin, or suppressed sorrow for sin, which has no vent by way of confession before God, is a dreadful thing. It seems to eat into the very bones: “My bones waxed old,” like a strong acid eating into the very pillars of our manhood.

4. *For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me:*

The mere touch of God’s finger would be enough to crush us, but when he comes to deal with us in conviction, and lays his heavy hand upon us, it is indeed terrible. We are then like Gideon’s fleece when he squeezed all the moisture out of it.

4, 5. *My moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*

Being confessed, it was forgiven; being acknowledged, it was blotted out.

6. *For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found:*

If thou, O Lord, dost hear a sinner cry unto thee, then surely thou wilt hear thy saints when they cry unto thee yet more and more! If seekers become finders, then others will become seekers, too.

6, 7. *Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.*

What a blessed experience that is, — to be surrounded with songs, to hear music on the right and music on the left, singing behind me for mercy received, singing before me for hopes yet to be fulfilled, — singing above me, the angels welcoming me when my time comes to go home to my Father’s house! “Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.” Now the Lord speaks to his servant: —

8. *I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.*

“Therefore, keep your eye on me; notice every movement of my eye, and be ready and obedient, at the slightest sign, to do my will.”

9. *Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.*

Be not hard in the mouth; be not stubborn, willful, obstinate, rebellious.

10. *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked:*

They pursue pleasure as if it belonged to them alone. They talk about “a short life and a merry one.” Poor things, how sadly mistaken they are! “Many sorrows shall be to the wicked.” They have a terrible inheritance, a dreadful entail of suffering.

10, 11. *But he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy,*

Be demonstrative about it, make other people hear of it. Do not be ashamed to let your holy joy be known. Be not so very proper and orderly as to mumble out your praises as some do: “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy,”

11. *All ye that are right in heart.*

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 25:10-22; AND PSALM 32.

PSALM 32

1-5. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not*

iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Boon over. Once poured into Jehovah's ear out of a contrite heart, and the transgression was gone for ever. May it be so with you, dear hearer. If your sin has never been forgiven you till to-

night, may you this night obtain pardon through confession of sin.

6, 7. *For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh him. Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 51 AND 32.

PSALM 32

1. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

No man knows the blessedness of pardoned sin but the man who has felt the weight of guilt upon his conscience. If you have ever been burdened and crushed under a load of sin, it will be a joy worth more than ten thousand worlds for you to get the burden lifted from your shoulders: "Blessed" — blessed beyond description — "is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

2. *Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile*

He has no need to dissemble now, for his sin is forgiven. David had tried to tamper with his conscience after his great sin. He invented all sorts of excuses and schemes, to try to hide his guilt, but when, at last, he was fully convinced of the awful sinfulness of his sin, and when God had put it away for ever, then, when the guilt was gone, the guile went, too.

3, 4. *When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.*

As if he was parched and scorched with inward grief. The agony of his soul kept him from sleeping, prevented him from taking his necessary food, and made him seem like a prematurely old man.

5. *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*

O blessed termination of a terrible condition of heart! Confession pulled up the flood-gates of his soul, and God caused the black stream to flow away and disappear. Friend, are you trying to conceal any sin, or to excuse yourself in any wrong course? Then, your soul will fret and worry more and more. But make a clean breast of it before God, in the humblest and most honest language you can use, and then you shall receive the Lord's full and free forgiveness.

6. *For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.*

A man, who can pray, shall see even the ocean driven back, as Moses did. If you get nigh to God, and keep nigh to him, the floods of great waters shall never get nigh to you.

7. *Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.*

The world is full of music to the man to whom God has said, "I forgive thee." Do not rest, dear friend, till you really know that you are forgiven; for if you do, you will rest short of all true happiness. But if you have sought God's mercy, and had your sin forgiven, you are already at the gates of heaven.

8. *I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.*

When God forgives, he also sanctifies. When he has brought back the sheep that wandered off into the wrong road, he afterwards leads it in the right track. Notice how the Lord says, "I will guide thee with mine eye." A look from the Lord ought to be enough to guide us; we should not need a blow, nor even a word, but be ready to be directed by the very gentlest monition of God's gracious Spirit.

9. *Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.*

Do not be difficult to manage. Be not hard-mouthed. Be ready to be guided by the eye of God. Be not like stubborn beasts, that must be held in with bit and bridle, and that often need the whip, too.

10. *Many sorrows, shall be to the wicked: —*

Wicked man, that is the portion that is to come to you; and it will surely come to you if you continue in your present evil course. This is the title deed of your future inheritance; do you like the prospect of such a possession as that? “Many sorrows shall be to the wicked:” —

10, 11. *But he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.*

Let your joy be demonstrative. Do not be ashamed to let others see how happy you are. The Lord hath done great things for you - therefore, “be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.” Be so jubilant that others shall be compelled to glorify God with you, and to ask, “May not we also share this great blessing with you?”

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 32 and 130.

PSALM 32

“A Psalm of David, Maschil”: that is to say, an instructive psalm:

“Maschil.” I suppose that David wrote it after he had been forgiven and restored to divine favor. I think we may read it as a part of our own experience, either of conversion or when restored after backsliding.

1, 2. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.*

Twice he says “blessed.” He had felt the weight of sin; he had been sore troubled, and now that Nathan is sent to him with the word of pardon, “The Lord hath put away thy sin, though shalt not die,” he counts himself doubly blessed — blessed, not the man who has never sinned; blessed is he who, having sinned, is forgiven; not

the man who has no sin, but whose sin is covered. Wonderful word! Both in English and Hebrew, it sounds very much alike. The sacred "Kophah." the cover which covers sin so that sin is hidden, even from the eye of God himself! A wondrous deed! Blessed is the man who knows that divine covering! "Blessed," says he "is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." All along, after David's sin, he became very crafty and very cunning, full of guile. You know the dodges that he had resorted to, to cover up his sin; he tried to play some of his tricks on God himself, but he felt it was a mischievous and foolish thing to do: he was uneasy, he was unhappy. We have sometimes heard it said that after David sinned, he remained insensible for nine months, until he received the divine rebuke; but it was not so. He remained very sensitive, very depressed, very unhappy, and he was trying this way and that to cover up his sin and guile. He could not do it; he ought to make a clean breast of it, and confess it before God, and give up his crooked ways, and his ideas of excusing himself, and when he had done that, when he had given up his guile and his guilt, too, then he got the double blessing: "Blessed, blessed!" If there are any of you who are treading crooked ways with God and man, give them up. I know of nothing that will make you give them up like knowing free, full, perfect pardon through the precious blood of Christ, and the free grace of God. The two things go together, guilt and guile; the two things go out of us together; when guilt is pardoned, guile is killed. Now hear how David felt while he was conscious of his sin, and yet was not right with God.

3. *When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.*

A wanton glance, and the sin with Bathsheba. Where was the pleasure of it when it cost him all this? Such groaning that his very bones get old as if they were rotten, and his heart was heavy as if he wished to die. "For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me." God was dealing with him; God with his hand pressing him heavily, forcing his sin home upon him, making him say, "My sin is ever before me." Oh! the misery of sinning to a child of God. Do not dream that we can ever have any pleasure in sin; the worldling may, but the believer never can. To him it is a deadly viper, that will fill his veins with burning poison.

4. *For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.*

When he tried to pray, it was a dried-up prayer; he tried to make a psalm, but it was a dried-up song; he tried to do some good, for he was still a good man, but it was all withered without the Spirit of God. His moisture was gone out of him, turned into the drought of summer, and summer in David's country was a very droughty thing indeed. Every human thing despaired, the grass seemed to turn to dust; it was so with him. If you go into sin, this is what will happen to you. If you are a true child of God, you will have all the joy of God taken from you, all the moisture of your heart dried up, and you will be like a parched, withered thing. "Selah": time to stop, time to have a pause in the music; he was on so bass a key, he had need now to screw up the harp strings and rise to something a little sweeter.

5. *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*

He must come to confession, full, spontaneous, unreserved; there must be a resolution. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord"; a firm determination to hide nothing, to see the sin yourself, and to tell the Lord that you do see it, and to confess it with great grief and sorrow. What a wonderful word that is: "I said, I will confess, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." God took away the sin: ay, the very pith and marrow of it, "the iniquity of my sin." Take the bone away, and the marrow of the bone too; "thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" — it has all gone, wholly gone; by one stroke of God's divine grace the sinner was pardoned. Selah again

6. *For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.*

"For this" (because of this and for this blessing) "shall everyone that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found." The pardoning God must be sought. There is an attraction in the greatness of his mercy. They that are godly, even though they have offended and gone astray, must come back and seek for pardon in a time when thou mayest be found. "Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him." The godly man is safe when the floods are out. There are times when great waters

prevailed in David's country; the brooks sometimes turned to rivers and came down with a rush when they were least expected; and here he says that, when such a thing as that shall happen, yet God's people shall be saved, They shall come, but they shall not come nigh unto them. Let me read those words again: If you have gone to God in the day of your sin, and have found pardon, he that took away the sin will take away the sorrow. "Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him."

7. Thou art my hiding place; thou shall preserve me from trouble; thou shall compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.

"Thou art my hiding place" — precious words! "Thou art my hiding place"; not "Thou art a hiding place," but "Thou art MY hiding place." A man who is beset by foes does not stand still, and say, "Yes, I can see there is a hiding place there," but he runs to it. Beloved, run to your hiding place this morning, each one of you who can have a claim and interest in Christ: run to him now and say: "Thou shalt preserve me from trouble." David has come up out of the roaring to the singing; all the day long he roared, and now all the day long he sings; he hears songs everywhere: he lives in a circle of music; his heart is so glad. Well may he put another "Selah," for he has smitten the strings very joyfully, and they need tuning again.

8. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.

And here the speaker changes: "I will instruct thee"; I have forgiven thee; "I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go." I have restored thee back to the way; now I will teach thee in the way thou shalt go. "I will guide thee with mine eye"; thine own might lead thee astray. I will guide thee with mine eye"; I will be on the path, I will fix mine eye upon thee. "I will guide thee with mine eye."

9. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.

"Be ye not as the horse," not only David, but all of you. If God will guide you, be guided; if he will teach you, be teachable; if he will be gracious to you, be gracious towards him.

10. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.

“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked”; David had found that out; his sin had brought him a transient pleasure, but a lasting misery. He shall have a bodyguard of mercy; God will be gracious to him, tender to him, and will not leave him if he is trusting in the Lord.

11. *Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.*

“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous.” Be glad. Well, but you cannot always be glad, says one. “Be glad in the Lord”; you may always be glad in him. Here is an unchanging source of joy. “Rejoice, ye righteous, and shout for joy.” Here is the man that was silent, has gone as far as shouting now. Is it not enough to make him? Twice he was blessed, in the first and second verses; and now he has been pardoned, he has been delivered, he has been compassed about with mercy: why, he must be glad! “Shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.” God bless you in the reading of his Word.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 32; JOHN 17.

PSALM 33

1. *Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright.*

False gods were worshipped with dolorous sounds, accompanied by cutting with knives and with lancets; but our God is the happy God, and he would have his people happy. “Rejoice in Jehovah, O ye righteous.” The praises of God are very beautiful when they are sung by holy people: “for praise is comely for the upright.” But the praises of God on the lips of godless men are altogether out of place. I wonder how Christians can allow those to lead their praises in the sanctuary who never can from their hearts praise God. They who sing to the worldling all the week should not be employed to sing to the God of the holy on the Sabbath, surely. “Praise is comely for the upright.” Hymns and psalms sung by the ungodly are but as sweet spices laid upon a dunghill; but “praise is comely for the upright.”

2, 3. *Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings. Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise.*

Under a dispensation of types and shadows, the use of musical instruments seemed to be necessary and suitable; but in the early Christian Church, in her purest ages, these things were discarded as tending towards Judaism; and at this day, the sweetest singing in the world is heard in the assembly which utterly abjures the use of every musical instrument. Yet I believe that there is Christian liberty about these things; and, for my part, I like to think of Luther with his lute and of George Herbert with his harp. If they were helped to praise God the better, let them have the music. Yet the singing is never sweeter than when it is all song; and there is no better music than that which comes from hearts and tongues that are alive, and that know what sounds they make, and wherefore they make them. Anyhow, let us sing unto Jehovah. Hang not your harps on the willows, suspend not your music. Praise God somehow, praise him anyhow; but do praise him.

4. For the word of the LORD is right;

Praise him for his Word, then. It is truth, it is righteousness. If we had nothing else but the Bible for which, to praise God, there would be reason enough for giving him endless praise for bestowing upon us such a priceless treasure.

4. And all his works are done in truth.

Praise him for his providence. There is never a mistake in what he does “All his works are done in truth.”

5. He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.

Therefore praise him. So good a God should not be without your gratitude.

6. By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

Praise your Creator, then, the Maker of the universe.

7-9. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.

These are simple but grand words. The work of creation was very wonderful, and it was all wrought by the word of the Lord. There were no angelic agencies. “He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.”

10. *The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought*

They plot and they contrive, but he baffles them; men may think and scheme as they will, but God has his way, after all.

10, 11. *He maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.*

His decrees stand fast. Still Jehovah reigns, and still he must reign for ever and ever.

12. *Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.*

There is the reason why they are blessed, it is all owing to God's electing love: "the people whom he hath chosen." If God has chosen them, they are blessed people indeed. Whom he determines to bless, none can effectually curse.

13. *The LORD looketh from heaven; he beboldeth all the sons of men.*

As we look out of a window, and see the people passing in the street below, "he beholdeth all the sons of men," whether at the pole or at the equator. None are hidden from his omniscient eye.

14, 15. *From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike;*

Not that their hearts are alike, but it means that he only fashioneth all their hearts. They were all made by him. There is no understanding so great but he made it, and there is no mind so feeble but still he made it: "he fashioneth their hearts."

15, 16. *He considereth all their works. There is no king saved by the multitude of an host*

See what vast companies of soldiers Darius gathered together, yet Alexander smote them; and Napoleon led into Russia more than half a million of men, yet they melted away like snow.

16. *A mighty man is not delivered by much strength.*

Sooner or later, he dies, however strong he is.

17. *A horse is a vain thing for safety:*

It throws its rider, or falls upon him, or is killed with him.

17, 18. *Neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy,*

Beautiful expression! I always like that mixture of fear and hope. An old fisherman used to compare it to his net. "Fear," said he, "is the weight that sinks it, and hope is the cork that floats it." To make a perfect character, there must be both fear and hope. The man that never fears may begin to fear; but he that is all fear is a miserable creature. God help him to begin to hope!

19. *To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.*

When others die of want, the Lord will take care of them that fear him. I remember a story of the siege of Rochelle, when the city was in such straits that the people had to eat cats, and dogs, and rats, and all manner of filthiness. There was one Christian woman, who, having some stores, fed the poor therewith, whereat her friends said she was a fool, for she would soon be starving. They asked, "Who is to take care of you when all is gone?" She answered, "The Lord will provide for me." At last her stores were exhausted. She went to beg of her friends, but they refused her. She was nearly famished when, strange to tell (as we put it), some one, unknown to her, shot down a sack full of wheat at her door. She never knew who it was, and then she said to her friends, "God has provided for me," and while others died she lived, for she had practiced holy charity. She had feared God, and given to her neighbours, she had not selfishly hoarded what she had; and the Lord rewarded her. Let me read these two verses again: "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine."

20. *Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield.*

Notice the three "ours." Personal possession is the very soul of piety; all else is mere verbiage. Not, "What hearest thou?" but, "What hast thou?" Not, "What he thou talk about?" but, "What dost thou possess?" That is the thing: "Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield."

21. *For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name.*

If you do but trust in his holy name, you shall one day rejoice in him. Trust him in the dark, and you shall see the light. Trust him in famine, and you shall surely be fed.

22. *Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.*

Let us each one pray that prayer now: "Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee." Amen. Now turn to the 1st chapter of the 1st General Epistle of John, that you may see what an apostle had to say concerning joy.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 33. AND 1 JOHN 1.

PSALM 33

1. *Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright.*

Notice the connection between the words "rejoice" and "praise." Joy is the soul of praise. God is not extolled by our misery, but by our holy mirth. Be glad in the Lord, for so can you make him glorious. "Rejoice and "praise", "for praise is comely for the upright." Praise is the beauty of a Christian. What wings are to a bird, what fruit is to the tree, what the rose is to the thorn, that is praise to a child of God.

2. *Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings.*

In the old days of forms, and ceremonies, and outward worship, musical instruments were abundantly used; but in the early Christian Church there was no such thing as a musical instrument, because the believers were afraid of going back to Judaism. It is curious that, as men get further away from Christ, they get fonder and fonder of such things as these. Still, under certain conditions, they are lawful; though, we think, not expedient. God was acceptably worshipped in the olden time with harp and with psaltery, and he may be so now; yet we worship him, so we judge for our own selves, better without them.

3. *Sing unto him a new song;*

For, you see, that all the music had singing with it. "Praise the Lord with harp; sing unto him "Sing unto him a new song." "Unto the Lord, unto the Lord, Oh, sing a new and joyful song!" It was only as it guided and strengthened the singing that the instrumental music was tolerated even in those early days.

3. *Play skillfully with a loud noise.*

God ought to be worshipped with our best: "Play skillfully." God ought to be earnestly worshipped: "with a loud noise." Hearty worship is what the Lord desires, and what he deserves; let us render it to him.

4. *For the word of the LORD is right;*

Let us praise him for his Word. Men are depreciating it; let us appreciate it. "The word of the Lord is right:" from the first page to the last it is right, emphatically right; let us praise him for it.

4. *And all his works are done in truth.*

The book of providence is full of truth; oh, for grace to read it with thankful hearts! Let us praise God, and sing unto him, as every page passes under our eye.

5. *He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.*

You would think, from the way in which most people talk, that the world was full of misery and full of the anger of the Lord; but it is not. Notwithstanding all the evil that is in it, it is still true that "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord."

6. *By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.*

They did not grow out of something that was there before; they were made out of nothing "by the word of the Lord." All the hosts of stars innumerable were created "by the breath of his mouth."

7. *He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses.*

We know not how much God hath in store, out of sight, in the vast abysses; but we know that he drowned the world when he broke up the fountains of the great deep.

8. *Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.*

He is so great a God that all the oceans are in his sight but as a heap; let us worship, and adore, and bow down before him.

9. *For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.*

With God it is no sooner said than it is done; "He spake, and it was done." All that he has to do is but to bid it be so, and so it is. And, as it was for creation, so is it for confirmation: "He commanded, and it stood fast."

10. *The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect.*

If the folly of man yields to God's wisdom, so also shall the wisdom of man. No matter though men take counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed, God will certainly carry out his purposes.

11. *The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.*

What the Lord intends to do, he will do; there is no turning him from his purpose, and his dispensations stand fast for ever.

12. *Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.*

If you have chosen God, God has chosen you. It is a happy thing when it is so; when these two elections meet,-your election of God, and God's election of you,-then you are happy indeed.

13, 14. *The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth.*

Just as in a glass hive you can see all the bees, and all they do, so can God see us; and he can see all that we think, and read and know us through and through.

15, 16. *He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works. There is no king saved by the multitude of an host:*

Look at Napoleon, who marched more than half a million of men into Russia; but they nearly all melted away, and, after a time, he himself became a captive on the lone rock of St. Helena: "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host."

16. *A mighty man is not delivered by much strength.*

Look at Goliath, stronger than all his fellows; yet how soon he lay prone upon the earth when a single stone from the sling of David smote him in the forehead.

17-19. *An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.*

Whatever becomes of kings and princes in the day of need, the Lord will take care of those who fear him, and put their trust in him. There have been vast numbers of cases of singular providence's, so

many that they have ceased to be singular, in which God has provided for those who have trusted in him,

20. *Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield.*

Dear friends, notice those three “ours”-three firm clasps, three strong holdfasts: “Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield.” Why did he not say, “Our souls wait,” for there are many of us? Ah! but we are so alike in this one thing that it is as if we had only one soul in all these many bodies, so the psalmist says, “our soul.” You remember, when the disciples went to Emmaus, and Christ talked with them, they said, “Did not our heart burn within us?” There were two of them; then, why did they not say, “Did not our hearts burn?” Well, their hearts were so one that he who spoke called them “heart” rather than “hearts”; and it is so here: “Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield.”

21, 22. *For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.*

That is a good prayer with which to close our reading; let us all present it at the throne of the heavenly grace.

PSALM 34

The title of this Psalm is, “A Psalm of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech (or, Achish); who drove him away, and he departed.” It relates to a sad scene in David’s life when he had to feign madness in order to escape from his enemies; but I notice that, although the fact is recorded, yet David does not dwell upon it in the Psalm. He had acted as a fool or a madman, but he was not fool enough, or mad enough, to glory in his shame. I have heard some men, whose past lives have been very disgraceful, who, after their professed conversion, have seemed to make a boast of their sin. David does not do that, nor will any other right-minded person. Let us always be ashamed of our sin, even while we magnify the grace of God which has saved us from it. Though we may feel that it is needful to mention it in order to encourage others to hope in the mercy of God, yet we must take care that we never even seem to dwell upon it with any kind of gusto. Thus the Psalm begins:-

1. *I will bless the LORD at all times:*

“Whether the times are dark or light, whether I feel well or ill, whether the Lord deals with me graciously or severely, I will bless him at all times.”

1. *His praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

What a blessed mouthful! If we could but carry out this resolve of David, we should not find so much fault with others as we often do. We shall have little or no opportunity for grumbling and murmuring if praise to Jehovah shall continually be in our mouth.

2. *My soul shall make her boast in the LORD:*

All men are more or less given to boasting but it seems to be specially characteristic of Englishmen and Americans. Well, there is a right way of boasting; if you can truly say, “My soul shall make her boast in the Lord,” you may boast away as much as you like.

2. *The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.*

Any other kind of boasting makes humble people sad; but when we boast in the Lord, the more we boast the more the humble rejoice.

3. *O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.*

Let each one of us throw his stone upon the cairn to make the heap as high as possible, for every one has some peculiar cause for gratitude and thanksgiving.

4. *I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears,*

It was a very poor way of seeking the Lord when he had got into the hand of the Philistines, and was planning in his own mind a disgraceful way of escaping from them. It was not that calm quiet calling upon God that one would have liked to see in David. Still, God heard him, and that makes the deliverance all the more wonderful.

5. *They looked unto him.*

“All these people that have come at my call to join me in praising the Lord: “They looked unto him,” —

5. *And were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.*

No, not one of them; if they looked to God, light shone from God upon their faces, and their faces glowed with the holy radiance, so they had no reason to be ashamed.

6, 7. *This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.*

David's deliverance had been so special that he could not help feeling that some special deliverer had been employed on his behalf; "the angel of the Lord" had been sent to his help. Then David, why did you act like a madman? Ah! that was through his want of faith, yet even want of faith must not make us rob God of his glory. What though we were unbelieving, he was faithful, therefore let us give him his due meet of praise. Let us try to blot out the remembrance of our own weakness with our tears, but let us not erase the memory of God's lovingkindness to us.

8. *O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.*

You may not only believe that God is good, but it may become a matter of experience with you: "O taste and see that the Lord is good." You cannot see the goodness of God to perfection without tasting it, so use the sense of taste as well as that of sight. Some people want first to see, and then to taste, but David says, "Taste and see."

9, 10. *O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack,-*

They are strong, cunning, ravenous, yet they "do lack," —

10. *And suffer hunger:*

They try to take care of themselves, and therefore they get badly taken care of.

10. *But they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.*

When God takes care of us, we are well taken care of, though we are not lions, but sheep; for we have a Shepherd, and the lions have not, so we "shall not want any good thing."

11. *Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*

I should not wonder but that, when David played the madman, and scabbled on the doors of the gate, the children in the streets gathered round him, and mocked him. Wherever we have done harm to any, let us try to do them good. So did David; he sought to gather the children about his knees, and to talk to them: "Come, ye children." He does not begin by saying, "Stand off, ye children."

There would be no teaching them in that way; you must seek to draw them to yourselves if you would draw them to your Lord. “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.” Though David had been anointed king, he remained a teacher of children, and the highest honour we can have is, for Christ’s sake, to teach the little ones. Children love bright, happy teaching; they naturally desire life and happiness; so David begins:-

12, 13. *What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.*

Children’s tongues are very active, and they need to be reminded that their tongues must be sanctified or they will say what is evil. David had both spoken and acted with guile at the court of Achish, so he particularly dwelt upon that matter. “Depart from evil,” — run away from it; not merely do not do it, but get away from it: “Depart from evil, and do good.”

15. *The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous,*

He does not merely give a glance at them now and then, but his eyes rest on them, he is always watching them.

15. *And his ears are open unto their cry.*

The translators put in the words “are open,” but they were not needed.

16. *The face of the LORD is against them that do evil,-*

You know what we mean when we say, “I set my face against it.” So God sets his face against the wicked. Note how near both the righteous and the wicked are to an observing God. In the first case, his eyes are upon the righteous; in the second, his face “is against them that do evil,” —

16. *To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.*

He will stamp them out as men do with fire. He will not even let them be remembered; he will take means to ensure that their unholy example shall die with them.

17. *The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.*

That is something to teach the children, teach them from your own experience, that God does hear and answer prayer; teach them to pray to God always, and to believe that prayer has real and

beneficial results: “The Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.”

18. *The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

We often hear of people who die of a broken heart; but here we read about people who live with a broken heart, and it is the best way of living too, with a heart that is broken for sin, and broken from sin, a heart that in every portion of it feels the power of God.

19. *Many are the afflictions of the righteous:-*

Do not tell the children that the good are always happy, and that the good escape trial, because you will deceive them if you do. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous,” — the happiness, the glory, the heaven of the righteous is not here, but hereafter. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous”:-

19. *But-*

Blessed “but” —

19. *The LORD delivereth him out of them all.*

Not only out of some of them, but “out of them all.” The righteous do not get out of them by their own power, but the Lord delivereth them; they have a Divine Helper.

20. *He keepeth all his bones. Not one of them is broken.*

The righteous may have skin wounds, and flesh wounds, but they shall not suffer any real hurt. God will not let his people be so injured as to be incapable of holiness. There shall be no bone-breaking in Christ’s mystical body, even as not one of the bones of Christ was broken.

21. *Evil shall slay the wicked:*

Sin itself shall slaughter them.

21, 22. *And they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.*

PSALM 34

1 *I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

What a sweet resolve! Oh, that every one of us who knows the Lord would make that resolve, and keep it all our days: “I will bless

the Lord at all times;” in dark times and bright times, as long as ever I live. “His praise shall continually be in my mouth;” that is the most delightful mouthful that a man can possibly have.

2. *My soul shall make her boast in the LORD:*

We do not like boasters, but we would encourage every child of God to boast in the Lord as much as he pleases.

2. *The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.*

There is nothing that humble people dislike more than to hear others boasting: yet there is nothing that they like more than to hear anyone boast in the Lord.

3. *O magnify the LORD with me-*

There is a sweet contagion about the praise of God, we want others to help us to spread it everywhere, so we say, with David, “O magnify the Lord with me,” —

3-4. *And let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.*

There is nothing that is so effective as personal testimony to the Lord’s saving power. How often is the skill of a physician commended by the grateful testimony of the patients who have been healed by him! So, shall not the prayer-hearing God be commended by those of us who have had our prayers answered by him? Let us not be slow to say, “I sought the Lord and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.”

5. *They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.*

“They looked unto him,” — a whole army of them, an innumerable company, — “They looked unto him and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.” There never was a face that was ashamed of being turned Christward and Godward.

6. *This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.*

Here David speaks of himself again, but he refers to himself in the third person: “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.”

7. *The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.*

The great Angel of the covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, surrounds with his army the dwellings of the saints, and takes care to have them in safe keeping.

8-10. *O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the LORD, ye his saints; For there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.*

We are often in want because we are not seeking the Lord, but are seeking what we think we want, whereas, if we sought him, and left the supply of our wants to him, he would supply all our need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Christ's command is, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Men think that they will not get what they want except they seek it, but if they seek God, he will give them what they really need even if he does not give them all that they want.

11. *Come, ye children, hearken unto me: —*

This man of God has made his confession to the saints, and now he tells it out to the children. There is nothing like working on material that will last, and those who are now children will most of them be alive when those who are now old men are dead and gone. So David says, "Come ye children, hearken unto me:" —

11-13. *I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.*

There is life or death in the human tongue; there is life in the tongue that is under subjection to the will of God, there is death, there is mischief of all sorts, in a wild ungoverned tongue.

14. *Depart from evil, and do good;*

Get away from evil as far as you can; that is the negative side. Do good, that is the positive side of piety. He who obeys these two commands shall find happiness and blessing.

14. *Seek peace, and pursue it.*

Do not be of an angry, irritable, quarrelsome frame of mind. If you do not at once find peace, seek it; and if it runs away from you, pursue it until you overtake it. Remember that it is the meek who shall inherit the earth, and that it is the peaceful spirit that is the happiest spirit.

15. *The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.*

He gives them his eyes and his ears, and this means that he gives them himself, and that he is ever ready to perceive their needs, and to hear their cries.

16. *The face of the LORD is against them that do evil,*

He sets his face against them, and this means that he is himself eternally opposed to all their wicked ways.

16, 17. *To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.*

Not only out of some of them, but out of all of them. It is often a very long “all.” The list of their troubles is often difficult to read through but in due time there comes a “finis” to it written by the hand of divine mercy: “The Lord delivereth them out of all their troubles.”

18. *The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

Not your proud spirits, not your hectoring ones; but your lowly, penitent souls are the ones that are dear unto the heart of God, he is nigh unto them, and saveth them.

19, 20. *Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all. He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.*

He will have many a flesh wound, but there shall be no permanent injury to him; and even though his body were diseased, his soul would be saved.

21, 22. *Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants:*

Great as the price is, he pays it; they are so precious to him that he minds not what price he pays so that he may redeem the souls of his servants.

22. *And none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.*

Blessed be his holy name!

PSALM 34

“A psalm of David when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.” It was a very painful exhibition, and one in which David does not shine but in which, nevertheless, the providence and grace of God are very conspicuous, and it is very pleasant to find a man of God penning such words as these after his escape.

1. *I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

After any very great deliverance we feel prompted to special gratitude, and it appears to us as if we never should leave off praising God. I wish that perpetuity were real, but, alas! it often happens that the next cloud that sweeps the skies brings back our doubting, and our fearing, and our song is over. It ought not so to be. Our heart's resolve should be, “I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”

2. *My soul shall make her boast in the LORD:*

What is there else to boast about? But what a proper subject for boasting the Lord is, because it is legitimate boasting? We can never exaggerate — we can never speak too well or think too well — of God. He is high above our thoughts, when they are at the best, so that we may make them as big as we may, and we shall never be guilty of extravagance here.

2. *The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.*

Humble souls cannot, generally, endure boasting, but boasting in God is very sweet to them. He that will make God great will always be a choice favorite with a broken spirit. Those that are little in themselves delight to hear of the glory of God.

3. *O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.*

It is too grand a theme for one. One little heart can scarcely feel it all. One feeble tongue cannot tell it out. Come, then, ye saints that know his name, magnify the Lord with me.

4. *I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.*

Blessed be his name for this. Are there not many of you, dear friends, who can bear the same testimony — personal proof of a prayer-hearing God? You tried him, for you sought him. You tried

him, and you found him true, for he delivered you from all your fears.

5. *They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.*

Only a look, and their burden was gone. Only a look! What great things hang on little things! Faith is but a look, yet it brings life, pardon, salvation. Heaven comes that way. Only a look!

6, 7. *This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.*

The angel of the Lord does not merely come to help his people, but he stays with them. He encampeth. He has pitched his tent, for he means to tarry. The guardians of God forsake not their charge. They encamp about them that fear him, for their deliverance.

8. *O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.*

It is the grandest of benedictions. It is the sum and substance of the gospel. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in him." By the way of works we are cursed but by the way of believing we are blest. Are you trusting? Dear heart, are you trusting? Is it a feeble trust? Are you often much tried and distressed? Yet if you are trusting, you are blessed. God pronounces you so; and do not let your faith waver about it, or suffer the Devil to tell you that you are accursed, for you cannot be. You are blessed.

9. *O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.*

Sometimes their wishes are not granted, but there is no real want. They shall have all necessaries, if they do not have all luxuries.

10. *The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger:*

Strong as they are, and crafty as they are, they howl, because of their hunger, sometimes.

10. *But they that seek the LORD*

Though they have no craft, and no courage, and no strength, and no foresight.

10. *Shall not want any good thing.*

Plead that, tried child of God. Plead it: plead it. If you are in want tonight — if you are in any form of need — plead this gracious word.

11. *Come, ye children hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*

A Sunday School teacher's text. Gather the children close to you. Say, "Come near me. I would be familiar with you." It was a king who spoke these words, and yet he delighted to say, "Come ye children." Win their attention. "Hearken unto me." If they do not hear, how shall they understand? "And I will teach you the fear of the Lord." That is your subject — pure religion — heart religion — spiritual religion. I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

12. *What man is he that desireth life,*

What man is he that does not desire life? Love of it is innate in us all.

12, 13. *And loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile.*

He begins with one of the hardest practical duties of the fear of God for he that bridleth his tongue is able also be bridle the whole body. The tongue is such an unruly member that if that be kept — and only through grace can it be so — then we may be quite certain that all the other organs and faculties will be kept, too.

14. *Depart from evil and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.*

A great deal packed away into a small compass there. There is the negative "Depart from evil," and the positive which must go with it, "Do good." And if you do not do good, you will soon do evil. And then there is that blessed precept "Seek peace." Hunt after it, if you cannot spy it out, and if it runs away from you, follow it — pursue it — hunt after it till you gain it. A peaceable life is a happy life.

15. *The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous,*

He watches them. He loves them too well to let them ever be out of his sight. He views them with complacency. He regards them with affection. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous.

15. *And his ears are open unto their cry.*

Ready to hear their feeblest prayer — the cry of their pain — their distress. His ears are always open.

16. *The face of the LORD is against them that do evil,*

Sets his face against them.

16-17. *To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.*

Here is an explanation of the experience of the believer — first, prayer; then God’s bearing, and then deliverance. Who would not pray who has found prayer to be so effectual with God

18, 19. *The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.*

The first line seemed to have something terrible in it: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous”, but there is a blessed “but” that comes in —thrown like the tree into Marah’s bitter stream to sweeten it all.

20, 21. *He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked:*

Their own evil shall be their destruction. They need nothing more than to be suffered to go on in sin. Sin is hell. The fire of corruption is the fire of perdition. Evil shall slay the wicked.

21, 23. *And they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.*

How grandly does David preach the gospel! We need not look to Paul to learn salvation by faith. The Psalms are full of it. We have had it just before. “Blessed is the man that trusteth in him”; and now, again, “None of them that trust in him shall be desolate.” They are sinful, but they shall not be desolate. They often feel as if they were utterly unworthy, but they shall not be desolate. They are, sometimes downcast, but they shall not be desolate. They may be hunted by trials, and afflictions, and temptations of the Devil, but they shall not be desolate. They may come to the bed of pain, and to the chamber of death, but they shall not be desolate. They shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ, but they shall not be desolate not one of them, for it is written, “None of them that trust in him shall be desolate.”

PSALM 34

1. *I will bless the LORD at all times:*

“At dark times, and bright times when I am alone, and when I am in company; when I feel like doing it and when I do not feel like doing it: ‘I will bless the Lord at all times.’”

1. *His praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

“I will not only feel it in my heart, but I will give expression to it with my mouth. Those who do not care for this blessed employment may leave it alone; but as for me, ‘his praise shall continually be in my mouth.’”

2. *My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.*

“I will ride the high horse when I begin to talk of the goodness of God: ‘My soul shall make her boast in the Lord;’ and whereas boasters are generally very vexatious to humble-minded people, this kind of boasting shall please them: ‘the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.’”

3. *O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.*

Come, my brethren and sisters, I cannot perform this happy service alone; it is too much for me all by myself. This bunch of grapes is too heavy to be carried by one. “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.”

4. *I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.*

Should not the prayer-hearing God be praised? If he hears the cries of his people, should he not also hear the praises of his people? It is not one only to whom God has thus listened, but many can say with the psalmist, “I sought the Lord, and he heard me.”

5, 6. *They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.*

It is God’s delight to hear the cry of poor men. Sometimes, he passes by the rich and great, and gives heed to the poor and desolate. It is our need that has the loudest cry with God; if our necessities are urgent, our prayer will be powerful.

7. *The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.*

God’s children are always attended like princes, legions of angels form their body-guard. The angel of the Lord, and companies

of holy angels with him, pitch their celestial tents round about them that fear God.

8. *O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.*

Do try him, dear friends, and prove for yourselves how good and gracious he is: “O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”

“Oh, make but trial of his love;
Experience will decide
How blest are they, and only they,
Who in his truth confide!”

9. *O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.*

He will supply all their wants. You need not fear for anything else when once you fear God.

10. *The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger:*

They are strong, and fierce, and crafty, and unscrupulous, yet still they suffer hunger: —

10. *But they that seek the LORD; shall not want any good thing.*

Though they be neither cruel, nor cunning, nor strong, “they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” What a promise for you to plead in prayer, dear friends! If you are in any need, do not hesitate, but by an act of faith take this gracious word, and plead it with the promise-keeping God: “Hast thou not said that, ‘they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing’? Then, Lord, do as thou hast said.”

11-13. *Come, ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.*

He who can manage his tongue can manage his whole body; for the tongue is the rudder of the ship, and if that be properly held, the vessel will be rightly steered. If thou wouldst escape the quicksands and the rocks, look well to thy tongue; keep it from evil, that it speak neither blasphemy against God nor slander against thy fellow men; and keep thy lips from guile, that is, from deceit, from double meanings, from saying one thing and meaning another, or making other people think that you mean another, — an art all too well

understood in these days. God make us plain-speaking men, who say what we mean, and mean what we say! When, by the grace of God, we are taught to do this, we have learnt a good lesson.

14. *Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.*

If it runs away from you, run after it. Never run into or after a quarrel, but always run after peace: "Seek peace, and pursue it."

15. *The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.*

The Lord is always watching them, and he is always listening that he may hear everything they say, especially when they cry unto him.

16. *The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.*

He will not only destroy the wicked, but he will blot out the very memory of them. They may become great and famous in their wickedness, but they shall not be kept in memory, as the righteous are. As Solomon says, "The name of the wicked shall rot."

17, 18. *The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

Men do not care for broken hearts, but God does. "Give me a sound heart and a brave heart," says man. "Give me a broken and a contrite heart," says the Lord. If you have such a heart as that, be not afraid to draw near to your God, through Jesus Christ, for he is already nigh unto you.

19. *Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.*

Many who read this verse admit that the first part of it is true: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." Yes, but the latter clause is also true: "but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Do not omit either portion of the passage, for one part is as true as the other.

20. *He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.*

God's people shall suffer no real, lasting, vital injury. You may have flesh wounds, but as to the bones of your spirit, as it were, the solid part of it, "not one of them is broken."

21. *Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.*

They shall want nothing else to make an end of them but their own sins:

“Evil shall slay the wicked.”

22. *The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.*

Now we are going to read the last chapter of the Book of the prophet Hosea, the first of the minor prophets.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 34; AND HOSEA 14.

PSALM 34:1-20

1. *I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

“Others may do what they please, and murmur, and complain, and be filled with dread and apprehension of the future; but I will bless the Lord at all times. I can always see something for which I ought to bless him. I can always see some good which will come out of blessing him. Therefore will I bless him at all times. And this.” says the Psalmist, “I will not only do in my heart, but I will do it with my tongue His praise shall continually be in my mouth,” that others may hear it, that others may begin to praise him, too, for murmuring is contagious, and so, thank God is praise; and one man may learn from another — take the catchword and the keyword out of another man’s mouth, and then begin to praise God with him. “His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” What a blessed mouthful! If some people had God’s praises in their mouths, they would not so often have fault-finding with their fellow men. “If half the breath thus vainly spent” in finding fault with our fellow-Christians were spent in prayer and praise, how much happier, how much richer, we should be spiritually! “His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”

2. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof and be glad. Boasting is generally annoying. Even those that boast themselves cannot endure that other people should boast. But there is one kind of boasting that even the humble can bear to hear — -nay they are glad to hear it. “The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.” That must be boasting in God — a holy glorying and extolling the Most High with words sought out with care that might magnify his blessed name. You will never exaggerate when you speak good things of God. It is not possible to do so. Try, dear

brethren, end even boast in the Lord. There are many poor, trembling, doubting, humble souls that can hardly tell whether they are the Lord's people or not, and are half afraid whether they shall be delivered in the hour of trouble, that will become comforted when they hear you boasting. "The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad." "Why," says the humble soul, "God that helped that man can help me. He that brought him up through the deep waters, and landed him safely, can also take me through the river and through the sea, and give me final deliverance. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord. The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad."

3. *O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.*

He cannot do enough of it himself. He wants others to come in and help him. First, he charges his own heart with the weighty and blessed business of praising God, and then he invites all around to unite with him in the sacred effort. "Magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together."

4. *I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.*

That was David's testimony. That is mine. Brother, that is yours. Is it not? Sister, is not that yours too? Well, if you have such a blessed testimony, be sure to bear it. Often do you whisper it in the mourner's ear, "I sought the Lord. and he heard me." Tell it in the scoffer's ear. When he says, "There is no God," and that prayer is useless, say to him, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." it is a pity that such a sweet encouraging profitable testimony should be kept back. Be sure at all proper times to make it known. But it is not merely ourselves. There are others who can speak well of God.

5. *They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.*

And who were they? Why, all the people of God — the whole company of the saints in heaven, and the saints on earth. It can be said of them all, "They looked to him, and were lightened." As there is life in a look, so is there light in a look. Oh! you that looked to Christ and lived at first. Look to him again, if it is dark with you tonight, and speedily it shall be light round about you. "They looked unto him, and were lightened."

6. *This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.*

Who was he? He was a poor man — any poor man — nothing very particular about him, but he was poor — a poor man. What did he do? He cried. That was the style of praying he adopted — as a child cries — the natural expression of pain. Poor man, he did not know how to pray a fine prayer, and he could not have preached you a sermon if you had given him a bishop's salary for it; but he cried. He could do that. You do not need to go to the Board School to learn how to cry. Any living child can cry. This poor man cried. What came of it? "The Lord heard him." I do not suppose anybody else did; or if they did, they laughed at it. But it did not signify to him. The Lord heard him. And what came of that? He "saved him out of all his troubles." Oh! is there a poor man here tonight in trouble! Had he not better copy the example of this other poor man? Let him cry to the Lord about it. Let him come and bring his burdens before the great One who hears poor men's prayers. And, no doubt, that poor man lived to tell the same tale as he who wrote this verse. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard and saved him out of all his troubles."

7. *The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.*

It is no wonder, then, that they are delivered, for the angels are always handy. They are waiting round about God's people. Lo, they are not at a distance to fly swiftly and come for our rescue, but God has set a camp of angels round about all his people. Are we not royally attended? What a portion is ours! Many are they that be against us, but glorious are they that be for us, both in their number and their strength. But the text does not intend so mush-the angels, as one blessed, glorious, covenant angel — the angel of the Lord, the messenger of God. He it is that holds his camp hard by his people, and sends his messengers for their rescue in all times of difficulty.

8. *O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.*

That is the language of experience. Some of us have lived by trusting God for many years, and, instead of growing weary of it, we would invite others to do the same. Oh! taste and see that the Lord is good. You cannot know his goodness without tasting it. But there

was never a soul yet that did taste of the goodness of the Lord but what could bear cheerful testimony that it were even so. “Oh! taste and see.” Partake of it. Become practically acquainted with it. Trust God yourselves, and none of you shall ever have to complain of God. To your latest hour you will have to find fault with yourselves, but never once will you have to accuse of changeableness, or of unfaithfulness, or even of forgetfulness. “Oh! taste and see that the Lord is good, for blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”

9, 10. *O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.*

They are very strong, those young lions. They are fierce. They are rapacious. They are cunning. And yet they do lack and suffer hunger. And there are many men in this world that are very clever, strong in body, and active in mind. They say that they can take care of themselves, and perhaps they do appear to prosper; but we know that often they who are the most prosperous apparently are the most miserable of men. They are young lions, but they do lack and suffer hunger. But when a man's soul lives upon God, he may have very little of this world, but he will be perfectly content. He has learned the secret of true happiness. He does not want any good thing, for the things that he does not have he does not wish to have. He brings his mind down to his estate, if he cannot bring his estate to his mind. He is thankful to have a little spending money on the road, for his treasure is above. He likes to have his best things last, and so he is well content, if he has food and raiment, to urge on his way to the rest which remaineth for the people of God. “The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.”

11. *Come, ye children,*

Ye that are beginning life — you that want to know where true happiness is found

11. *Hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*

It is that which you want to know, beyond everything else.

12, 13. *What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.*

He that can rule his tongue can rule his whole body. Alas! that unruly member destroys peace and happiness in thousands of cases. The tongue can no man tame, but the grace of God can tame it; and that man begins life with a prospect of happiness whose tongue has been tamed by grace.

14. *Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.*

True happiness is found in true holiness. "Depart from evil." That is, do not go after it. But it is much more than that. Go away from it. Give it a wide berth. "Depart from evil." But be not satisfied with the negatives. It is not enough to say, "I do not do any evil," but do good. The only way to keep out the evil is to fill the soul full of good. We must be active in the cause of God, or Satan will soon move us into sin. "Depart from evil and do good." "Seek peace." Be of a quiet turn of mind. Be always ready to forgive. "Seek peace and pursue it." That is, when it runs away, run after it. Make up your mind that you will have it. There are some that seek quarrels, There are some that seek revenge. As for you, seek peace and pursue it.

15. *The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto heir cry.*

God is all eye and all ear, and all his eye and all his ear are for his people.

Are you distressed in heart? God sees your distress. Are you crying in secret in the bitterness of your soul? God hears your cry. You are not alone. O lonely spirit, broken spirit, be not dismayed; be not given to despair. God is with you. If he sees nothing else, he will see you. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous." And if he hears no one else in the world, he will hear you "His ears are open to their cry."

16. *The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.*

You know what we say sometimes. "I set my face against such a thing as that." Now God sets his face against them that do evil. You will come to an end, my friend. Your happiness, like a bubble painted with rainbow colors, may be the object of foolish desires; but in a little while it will burst and be gone, as the bubble is, and there will be nothing left of you. Even your remembrance will be wiped out from the face of the earth. What numbers of books have been written against God of which you could not gets copy now,

except you went to a museum! What numbers of men have lived that have been scoffers; and they had great names amongst the circles of unbelievers, but they are quite forgotten now! But the Christian Church treasures up names of poor, simple-hearted Christian men and women — treasures them up like jewels, and their fame is fresh after hundreds of years.

17. *The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.*

That is how we live, if you want to know. God makes us righteous, and then we cry. We often praise him. We desire to have our mouth full of it. But we cry as well, and whenever we cry God hears, and our troubles are removed.

18. *The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

Are you here tonight, poor weeping Mary? Are you here, brokenhearted, troubled sinner? Are you here? Are you seeking the Lord? Do not seek him any longer. You have got him. Read the text, “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart.” He is with you now. Speak to him; cry to him; trust him. You shall find deliverance this night.

19. *Many are the afflictions of the righteous:*

You should hear some of them talk, and you would soon know that; for I know some of the righteous that seldom talk of anything else. “Oh! the badness of trade!” They have been losing money — oh! ever since I knew them. They had not any when they started, but they have gone on losing money every year; and I believe they always will. And they always have pains of body. The weather is so bad. And they always have ungrateful friends. And the church they belong to is not up to the mark. Indeed, there is nothing around them that is right. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous.”

Well now, dear brethren, as that is recorded in God’s Word, and most of us have a pretty good acquaintance with that subject, I do not think that it is necessary for all of us to insist upon it every day. Could not we go on to the next part of the verse? “Many are the afflictions of the righteous,” but — but —

19. *But the LORD delivereth him out of them all.*

Not out of some of them, but out of them all, however numerous they may be.

20. *He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.*

He sustains no real injury. He gets flesh wounds and bruises, but his bones are not broken. That is to say, the substantial part of his nature is well kept and preserved.

PSALM 37

It may be, beloved friends, that there is a word of comfort for some of you in this "Psalm of David." If any of you have been perplexed and worried, and there has been a stern conflict within your spirit, here are some cheering words which will bring a message from God to you. It may be worth your while to remember that the 37th Psalm and the 73rd are upon the same subject. They are the same figures reversed, but they both deal with the great mystery which has vexed the hearts of godly men in all generations.

1, 2. *Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.*

What a contrast there is between the grass before the mower comes with his scythe, and that same grass when it is cut down; and there is the same kind of difference between the glory of ungodly men at one moment and their destruction the next. How beautiful the fertile mead appears before you with its many-colored flowers, yet in how short a time all its beauties are cut down, and withered in the sun!

3, 4. *Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*

The psalmist begins with "Fret not thyself, . . . neither be thou envious;" but he advances to something higher. He seeks to lead his hearer or reader up to "trust in the Lord," and then still further up to "delight in the Lord." A Christian should constantly be on the rising scale; though he is ever in the way of change, it should be a change for the better. Take care, dear friends, that you are people of simple trust: "Trust in the Lord;" and then you shall advance to delight in him: "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

5, 6. *Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.*

It may be very dark with you just now, but God will turn your midnight into noonday. It is only he who can do it, therefore be sure to commit your way unto him; “trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.”

7. Rest in the LORD, —

Not only rest on him, but rest in him, get into such close fellowship with him that you do really “rest in the Lord,” —

7, 8. *And wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.*

It is fretting that leads to anger and all manner of evil; but when the heart truly rests in God, it forsakes wrath. When we get away from resting in the Lord, we soon drift out upon a very stormy sea, where our poor little skiffs are not able to hold their own; therefore is it most needful for us to obey the injunction, “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.”

9, 10. *For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.*

The very house he inhabited, the grand estate which he called his own, shall be called by the name of another owner, and he shall be blotted out of remembrance.

11-15. *But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.*

They were so eager “to cast down the poor and needy” that they used both sword and bow against them, yet they could not succeed in their evil designs; for God took care of his own people, and therefore the psalmist was able to say concerning their enemies, “Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.”

16. *A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.*

“Many wicked.” That is a strong expression; the psalmist does not merely mention the riches of one wicked man, but he says, “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.”

17. *For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous.*

He keeps on upholding them. He holds them up, and in another sense he lifts them up on high, and holds them up near to himself in the glorious sunshine of fellowship with him.

18. *The LORD knoweth the days of the upright:*

He is well acquainted with their bright days and their dark days. He keeps a diary of all their ever-changing experiences: “The Lord knoweth the days of the upright”: —

18. *And their inheritance shall be for ever.*

There is a necessity upon covenant blessings, which ensures their enjoyment by all the chosen seed, and they shall never be taken from them: “Their inheritance shall be for ever.”

19. *They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.*

They shall not only get, as we say, “a sup and a bite,” but “they shall be satisfied,” and that even “in the days of famine,” when other people starve. They are well fed whom God feeds; there is no table like the one furnished and supplied by Omnipotence. He who is infinite in resources can readily supply all our necessities.

20, 21. *But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous showeth mercy, and giveth.*

He prefers to do that rather than to lend; it generally comes to the same thing in the long run, and he may as well know from the first what he is really doing: “The righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth.”

22, 23. *For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.*

What a beautiful expression that is, “the steps of a good man” — the very steps, the little things, the daily actions, the ordinary progress of a good man, — “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way.” Our way is sometimes rough, but if God takes a delight in it, it must be right. It is a joy to us to know that the lives of godly men are delightful to the Most High.

24. *Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.*

There may be a stumble, or even a fall, and he will grieve over it; he may suffer great losses, and he may think that there is an end to his mercies, but it shall not be so. God’s servants are like the sheep; they may fall many times, but they are soon up again. Hypocrites are like the swine; when they fall, they wallow in the mire, which is their congenial element.

25. *I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*

David had not seen the seed of the righteous begging bread, but we have often seen it; for, when the seed of the righteous do not behave themselves aright, they have to suffer poverty as well as other people. But, under the old covenant, David could truly say that he had not seen this grievous sight. Yet many of us could go as far as David did in the first part of the verse: “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken.” No, that shall never be the case; and it is a very singular circumstance, which they who have to distribute charity have often noticed, how seldom, comparatively, do they find godly people very greatly reduced. Somehow or other, God does provide for them. The trouble we have with our Orphanages is to find the orphans of godly men and women, for they are very few compared with those of other people, You may look over any list you like, and you shall find that very seldom are the saints reduced to absolute poverty. Yet, when poverty does come, and it does come to some of the very best of men and women, then God blesses it to them, and bears them up beneath it, so that they do not really lack any good thing. As for the gracious man, —

26-37. *He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed. Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. For the*

LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide. The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him. The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged. Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.

When you come to sum up the whole of his life, the total of it amounts to this, — “peace.” After all his varied experiences, God did give him rest; and with all the turmoil and tossing which came upon him occasionally, still he was a man to be envied. It is the end to which we must always look, after all; and concerning the perfect and upright man the psalmist says, “the end of that man is peace.”

38, 39. *But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD:*

It is not the result of their own goodness or merit; but it is wholly “of the Lord.” Righteous men are saved men because the Lord saves them by his grace, and that is where they put their confidence.

39. *He is their strength in the time of trouble.*

Dwell on that sweet short sentence. Not only does the Lord give them strength, but he himself “is their strength in the time of trouble.” He is so near to his people that all the omnipotence of his Godhead is theirs. Are you in trouble just now, dear child of God? Well, you have strength enough to carry you through it all if this be true, as it is “He is their strength in the time of trouble.” If God himself is your strength, do not talk about being weak; of course you are weakness itself apart from him, do not expect to be anything other than that; but then remember the psalmist’s declaration, “He is their strength in the time of trouble.”

40. *And the LORD shall help them, —*

Do you want anything more than this great promise? You have a heavy load to carry, but it is nothing to him who is omnipotent: "The Lord shall help them," —

40. *And deliver them:*

He shall help them while they are in the trouble, and bring them out of it in due time.

40. *He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.*

O dear friends, lean hard upon God! Lay down all your burdens at your Saviour's feet, and rest there in holy and happy confidence in him. May the Lord give to all of us the grace to enjoy this sweet rest, for his dear Son's sake. Amen.

PSALM 37

This is one of the Psalms of David which have often cheered the saints of God when they have been perplexed because of the prosperity of the wicked and their own troubles.

1, 2. *Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.*

What if their lot be sweet? Yet consider how short it is. No wise man envies the bullock which is being fattened, for he knows that it is being fattened for the slaughter. None will envy the ungodly their pleasures when they remember how transient they must be. Let them have them and I would urge all Christians to do their best to make the ungodly happy. This is the only happy time they can ever have unless they repent, and turn to the Lord so do not make them unhappy, but contribute all you can to the little bliss they ever will know, for it will soon be over. Certainly, if you are a child of God, you have no chance to envy them.

3, 4. *Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee like desires of thine heart.*

Here is a duty which is as much a pleasure as it is a duty, nay, it is even more a pleasure than a duty: "Delight thyself also in the Lord." Here is a commandment to be happy in the safest conceivable way. Of all delights, the most delicious is delight in God, and to this we are commended. But what a privilege is that

which is annexed to it: "He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Why is this? Because, when you delight in God, your desires will be such as he can safely grant. Delighting in him, you will only desire that which is for this glory; and then, without any restrictions he may promise to you, and give to you the desires of your heart.

5. *Commit thy way unto the LORD;*

Blindly, yet believingly, put your hand into his hand, and follow wherever he may lead you.

5-7. *Trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, —*

Oh, what sweet precepts these are! — easier to read and to hear than they are to practice; yet, if grace be given to us, we shall find them blessedly easy to practice. Surely, if it is easy to rest anywhere, it must be easy to "rest in the Lord." There is no such resting place anywhere else, like that where omnipotence and eternal love are sweetly joined together: "Rest in the Lord," —

7-9. *And wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.*

I do believe that, in a right sense, the child of God does get the best of both worlds. He may not get, in this world, what ungodly men think the best; and as far as worldly good is concerned, he often gets the worst there; but God makes his dinner of herbs to be sweeter to him than the stalled ox is to the wicked. If I knew that I should die like a dog, I would still wish to be a Christian. If there were no hereafter, no world to come, and even if my lot, judged after the manner of men, should be of all men's most miserable, yet, to have had God to be my Friend here would have turned even that misery into happiness.

"O God of love, how blest are they Who in thy ways delight!
Thy presence guides them all the day And cheers them all the
night."

10. *For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.*

How often even the place where he lived — his house, — becomes a ruin. The very palace where the tyrant dwelt is burnt down, or destroyed in some other way.

11. *But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.*

There is a great fulfillment of that prophecy yet to come in the latter days, but it is fulfilled even now. Who does not see that the man who really enjoys life, and enjoys the world, is, after all, the meek, humble-minded Christian man? That shepherd of Salisbury Plain, of whom we used to read in our childhood, when he was asked what he thought of the weather, said it was good weather, for God sent it; and any sort of weather pleased him if it pleased God. Anybody can see that a man of that kind is in a healthy state, and that he inherits the earth, and possesses far more of what is worth having — namely, ease and peace of mind, — than the owner of broad acres who has no true rest of heart in the Lord.

12-19. *The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall he broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous. The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.*

Let me read that nineteenth verse again, so that any child of God here, who is in great straits, may be able to lay hold upon it: “They shall not be ashamed in the evil time; and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.”

20-25. *But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast*

down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

We have often remarked here that we also, though we are not old, have never seen the righteous forsaken, and we do not think that the oldest man or woman here has ever seen the righteous forsaken. David says that he had not seen the seed of the righteous begging bread. Well, he was a king, so he was not likely to see very many poor people; but we have several times seen the seed of the righteous begging bread. It is not a common thing, but we have seen it; and when the seed of the righteous misbehave themselves, — when they disgrace their father's name, — they will have to beg bread the same as other people's children do. They will come to poverty through idleness and drink just as other people do. And it has been my unhappy lot, within these very walls, to have to minister relief to the unworthy and reprobate sons of Christian ministers, about whose piety I could entertain no doubt, and some of whom, are now in heaven. These good men's children have walked contrary to God, so God has walked contrary to them. I have often hoped that the poverty I saw might be the means of bringing them to seek the God of their fathers! You, who fear the Lord may depend upon this, — if the Lord helps you to train up your children aright, he will take care of them. If they are truly the seed of the righteous by being themselves righteous, your children shall not beg bread, for the Lord will provide for them; and you will find that God always takes care of the children of those who faithfully serve him. He seems to say to then, "You mind my business, and I will mind your business. If you look after my children, I will look after yours." If we serve the Lord with all our hearts, we may fairly reckon that the God of the fathers will be the God of the children.

26-40. *He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed. Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide. The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him. The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when*

he is judged. Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them; and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.

PSALM 37

1. *Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.*

They often seem to have the best of it in this life; but if it really is so, we must never forget that there is another life after this, in which there will be no reason for the righteous to be envious of evildoers and workers of iniquity.

2. *For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.*

It is very easy to cut down the grass with a sharp scythe; and when death takes down his scythe, and cuts down men as the mower cuts down the grass of the field, they fall, rank upon rank, to “wither as the green herb.”

3. *Trust in the LORD, and do good; —*

These are two good things to go together, faith and good works: “Trust in the Lord, and do good;” —

3. *So shalt thou dwell in the land,*

Not merely on earth, but in the land of promise, the land which God has promised to his people. We dwell there by faith even now. Everywhere we find our God; and wherever we find him, it is Emmanuel’s land to us.

3 *And verily thou shalt be fed.*

“Verily, verily,” is Christ’s most solemn affirmation. David here says “verily” because the statement he makes is absolutely true: “Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.”

4. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

When all thine heart's desires are fixed upon him because he is thine heart's delight, then thou mayest give a loose rein to those desires without any fear that they will run away. When thine heart's desires are of this sort, thou shalt have them, be they what they may. It is not every man who shall have the desires of his heart given to him, but only that man whose heart's delight is in his God. There is much in connection with the person praying which will help to decide whether he shall or shall not have his desires granted. What is the condition of the heart out of which the desires come? When the heart is full of delight in the Lord, its desires shall be pleasing in his sight, and shall be granted.

5. Commit thy way unto the LORD;

You who are just now in trouble, you who are walking in a rough way, commit that trouble and that way to the Lord. You who are in difficulty as to what is your right way, commit that difficulty to the Lord. Then, of course, you will not need to keep it yourself, nor to trouble your own head about it. It does not need two to "care" when God is one of the two, so cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you. His grace is amply sufficient for every emergency that can possibly arise, so "commit thy way unto the Lord." You have committed your soul to him; then you can surely commit your business to him, for that is a far inferior thing to your immortal soul.

5. Trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

Thy desire shall be brought to pass. Thy safety shall be brought to pass. Thine everlasting advantage shall be brought to pass. Thy way shall be made passable to thee; thou shalt find thy way to heaven.

6. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

Are you misunderstood, misrepresented, slandered, calumniated? Leave it all with your God. Are you now walking in darkness? Trust in him, and he will bring you out into the light in due time. We do not have morning light in the evening; morning light comes when the morning comes, and your deliverance shall come when it is the right time for you to have it.

7. Rest in the LORD, —

That is a blessed state to reach. Notice the various stages that the psalmist has mentioned. There was first, "Trust and do." Then there was "Delight and have." Then there was "Commit, and have it brought to pass;" and now there is "Rest in the Lord," —

7, 8. *And wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, —*

That comes of fretting, and of being in a hurry, and not resting and being patient; for when the mind is restful, we can bear injuries: "Cease from anger," —

8. *And forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.*

Very often, our proverb is true, "The more haste, the less speed;" and he who is in a hurry often does evil under the notion that it is the shortest way to get good, which it never is, for evil brings forth evil, and that perpetually.

9,10. *For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.*

The very place wherein he stood so high has utterly perished. How many instances there have been of men who have taken great pains to perpetuate their own names, yet their names are forgotten in the very place where they dwelt. God has a way of stamping out evil, and putting an end to it; and when there has been great wickedness in the land, he knows how to make the very name of the wicked to rot.

11-13. *But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming.*

"His day is coming," and what a day it will be! When the day of the wicked shall come, the day of God's righteous vengeance, woe unto him; woe unto him!

14-16. *The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.*

Not of one wicked man only, but of “many wicked.” Fortunes heaped upon fortunes as the result of evil-doing cannot equal the portion of the poorest of God’s saints. A little with a blessing resting upon it is vastly better than much accompanied by a curse.

17. *For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous.*

They would soon fall if they were not upheld; but they shall not fall, for God will make them to stand.

18. *The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: —*

He knows our dark days and our bright days, and all our days that are yet to be as well as all our days that have been. The Lord knows all about all our days.

18. *And their inheritance shall be for ever.*

What they have, if it be really worth having, they shall keep for ever. What God has given them in Christ, because they are his children, shall never be taken away from them, nor shall they be taken away from it: “their inheritance shall be for ever.” Men try to entail their estates, but it is often an unsatisfactory system. Our estates are entailed by God; upon the inheritance of every one of his people there is an inalienable entail.

19. *They shall not be ashamed in the evil time:*

If any shall say to them, “How is it that you are a child of God, and yet you live in such an evil time?” they shall not be ashamed, but they will have an answer ready for them. They will tell them that many righteous men have lived in evil times, but they themselves have not been evil because of that. Where should bright lights be but in a dark place: Where should the salt be but where everything is going to corruption? “They shall not be ashamed in the evil time,” for their God will be their God still; and though everyone else may fail them, their God will not fail them.

19-23. *And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut of. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD:*

Oh, what comfort there is in this blessed assurance! Sometimes we know not which way to move, but we need not lack divine guidance, for there is a special providence which watches over every step of a gracious man. When we are right with God, everything is right with us. If our heart's desire is that we may walk in God's way, then God will take care that the way of his providence shall be made plain to us, and shall be full of love to us.

23. *And he delighteth in his way.*

God delights to watch the way that his children walk, even though their steps may falter and totter, for they are often like little children learning to walk, and usually they are very weak and feeble. Yet, if it is a good man who is walking as he should walk, God "delighteth in his way."

24. *Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.*

He is like a little child who does not yet know how to stand alone, so his mother or nurse holds him up, or picks him up if he falls. God's arms are under his children's arms, as he says by the mouth of the prophet Hosea, "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms." This is how he teaches us also to go, in wondrous condescension taking us by our arms.

25. *I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*

I have been young, and though I am not yet old, I can truly say that I have never seen the righteous forsaken. I have, however, seen the seed of the righteous begging bread. David never saw that sad sight, but then he was a king, so he was not likely to see so many beggars as some of us do; yet, still as a general rule, it remains true that the God of the fathers does provide for their children. Of course, if the seed of the righteous become vicious and profligate, as they sometimes do, drunkenness will clothe them with rags and set them among the beggars of the street just as it would if they were the children of ungodly parents; and it may be mercy on the part of God that it should be so, as it was in the case of the prodigal, who never came to himself until he was in want, and his begging of bread was a blessing to him, for it brought him at last to beg to be received again into his father's household. Still, there are blessings that are meant for us and for our seed also, as Paul and Silas said to

the jailor at Philippi, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

26-27. *He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed. Depart from evil, —*

Do not remain near it, do not even look at it, do not parley with it; run away from it: “Depart from evil,” —

27. *And do good; —*

For you must do something, either good or evil. If you became an idler, even though you had departed from evil, you would not have become what God would have you to be. Negatives must be backed up with positives: “Depart from evil, and do good;” —

27, 28. *And dwell for evermore. For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.*

Not, of course, if they themselves become righteous, for then they come under the covenant of grace, and shall never be cut off.

29-37. *The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide. The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him. The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged. Wait on the LORD, keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.*

He does not wither and vanish, like a gourd of the night. He passeth not away like that phantom baytree which seemed so substantial, but really was not. His end is peace, and “all is well that ends well,” so all is well with him, and blessed is that man’s life which cometh to such a blessed conclusion as this: “the end of that man is peace.”

38, 39. *But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD:*

That is why they are not cut off like the wicked, because God’s salvation is in them. They would pass away, they would be but the

mere dream and phantom that the prosperous wicked ones are; but God himself is in them, and therefore are they solid and substantial, and their salvation is an everlasting salvation.

39, 40 *He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.*

That is the main point: “they trust in him.” One of the descriptions of Abraham is this, “Abraham believed God,” and therefore he had God for his shield and his exceeding great reward. Are you trusting in God dear friends? Are you living a life of faith? Then the walk of faith will be followed, in due time, by the triumph of faith. Blessed are all they that put their trust in the Lord, and blessed for ever shall they be.

PSALM 37

May the Spirit of God graciously apply this Psalm to our hearts, comforting us as no one else can! Is he not the Comforter, and what better cordial has he for our spirits than his own Word?

1, 2. *Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.*

Evil cannot last. It is a feeble plant, like the grass and weeds which the mower’s scythe soon cuts down, and leaves to wither in the blazing sunshine.

3, 4. *Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*

This is a most precious verse, its sweetness who can tell? Do not think first of the desires of thy heart, but think first of delighting thyself in thy God. If thou hast accepted him as thy Lord, he is thine; so delight in him, and then he will give thee the desires of thy heart.

5. *Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.*

Give it over into God’s hands, and then confide in him as completely as a little child confides in its mother. “He shall bring it to pass.” It is quite certain that you cannot “bring it to pass,” so you will be wise if you leave it with him who can do what you cannot.

6. *And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.*

Thou canst not make the light and the noonday; that is a work that is far beyond thy power; but thy God can give thee both light and noonday. He can clear thy character from any slander that may have befouled it, and he can crown thee with honour and glory in place of the contempt that is now cast upon thee.

7. *Rest in the LORD,-*

That is the sweetest word of all: "Rest." Go no further. Fret no more. Bear thy burdens no longer. Make this day a Sabbath to thy soul: "Rest in the Lord,"-And wait patiently for him:-Do not be in a hurry. The Lord has infinite leisure, so partake of it as far as thou canst: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him:"-

7, 8. *Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger,-*

You cannot do that unless you "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." Angry passions fail upon the fire of fretfulness; therefore, "cease from anger,"-

8, 9. *And forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evil doers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.*

Their turn will come in due time. It comes last, but then it comes to last, for there is nothing to come after the last.

10. *For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.*

The house in which he lived, or the place that was called by his name, is often destroyed.

11, 12, *But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. 'The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.-*

That has been the style of things from the beginning, and the old serpent's seed will be like the old serpent, and he "was more subtle than any beast of the field." "The wicked plotteth against the just,"-He plots against the Lord's people, but--

13-18. *The Lord shall laugh at him,"For he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of*

upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous. The LORD knoweth the day of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever.

He gives them an eternal portion by an everlasting covenant.

19. *They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.*

There is nothing that they can get, but God will give them what they cannot get themselves. He will ransack heaven and earth to find food for his people: "In the days of famine they shall be satisfied."

20-23. *But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth, and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off.*

The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD:-Even his "steps"-the little movements of his life,-not only his "rest plans and his ambitious projects, but "the steps of a good man are ordered by Jehovah;"-

23. *And he delighteth in his way.*

He loves to see him walk, even as parents delight to watch the first tottering steps of their little children, so that he, who "taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man," taketh pleasure in the ways of his people.

24. *Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down:-*

For a while, it may seem as if he had been finally defeated; things may seem to go altogether wrong with him; but, "though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down;"-

24, 25. *For the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*

And we also can still speak of the faithfulness of Jehovah. He who took care of his people in David's day has not changed since then. We have not seen the righteous forsaken.

26. *He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed.*

God has a special regard for the children of believers. Grace does not run in the blood, but it often runs side by side with it. The God of Abraham is the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and the God of Joseph, and the God of Manasseh and Ephraim.

27-29. *Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.*

I have frequently remarked to you that, although the wolf is very strong and fierce, and the sheep is very weak and timid, yet there are more sheep in the world than there are wolves; and the day will come when the last wolf will be dead, and then the sheep shall cover the plains and feed upon the hills. Weak as the righteous often are, they “shall inherit the land” when the wicked shall have been out off from the earth.

30. *The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment.*

That which is down in the heart will come up into the mouth, and you may rest assured that men are fairly judged by the common current of their conversation.

31-33. *The law of his God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide. The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him. The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.*

How dreadful it would be for the godly man if the Lord were to leave him in the hand of the wicked! You remember how David sought to avoid that calamity when he had to choose famine, pestilence, or the sword of his enemies. “Let me fall,” said he “into the hand of the Lord, for very great are his mercies; but let me not fall into the hand of man.” Let us thank God that, even if we should get into the hand of the ungodly, the Lord will not leave us there, nor condemn us when we are judged.

34-37. *Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.*

There is no end to that man, for he is to endure world without end. In any sense in which there is an end to him, his end is everlasting peace

38, 39. *But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble.*

Have you not proved it so, dear brethren and sisters in Christ? I know that you have had times of trouble, but has not God been your strength in a very peculiar way in all such times?

40. *And the LORD shall help them,-*

He is and he shall ever be their Helper: "The Lord shall help them,"-

40. *And deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.*

That is the point,-not because of any merit of theirs, nor because of any skill of theirs, but "he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him." So, Lord, help us to trust in thee! Amen

PSALM 37:1-10

1. *Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.*

A common temptation. Many of God's saints have suffered from it. Learn from their experience. Avoid this danger. There really is no power in it, when once the heart has come to rest in God. But it is a sad affliction until the heart does get its rest. "Fret not because of evildoers."

2-4. *For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD;*

Make him thy delight, and take care that thou do really delight. Feel a fullness of joy in him.

4. *And he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*

Because when the heart delights in God, then its desires are all such as God can safely grant. He does not say to every man, or even

to every praying man, "I will give thee the desires of thine heart," but "Delight thyself in the Lord," and then he will.

5. *Commit thy way unto the LORD;*

Give it up to him to rule it, and to guide thee and lead thee in every step.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord."

5, 6. *Trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.*

It is better to trust our character with God than with the ablest counselor. Scandal may pass over a fair name for a while and cloud it, but God is the avenger of all the righteous. There will be a resurrection of reputations, as well as of persons at the last great day. Only we must commit it to God.

7, 8. *Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.*

A fretful spirit soon comes to be an angry spirit, and when we begin to be jealous of evildoers, we are very apt to become evildoers ourselves. Many an honest man has snatched at hasty gain, because he was envious of the prosperity of the unrighteous; and then he has pierced himself through with many sorrows in consequence. But "fret not thyself in any wise to do evil." There is an old proverb that it is hard for an empty sack to stand upright. Therefore, when you are in temporal trouble, ask the Lord to fill you with his grace, for then you will stand upright, and by-and-by you shall be delivered.

9. *For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.*

If there is anything good to be had here, men that wait upon God shall have it. If there is any grain of wheat amidst these heaps of chaff, believers that are trusting the Lord shall find them.

10. *For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be:*

How transient are their joys! Their wealth which they accumulate, the beauty which they think is upon their estate, all this is but as the painted colors of the bubble, which is scarcely seen before it vanishes. Wilt thou envy this? Wilt thou envy a little child his play-toys, which will be broken in an hour? Wilt thou envy a

madman the straw crown which he plaits and puts upon his head when he thinks himself a king? Oh! be not so foolish. Thine inheritance is eternal, and thou art immortal. Why shouldst thou envy the creature of an hour? “For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be.”

10. *Yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place,*

His mansion, his house, the grand figure that he cut in society.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 73; 37:1-10.

PSALM 37:1-18

Let us read tonight part of the thirty-seventh Psalm. David here first of all dissuades himself and us from falling into a very common evil, that of envying the wicked because of their prosperity, and murmuring against God because we, perhaps, are not so highly favored in our earthly affairs.

1, 2. *Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of inequity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.*

No one envies the grass, let it be never so green; no one envies flowers, let them be never so fragrant, for we know that grass must be cut, and that flowers must wither. Let us look upon the wicked in the same light; their time of perishing shall soon come, their end hasteth on apace; therefore, let all envying be out of the question, since they are such short-lived beings.

3. *Trust in the LORD, and do good;*

There you have the secret of the active life of the Christian. The root of his activity lies in his faith: “Trust in the Lord.” The outward manifestation of his inner life is in the good that he does; and where there is this faith, proved to be living faith by good works, there follows the promise, —

3. *So shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.*

It does not say, “Young man, verily thou shalt prosper in business.” It does not say, “O ambitious man, thou shalt dwell in a palace, or revel in luxuries, “but it does say to thee, O humble-minded Christian, trusting in God, “Verily thou shalt be fed.” You know, when the word “Verily” is used, there is something upon which God sets his seal as being true: “Verily thou shalt be fed.” God’s “Verilys” are better than men’s oaths. Believe, then,

Christians and let there be no more fretting about your temporal trials. I know you have come in here tonight very anxious, and vexed with care and grief; take this “Verily”, and lay it, like Isaiah’s lump of figs, upon the boil, and “Verily” you shall soon be healed.

4. *Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*

Delight is a Christian’s duty. To sorrow, to mourn, to despair, — these belong not to the believer: “Delight thyself in the Lord.” Here is a river to swim in, Christians, plunge into it. Here is a bottomless abyss of delights, the person, the grace, the works, the attributes of our covenant God; and here is a promise given to each one of those who carry on this excellent duty, “He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”

5. *Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.*

Put the helm of your ship into the hand of the Almighty Pilot. Leave the guidance of your pilgrimage to him who has led many caravans across the desert aforetime, and who has never suffered any to perish. What an easy way this is; and yet how hard do we find it to carry it out! It is to unload ourselves, and put our burden on our God. Oh, that we had the sanctified common-sense to make us fulfill this duty!

6. *And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.*

Leave your character with God; it is safe there. Men may throw mud at it, but it will never stick long on a true believer; it shall soon come off, and you shall be the more glorious for men’s slander.

7-11. *Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way; because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.*

This is now a gospel blessing, for Christ pronounced it upon the mount among his other benedictions: “Blessed are the meek, for

they shall inherit the earth.” Somehow or other, the only persons who truly enjoy life, and get happiness out of this present vale of tears, are the meek spirits, the men who can say, — “Mine are the valleys, and the mountains mine; my father made them all.” Even the possessions of other men make these people glad. They are like the man we have heard of in China, who met a mandarin covered with jewels, and, bowing to him, said, “Thank you for those jewels.” Doing this many times, at last the mandarin asked the cause of his gratitude. “Well,” said the poor but wise man, “I thank you that you have those jewels, for I have as good a sight of them as you have; but I have not the trouble of wearing them, putting them on in the morning, taking them off at night, and having a watchman keeping guard over them when I am asleep. I thank you for them; they are as much use to me as they are to you.” This meek man can walk along the broad acres of a rich man’s farm, he can see his noble oaks and other forest trees, and he can say, “Thank God for them all! I have as much enjoyment from these as the rich man himself has, for they are mine to enjoy as truly as they are his.” “The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace, “not in the abundance of wealth, but in the abundance of peace. To a meek man, peace is his wealth, and holy quietness and calm his true riches.

12-18. *The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous. The LORD knoweth the way of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever.*

He knows their dark days, and he will be their light; he knows their sunny days, and he will be their shelter; he knows their last day, and he will be their confidence; he knows their resurrection-day, and he will be their glory: “Their inheritance shall be for ever.”

“Go, you that boast in all your stores,
And tell how bright they shine;
Your heaps of glittering dust are yours,

But my Redeemer's mine."

PSALM 37:17-40

17. *For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous.*

They must stand, therefore, for how shall he fall whom God upholds?

18-19. *The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.*

These are bad times now. Everyone complains, and indeed there seems to be abundant cause, for distress is universal. But let us fall back on the promise. "In the days of famine they shall be satisfied."

20-23. *But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.*

There is a mutual delight, you see. If we delight in God, God delights in us. He delights in the conduct of his people. When they walk with him, he takes pleasure in every step that they take. What say you, brothers and sisters? Have you tried to live today so that God may take pleasure in you? He cannot do it if we have lived carelessly, or fruitlessly, or selfishly. But when we live to him, then the Lord delights in our way.

24. *Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.*

Just going to fall, but in came the interposing hand. Grace catches us up when sin would throw us down.

25. *I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*

It was so unusual a thing that David had never seen, it. I have several times seen the seed of the righteous begging bread, but in every case it has been because of their drunkenness or their laziness, or because of their own vice which they brought upon themselves. But, as a rule, takes care of the children of his children. He does not

suffer them to want. They may be brought into great straits, but he will not permit them to come to beggary.

26-29. *He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed. Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are perserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.*

There is a grand time coming (oh! that God would hasten it!) when truth and righteousness shall rule the earth, and then shall the godly have their portion. At the present time: —

“Every prospect Pleases,
And only man is vile “;

But the day shall come when the vile person shall cease from off the earth, and the saints shall trove the kingdom.

30. *The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment.*

You may often judge a man by his mouth. The physician looks at the tongue to see how the man is; and so is a righteous man known by his mouth and his tongue, for he talks of judgment.

31-40. *The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide. The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him. The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged. Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright. For the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.*

PSALM 38

A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance. Remember, although this is a very sorrowful Psalm, it was written by a man of God. It will show you what a terrible thing sin must be, for even a child of God feels the smart of it very grievously. This is not the

language of an unforgiven sinner; it is the cry of a saint who, for a while, has sinned, and is feeling the bitterness of his transgression.

1. *O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath:*

“If thou dost rebuke me, O Lord, do it gently! Be not very angry with me, for I cannot bear it, I shall die under it. O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath.”

1. *Neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.*

“Chasten me, it will do me good; it is needful; it is profitable; but not in thy displeasure, certainly not in thy hot displeasure.” The man of God is more afraid of God’s anger than he is of suffering. He does not object to affliction; what he does fear is any degree of the wrath of God in the chastisement.

2. *For thine arrows stick fast in me,*

Does God shoot at his own children? Yes, but only that he may kill the sin in them; and he knows how to make his arrows stick, and stick fast, too, in his own dear children. The Lord hates sin with a perfect hatred. Even when sin was laid on Christ, even though it was none of his, yet the Father forsook him. He will not endure sin anywhere; but he hates it most in those whom he loves most: “Thine arrows stick fast in me.”

2. *And thy hand presseth me sore.*

As if God’s hand pressed heavily upon the soul of David. I remind you again that this was a man of God who thus cried out. If any of you, who are not the children of God, are feeling the heavy hand of the Lord on account of your sin, do not wonder at it. If his own children do not escape the rod, he is not likely to spare you. See into what a terrible condition David came, as he tells us in the third verse.

3. *There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger;*

He felt as if his very flesh was decaying, rotting, dissolving, and that there was no soundness in it. When God deals with men in a way of anger, they cannot stand against him any more than the wale can resist the heat of the furnace. Beware, I pray you, that you provoke not God’s eternal wrath in hell, for even here it is not to be borne; what will it be when mercy’s gate is closed? “There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger.”

3. *Neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin.*

His very bones suffered through his sin. He could not rest, he turned over and over in his bed but he could not find a place soft enough to lie upon in peace. Sin will make any man's bones ache when once his conscience is really quickened, and, with David, he will cry, "There is no rest in my bones because of my sin."

4. *For mine iniquities are gone over mine head:*

David was like a man who has sunk seven fathoms deep. Big waves of iniquity rolled over him, and he saw no light, no hope, no way of escape.

4. *As an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.*

It is a great mercy when sin is a burden; for, when it becomes too heavy for us to bear, Christ will bear it. A man is in an ill case when he finds no burden in sin, when he thinks he is quite able to bear it himself but he, to whom sin is an insupportable, intolerable load, is already on the road to mercy. See how the psalmist goes on to show that his case is worse still.

5. *My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness.*

He got to be so bad that he could not bear himself. His sorrow on account of his folly had made him feel as if he was a corrupt being, like one suffering with a foul cancer, unfitted for the company of his fellows: "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness." As I read that verse, it brings up memories of my own state of mind before I found the Saviour. Look at the title of the Psalm: "To bring to remembrance." That is just what it has done with me; perhaps it is doing the same with some of you.

6. *I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long.*

I again remind you that this is a child of God, a man who had enjoyed the light of God's countenance; and yet he was in this sad state. Do not utterly condemn yourselves, do not say that you are not the people of God, because you are troubled in heart; but if you really are not God's people as yet, but only seekers after him, do not wonder if sin greatly grieves and vexes you.

7-9. *For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before thee;*

The first beam of comfort comes in here. "Lord, I am almost at death's door, yet thou knowest my desire; I do not love sin, I wish to be a true believer, I desire to be holy. Lord, all my desire is before thee. Thou canst read it as if it were written in a book. I need not speak, for I should only spoil my case with my words; but all my desire is before thee."

9. *And my groaning is not hid from thee.*

"I can hide my groaning in a measure from my fellow-creatures, I try to suppress my moans when anybody is near; but my groaning is not hid from thee." Thank God, there is not a tear in any eye but God sees it, nor a groan in any heart but God hears it! Make much of this truth, and find sweet consolation in it.

10. *My heart panteth,*

That is the best sort of prayer in all the world, when there are no words, but in silence there is a panting and longing after God. We cannot explain what this panting is; but if you have ever seen a hunted stag panting for breath, you have some idea what David meant when he said, "My heart panteth."

10. *My strength faileth me:*

That is good prayer, too. "When I am weak, then am I strong." When I cannot pray, I do pray. When my strength fails me, then God's strength comes in to help me.

10, 11. *As for the sight of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off.*

If you have ever had much trouble, you will find that your friends are rather scarce at such times. Friends are very much like swallows; they twitter about us in the summer, and they build their nests under our eaves; but where are they in the winter? Ah! where are they? You may ask the question, but who can answer it? Sorrow is not a thing which attracts company; men naturally hide themselves from grieving companions. So David says, "My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off"

12, 13. *They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long. But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth.*

It is a fine thing, when you are slandered, not to hear it, and it is a better thing never to reply to it. I have always tried to possess one deaf ear and one blind eye, and I believe that the deaf ear is the better ear, and the blind eye by far the more useful of the two. Do not remember the injury that is done to you, try to forget it, and pass it over. Do not go about the world determined to grasp every red-hot iron that any fool holds out before you. Let it alone. It will be for your own good and for God's glory to be very patient under the slander of the wicked.

14, 15. *Thus I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs. For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God.*

So the psalmist, by his example, encourages you to take your troubles to God, and not to handle them yourselves. Spread them before him, and trust in him to deliver you in his own time and way.

16-21. *For I said, Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me. For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin. But mine enemies are lively, and they are strong; and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries; because I follow the thing that good is. Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me.*

The persecuted psalmist resorts to his God; let us do the same when we also are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

22. *Make haste to help me, O lord my salvation.*

David's case is urgent, and his plea is earnest. If we are in a like case, let us also cry, "Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation."

PSALM 38

I am going to read two portions of Scripture. In the first, — the 38th Psalm, — we shall hear a suffering servant of Jehovah crying out to his God.

1. *O LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.*

"If thou dost rebuke me, do it gently, O my Lord! If thou dost chasten me,

let not thy displeasure wax hot against thy servant."

2. *For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore.*

God may aim his arrows even at his own children, and he may lay his hand very heavily upon those whom he deeply loves.

3. *There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin.*

David was under the afflicting hand of God even with regard to his bodily disease. He could have borne the pain if it had been merely physical; but there was a sense of sin mixed with it which made it sting him in his very soul.

4, 5. *For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness.*

David had some painful old sores; I mean, old sins; and they seem to have broken out again and again, and when he wrote this Psalm, he was groaning in his spirit at the remembrance of them. His faith was at a low ebb, and his feelings were of the most bitter and sorrowful kind.

6. *I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long.*

Yet he was a true child of God all the while, for this is, according to its title, "A Psalm of David," concerning whom the Lord said "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will." God's flowers do not have sunlight twenty-four hours in the day. They have their night seasons, when it is not only dark, but it may also be heavy with the cold dew, or trying with a sharp frost.

7, 8. *For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart.*

That is an expressive word that David uses: "I have roared." He felt as if his prayers were more like the agonized cries of a wounded beast than the intelligent supplications of a human being, — least of all, of a man of God; and, sometimes, when the spirit is greatly bowed down, it cannot express itself in words, but has to be content with groans, and cries, and sobs, and tears.

9. *LORD, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee.*

What a sweet, sweet truth that is! Happy is that man, who in the time of deepest darkness, can still grasp that truth and hold it fast. “Lord, my groaning is not hid from thee! I could only roar out my complaint, or groan it out; but thou couldst hear it just as well as if I had ordered my words aright before thee.”

10, 11. *My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off.*

“Relatives and friends alike all get away from me as far as they can, for they cannot bear to be in such sorrowful company.”

12, 13. *They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long. But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth.*

Although David was a tried man, he was, at least at that time, a wise man. God did not leave his servant to act or to speak foolishly; and beloved, when men are unjustly rebuking and reproaching you, there is nothing more wise than to act as if you did not hear them. It is the very acme of wisdom if you can keep quiet, and not answer them, — refusing to make any apologies or extenuations — or even showing any sign that you have so much as heard what they have said.

14, 15. *Thus I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs. For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: —*

What sublime faith there is here! It is easy to have faith in sunshiny weather, — to have faith when you have the least need of it. There are plenty of people, who fancy they are believing in God when everything is going well with them. It is one thing to believe when you are lying at anchor in a peaceful harbour, it is quite another matter to believe when you are at sea in a storm. David hoped in God when trouble had come upon him wave upon wave: “For in thee, O Lord, do I hope:” —

15. *Thou wilt hear, O LORD my God.*

“Even if I do not hear thee, thou wilt hear me and if no man shall hear me, thou wilt hear my prayer, and answer my supplication.”

16-20. *For I said, Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me. For*

I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin. But mine enemies are lively, and they are strong: and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries; because I follow the thing that good is.

We need never be afraid of any man's opposition when the reason for his being our adversary is that we "follow the thing that good is," as our translators quaintly express it.

21, 22. *Forsake me not, O Lord: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation.*

Now we shall see, as we read that wondrous 53rd chapter of Isaiah not a man of God in trouble, but the Son of God in trouble; and we shall see him also as a deaf man that heareth not, "and as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth."

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 38, AND ISAIAH 53.

PSALM 39

To the chief Musician, even to Jeduthun, A Psalm of David. Jeduthun was one of those who led the sacred song in the house of God in David's day, and, long afterwards, we find the son of Jeduthun still engaged in this holy service. What a blessing it is to be succeeded in the work of God by your children from generation to generation! May that be your privilege, my dear brethren! May your families never lack a man to stand before the Lord God of Israel to sing his praises! This is called, "A Psalm of David." His life was a very chequered one; sometimes he was very joyous, and then he wrote bright and happy Psalms. But he was a man of strong passions and deep feelings; so at times he was very sad, and then he touched the mournful string. This is a very sorrowful Psalm, but it is full of teaching. How grateful we ought to be that such a man as David ever lived, and that he had such a wonderful experience! It may be said of him that he was — "A man so various, that he seemed to be not one, but all mankind's epitome." Well was he made the type of Christ in whose great heart the joys and sorrows of humanity met to the full. Thus the psalmist sings, —

1. *I said, I will take heed to my ways,*

It is not everybody who would like to recollect what he has uttered; but David could remember and dwell upon what he had formerly said: "I said, I will take heed to my ways." That is a good

thing to do. He that does not take heed to his ways had need do so. Heedless and careless, and heedless and graceless, are much the same thing. He that does not take heed what he does will be sure to do wrong.

1. *That I sin not with my tongue:*

He that does not sin with his tongue usually has his whole nature under government. The tongue is the rudder of the vessel, and if that be managed well, the ship will be rightly steered. "I said, I resolved, I determined and I uttered my determination, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue." Just then David was sinning in his heart, for it was in a great state of ferment, but he said, "I will not sin with my tongue." It was with him as it sometimes is with the captain of a vessel; if someone on board is suffering from the yellow fever, the ship-master will not send a boat to the shore for fear of spreading infection, his vessel will be in quarantine until all danger is past. It was thus with David; while all within him was seething and boiling in feverish impatience, he said, "I shall not speak for the present, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue."

1. *I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.*

The marginal reading is, "with a muzzle for my mouth." David would not speak at all, and herein he was not right. If he had said, "I will keep my mouth with a bridle," as our translation has it, that would have been perfectly proper. We ought never to leave off bridling our tongue, but David muzzled his. He would not speak at all while the wicked were before him, he knew that they would misconstrue his words, that they would make mischief of whatever he said, so he muzzled himself when in their company.

2. *I was dumb with silence,*

"I did not speak, I could not speak: 'I was dumb with silence.'"

2. *I held my peace, even from good;*

David's conduct proves that, even when we are doing something which is right, we are apt to overdo it, and so we stray into a vice while pursuing a virtue. You can run so close to the heels of a virtue that they may knock out your teeth; you may be so ardent for one good thing that you may miss another: "I held my peace, even from good."

2. *And my sorrow was stirred.*

Not giving it vent, it boiled and seethed: "My sorrow was stirred." Sometimes, a little talk is a great easement to a troubled spirit; but, as David was dumb, his sorrow was not still.

3. *My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned:*

There was an inward friction, his griefs kept revolving till his heart grew hot; this heat generated fire, which burned so vehemently that, at last, the psalmist could not help himself, and he was obliged to speak.

3. *Then spake I with my tongue,*

Whether rightly or wrongly, he must say something, he could not hold himself in any longer: "Then spake I with my tongue."

4. *LORD,*

If you must speak, address your words to the Lord. So David does, he does not speak to the wicked, but he prays to God most holy.

4. *Make me to know mine end,*

Did he wish to die? Perhaps so; you remember that one of the two men who never died once prayed that he might die. Elijah did so; and David does so here, I think, if I put a hard construction on his speech: "Lord, make me to know mine end." But if I read it more tenderly, I may make it to mean, "Lord, help me to recollect that my sorrows will not last for ever! That thought will tone them down, and keep them in cheek. 'Make me to know mine end.'"

4-5. *And the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth;*

That is, the breadth of your four fingers; all the length of life is to be measured by a span.

5. *And mine age is as nothing before thee:*

All that exists is as nothing before God. What are even the elder-born of angels but the infants of an hour in contrast with the ages of eternity? The world itself is only like a bubble blown yesterday, the sun is as a spark struck from the anvil of omnipotence but a few days ago; and as for man, compared with the eternal God, he is "as nothing."

5. *Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.*

Or, as the Hebrew has it, every Adam is all Abel. Was not Abel the child of Adam, and was he not soon cut off? Every man even at his best state is altogether vanity. What poor creatures we are! Our

breath is not more airy than we ourselves are; our lives are but as a mist that is blown away by the wind. “Selah.” When the psalmist had come so far, he stopped a while, to screw up the strings of his harp; such pressure as he had given it had taken away its melodious tones, and it needed to be brought again up to concert pitch.

6. *Surely every man walketh in a vain show:*

Like players, or actors, all of us are walking in a phantom show; which is not really anything, but only seems to be.

6. *Surely they are disquieted in vain:*

They make a dreadful noise in the tumult of the battle, the din of the exchange, the hum of the streets, the fret and worry of the counting-house; but it is all in vain.

6. *He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.*

If a man does succeed in amassing wealth, it is a poor success; the muck-rake gathers, and then comes the fork that scatters. One man hoards it up, and another takes as much delight in squandering it. They think that they have entailed their estate, and that their name and house will continue as long as the sun, but it all comes to nothing. “Vanity of vanities,” said the son of David, “all is vanity,” and his father had said so before him.

7. *And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.*

There is no vanity in that declaration. Now we are on the rock, now we have come to something real. When a man trusts in the unchanging God, and hopes in the ever-blessed Saviour, he has come out of his state of vanity: “My hope is in thee.”

8. *Deliver me from all my transgressions:*

We had not expected David to offer that prayer, we might have thought that he would say, “Deliver me from all my troubles, and from my many vexing thoughts.” But no, he lays the axe at the root of the evil: “Deliver me from all my transgressions.” There is only One who can do that, even the glorious Son of God, who lived and died to save his people from their sins.

8. *Make me not the reproach of the foolish.*

“The wicked will be ready enough to catch me up, and pour scorn upon me. Lord, keep me so right with thee, and so near to thyself, that they may never be able to reproach me!”

9. *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.*

This verse should read, “I will be dumb, I will not open my mouth, because thou hast done it.” That is a better silence than the first, for the psalmist is getting into a right state. This is the proper silence, the other was brazen, this is golden. God help us to know how and when to practice it! Never speak against God whatever he does, open not your mouth when he chastens because whatever he does must be right.

10. *Remove thy stroke away from me:*

Having come to complete submission, he ventures to pray for deliverance from his sorrow. You may pray very boldly, and very freely, when you can truly say, “Thy will be done.” David had said that he would not open his mouth against his God, and now he begins to plead, “Remove thy stroke away from me.”

10. *I am consumed by the blow of thine hand.*

When God does strike, it is no playing matter; a blow of his hand consumes us.

11. *When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth:*

As a moth eats up the fur or the cloth, and spoils it, so, when God’s corrections come upon us, our beauty is soon gone. Poor beauty it must be that can so soon go. Lord, let thy beauty be upon us, for no moth can ever eat into that!

11. *Surely every man is vanity. Selah.*

In the fifth verse, you see that, when the psalmist reached that point, he stopped, and said, “selah,” and he does so again here. Striking his lyre with a heavy hand, he has put it out of tune again, so he pauses, and begin to screw the strings up once more. You and I often need to be screwed up like the strings of a harp, to put us in right order before we go on to praise or to pray.

12. *Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry:*

See how David’s “prayer” grows into a “cry.” It deepens in intensity; there is more power in a cry than in an ordinary prayer, it shows more earnestness, and implies greater urgency: “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry.”

12. *Hold not thy peace at my tears:*

That is a still more powerful mode of pleading. Tears are the irresistible weapons of weakness. Women, children, beggars, and sinners can all conquer by tears: when they can win by nothing else,

if they will take to these pearly drops, and especially if they can look through them to the crimson drops of a Saviour's blood, they can win what they will of God:

“Hold not thy peace at my tears.”

12. *For I am a stranger with thee,*

The believer is a stranger in this world, just as God is. The Lord made the world, but the world does not know its Maker, and it does not know his people.

“Tis no surprising thing, That we should be unknown:

The Jewish world knew not their King,

God's everlasting Son.”

“I am a stranger,” not to thee, but “with thee, a stranger even as thou art.” There is another very beautiful meaning to this expression. You know how the Orientals exercise hospitality to strangers; when they once take them into their tent, they supply them liberally, and treat them honourably. “I am a stranger with thee: “I am a poor alien who has come into God's house to tarry for a while with him. I have eaten of his salt, I have cast myself upon his protection, so he will certainly take care of me: “I am a stranger with thee.”

12. *And a sojourner, as all my fathers were.*

“They did not remain here. My fathers used this world merely as an inn, at which they stayed for a night; in the morning, they hurried on to the city that hath foundations, on the other side of Jordan, —

“To the islands of the Blessed,

To the land of the Hereafter,”

where the saints dwell for ever with their Lord.

13. *O spare me, —*

“Deal gently with me; do not break me in pieces. If thou must needs smite me, yet do not altogether crush me. O spare me,” —

13. *That I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.*

“Let me be able to take a little nourishment, and to gather my faculties together yet again, that I may sing to thee some sweeter hymn before I cease to be in the land of the living, and go hence out of this world.” So, you see, this is a sweet Psalm after all, it is a bitter sweet, a sweet bitter, a Psalm that tends towards our spiritual health. Many of us understand what David meant by it. May others, who as yet do not, soon be taught its gracious lessons! Amen.

PSALM 39

To the chief Musician, even to Jeduthun, A Psalm of David. David dedicated some Psalms to Asaph, and one or two to Jeduthun. Some of this chief musician's family appear to have remained singers as late as the time of Nehemiah. It is a great honour to be a singer in the house of God. Ungodly men have no right to lead the psalmody; only redeemed lives can sing aright the song of redemption. I reckon that it is almost as wrong to have an unconverted person to lead the singing as it would be to have an unconverted man to preach the Gospel. David was in a great heat of spirit, and much tried, when he wrote this Psalm. There is little that is cheerful in it, yet there is much that may cheer us, Sometimes, when we are unusually thoughtful, we are more likely to be blessed than at other times. Specific gravity is better than specific levity; there are some who have a great deal of the latter quality.

1. *I said,*

“I thought it, and at last I said it. I resolved; I determined upon it; and I registered the vow.”

1. *I will take heed to my ways,*

Men never go right by accident, he who is heedless is graceless. A holy life is a life that comes of taking heed.

1. *That I sin not with my tongue:*

He who keeps his tongue can keep all the rest of his body. The tongue is the helm of the ship, and if that be well managed, the ship will be steered aright. How many sins of the tongue there are, — proud words, false words, trifling words, unclean words! I cannot mention the whole list. The tongue is the best thing in the world or the worst thing, according to how it is savoured.

1. *I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.*

“I may feel free when I am with God's people; then I may wear my heart upon my sleeve, for there are no claws to peck at it. But when I am with the wicked, I must not cast my pearls before swine. I must be careful what I say, for they will be sure to misunderstand and misrepresent me.”

2. *I was dumb with silence,*

Ah, me! How often we do wrong even when we try to do right! He tried not to sin with his tongue, so he was silent, but silence itself

may be a sin of the tongue. God forgive our idle silence, and silence our idle words! I do not think we often sin this way; but silence may sometimes be more wicked than speech even though at other times speech is silver and silence is golden. If silence is sometimes better than speech, it may also be worse. So poor David, like a pendulum, swings first this way and then the other way. Yet he went too far in the silent direction.

2. *I held my peace, even from good;*

Which he should not have done. A dumb sorrow is a heavy sorrow.

2. *And my sorrow was stirred.*

Or “troubled.” Water, while it is quiet, may look clear, the sediment lies still at the bottom; but if you stir it, you see all there is in it. So is it with sorrow; when it is stirred, you find its bitterness.

3. *My heart was hot within me,*

The fire was kept in his heart; it was not allowed space to break forth, so his heart was hot as an oven.

3. *While I was musing the fire burned:*

He grew so hot with grief, that he was compelled to speak.

3. *Then spake I with my tongue,*

I am not sure that he did not sin then. We sin if we are silent, and we sin if we speak, for we are such sinful creatures. It would have been better perhaps, if David had said, “Lord, help me to take heed to my ways, and rule thou over my tongue, “for as it was, you see, he could not manage his tongue. He was either too fast or too slow. However, this time he spake well, for he spoke to God. More talk to God and less chat to men, and we should be wiser and better.

4. *Lord, make me to know mine end,*

It is greatly wise for us to be familiar with our last hours. There is much to be discovered in the shroud, the mattock, and the spade.

4. *And the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.*

A bubble is more substantial than I am, — a little handful of dust, easily blown to the wind, rather an appearance than a reality. Ah, me! little do we know, any of us, how frail we are.

5. *Behold thou hast made my days as an handbreadth;*

How short is our life! It is just a span, and no more,

5. *And mine age is as nothing before thee:*

What multitudes of generations of men have come and gone! An angel might have cried, long before, "Man is but a thing of yesterday compared with the eternal God." God created the first star that twinkled out of the primeval darkness. "The everlasting hills," as we call them, are but infants of a day compared to him; therefore, man may truly say, "Mine age is as nothing before thee."

5. *Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.*

The best man is only man at the best, and when he is at his best, he is nothing but vanity. It is strange that he should get vain of his best state, when his best is only vanity.

6. *Surely every man walketh in a vain show:*

He is a shadow walking among shadows.

6. *Surely they are disquieted in vain:*

They fret and fume about nothing.

6. *He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.*

He is busy with a rake, but another will be busy with a fork. What the miser gathers the spendthrift scatters.

7. *And now, Lord, what wait I for?*

"Do I wait to gather riches for another to squander? Do I wait to worry myself? Do I wait here to walk as a vanity in the midst of vanities? No, Lord, I am waiting for something better than that!"

7. *My hope is in thee.*

Here the psalmist steps off the sand, and puts his foot on the rock. Happy is the man who can say to the Lord, "My hope is in thee."

8. *Deliver me from all my transgressions:*

When he gets near to God, he sees himself to be a sinner.

8, 9. *Make me not the reproach of the foolish. I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.*

That is fine silence when a man will not complain because his affliction comes from the hand of God. There is something better even than that when a man breaks the silence, and begins to praise God under the rod. A mute Christian smarting under the rod is a wonder of grace; but a singing Christian under a cutting stroke is a still greater miracle of mercy. Such ought all Christians to be.

10. *Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand.*

When God smites, he never plays at chastisement, and there are times when his blows are very heavy, and then the smitten one cries out, "Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand."

11. *When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth:*

Stout, he is reduced to a shadow, comely and beautiful he is wrinkled, and looks like a skeleton, joyful and blithe, he ends his day in mourning. Ah, dear friends, we who have joy, and calm, and peace, ought to be very grateful! Praise God while you can, for it may be that a dark night will follow the bright day. Oh, for grace to praise God then! That is the best of music that comes from God's nightingales. Music by night is music indeed. But when God corrects men, how soon he takes them down!

11, 12. *Surely every man is vanity. Selah. Hear my prayer, O LORD,*

"If I cannot do anything else, I can pray, and I will pray." That is the best relief that mourners have: "Hear my prayer, O Lord."

12. *And give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears:*

"Do not see me weeping, and yet refuse me comfort and relief. Do not, I pray thee, hear my cry, and yet turn thy back upon me."

12. *For I am a stranger with thee,*

Notice, not a stranger to thee, but, "a stranger with thee. Thou art a stranger in thine own world, and I also am a stranger here." Men will not entertain the King, for they know him not; therefore,

—
"Tis no surprising thing,
That we should be unknown:
The Jewish world knew not their King
God's everlasting Son."

"I am a stranger with thee." There is a sweet familiarity about this expression, as if the psalmist said, "Lord, I am not at home, I am a stranger here; and thou, too, art a stranger; men will not acknowledge thee. Therefore, Lord, sympathize with me. Hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee."

12. *And a sojourner, as all my fathers were.*

“Thou art my Host; I am thy guest; thou dost entertain me. Lord, look at my tears! When the good man entertains a stranger, then he is kind, he pours oil and wine into his wounds. Lord, do so with me, thou art the Good Samaritan, and I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, a temporary guest with thee in this world, as all my fathers were.”

13. *O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.*

There is much sweet comfort here, though the Psalm reads like a dirge, rather than a hymn. God give us, if we are obliged to sing such words as these, to sing them with a full belief that the Lord will hear us, and will bless our trials to us, and make them work our lasting good!

PSALM 39

1. *I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.*

This is what David said; what he had deliberately resolved upon and solemnly determined in his own mind: “I said, I will take heed to my ways.” That is a good thing for all of us to resolve and to say: “I will take heed.” To be heedless is to be graceless. No man ever does a good thing by accident. We shall none of us get to heaven by blundering. “I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue.” The tongue may be a most powerful instrument of evil. Tongue sins are terrible sins. They are like sparks of fire which may set a whole town upon a blaze. He that can take heed to his tongue will probably be able to manage all the rest of the members of his body. The tongue is the most unmanageable member of our frame; and if we sin not with our tongue, we shall most likely be kept from sinning in other ways. “I will keep my mouth with a bridle,” says David; it should be rendered, “with a muzzle.” He did not mean that he would merely control his tongue, but that he would silence it altogether. “I will keep my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked is before me.” I do not know whether that was a right resolution on David’s part. Tongues were meant to be used and there are often opportunities of using them to God’s glory even in the presence of the wicked. Sometimes, we are bound to use our tongue in rebuking their sin; yet we cannot criticize David’s resolution very much,

because when the wicked are before us, it may be only like casting pearls before swine if we begin to speak to them even upon the best themes, and we may be drawn away, by their company to speak that which is questionable. So that often, it may be best to keep our mouth muzzled while the wicked are before us.

2. *I was dumb with silence, —*

“I was as silent as if I had been dumb. I did not say a word.” It seems to me that this silence of the psalmist was partly sullen and partly judicious: “I was dumb with silence,” —

2. *I held my peace, even from good; —*

He was a total abstainer from all speech. Perhaps he felt that he could not speak a little without speaking too much, and so he refrained from speech altogether. Yet we must not follow his example so closely in this matter, for there is a time for speech as well as a time for silence. It was not good for David to hold his peace even from good. It is good for us to hold our peace rather than speak unwisely, but it would be better for us to speak wisely, discreetly, as God’s Spirit should direct us.

2. *And my sorrow was stirred.*

It is a great relief to sorrow to be able to speak about it. Be not silent in thy grief, lest thy grief should burn too fiercely within thy heart. It is often one of the signs of a failing mind when persons sit quite still, and will not tell their grief to anyone. Tell thy grief to thy God first of all, and thou mayest also tell it with advantage to some sympathizing friend. But David felt that he could not speak, so his sorrow was stirred, troubled, agitated, like a pent-up fire that must sooner or later burst into a blaze.

3. *My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned:*

While he was musing, his heart was fusing, and there was much that was most confusing to him. He saw the prosperity of the wicked, and the oppression of the righteous. He heard the reproaches of the ungodly, and he felt the stings of affliction and trial in his own soul. So, as he did not speak, his heart grew hot within him: “While I was musing the fire burned: —

3. *Then spake I with my tongue,*

We say, “Murder will out,” and so will misery. David’s heart had become like a volcano, and the fire burned so furiously within

that he was obliged to let the burning lava flow forth, and so give his soul vent. There is no speech like that which comes from a hot heart. That shot from the tongue which has been made red-hot in the heart is sure to tell upon the adversary. "Then spake I with my tongue;" and what he said was not unwise. There was nothing of boasting or excitement in it; it was a very wise, plain, earnest prayer.

4. *LORD*, —

That was a good beginning of David's speech. When we turn our burning words towards God, and not towards men, good will come of them. David's hot heart finds a vent Godward. This was the wisest thing that he could do, cry unto his God. "Lord," —

4. *Make me to know mine end*, —

Did David mean to pray, "Let me die," like Elias did? I am half afraid that he did, and many a time some of God's servants, in their great heats when their soul has been fuller of passion than of faith, have prayed in this sense, "Make me to know mine end." Yet a better meaning may be put upon the psalmist's words, and we are bound to put the best meaning upon them that we can. He may have meant, "Let me know, Lord, that my sorrows will come to an end, that they are not to last for ever." Death may be looked at through the glass of faith till it becomes even a goodly and desirable object. "Lord, make me to know mine end," —

4. *And the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.*

Our days are all measured, they do not come to an end by accident. As mercers measure their ells and their yards of silk or cotton goods, so does God measure out life to us. There is not half an inch more or less than God himself determines that we shall have. If David wanted to know what the measure of his days was, he was trying to pry into the folded leaves of the future. Such prying is both wrong and futile, and we may be thankful that we do not know what the measure of our days is in this sense. We do know that, at their utmost, they are not likely to exceed the threescore years and ten, or the fourscore years, which now make up the ordinary measure of human life.

5. *Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth;* —

That is a very short measure, the breadth of a hand, the space that we can span with one of our hands, yet that is the true measure of our life: “Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth;” —

5. *And mine age is as nothing before thee:* —

What are seventy or eighty years, even if we live so long as that, out of the thousands of years that men have lived on the face of the earth? One man’s life seems but a drop in the great ocean of human history. Yet what an insignificant thing human history itself is! Some thousands of years ago, there were no men upon this earth; yet what is the history of the whole world compared with eternity? It is not worth speaking of, it is scarcely one tick of the clock of eternity. Why, this world is only like a newly blown bubble, and the sun is but a spark fresh from the eternal fire. As compared with the eternal God, man is a non entity, a nullity, and David was right when he said to the Lord, “Mine age is as nothing before thee.”

5. *Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.*

When he is strongest, calmest, happiest, when he is in his prime, when he is at his best, of which he is so vain, is itself vain. Whatever there may be true about man, this is true, that he is unstable, and soon passes away. He is constant in nothing but his inconstancy. “Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.”

6. *Surely every man walketh in a vain shew:*

This world is a mere theater, and men strut across its stage, acting their various parts. They come and they go as if they were mere figures moved by invisible wires; the most of men do not live at all, but only seem to live for they have not the true, spiritual, eternal life within them. Every man walks like a performer in a pageant, or like those who march in a procession. We think we are standing still, and watching others pass by, but we are ourselves part of the vain show, and are passing away with the rest.

6. *Surely they are disquieted in vain:* —

They fret, they fume, they vex themselves, but it is all in vain. They make a noise, so the Hebrew says, in vain. Hear the clamor of the streets, hear the buzz of the exchange, hear the noise of war, and the shouts of conflict. It is all in vain, it is all for nothing. You are troubled about your business, troubled about your children, troubled about your wealth, troubled about I know not what; surely, you are

disquieted in vain. Oh, that we could but believe that all this disquietude is only vanity! Then might we live much more peaceful lives.

6. *He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.*

He has cut his corn, and it stands in sheaves in the field, but his enemy comes, and carts it away; or if he has gathered it into his granary, it is consumed by rats or mice, or it becomes mildewed and useless. How many there are who spend their lives gathering wealth with the muck-rake, and then their sons come with the fork and shovel, and scatter it quite as quickly as their fathers gathered it. What is the good of getting all this gold together, and stinting yourself in order to get it, when the one who has it after you will never thank you for it, or if he did, you would be dead and buried, and would know nothing of his gratitude?

7. *And now, Lord, what wait I for?*

The psalmist improves as he advances. Now you see that he is cut loose from the world. He has seen the vanity of man, and he has seen the vanity of wealth, so he says, “Now, Lord, what wait I for? What is there here, in this land of shadows, that I should wait for? Why sit I down where nothing good has ever come, or ever can come? “The ropes that held the balloon to earth are cut, and up it mounts.

7. *My hope is in thee.*

This is a glorious hope; this is a hope that finds its all in God, this hope will outlast death and the grave; this hope will be our treasure in eternity. Can each of you truly say this, “My hope is in thee”? Let this be the language of your heart as you speak to your God, “This is what I wait for, — that I may enjoy thy presence here, and that I may rejoice in thy presence hereafter; I wait for the coming of my Lord; I wait for the time when the Lord shall call me home.”

8. *Deliver me from all my transgressions:*

That is a better prayer than if David had said, “Deliver me from all my sorrows.” Now he has hit the very center of the target: “Deliver me from all my transgressions.” So let each one of us pray at this moment, “O Lord, I do not ask to be saved from thy rod, but I do ask to be washed from my sin. Do what thou wilt with me, but do

forgive me, do sanctify me, do let me be washed in the precious blood of Jesus. ‘Deliver me from all my transgressions.’”

8. *Make me not the reproach of the foolish.*

Do not let the wicked be able to say, “See the sadness of that man’s countenance, see how sullen he looks. His face is like a thundercloud, it is clear that a Christian has no joy.” Let not the wicked be able to say that, my Lord; but save me from sin, and give me the full joy of thy salvation, and then they will not be able to reproach me.

9. *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.*

You will understand this verse much better if we read it in another tense as it should be: “Now I will be dumb, I will not open my mouth, because thou didst it.” David was wrong the first time when he was dumb, but he is right this second time. Two things may be very like one another outwardly, yet very different inwardly. There is a silence which the Christian ought to keep.

10. *Remove thy stroke away from me:*

The child of God, who is perfectly resigned to his heavenly Father’s will may yet pray to be delivered from his trouble. Prayer for deliverance from grief is quite consistent with perfect submission to the will of God. We may pray, for Jesus prayed, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;” but we must take care also to add, “Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

10. *I am consumed by the blow of thine hand.*

“Thou hast beaten me sorely; oh, smite me not again!” This is good pleading, for God does not mean to consume his own children. He means to consume our sins, and when he makes us cry, “Deliver me from all my transgressions,” and when we submit to his holy will, he will soon put his rod away. As soon as you are willing to bear it, you shall not have to hear it any longer. When you submit yourself to the stroke, then the stroke will cease to be given.

11. *When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity. Selah.*

When God whips his children, he does not play with them. God is in earnest, if we are not; and when he corrects us, he means us to feel his rod, and he means us to bear the scars it leaves upon us. There must be real strokes, and real smarts, ere we are likely to be

cured of sin, and, sometimes, when he is dealing in chastisement with his people, he makes their beauty to depart like a piece of cloth or fur when the moth gets into it, and utterly destroys it. What a poor thing beauty is if the moth can eat it up! If a little affliction can take away our beauty, we may well pray for that beauty for which Moses pleaded, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." That is a beauty of quite another kind, the beauty of grace which no moth can consume. But if we have not that, our beauty is a poor thing. Let no man, let no woman, be vain of beauty which can so soon be gone.

12. *Hear my prayer, O LORD,*

David is dumb, yet he prays, dumb as to complaints, but eloquent as to pleading with his God.

12. *And give ear unto my cry; —*

The psalmist goes from pleading to crying, and believers often thus intensify their prayers. There is something more sorrowful, more earnest, more prevalent, about crying unto God than mere ordinary praying: "Give ear unto my cry;" —

12. *Hold not thy peace at my tears: —*

David goes further still, for the most eloquent things in the world are tears. They are the irresistible weapons of weakness. Many a woman, many a beggar, many a child, has gained by tears what could not be obtained in any other way; so David pleaded most powerfully when he prayed, "Hold not thy peace at my tears:" —

12. *For I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.*

"Thou dost entertain me in thy tent as I have entertained wanderers many a time. I have broken bread with thee, and eaten of thy salt, be kind to the stranger and sojourner as thou hast bidden thy servants to be." Or does David mean that, as God is a stranger in his own world, so are we while necessarily passing through it?

13. *O spare me, —*

That is a singular petition, for just now, he seemed to be wanting to get to the end of his days; yet he says, "O spare me," like Elias, who was afraid to die, and so ran away from Jezebel, and then prayed to God, "Let me die." So are God's children still a mass of contradictions, longing for death, and yet, when death comes, they cry, "O spare me! O spare me!"

13. *That I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.*

“Give me a little respite, that I may take my nourishment, and have my sleep before I go hence to be no more, for soon I shall do that. But give me a little interlude first, wherein I may again take my harp, and sing to thy praise.” If worldlings cannot understand this mingled experience God’s children know that this is only one of the many paradoxes with which they are perfectly familiar. In any case, may each one of us be ready when it shall be God’s time for us to “go hence, and be no more” here!

PSALM 39

This Psalm gives a description of David’s experience and conduct when stretched upon a sick-bed. He appears to have felt impatience working within him, which I am sorry to say is a very common disease with most of us when God’s hand is heavy upon us. Yet David struggled against his impatience, though he felt it, he would not know it, lest he should thereby open the mouths of his enemies, and cause them to speak evil of his God. Let us imitate his restraint if we resemble him in the temptation to impatience.

1. *I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue:--*

This government of the tongue is a most important part of our ways; it is a very essential part of holy discipline, yet we have heard of one saint who said that he had lived for seventy years, and had tried to control his tongue, but that he had only begun to understand the art when he died. David said, “I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue;”-

1. *I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.*

They have such quick ears, and they are so ready to misinterpret and misrepresent our words, and if they can find one word awry, they will straightway preach a long sermon over it, so let us muzzle our mouths while they are near. The ill words of Christians often make texts for sinners, and thus God is blasphemed out of the mouths of his own beloved children. Let it not be so with any of you, beloved.

2. *I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred.*

We all know that, unless our grief can find expression, it swells and grows till our heart is ready to break. We have heard of a wise physician who bade a man in great trouble weep as much as ever he could. "Do not restrain your grief," he said, "but let it all out." He felt that only in that way would the poor sufferer's heart be kept from breaking. David determined that, before the wicked, he would have nothing at all to say, and though his griefs were surging within him, yet for a time he kept them from bursting out.

3. *My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue,*

He could not hold his peace any longer; it would have been well if he had done so, for he uttered an unwise prayer when he spake with his tongue.

4. *LORD, make me to know mine end,*

That is what you and I are apt to say when we get into a little trouble; we want to die, and get away from it all. We say that we long to be with Christ, but I am afraid that it is often only a lazy wish to share the spoils of victory without fighting the battle, to receive the saints' wages without doing the saints' work, and to enter into heaven without the toils and dangers of the pilgrims' way. Perhaps this has been the case with us sometimes when we have thought that our aspirations were of the best and holiest kind. When David prayed, "Lord, make me to know mine end," his prayer was not a very wise one, but the next sentences were not quite so foolish:--

4. *And the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.*

Oh, that we could all know how frail we are! But we reckon upon living for years when we have scarcely many more minutes left, we think our life's hour-glass is full when the sands have almost run out, and although the hand of God's great clock may be upon the striking-point, we think our brief hour has but just begun.

5. *Behold, thou hast made my days as, an handbreadth;*

This is a very common measure, the breadth of the human hand; and David says that this span is the measure of his life. Some here must surely have spent a great part of that handbreadth; let them and all of us be prepared to meet our God when that short span's limit is reached.

5. And mine age is as nothing before thee:

It is an incalculably tiny speck when compared with the immeasurable age of the Eternal: "Mine age is as nothing before thee." When Alcibiades boasted of his great estates, the philosopher brought him a map of the world, and said to him, "Can you find your estates on this map?" Even Athens itself was but as a pin's point; where, then, were the estates of Alcibiades? Nowhere to be seen. So, when we see the great map of eternity spread out before us, where is the whole of this world's history? It is but a speck, and where then, are your life and mine? They are as nothing before God.

5. Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.

Then what must he be at his worst state

6. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain:

They fret, and fume, and flurry, and worry, and all about what? About nothing. We sometimes say, "It will be all the same a hundred years hence." Ah! but it will be all the same much sooner than that, when the six feet of earth shall be all our heritage.

6. He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.

"Bethink thee," says an old writer, "every time thou dost lock up thy money in a box, how soon death shall lock thee up in thy coffin." Some men seem to be like our children's money-boxes, into which money is put, but they must be broken before any can come out. To some men, how sad must be the thought that they have been accumulating wealth all their days, and they know not for whom they have been gathering it! A stranger may, perhaps, inherit it; or if their own kith and kin shall get it, they may squander it just as thoroughly as the misers hoarded it.

7. And now, Lord,-

If all earthly things are nothing but emptiness,-

7. What wait I for?

"I wait for nothing here, for there is nothing here to wait for."

7. My hope is in thee.

Ah! this hope makes life worth living. Now that we hope in God, now that we know that there remaineth another and a better world than this world of shadows, life is invested with true solemnity.

8, 9. *Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish. I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.*

It is always a blessed reason for resignation when we can say of any bereavement or affliction, "The Lord has done it." Shall he not do as he wills with his own? Then let us say, with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

10-12. *Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity. Selah. Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears:*

Tears have ever had great prevalence with God. Christ used these sacred weapons when, "with strong crying and tears," he prayed to his Father in Gethsemane, "and we heard in that he feared." Sinner, there is such potency in a penitent's tears that thou mayest prevail with God if thou wilt come to him weeping over thy sin, and pleading the precious blood of Christ. Thy tears cannot merit heaven, or wash away thy sins, but if thou dost penitently grieve over them, and trust in the great atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, thy tearful prayers shall have a gracious answer of peace. Mr. Bunyan describes the City of Mansoul as sending Mr. Wet-eyes as one of her ambassadors to the Prince Emanuel, and he is still a most acceptable ambassador to the King of kings. He who knows how to weep his heart out at the foot of the cross shall not be long without finding mercy. Tears are diamonds that God loves to behold.

12. *For I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.*

"I am not a stranger to thee, O my God! Blessed be thy holy name, I know thee well; but 'I am a stranger with thee.' Thou art a stranger in shine own world, and so am I. The world knows thee not, and the world knows me not; and when I act as thou actest, the world hateth me even as it hateth thee."

13. *O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.*

PSALM 40.

These are the words of David: they are the words of all God's tried and believing people; but above all they are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. So complete is the union between Christ and the believer that it is possible to describe them both at the same time. The experience of a child of God, sin alone excepted, is very like the experience of the great Firstborn. But Christ is ever above us, so you will find words in this Psalm which belong to nobody but Jesus in all their fullness. Yet the title of it is "A Psalm of David."

1. *I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.*

You and I can say that, so could our Divine Master. Oh the wondrous patience of the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer! In that agony in the garden when the bloody sweat showed how great were the wrestlings of his spirit he could then say, "I waited patiently for Jehovah, and he inclined unto me and heard my cry."

2. *He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.*

We can say that too. We remember when we were deep down in the mire, when we found it impossible to rise, for the more we struggled the more we sank. It was clay under us, miry clay. We could not hope for a rescue, but the arm of Jehovah lifted us out of the deep and set us on a rock, and there we stood to sing his praises. Jesus Christ could say the same. He said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death," and he cried, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me!" What a very different frame of mind he was in a few minutes afterwards when he said, "Father, unto thy hands I commend my spirit," and shouted, "It is finished!" all his travail was over. Well it is a great thing for us to have fellowship with Christ in his suffering which we could not have had if we had not ourselves been brought up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay.

3. *And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.*

Well, God has done that for you and for me; he has put a new song into our mouth which Satan cannot take out of it, and we are singing it today, and others who hear it shall be encouraged to trust in God. But is this true of Christ? Listen to those words at the end of the 22nd Psalm, where beyond all doubt it is the Saviour who speaks;

-- "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation; I will pay my vows before them that fear him." So the Saviour is the chief leader of the holy song which goes up to God on account of redemption. He sings because God has delivered him and delivered us. Both the Surety and the sinner are now free, and the song goes up from both of them. Again you see what sympathy, what fellowship, we have with Christ.

4. *Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.*

Jesus knew the blessedness of faith. Remember how Paul quotes it, "I will put my trust in him," as the language of the Redeemer himself. As man he had his fears; as man there was wrought in him a wondrous faith in God. Oh that you and I might have the same trust, and have no respect to the proud nor such as turn aside to lies!

5. *Many O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.*

We are not dealing with a God who never deals with us. Faith in God is no fiction. We have already had from God the most wonderful displays of power. We have been the recipients of great mercy springing from his thoughts of love toward us. It ought to be an easy thing for experienced saints to trust in God and I hope it has become so with us.

6 - 8. *Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said, I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.*

Now we get the words of Christ undoubtedly. Our Lord said these words and therefore he came to fulfill the Father's will and present on our behalf an acceptable sacrifice, with blood better than that of bulls or of goats. You and I have to say this in a very humble measure. We do not bring to God now any sacrifice of bulls or goats but we do bring our whole heart to him, trusting to be accepted, for he has written on those heart his own law, and it is our delight now to do the will of God. This it the kind of sacrifice that God accepts; true, fervent, obedient hearts. God grant us always to present it.

9, 10. *I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.*

What a preacher Christ was! How he told out what he had learned of the Father! How fully, how constantly was he the witness for God to men! Some of us following far behind, with unequal footsteps, nevertheless can say "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation." It is a great comfort in feeling if you are called to present the gospel that as far as you know, you have preached it and have kept back nothing that God has taught to you. It will be a thousand mercies if any one of God's servants shall be found clear at the last. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, we have only done what it was our duty to do; but still there is a sweet peace about fidelity when in the integrity of one's heart we can say that we have not refrained our lips as God knows. Then comes the prayer —

11. *Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.*

If you have dealt honestly with God's word you may expect that God will deal graciously with you. Surely he would not send us to proclaim a message of mercy and then deny mercy to us. That cannot be. But brethren when we have done our best for God and before God, yet we cannot boast, we still want mercy and we fall back upon the lovingkindness of God just as the sinner must do when he first of all comes to God. May we ever be in that true and humble frame of mind which looks for nothing but mercy.

12. *For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me.*

Now here is a passage in which the Master is not to be seen but only the servant. This is the man that said than God had put a new song into his mouth. He is a true child of God to whom God had had respect and whose prayer God had heard, yet see what a plight he has come in to. Dear friends, you and I may have to undergo this trial. Happy shall we be if we have such faith in God that even when innumerable evils compass us about we shall remember the

innumerable mercies of God, such mercies as the Psalmist had spoken of in the fifth verse. When our iniquities take hold upon us what a mercy it is to think that Christ has taken hold upon us too, and will never let us go. When our sins seem more than the hairs of our head and our heart is failing us, it is very sweet to feel that the depths of eternal love and of atoning merit have drowned even our innumerable sins; they are cast upon the head of him that said “Lo, I come to do thy will;” they are carried away and they have ceased to be, through him whose precious blood and glorious righteousness have made us accepted before God.

13. *Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me.*

You may pray like that and yet be a true believer, the man that is not in haste to be saved does not want to be saved at all. He that can put it off till tomorrow knows nothing about it. True believer when he is crying for mercy cries “My case is urgent, help me now, make haste to help me;”

14-17. *Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil. Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, “Aha, aha.” Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified. But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.*

“But I am poor and needy; yet” — oh blessed “yet” — “Yet the Lord thinketh upon me.” He does not throw me a penny and pass on as we often do to the poor and needy, but He stops and thinks. Yet He makes no tarrying. He answers the cry of his people and comes in haste to deliver them.

PSALM 40

If our hearts are in trouble, as his was who wrote this Psalm, may we be able to act as wisely and as well as he did, and so obtain a like deliverance!

1, 2. *I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of*

the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.

God does nothing by halves; if he brings people up out of their sorrow, or their sin, he takes care that their feet shall not slip back again into the mire. David says, "He set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." What a blessing that last little sentence contains! God does not set our feet upon a rock, that we may afterwards slip off, and finally fall, but he establishes our goings, he makes our footing firm, so that we do not perish after all.

3. *And he hath put a new song in my mouth, —*

Such a song as I never sang before; for I had never been in such trouble before, and therefore had never experienced such a deliverance as the Lord has now granted to me. "He hath put a new song in my mouth." With that sweet songstress, Ann Letitia Waring, I can say, —

"My heart is resting, O my God;
I will give thanks and sing;
My heart is at the secret source Of every precious thing.
"And 'a new song' is in my mouth,
To long-loved music set;
Glory to thee for all the grace I have not tasted yet."

3, 4. *Even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.*

You know that this Book of Psalms has many benedictions in it. It begins with a blessing upon "the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful;" but here it has a blessing for the believer: "Blessed is that man that maketh Jehovah his trust." As for the proud and the false, may God preserve us from ever paying any regard to them; for, if not, they will lead us into some such mischief as that into which they have themselves fallen.

5. *Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done,*

"Thy works in creation, in providence, and in redemption," —

5. *And thy thoughts which are to us-ward:*

God is always thinking of his people, and his thoughts are wise, and kind, and practical, for, when he thinks of doing anything for us, he speedily performs it.

5. *They cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.*

Think of that! You cannot count God's thoughts of you. If he were only to think of us once, in tender mercy, that one thought would run on throughout eternity, for he does not retract either a thought that he thinks or a word that he utters. Instead thereof, one gracious thought is followed by another, swiftly as the beams of light flash from the sun, so that it is impossible for us to number them. Thus thinking and writing concerning God's work, the psalmist is carried away, as it were, into a vision, in which he sees Christ, and speaks in the name of Christ: —

6. *Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire;*

The blood of all the bullocks, rams, and lambs offered in sacrifice, had possessed no real efficacy in putting away sin. They had no virtue except as types, and symbols, and prophecies of the one great sacrifice that was to come.

6. *Mine ears hast thou opened:*

Probably alluding to the ceremony of boring to the door-post the ears of those who determined to remain as slaves to their masters when they might have gone free. So Christ was ready to be the servant of his Father, and the Saviour of sinners; he voluntarily undertook to bear all that this would involve.

6-8. *Burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.*

He was the perfect One, coming to do God's will for us, and offering himself as the truest sacrifice that could ever be presented to God. So we may rightly picture our great Lord and Master uttering these words when he came to die.

9, 10. *I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.*

With what indefatigable earnestness, with what indomitable courage, with what sacred faithfulness, with what holy tears, did Christ preach the truth while he was upon earth! He was ever the Prince of preachers; so, when he was dying, he could plead this fact with his Father. —

11, 12. *Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me. For innumerable evils have compassed me about:*

Was it not so with Christ? The evils of sinners seemed to compass him about, and, like wild beasts, to hunt him to the death; and the saints of God, in their measure, may often use similar language to that which the psalmist here, prophetically, used concerning Christ.

12. *Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me.*

We could not apply this language to the Saviour except as we spoke of the sins of ourselves and others which were laid upon him; but we may apply this language, and ought to apply it to ourselves when we are sorely beset by sin. Have not even you, who are the dear children of God, sometimes felt as if you could not look up, and dared not look up? You were so desponding, so downcast, that there seemed no help for you, even in God. Your sins, your cruel sins, your fierce tormentors were; and therefore your heart failed you.

13-15. *Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me. Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil. Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, Aha, aha.*

So will it surely be, for the enemies of God's people are God's enemies; and Satan and all his host, who seek to destroy the souls of the Lord's chosen, shall be driven backward, and covered with eternal shame.

16. *Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified.*

Are you content to bear your present trial, dear friend, so that God may be magnified? Are you willing to be reduced, by

infirmities and weaknesses, to a condition of absolute nothingness, so long as God is exalted? If you are, then you will be saying continually, "Let God be magnified in my weakness, let his majestic love be seen amid all my sorrows."

17. But I am poor and needy;

A double expression for a poverty that is doubly felt; — perhaps, poor in temporals; certainly poor in spirituals; poor, and full of needs, yet with nothing to supply those needs: "I am poor and needy;"

17. Yet —

That is a blessed "yet" —

17. The Lord thinketh upon me:

That is enough for me; if he thinks upon me, his thoughts are so kind, and generous, and wise, and practical that he will help me.

17. Thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.

PSALM 40

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. If I were to read this Psalm all through as referring to Christ, and to Christ only, I should be correct in so doing; but still, there is such a unity between Christ and those who compose his mystical body that, what is true of the Head, is true of the members. What is true of the Vine, is true of the branches. What is true of Christ, is true of those who are in him. Therefore, this Psalm relates to David as well as to "great David's greater Son", and it also concerns every one who is of the royal seed, every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the Psalm begins :—

1. I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.

"I waited." Do not beggars wait long at a fellow-creature's door for some pitiful alms, and should not I be content to linger at Mercy's gate for such great boons as I am craving? "I waited patiently." Well may we tarry in patience till Jehovah's time to help, since we know that "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; and if he be pitiful, we can well afford to be patient, "I waited patiently for Jehovah." Those who have been most mighty in prayer have sometimes had to wait for the answers

to their supplications. Do not expect the Lord to hear thee today or tomorrow. He may hear thee before thou speakest, according to his promise, "Before they call, I will answer;" but he may, for the trial of thy faith, make thee wait. Art thou able to wait? Then thou art certain to receive a great blessing. "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me," bowed down out of heaven, inclined unto me, stooped to me, thought well of me, and of my prayer also, "and heard my cry."

2. *He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.*

This is a wonderful song, full of rapturous joy. You know how Orientals were accustomed to cast their prisoners into pits, and those pits were often horribly deep, and dark, and damp; and the mud at the bottom would be such that a man would sink in it. David sings of the Lord, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay." What a wonderful up-bringing was this; and, as God never does anything by halves, he did not let his servant slip back again, for David added, "and set my feet upon a rock." "He set my feet." When God sets a man's feet, those feet are well set; there is no sliding, no slipping, then. The Lord set' David's feet upon a rock; and, more than that, established his goings, made them firm, so that when he stirred he did not stumble.

3. *And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God:*

Sing, then, believer! Thou didst groan often enough in the pit; sing now that thou art on the rock. Thou wast desolate enough in the dungeon; sound aloud thy grateful thanksgivings now that thy goings are established.

3. *Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.*

There you have a picture of a sinner's conversion and its effects. The man sees the Lord's goodness to the child of God in distress. He fears; that is, he stands in awe of the great God; and then he also believes, he trusts in the Lord. One saint makes many; one child of God brought up out of the horrible pit leads to the bringing up of a great many others in the same way.

4. *Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.*

If you trust in God, you will have no reverence for the proud, nor for those who turn aside from God's Word, and teach falsehood. If you really fear God, you will have no fear of men.

5. Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

The child of God, reviewing the Lord's great goodness, feels that he can never count the mercies of God to him; and, as to telling them out, that can never be, It will be, perhaps, a part of our eternal employment to tell to angels, and principalities, and powers in the heavenly places the story of the lovingkindness of the Lord which we have experienced here below. If we had no troubles, we should have nothing to tell; but now that we are led in a strange way, and into very difficult places, we can write another page in our diary, which will be worth reading in those days when fictions shall all have been consumed in the fire, but the great facts in the lives of the Lord's people shall make God to be admired in his saints for ever and ever.

6-8. Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.

Spoke I not truly when I said that the Christ of God is here? To whom is this passage one hundredth part so applicable as to the Lord Jesus himself? Does not Paul dwell upon this passage as teaching the putting aside of the old covenant law, and the bringing in of something better, even the obedience of Christ our Saviour? However, this evening, I wish to read the Scripture in reference to the saints, the Lord's own people. I trust that many of us, seeing that God does not delight in ritualistic performances, and in the externals of religion, so much as he does in the obedience of the heart, can come to him, and declare with David, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." Beloved friends, you are not what you ought to be; you are not what you want to be; you are not what you shall be; but, tell me, are you ever happier than when you are consciously doing the will of God? Do you not find misery in sin, and delight in holiness? If you can say that it is so with you, then you are bound for the kingdom; you are on the way to complete victory over sin. Be of

good cheer; he who has wrought in you this selfsame thing, to delight to do the will of God, will grant you grace to do it. He will bruise Satan under your feet shortly; and your inbred corruptions shall yet be uprooted by the Spirit of his grace.

9. *I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest.*

This is what Jesus can say. He was the Prince of open-air preachers, the Great Itinerant, the President of the College of all preachers of the gospel; and I trust that many of us here can also say that, according to our ability and opportunity, we have tried to tell of Christ to those round about us.

10. *I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.*

If any of you have done so, if there has been a sinful reticence about the things of God, if called to preach, you yet have not preached the full gospel of God's grace, the Lord forgive you, and bring you out into a clear manifestation of what he has written within your hearts! We cannot tell what we do not know, and we ought not to try to do so; but what is graven in our hearts by the Holy Spirit we are bound to tell to others. This gas was lighted that it might shine; and you received the divine fire that you might shine to the glory of God. It may be that, in some dark hour, it shall afford you at least a little comfort to be able to say, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation." You may be able to use it as an argument in prayer, as the psalmist does: "I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation, therefore,"—

11. *Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord; let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.*

Depend upon it, God will take care of us, if we take care of his truth. If we, from cowardly reasons, keep back any part of the gospel, God may leave us to defend ourselves; but if we conceal nothing that he has revealed to us, if we are faithful to the truth committed to our charge, that truth will itself preserve us, and we shall know more and more of the loving-kindness of the Lord.

But what a sad verse is the next one, if it describes the experience of any one of you who have known the Lord!

12. *For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me.*

If that is the condition of any one whom I am addressing, be comforted by the remembrance that another has been along that dark road where you now are found, and follow his example in praying to the Lord to deliver you. —

13. *Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me: O Lord, make haste to help me.*

Thus did David cry unto the Lord “out of the depths.” Imitate his example if you are in similar circumstances. Say, with good John Ryland,— “Out of the depths of doubt and fear,

Depths of despair and grief,
I cry; my voice, O Jesus, hear,
And come to my relief!”

14—16. *Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil. Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, Aha, Aha, Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee:*

Here is comfort for all poor trembling seekers; they are only seekers, but let us thank God that they are seekers, and let us say with the psalmist, “Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee.” All true Christians, those who have found Christ, are still seekers; for, after finding Christ, they do their souls inflame to seek him more and more. So that our prayer also is, “Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee.”

16, 17. *Let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified. But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.*

The Lord bless to us the reading of this precious portion of his Word, for his name’s sake! Amen.

PSALM 41

You will see, dear friends, from these holy songs, that the saints of God in those olden days were not screened from trials and troubles, but were tempted in all points like as we are. If we happen to be in similar trying circumstances, let us take comfort from their experiences; the footsteps of the flock that has gone before should make the sheep feel that it is not lost. Psalm 41 To the chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

1. *Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.*

David delivered others, and God will deliver him. When he is poor and needy, God will think upon him, even as he considered the poor and the needy when they cried unto him.

2, 3. *The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.*

God will be condescendingly gentle to such as are kind and gentle to the poor. If we love God first, and then exhibit the result of that love in our care for the poor and the needy, we shall certainly be recompensed, for he that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord, and the Lord will pay him back, — sometimes in his own coin, and oftener in a coin of heavenly currency. Let us take note of this, and let us never harden our heart against the poor and the needy in the time of their extremity.

4. *I said, Lord, be merciful unto me:*

David had been very kind to the poor at all times; but when he gets into trouble, he does not plead that, he just mentions it, but the main stress of his pleading is quite in another direction, namely, for mercy: “I said, Lord be merciful unto me.”

4, 5. *Heal my soul; for have sinned against thee. Mine enemies speak evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish?*

But good men do not die to please wicked men, and sometimes, when the good men have been dead and buried, and their memory has been insulted by the wicked, they have risen up again in their posthumous influence. Good men live too long for the wicked, but they live as long as God wills that they should; they are immortal till their work is done. The story of Wycliffe is but a typical case of

what has often happened. When the monks gathered round his bed, and expected that their opponent would soon be gone, he said, "I shall not die, but live," and so he did; and even after he had died, he continued to be a living power in the land; indeed, we know not how much of the blessings we enjoy is the result of the light that was shed upon England by "the morning star of the Reformation."

6. *And if he come to see me, he speaketh vanity: his heart gathereth iniquity to itself; when he goeth abroad, he telleth it.*

Those are bad visitors to the sick who, when they speak, talk only nonsense or that which galls the sufferer; and then, when they go out, begin to tell an idle tale against him to his injury.

7-9. *All that hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt. An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him: and now that he lieth he shall rise up no more. Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.*

Many a child of God has had his character whispered down by slanderers, many a man has had a hard time of it through the evil speaking of men of the world; yea, even the Lord of saints and the King of pilgrims knew what it was to find a traitor in his most familiar friend, and to receive the basest ingratitude from one who had eaten of his bread. Do not be carried away with too much sorrow if you are slandered or betrayed; better men than you have suffered through this fearful evil. Therefore, take the trouble to your Lord, and bear it with such patience as he will give you.

10, 11. *But thou, O LORD, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them. By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me.*

"He may think that he shall triumph over me, he may even begin in his mind to divide the spoil; but he shall never really get it: 'Mine enemy doth not triumph over me.'"

12, 13. *And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.*

That is the sick man's praise; it is full of fervor and full of life. Let us never rob God of the revenue of his praises; let us not have such a cupboard love for him that we only praise him when he gives us good things. Let us bless his name just as much when he takes

away, when he afflicts, when he chastises. That is true praise which comes from the bed of affliction, and from a heart that is sore broken with sorrow. Now in the next Psalm we find the good man in trouble again.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 41, AND 42.

PSALM 42

We often read this Psalm, because we are very often in the same state that the psalmist was in when he wrote it, and the language seems to suit us at many periods of our life.

1. *As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.*

It is the “hart” that panteth; and, in the Hebrew, the word is in the feminine. The old naturalists say that the female has greater thirst than the male, and that it shows it more, having more feebleness of body, and less power of endurance. The hart is said to be, naturally, a thirsty creature, and when it has been long hunted, its thirst seems to be insatiable. The psalmist does not say, “thy soul hungereth,” but, “My soul thirsteth.” As man can bear hunger much longer than he can bear thirst; he may continue without food for days, but not without drink; so the psalmist mentions the most thirsty creature, and the most ardent of the natural passions: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks.” He does not merely say, “after the brooks;” but, “after the water brooks.” Why is this? I think it is because there are many brooks that are dry at certain seasons, and the hart longeth for those that have water in them. So the Christian thirsts, not only for the means of grace; they are the brooks, but he longs for God in the means. When grace is in the means of grace, then they are water brooks indeed. “So panteth my soul after thee O God.” He does not say, “So I pant after my former grandeur,” or “so pant I for my friend,” but “so panteth my heart after thee.” His soul had only one longing, one thirst, and every power and every passion had united itself to that one desire, “so panteth my soul after thee, O God.”

2. *My soul thirsteth for God, —*

It was a soul thirst, not a throat thirst; the thirst had got as far down as the soul, till the inner spirit was as dry as a man’s throat after a long journey through the desert. “My soul thirsteth for God,”

2. *For the living God:*

David had thirsted, you remember, for water from the well of Bethlehem that is within the gate, and he said, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" But that was not living water; he had drunk of it before, yet he thirsted again, but now his soul thirsted for God, for the living God. Nothing but the cool refreshing living water of the living God can ever effectually quench human thirst.

2. *When shall I come and appear before God?*

He valued the assembly of God's people because he believed that, there in an especial manner, he was "before God." What a rebuke this is to those who despise public worship! We know some who say, "Well, we can read a good sermon at home, we can study the Scriptures there." David was a great lover of God's Word, and read it both day and night, yet even he could not dispense with the outward means of grace, the public assembly of the saints. "When shall I come and appear before God?" Brothers and sisters, let us look upon our gatherings for worship as an appearance before God. You do not merely come to listen to the Lord's minister, or to join in the sacred song of the congregation, but you come to "appear before God," that you may show yourself to him as his servants, and that he may reveal himself to you as your Lord. When you and I have been tossing upon the bed of languishing, or have been detained upon the sea, or have journeyed abroad, then we have learned to prize the means of grace more than ever.

3. *My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?*

The psalmist had sorrow within, and persecution without, and a Christian sometimes has to eat salt meat. "My tears have been my meat." He finds but very little sweetness or solace in such food as this; yet, after all, there is much in a Christian's tears. It is a comfort to be able to shed tears of repentance, and tears of longing after God. There are some believers who still have tears for their meat, yet they can say, "Thank God we are not dead if we can weep, we are not utterly left of God, if we can sigh after him; and so, though our tears are salt, they are nourishing to the spirit." "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, "Where is thy God?" This is what our enemies always say to us when we are in trouble. This is what Queen Mary said when the

Covenanters were obliged to fly to the Highlands. "Where now is John Knox's God?" But when her French soldiers were afterwards put to the rout by the brave Scots, she found out where God was. This was the taunt at the St. Bartholomew massacre in France. As they stabbed the Protestants the Papists cried, "Where is your God?" What a mercy it is that they do say this, for nothing brings God so soon to his people as the stunts of their enemies. If any man supposes that God has forgotten his people, and therefore insults them thus, God will come to them post-haste to rectify the mistake. "Where is thy God?" He is coming to thee, O Christian; he is near thee now!

4. *When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day.*

You see, brethren, the more a man enjoys the means of grace at one time, the more he grieves when he loses them. "I had gone with the multitude." There is something very inspiring in worshipping God in a crowd; the joy is infectious, there is a holy contagion in it; as the sacred song floats upward from many joyous voices, we seem borne up upon its billows of praise. I like that word "holy day" even though it is rather like holiday, for our holy days should be our true holidays. There should be no rest to the Christian like the holiness of the Sabbath, the holiness should be the very joy of it. Keep it a holy day, and then it will be a holiday; try to make it a holiday, and then it will be neither a holiday nor a holy day. At the remembrance of these past joys, the psalmist's soul was poured out like water, his heart was as water spilt upon the ground. See, brethren, how low a good man may come, and yet be safe; how near the rocks God's ships may go, and yet not be wrecked.

5. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.*

As one well remarks, Christian men have a deal of indoor work to do. They have not only to question others, but they have to question themselves. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" Be very jealous, dear friends, of doubts, and fears, and despondency. Some of us are sometimes the subjects of these emotions, and this is pitiable; but when we try to pamper them, this is inexcusable. Endeavour to live above this disquietude; you cannot praise God,

you cannot serve your fellow men, you cannot do anything well, when your soul is in a disquieted state. Hope in God is the best cure for this despondency. "Hope thou in God." When thou hast no hope in thyself, nor in thy graces, nor in thine experience, "hope thou in God." He is loving, faithful, powerful, and true, so "hope thou in God." "For I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." "My countenance is wrinkled, and covered with sores through my sickness; but he is the help of my countenance, and I shall yet praise him."

6. O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.

Oh, what a mercy it is to be able to look back upon our past experiences of God's mercy! How delightful it is to remember what the Lord was, to us in days gone by, for he is the same God still. When you are like in the great storm, when neither sun, nor moon, nor stars for many days appeared, it is very pleasant to remember that the sun, moon, and stars did shine in the past, and that they will shine forth again.

7. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.

When there is a great rain at sea, there is a peculiar kind of noise, as if the deep above were talking to the deep below. "Deep calleth unto deep; and sometimes, the two deeps clasp hands, and then there is what we call a waterspout. The psalmist uses this as a picture of his sorrows, and it is very remarkable that sorrows seldom come alone. When the rain comes down on land, it calls to the little brooks, and they say, "Here we are," and they go leaping down the hillside, and speak to the rivulets, and they say, "Here we are," and the rivulets speak to the rivers, and they say, "Here we are," and they speak to the gulfs, and the gulfs to the broad sea, till "deep calleth unto deep." So, little sorrows, great sorrows, overwhelming sorrows, come to the Christian, and they all seem to come at once. Nay, not only do they come to us, but they go over us, till we cry, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Surely, this language is an exaggeration, for it is only Christ who could say that; but, sometimes, when you and I are in a low dark frame of mind, we are apt to think that we have felt all the twigs of the rod, and that we could not be made to smart more. Little do we really know of it;

God grant that we may never know more than we do! Now comes an exercise for faith, to be able, when down at the bottom of the sea, like Jonah, and at the mercy of every wave, to say with the psalmist in the next verse,

8. *Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.*

We shall not only have day-time grace, but night-time grace, too: “In the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.” What a sweet title that is, “The God of my life,” the source of my life, the strength of my life, the comfort of my life, without whom my life is not life at all!

9. *I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me?*

He had been talking too much to himself; now he talks with his God.

9-11. *Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

Notice how the psalmist had been growing. In the fifth verse, where the refrain comes in, it is very nearly the same as it is here, yet there is some difference. There it was, “I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance,” but here it is, “I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance.” Then it was God helping the poor wrinkled brow to turn towards heaven, now it is God himself giving the man joy and rest. Then there is the last utterance of the psalmist on that occasion, “My God.” He could not reach that note before, and when the Christian can say, “My God,” his troubles are at an end.

PSALM 42

1. *As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.*

It is said that when they cannot find water, they sometimes let loose a hart, which, flying over the desert sand, by instinct seems to scent out the water-brook. If he cannot find it, however, the stag is

subject to a burning thirst. He stands and pants. His sides heave while he thirsts. So says David, "As the hart panteth (or "brayeth") "after the water-brooks."

2. *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?*

Not God's worship only; not God's people, but God himself he pants for. Oh! for such a thirst. The next best thing to having God is to have an insatiable thirst after him. Do you think a soul ever could be cast away that longed for God? Impossible. There is never a soul in hell that had any sincere longings after God. Grace is in thy heart, dear hearer. That thirst is grace if thou art longing after the living God.

3. *My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?*

"Thou art forsaken. God has forgotten thee." At the very thought of this, he had the salt meat of his tears, and nothing else, for there is nothing that touches a Christian's heart and wounds him to the quick like that. "Where is thy God?"

4, 5. *When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.*

See how he clings to God in the dark. When the question cuts through his soul, "Where is thy God?" he seems to say, "I will none but him. I will follow hard after him. He is everything to me. I will be sick till he heals me. I will be in the dark till he gives me light. I look to none, but to my God."

6. *O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.*

Or the little hill. I did know thee there. These were thy trysting-places. There didst thou meet with me, and I do remember this, and canst thou have met me in love so often, and wilt thou cast me away now? Thou didst there manifest thyself to me — as thou dost not unto the world, and thou art an unchanging lover. Wilt thou not come to me again?

7. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts:

Heaven's troubles and earth's trials seem to clasp hands and form a waterspout. The deep of thy dark purposes seems to echo to the deep of human malice and Satanic wrath. "Deep calleth to deep."

7. All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.

Thou haste concentrated an ocean upon my devoted head.

8. Yet.

Oh! what a glorious "yet" that is. How it swims! Never was there a swimming suit like that which is made of hope.

8. The LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.

How dear God gets to be to a gracious man in the time of trouble. Just now he called God the health of his countenance. Now he calls him his very life. "My prayer unto the God of my life."

9-11. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

Or, as the old psalm puts it: — "Yea, mine own God is he." A sweet collocation of words, indeed! "Yea, mine own God is he." He seems to revel in God; — to find intense delight in God. God is everything to him.

PSALM 42

1. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.

Hunted, hot, weary, thirsty! It must drink or die. You see the poor creature with the big tears in its eyes, with the sweat distilling from it, moving to and fro as it pants in its longing for the water, "even so does our soul long after God." I must have my God. I must die if I have not God. It is the refrain of our hymn, "Give me Christ, or else I die." It is not verbal. It is the soul that is panting. And when

you grow very weary with the word and very heavy of heart--and when without any trouble you are led to see the emptiness of all carnal joys--then is the time when this panting comes.

2. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?

Not sacraments, not sermons, but God. Not books, not even prayers, but God. Three times he puts it; "for God"--"for the living God"--"that I may come and appear before God." We could not pant after an idol or an image; but we do thirst after a living God that he would come to our living souls. We feel as if we could not live without the living God. Is it so with you? You shall have your desire. If for a while he delays, he must come at the cry of his children.

3. My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?

That is a very stinging question, and the enemy knows that and he takes care to put it often to the Christian." "Where is thy God." "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That was the bitterest bitter in Christ's cup. When our adversaries think that we are altogether left, and to cry, "Where is thy God?" it is not wonderful that we begin to weep until our tears become the salt meat of every meal. "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?"

4. When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me:

You could not help it. It is not the best thing in the world. Meditation is always good, but it needs to be done in a wise way, else we may meditate ourselves into still deeper griefs. "I pour out my soul in me."

4. For I had gone with the multitude,

Here were memories which made him sorrowful, but yet made him hopeful.

4. I went with them to the house of God,

Time was when I had many with me, when I did not stand alone,-when they were glad of my company, and I of theirs. I did not go the wrong way, but I went with them to the house of God; and the house of God is all the more delightful because of the many that go to it. "At once they sing, at once they pray They hear of heaven and learn the way."

4. *With the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day.*

And I felt it to be a true holiday. There are some that turn holy days into holidays. Blessed are they that turn holidays into holy days. It is indeed, a great solace for the heart to enjoy Christian fellowship, and to go with the many to the worship of God. But if he cannot--if his pathway is to be a lonely one, then let him still trust in God though I should not wonder that he has his grief.

5. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?*

As old Master Trapp says, "David tries to talk David out of the dumps; and he does well." Here were two Davids--David that was down and David that was up, and David draws David up. So you, too, if you are a little low tonight, should let your better, godlier self talk to yourself.

5. *Hope thou in God:*

If you cannot do anything else, yet hope. The New Zealanders call hope "the swimming thought," because when everything else is drowned up comes hope at the top of the wave. You cannot drown hope.

5. *For I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.*

Snatch from the altars of the future fire-brands with which to kindle the altar of today. "I shall yet praise him." I am not always going to be low. I have hung the harp upon the willows, but I have not broken its strings. I shall take it down again. "I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." If he does but look upon us, if he does but have pity upon us, let us be content with that, and abide his time.

6. *O my God, my soul is cast down within me:*

Is it not a blessed thing that, even when he is down, he says, "Oh, my God"? He gets hold of his God. He has lost his company, but he has not lost his God. See--"my soul"--"my God." His God is as much his as his soul is his. He puts them together--"my God"--"my soul."

6. *Therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.*

Were these places where he was then wandering? He would remember God wherever he was. He would remember happier days,

seasons long past when he did walk in fellowship with God. So let us remember how he kept his tryst with us in former days of sorrow,-how he manifested himself unto us as he does not to the world. He will do the same now. Let us be of good courage.

7. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.

They are God's waves and God's billows; so he will not mind them. Our Father rules the stormiest deeps, and the noisiest depths of the soul only speak as he permits them. Be of good cheer.

8, 9. Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

He had tried his "whys" on himself. Now he comes with his "whys" to his God, and God will answer him. Our Father permits his children to plead with him. You are permitted to say, "O God, show me wherefore thou contendest with me;" and he will be pleased to let you see the reason, or, if not, to give you faith enough to be satisfied without a reason.

10. As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?

Rather monotonous this. "Where is thy God?" is all they can say. They are rather short of wit when they must always hang on to the same old taunt. If ever you hear of a new heresy, it is only an old heresy with a new soul put to it.

11. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 15.; AND PSALM 42.

PSALM 42

1. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.

"As the hart panteth" or "brayeth." And if such be your soul's panting after God, you shall have what you pant for. Sooner or later, God will manifest himself in grace to the man who cries after him in this fashion.

2. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : —

“My soul, my very soul, thirsteth for God, the living God.”

2, 3. *When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?*

That is another of the taunts of the ungodly. Just now, they said, “When shall he die and his name perish?” Now they cry, “Where is thy God?” “You said that he would help you; you were sure that he would comfort you; you were confident that he would draw near to you; and now you are crying and panting after him, and have not got what you want: ‘Where is thy God?’”

4. *When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me :-*

That is not a good thing to do; if you do pour your soul out, do not pour it into yourself again. There is little gain when you merely empty your grief out of yourself into yourself. I have known many a man lay his burden down, and then take it up again directly. That is poor economy; the way to get rid of the sorrow is to pour out your hearts before God. There is no wisdom in doing what the psalmist says he did: “I pour out my soul in me.”—

4, 5. *For I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?*

You see, the psalmist here talks to himself. Every man is two men; we are duplicates, if not triplicates, and it is well sometimes to hold a dialogue with one’s own self. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” I always notice that, as long as I can argue with myself about my depressions, I can get out of them; but when both the men within me go down at once, it is a downfall indeed. When there is one foot on the solid rock, the other comes up to it pretty soon.

5. *Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.*

“I know I shall; he will yet look at me. I shall not always be in the dark; wherefore, let me begin at once to praise him.” It is well sometimes to snatch a light from the altars of the future, and with it to kindle the sacrifices of the present: “I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.”

6. *O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.*

From the little hill I will think of all thy former love; — all the sacred spots where thou hast met with me, all the lonely places where thou hast been my comfort, and all the joyful regions where thou hast been my glory. I will think of these, and take comfort from them, for thou art an unchanging God; and what thou didst for me aforetime, thou wilt do for me again and yet again.

7. *Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.*

Here is a great storm; here is a man, not merely on the sea, but in the sea;

with not only some waves beating upon him, but with all of them going over him; and those not common waves, but God's waves. That is a Hebraism for the biggest waves, Atlantic billows; all these have gone right over him, yet see how he swims. Hope in God always crests the stormiest billow.

8, 9. *Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?*

See what liberties saints take with God; how they reason with him, how they argue with him; and God loves them to do so. Are you not pleased with your child when he urges reasons why you should do this or that for him? You are glad to see that he has mind enough to think of these things, and confidence enough in you to expect you to be affected by his pleadings; and the Lord loves his people to discourse with him. "Put me in remembrance," saith he, "let us plead together." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." If we reasoned more with God, we should reason less with ourselves. There is a good reason for reasoning with God, but it is often unreasonable to reason with yourself.

10, 11. *As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: For I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

It is curious to see the duplicate man here; he talks to himself as “thou,” and yet he says “I.” “Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance.” First, he said, “I shall yet praise him for the health of his countenance;” now it is “the health of my countenance.” When God helps us with his countenance, then our own countenance soon grows bright and healthy. “Who is the health of my countenance,” says the psalmist; and then he comes to the sweetest note of all, “and my God.”

“For yet I know I shall him praise,
Who graciously to me,
The health is of my countenance,
Yea, mine own God is he.”

Oh, sweet word that! May each of us be able to reach it! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 41, AND 42.

PSALM 43

1, 2. *Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man. For thou art the God of my strength:*

In the previous Psalm, David had called the Lord the God of his life. Now he calls him the God of his strength. We generally sing ourselves up. We may begin in a very low key, as David did, but if we can praise God in the dark, we shall soon praise God in the light.

2-4. *Why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy:*

“My exceeding joy,”--exceeding all the other joys I have,--exceeding still the joys of the happiest men I have ever known.

4. *Yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.*

It was not enough for David to say, “O God;” he cries, “O God my God.” You cannot praise another man’s God. Possession is not only nine points of the law, but it is all the points of the gospel.

5. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.*

May the Lord comfort his mourning people by such words as these!

PSALM 44:1-8

1. *We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.*

Now Israel was restored to Canaan, and the Canaanite and Perizzite were driven out, that God's chosen people might occupy their appointed place.

2, 3. *How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.*

They did use their own arm and sword; but, for all that, it was God who won the victory for them. It was his might that made them brave, and a consciousness of his gracious purpose that made them strong, so that they routed all their foes until, from Dan to Beersheba, the land was all their own.

4-6. *Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob. Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.*

See how the lesson from ancient history was turned to practical account in the psalmist's own experience: "As our forefathers were delivered, not by their own bow or sword, but by the right hand of the Most High, so I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me." Brethren, let us always labour to reproduce in ourselves, by God's grace, the best experiences of his saints. Wherever we see the hand of the Lord displayed in others of his people, let us pray that the same hand may be manifested to us and in us.

7, 8. *But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. Selah.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 44:1-8; AND PSALM 45.

PSALM 45

1. *My heart is inditing a good matter: speak of the things which I have made touching the King:*

You know what King is referred to here, it is he, of whom the psalmist said, in the 4th verse of the previous Psalm, “Thou art my King, O God.” “I speak of the things which I have made touching the King.”

1, 2. *My tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men:*

The psalmist writes as if he had been actually looking upon him. Faith has a wonderful realizing power; and when the soul is deeply meditative, it seems to be full of eyes: “‘Thou art fairer than the children of men.’ Though thou art one of them, yet thou art fairer than all the rest of them. There is a beauty about thee, O Lord, that is not to be perceived in the brightest and best of the sons of Adam!”

2-5. *Grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.*

There is no other conqueror who is equal to Christ, whether he smites with his sword his foes who are near at hand, or shoots his arrows from his bow at those who are far away. Whether the gospel is preached to us who have long heard it, or is proclaimed to the heathen in distant lands, it has the same almighty power in it to work the glorious purposes of God's grace.

6, 7. *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.*

Note the connection here between God and man, the very same Person who is addressed as God, is also spoken of as anointed by God above his fellows. God and yet man art thou, O blessed Jesus Christ! Thou art very God of very God, yet just as truly man, the God-man, the Mediator between God and man.

8-10. *All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. Kings'*

daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir. Hearken, O daughter, and consider, —

Listen, each one of you who are a part of this matchless bride of Christ, ye who are part of her whom Christ has looked upon with infinite and eternal love: — “Hearken, O daughter, and consider,”

10. *And incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house;*

God’s message to his people in the world today is just what it was when the Spirit bade Paul write to the Corinthians, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord almighty.”

11. *So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.*

Our Saviour is our King, and he must be both loved and adored; “He is thy Lord; and worship thou him.”

12. *And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour.*

When Christ’s Church really has her Lord in the midst of her, and when she is strong in the power of his might, there will never be any lack of wealth for the carrying on of his cause: “Even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favor.”

13. *The king’s daughter is all glorious within:*

Other daughters are often far too glorious without, but that is the best beauty which is inward: “The King’s daughter is all glorious within:”

13-16. *Her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king’s palace. Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, —*

We often see the hoary head laid low, and the ripe saint taken home to heaven; but the ranks of Christ’s retinue are not thereby thinned, for the sons shall stand in the place of their sires. God be thanked for this cheering promise: “Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children,” —

16, 17. *Whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth. I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 44:1-8; AND PSALM 45.

PSALM 45

To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, (or, upon the lilies,) for the sons of Korah, Maschil, A Song of loves. We may look upon the 45th Psalm as being a sort of compendium of the Song of Solomon. It is written, too, upon the same subject, and that is not the marriage of Solomon with Pharaoh's daughter; — only the strangest and most whimsical fancy could ever have found Pharaoh's daughter either in this Psalm or in the Book of the Canticles. It is a description of Christ and his Church; a song of love between that pair for ever affianced, and soon to sit down together at the marriage supper in glory.

1. *My heart is inditing a good matter:*

Or, as the margin has it, "My heart boileth or bubbleth up with good matter." It is said of Origen, one of the ancient fathers of the Church, that whenever he preached, he preached with great earnestness and fervor; but that, when he spoke of Christ, he seemed to be all on fire. So, whenever our hearts speak of the good matter which concerns Christ, our souls should be all on fire, we should be boiling over with love to him.

1. *I speak of the things which I have made touching the king:*

A man can never speak so well of the things which he has learned, or heard, as of the things which he has made, that is, the things which he has experienced. Indeed, this is your life-work and mine, beloved, to tell to others the things which we have made our own touching the king.

1. *My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.*

A ready writer writes what he has thought of beforehand, what he has well meditated upon, and digested; so the psalmist declares that this rapturous song is as certainly true as the verba scripta of a thoughtful accomplished penman.

2. *Thou art fairer than the children of men:*

The Hebrew word here is doubled, as much as to say, "Thou art doubly fair; thou art fair, fair; twice fairer than the children of men."

Both in outward appearance — although his visage was so sadly marred while he was here, — and in personal character, our Lord Jesus Christ is “fairer than the children of men.”

2. *Grace is poured into thy lips:*

Grace has, in the most copious manner, been poured upon Christ, and now there pours from his lips a very cataract of grace; — floods of love, and tenderness, and holy eloquence stream from his lips.

2, 3. *Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.*

Put thy sword where it will be ready for use; come forth, and let us see thee appear in thy strength, O most Mighty! For this is one of the names of Christ: “I have laid help upon One that is mighty; I have exalted One chosen out of the people.”

4, 5. *And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.*

You may see, on some of the ancient slabs, representations of Oriental monarchs riding in their chariots, perhaps engaged in hunting, or pursuing their enemies, with their bow and arrow in their hands, and their sword upon their thigh. So is our Saviour thus graphically described. His Word is his sword, and the testimony of his ministers he makes to be like sharp arrows sticking in the hearts of his enemies. May it be so this day, and everyday may Christ thus ride prosperously!

6. *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter.*

This could not have been said of Solomon; for he was never called God. It refers to none other than Christ the King, whose throne is for ever and ever.

7-9. *Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women:*

Thy maids of honour, for all those who truly wait on Christ become at once the King's daughters. It is more noble to serve God

than to sit as king upon a throne. The day shall come when all the honour of earthly kings' daughters will have passed away, but the glory of those who are in Christ's court as honourable women shall abide for ever.

9. *Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.*

In the best and purest gold. Every member of the Church of Christ may well say, with Dr. Watts, —

“Strangely, my soul, art thou array'd
By the great Sacred Three”

10, 11. *Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.*

Though the Church has been brought up in the world, she is to be separated from it. The more distinction there can be between Christians and worldlings, the better will it be for both. Christ greatly admires the beauty of his Church when she is separated from the world, and it is nothing but an adulterous alliance when the church becomes united to the State. We never can expect any great and permanent blessing to any church which thus degrades and dishonours itself. If a church cannot stand without the support of the civil power, let it fall; but happy is that Church which relies alone upon the King himself, and is content with the dowry which he gives her.

12. *And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour.*

The day is coming when the Church of Christ shall be honoured by all men. The merchant princes, who now esteem her as a thing of naught, shall come with their tribute to her, and those who once despised her shall entreat her favor.

13, 14. *The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee.*

Happy was John the Baptist to be “the friend of the Bridegroom” to Christ, and happy are the hearts of those who are the bridesmaids to his Church: “the virgins her companions that follow her” — you, whose pure hearts are set upon the Lord alone, and who follow

whithersoever he doth lead, you, too, “shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework” with his Church.

15, 16. *With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king’s palace. Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.*

There is such a thing as an apostolical succession, though not the fiction which usually goes by that name. The Lord is constantly raising up fresh disciples, fresh preachers, and fresh teachers, whom he makes to be princes in his earthly courts, and who shall be princes in his heavenly courts for ever and ever.

17. *I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever.*

“Jesus shall reign where’er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.”

PSALM 45:1-9

The lily psalm — a psalm of loves. Oh! that our hearts might be full of love tonight, and, while we read, may our hearts be singing to the praise of the Well Beloved.

1. *My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.*

Sometimes the heart could speak if it could move the tongue; but it is a blessed time with us when, first of all, the heart is fully warmed with love, and then the fire within burns the strings that tie the tongue, and the tongue begins to move right joyously in expressing the heart’s love. May it be so with us tonight who have to preach. May it be so with all our brethren who have, in public, either to preach or to pray.

2. *Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.*

No sooner does he begin to write about Christ than he sees him. A warm heart soon kindles the imagination. The eye of faith is soon opened when once the heart is right. We feel the presence of Christ. We begin to speak of him and to him. “Thou art fairer than the children of men.” Oh! I would tonight that Christ would but lift the

corner of his vail and show you but one of his eyes. Your hearts would be ravished with his infinite beauty. "Thou art fairer than the children of men." Would God he would but speak half a word into our weary ear, and we should say, "Grace is poured into thy lips." Oh! for some sense and sight of him! Do not our hearts hunger after this tonight?

3, 4. *Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.*

The heart never glows with love to Christ unless, in consequence, there is a longing that his kingdom may be extended. It is an instinct of a loving heart, that it desires the honour of its object. We long for Christ to rule and reign, simply because we love him. Oh! that he would lay his right hand to his work in these slow times. How little is being done, comparatively! Oh! for an hour of the right arm of Jesus. If he would but come himself to the battle, and the shout of a king were heard in our camps, what victories would be won. Cry unto him, O you that love him. He will come to your call.

5. *Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, whereby the people fall under thee.*

Christ has not only power near at hand, with his right hand, but far off he darts the arrows of his bow and heathens are made to feel that the gospel is mighty. Would God it were so now. Cry for it.

6. *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter.*

And this we know to be spoken concerning Jesus Christ for this was quoted by the apostle, "Thy throne, O God." Let those who will, deny his Deity. It shall be the joy of our heart to worship him, and, in express terms, to address him who is our brother as "very God of very God." "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. The scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter."

7. *Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.*

Fellow with us and yet equal with God. Man anointed, the Christ, yet still the reigning God. Glory be to his name.

8. *All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.*

Not only is Christ precious, but everything that touches him. There is not a garment that hangs upon his shoulder but becomes sweet by contact with him. “All thy garments smell of myrrh.” There is myrrh about the priestly robe that falls down to his feet, and about the golden girdle of his faithfulness that is girt about his waist. There are myrrh, and aloes, and cassia about his crown, though it be of thorns. About every garment that he puts on there is a sweet perfume.

9. *Kings’ daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.*

Blessed queen of Christ, — his church. Let us never think little of her. There are some that are always crying up “the church,” “the church,” “the church”; but that is not the true church that tries to take the place of Christ. It is anti-Christ. The true church has her place, however, and that is at her husband’s own right hand, where she sitteth in the best of the best, — in gold, and that the gold of Ophir, for he spares nothing for her beauty and her glory.

PSALM 45:1-14

It is a Psalm of instruction, and yet it is a song of love, for the science of love to Christ is the most excellent of all the sciences. To know Christ is to love him, and we are best instructed who love him most, and the Psalm is most of all a Maschil, a Psalm of instruction, when we are taught to love. Hence the Psalm is a song of love.

1. *My heart is inditing a good matter:*

A good instrument — the heart refined and sanctified — a good subject, for, says he: —

1. *I speak of the things which I have made touching the king:*

Oh! it is a loyal subject concerning King Jesus. The original has it, “My heart boileth up with a good matter” — bubbleth up — as if each verse of this Psalm were, so to speak, the bubbling up of a boiling heart that is heated with the love of Christ; and all is concerning him — concerning him the king. “I speak of the things which I have made.” That is experience — things made my own; and there is no matter like that. Theoretical theology is of little value. We must have it in the heart, and have it in our own.

1. *My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.*

As though it were moved by another hand, as a pen might be. So the Psalmist feels as if his tongue were under divine influence, and he were about to utter things his own, yet not his own; — things which he has made, yet which the Spirit indicts.

2. *Thou art fairer than the children of men:*

And then he sees him. He does see him by faith; and he speaks, not so much about him, as to him. “Thou art fairer than the children of men.” Oh! it is sweet meditating upon Christ, when Christ himself is present. It is blessed work to speak about Christ when you can speak to Christ at the same time. Thou art fairer than the children of men — the very fairest of them. Whatever beauty, excellence, and worth there may be about mankind, thou hast all, and more than all that they possess.

2. *Grace is poured into thy lips:*

It comes, therefore, pouring from them. It comes swelling up from thy mouth. Every word that thou speakest is full of grace and truth.

2. *Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.*

The Mediator, the God-man, Christ Jesus, is blessed of God. The blessing of the Most High rests upon him, because he is so infinitely lovely. His words are unspeakably gracious; and if God blesses him, shall not we bless him? If God himself praises him, shall not we praise him? Oh! let us not be silent, but where God leads the way, let us joyfully follow.

3. *Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.*

He loves the fighting Christ — Christ with the sword on his thigh. Oh! but it is sweet to see the Prince of peace — to know that he comes to our heart bearing unspeakably precious blessings; but yet the terrible side of Christ is precious to his saints. They ask him to gird his sword upon his thigh. An armed Christ can only be armed for the defense of his people, and for the deliverance of them from captivity. Therefore, O thou loveliest of the lovely, be the mightiest of the mighty too.

4. *And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.*

There are three things that are much put to it in this world, and have a hard time of it; truth, which is beset with error, like the hunted hind pursued by dogs. O God, defend thy truth! O Christ of God, lay upon thy sword to smite down error! The next thing is meekness. A gentle spirit has a hard time of it amongst the hard-hearted sons of men. They do not understand meekness. They call the meek man a milksop. They make mirth out of his gentleness. O sword of the Lord, defend the meek ones of the earthy And there is a third thing that has a hard time of it, and that is righteousness amongst a godless generation, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter —darkness for light, and light for darkness. Righteousness has to run the gauntlet. But, O thou who art truth, and meekness, and righteousness embodied, come forth with thy sharp sword, and fight on the behalf of these things! We do not ask the Lord to come into the world for the sake of pomp, and pride, and power. We only want his battles to be battles of love. We only ask him to extend the kingdom of truth, and meekness, and righteousness.

5. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.

Christ has far-reaching power. He can not only smite with the sword, but he has skill with the bow, and he can dart an arrow to those that are far off, that they may feel his power. Oh! that he would do so now, that those who are leagues away from him may, to their own surprise, find a shaft come right into their heart, that they may fall under the power of Christ, and cry out to him to come and heal the wound that his own arrow has made. He will do it, for it is written, "I wound, and I heal"; and wherever Christ wounds in mercy, he heals in mercy too.

6. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter.

Notice that the more you look at Christ the more there is to see. Here the songster first said, "Thou art fairer than the children of men"; and now he cries, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." That man has not seen much of Christ who has not perceived him to be God — God on the throne, God on an everlasting throne. Oh! if any of you have not yet believed in Christ as God, I pray you may do so; for you do not know the Christ of the Scriptures at all, however much you may value his moral character as supreme in wisdom, unless you can say, "My Lord and My God," as Thomas

did when he saw his wounds. “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. The scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter.” There is the joy of it! Christ has absolute sovereignty, but that absolute sovereignty never goes beyond the realm of right. “The scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter.”

7. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

Christ is no neutral. He loves righteousness, and hates wickedness. He is like fire in all that he does. There is about him a certain strength of heart, both to love and to hate; and it is for this reason that God loves him, for God hates lukewarmness. “So then, because thou art neither cold nor hot,” says he, “I will spue thee out of my mouth.” But Christ is never neutral about those matters. He loves righteousness. He hates wickedness. “Therefore, God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” And if you want to have the oil of gladness, dear friends, you must not be neutral. You that live betwixt and between — that are neither very good nor very bad — that are not decided worldlings, nor yet decided Christians, you never have any joy at all. You see, you do not go enough into the world to get its joy, bad and base as it is; and you do not go enough into Christ’s kingdom to get its joy; so you get no comfort either way. Oh! to be cast into the kingdom altogether — thrown into it as a man into the deep sea, and swallowed up in it! In its lowest depths are the sweetest waters.

8. All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.

The very clothes of Christ are precious to believers. “Unto you that believe he is preciousness.” But even his very garments are savoured with it, whether he puts on his priestly robes, or his royal garniture, or his prophetic mantle. Each one of these has in it a sweet savour of all manner of choice perfumes, myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. Bitter sweets all of them. Oh! in Christ there is a wonderful bitter sweetness — the pangs of death that breed our life: the pangs of sorrow that bring us joy: his downcasting for our uplifting.

9. Kings’ daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.

No one is so honoured as the one who waits upon the Saviour. They are honourable women that minister to him of their substance, that are often found in his temple, like Anna of old. These are kings' daughters, every one of them. And, as for his Church as a whole, she is a queen. She takes no low mean rank, and her apparel is like her dignity. She is clothed in the gold of Ophir — the, best of metals, and the best kind of that metal — the gold of Ophir; and “strangely, my soul, art thou arrayed by the great Sacred Three.” All manner of royal apparel is put upon the Church of God, and upon every member of it.

10. *Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house;*

We cannot know Christ thoroughly unless we leave off knowing the world. There must be a forgetting as well as a remembering. We are to forget our father's house come right out from it. If Christ is to love his Church, it must be a nonconforming church in the deepest sense of that word. I mean not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of its mind. Not only are we not to love the world, but we are not to think of it. “Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house.”

11. *So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty:*

We were thinking of his beauty. But see: when once we see the beauty of Christ, Christ puts a beauty upon us; and when we learn the beauties of Christ, we soon see beauties in his Church. I find that those who at the Church of God have not any very high esteem of the Church's Head; but when he is beloved, his people are beloved for his sake. Why, there is an old proverb that says, “Love me, love my dog.” Much more may we say, “Love Christ, love his Church.”

11. *For he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.*

This is the great business of the Church — to carry on the worship of her Lord; and I believe that, met together as we are tonight, we are met for the noblest purpose under heaven. When the people of God come together for worship, they are doing that which angels do before the throne — an occupation from which they never cease day or night!

12. *And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift;*

Well, but she is a heathen; she is a trafficker. What does she know about the king of Israel? Ah! but when Israel owns her king

— when the Church of Christ delights in Christ, and dotes upon him, she shall have converts in plenty, from the least likely places.

12. *Even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour.*

They are generally taken up with other things, but then they shall know, when once the Church is right with her King.

13. *The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold.*

Who has wrought it but her King, whose own right hand has hammered out the precious fabric, and then has taken every golden thread and, with his own bleeding hand, has wrought it into a sacred vesture that shall outlast the stars. "Her clothing is of wrought gold."

14. *She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee.*

Happy are those pure virgin spirits that hardly dare think themselves fit to be called a part of the bride, but yet follow her and keep close to her. They are really a part of her, and they "shall be brought unto thee."

PSALM 46

To the chief Musician for the sons of Korah, Song upon Alamoth. This Psalm is often called "Martin Luther's Psalm." Whenever there was any great trouble, Luther used to say, "Let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm together, and then let the devil do his worst." This is the Psalm, too, from which Mr. John Wesley preached in Hyde Park, at the time of a great earthquake. While the earth was shaking, and there was a great tempest, Mr. Wesley preached from the second verse: "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

1. *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

All creatures have their places of refuge. "As for the stork, the fir trees are her house. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies." All men also have their places of refuge, though some are "refuges of lies." But God is our refuge and strength," the omnipotence of Jehovah is pledged for the defense and support of his people. "A very present help in trouble,"—one who is near at hand; always near, but nearest when he is most needed. Not much entreaty is required to bring him to the aid of his people,

for he is close at hand and close at heart, “a very present help in trouble.”

2, 3. *Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.*

Here we have, you perceive, a mention of the greatest convulsions of nature, yet the believer fears not. Doubtless, too, these verses are intended to be a picture of the great convulsions that take place in the providential dealings of God. States and kingdoms that seem to be as solid as the earth will one day be removed. Dynasties that seem as fixed and firm as mountains may soon be swept away into the sea of oblivion. We may have famine, and war, and pestilence, and anarchy, until the whole earth shall seem to be like the sea in a great storm; yea, hope may fail with many and the stoutest hearts may shake at the swelling thereof; yet, let the worst come to the worst, God’s people are still safe. As one old writer saith, “Though God should, to use his words concerning Jerusalem, wipe the earth as a man wipes a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down, yea, though he should break it into a thousand shivers, yet need not his people fear; for, if he does not protect them under heaven, he will take them up to be with him in heaven.” If heaven and earth could be mingled together, and chaos could return, yet still, as long as God is God, there is no use for the believer to fear.

3. *Selah.*

We may well pause, and renew our confidence in the God who never has failed us, and who never will fail any who trust him.

4. *There to a river, the stream whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the most High.*

Whatever river may have been in the psalmist’s mind, it was the symbol of sovereign grace, flowing freshly and freely from the sacred fountain of eternal love, to make glad the people of God. And now we have the inspired Book, we have the preached Word, we have the many precious promises, we have the blessed Spirit himself, and all these make a glorious river, the streams whereof “make glad the deity of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.”

5. *God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.*

The Hebrew expression is, “at the turning of the morning,” our marginal reading gives it, “when the morning appeareth.” “God shall help her at the turning of the morning.” At that period when the night is the blackest, just before the light begins to come, then shall God help his Church. Child of God, this promise is to you also. When the night gets thickest, and the gloom is the heaviest, then God shall help you “at the turning of the morning.” He may tarry for a while, but he will tarry no longer than is wise. You shall find, in looking back upon God’s dealings with you, that, although he sometimes seemed to be long in coming to your help and you cried out, “Lord, how long?” yet, after all, he did help you, and that “right early,” too.

6. *The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted.*

God hath but to speak, and his stoutest foe shall dissolve like snow when the sun shineth upon it.

7-9. *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.*

Here the psalmist invites us to behold what God has done in the past. He has desolated the desolaters, and destroyed the destroyers. War has been a terrible scourge to mankind, but our God is Master even over war. When I look at the old ruined castles all over our land, I cannot help saying to myself and others too, “Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth,” and when I stumble upon some broken-down abbeys, and monasteries, and Popish cathedrals, I can but wish that there were more of them, that we might see many such desolations which the Lord hath made in the earth. He will get the victory over all his foes, and break all his adversaries in pieces, however long he may wait before putting forth his great power in judgment upon them.

10. *Be still, and know that I am God:--*

Here is the command, and here is the reason which will help us to obey it. Judge not the Lord hastily; murmur not at his providential

dealings with you. Be not hurrying and scurrying hither and thither, but “be still.” In silence and in confidence shall be your strength. “Be still, and know that I am God:”-

10. *I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.*

If God is willing to wait, you need not be impatient. His time is the best time, and he will be exalted in due time.

11. *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.*

PSALM 47

1-9. *O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great king over all the earth. He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet. He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah. God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.*

The delivered people give God all the glory. He reigneth, and he it is who subdues the people. Let him be exalted in the congregations of the people and praised in the assembly of the elders now and evermore!

This exposition consisted of readings from 2 CHRONICLES 20.; AND PSALM 47.

PSALM 47

1-5. *O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth. He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet. He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah. God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.*

One of our sacred poets has written, “All his work and warfare done, He into his heaven is gone, And beside his Father’s throne,

Now is pleading for his own;” but, not merely is he “beside his Father’s throne,” he is with him sitting upon the throne, and waiting until his foes be made his footstool.

6-9. *Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.*

There are some, in these days, who have, according to their own confession, cast off the God of Abraham. They do not believe in the Jehovah who is revealed in the Old Testament; they are like those of whom Moses said, “They sacrificed to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not; “ but as for us, we still delight to sing,”

“The God of Abraham praise
Who reigns enthroned above,
Ancient of everlasting days,
And God of love!
Jehovah, great I AM!
By earth and heaven confest;
I bow, and bless the sacred name
For ever blest!”

“But the God of Abraham is very stern,” says someone. Assuredly he is; he is terrible in the majesty of his justice; yet we worship and adore him for that very reason. No effeminate deity, such as modern thought has invented, has even an atom of our admiration, much less of our adoration;

but the glorious God of the Sinai thunders, who is equally terrible as the God of justice on Calvary, this God, who, nevertheless, is love, our hearts adore and worship.

PSALM 48

1-3. *Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge.*

It was so with the literal Jerusalem; and it is so now with the Church of Christ, of which “the city of the great King” was a type. God still dwelleth among men; his Spirit abides with his people; and his Church stands securely upon the rock of his eternal purposes, evermore the same.

4. *For, lo, the kings were assembled,*

The adversaries, who boasted that they would destroy Jerusalem: “the kings were assembled,”

4-7. *They passed by together. They saw it, and so they marveled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. Thou brakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.*

The adversaries of Zion looked up at the city set on that high hill, and they despaired of being able to capture it; and, in like manner, those who attack the truth as it is in Jesus if they did but know how well it is garrisoned by the omnipotence of Jehovah, they also would faint with fear, and give up the assault. If they do not, the Lord can break them in pieces as he broke the ships of Tarshish with his strong east wind.

8-14. *As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah. We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple. According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness. Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.*

According to Alexander and Bonar, this last clause should be read, “He will be our Guide at death and over death.” He will lead us across the Jordan, and be our God and our Guide in the land that floweth with milk and honey, whither we are bound; so, glory be unto the God of Abraham, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for ever and ever! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 114. AND 48.

PSALM 48

A Song and Psalm for the sons of Korah. It is not every Psalm that is a song, for some Psalms are full of sorrow and it is not every song that is a Psalm, for, alas! there are many songs that are mere foolish rhymes or something worse, but here is a happy combination, “A Song and Psalm for the sons of Korah.”

1. *Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised* —

Surely a great God should have great praise: “greatly to be praised” —

1. *In the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.*

If there is any place where he ought to be praised, surely it is there. Even if all the rest of the world is silent, let God be praised “in the mountain of his holiness.” Holy people must praise the holy God. It is natural that they should do so. It needs holy people to see God, and when they do see him, their eyes will glisten with delight, and their voices will ring with his praise.

2. *Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, in mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.*

Thus the Jew praises Jerusalem, and thus the Christian praises the Church. The Church of Christ is, to his eye, the most precious thing in the whole world, and there is nothing upon the face of the earth that is so lovely in the sight of God as his own chosen Church.

3. *God is known in her palaces for a refuge.*

Are not all her people kings? Therefore they live in palaces; and they none of them trust in themselves, God is known to them as a refuge.

4, 5. *For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marveled;*

They came up with their confederate bands of kings to attack Jerusalem, and they looked at it, and wondered at its strength and beauty.

5. *They were troubled, and hasted away,*

If they came quickly, they went away still more quickly, hurrying off like a band of frightened children.

6, 7. *Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.*

God broke up the confederacies of kings that were leagued against his people. Even the great galleons of Tarshish were dashed

to pieces when the Lord blew with his wind, and scattered them, as, many centuries later, he did with the “Invincible” Armada on our own coasts.

8. *As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of host, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah.*

Well might there be a pause here for solemn consideration, for putting the harp strings right, and lifting up the heart to the Lord in praise.

9. *We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.”*

Here is a blessed subject, “thy lovingkindness, O God;” — a blessed people, we who have enjoyed it; — a blessed occupation, “we have thought of thy lovingkindness,” — and a blessed place in which to do it, “in the midst of thy temple.” When we are in the midst of the Lord’s people, in the midst of his Church, then is the time for sweet and blessed thoughts concerning our gracious God.

10. *According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth:*

As is God’s name, so is his fame; unto the very ends of the earth shall men hear the praises of the Lord, especially when he delivers his people.

10. *Thy right hand is full of righteousness.*

God’s right hand is never empty: “thy right hand is full;” and when he comes to sinners, he deals with them in righteousness; and when he comes to his saints in mercy, it is still in righteousness. “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins”

11. *Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments.*

That is, the smaller cities of Judah, let them sing, as well as Jerusalem, the high praises of their delivering God. Perhaps it refers to the women who, in times of war, have to suffer most and worst of all; let them be loudest in their joyous music; as Miriam took her timbrel, and led the song of the women on the shore of the Red Sea, so let the daughters of Judah be glad because of the Lord’s righteous judgments upon the enemies of his people.

12, 13. *Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following.*

Sunday-school teachers, note the security of the Church of God, mark the eternal truth on which she is founded, the everlasting promises by which she is guarded, the forts and bastions of omnipotence that preserve her from the assaults of her enemies! and then tell all this “to the generation following.”

14. *For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.*

But the Hebrew is better still: “He will be our guide even over death.” We shall trample down death; or, as one puts it, we shall stand by the grave of death. What a glorious place for us to stand in when death itself is dead through the ever-living Christ, and the resurrection power that comes through his death! “He will be our guide even over death.”

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 KINGS 5, AND PSALMS 48, AND 95.

PSALM 49

The chief musician here bids us not to fear the ungodly. However high they may be placed, they are but dying men, and when they die their hope shall perish with them. He gives a very graphic description of the deathbed and of the perdition of ungodly men.

1, 2. *Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world: both low and high, rich and poor, together.*

Whenever God has a voice for men, it is meant for all sorts of men. No Scripture is of private interpretation. No warning is intended only for a few. Hear ye this, then, all ye people. Whether ye be low, ye are not too low to listen to his voice; or, whether ye be high, ye are not too high to be under his supremacy.

3, 4. *My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding. I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp.*

Mysteries are to be preached, but they are to be preached with an earnest endeavor on the preacher’s part to make them plain. If it be a dark saying, yet let it be open; and, if music will help, so let it be.

Whatever there is to be taught, let it be plainly taught to the sons of men.

5. *Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?*

We may read it: "The iniquity of my supplanters shall compass me about." There may some dark days when the wicked seed, whose delight it is to bite at the heel of the seed of God, will gather around us; and we think, perhaps, that they will be too many for us. But why should we fear them?

Who are they? They are great and mighty, perhaps, but if they are but an iniquity; — a corporated iniquity, — we need not to be afraid of them. Our righteous God is our defender.

6, 7. *They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him:*

They may be rich as Croesus, but they cannot save a comrade from the grave. They may fee the physician, but they cannot bribe death. How little is the power of wealth, after all! The rich man cannot save even his babe that he loves so well. He certainly cannot save his fellow-sinner.

8. *(For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:)*

There is no redemption but one, and if a soul be unredeemed, the hope of it ceaseth for ever.

9. *That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption.*

For the bodies of the great are fed upon by the worm as readily as the bodies of the paupers. They may embalm the body, if they will, to cheat the worm, or put it into a coffin of lead, but little can they do with it. It is a costly business after all, and is the exception to the rule. Even the wisest cannot live for ever, so as not to see corruption.

10. *For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish and leave their wealth to others.*

Whatever men may have gathered, the wisest cannot find an invention which will enable him to take his treasure with him. He must leave it behind. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither."

11. *Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names.*

Man is so fond of immortality that, while he foolishly rejects the reality of it he clings to the name of it; and he builds a house which he ties down by entail to his heirs, and his heirs' heirs, "for ever," as he calls it. And then he calls the land by his own name, that it may never be forgotten that such a worm as he once crawled over that portion of the earth.

12. *Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not:*

He passes away. His grace, his lordship, his reverence, must lie in the grave. How ridiculous grand titles seem when once it is said, "Earth to earth; dust to dust; ashes to ashes." "Vain pomp and glory of the earth," indeed we may say, in the presence of the shroud and the mattock, and the grave and the worm. "Man being in honour abideth not."

12. *He is like the beasts that perish.*

Not like any one beast, but like any beast that perisheth. He doth but live, and, as far as this world is concerned, he is gone.

13. *This their way is their folly: yet their prosperity approve their sayings. Selah.*

When men have lived only for this world, and die and pass away, without any future worth the having — without any hope of heaven — yet still they report it in the papers that he died "worth" — so much, as if it were wonderful to have so much to leave. And they speak of the shrewd things he used to say — mostly very greedy things, and very grasping things; and though he was a fool, after all, for aiming at the "main chance," as he called it, while he missed the real main chance, namely, the salvation of his soul yet his posterity inherit his folly with his blood, and they approve his sayings.

14. *Like sheep they are laid in the grave;*

They lead a worldly life, and die a worldly death-quiet, contented with this world, — no thought of the world to come.

14. *Death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning;*

That everlasting daybreak shall shed a light on many things; and then the master and the lord, who-- tyrannized over the poor and

needy, shall find himself under the foot of those he trod upon. "The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning."

14,15. *And their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling. But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.*

What a happy confidence! Blessed are those who, by a living faith in a living God, know that their soul shall be received into its Maker's hands. But woe unto those whose confidence lies in the treasure they have accumulated and the acres they have purchased.

16, 17. *Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him.*

They will not know him in the next world to be the squire, the peer, the prince. Death is a dreadful leveller. Envy not the great man of this world. "His glory shall not descend after him."

18. *Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself.*

Not "when thou doest good," mark; for often when you do good, men will criticize and censure; -- and, the better the deed, the more sure is it to provoke the contempt of many. But "men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." A shrewd man, that! That is the kind of man, See how he prospers! A smart, pushing fellow! Oh, yes, he is the man for a friend." Whenever there is an aggravated selfishness that accumulates to itself like a rolling snow-ball, men are sure to praise. It is the irony of life.

19. *He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light.*

They are sleeping in the grave. So shall he, and beyond the grave there is nothing but darkness for him whose heart is set on this world.

20. *Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.*

Understanding, and the fear of the Lord which is the beginning thereof, and not earthly honour, is our only succor in the day of death.

PSALM 50

1-4. *The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun until the going down thereof. Out of Zion the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.*

To profess to be the people of God is a very solemn thing, for the apostle Peter tells us that “judgment must begin at the house of God.” Those who profess to be his people shall be like the wheat on the threshing floor. John the Baptist, preparing the way for the first coming of Christ, said of him, “whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor.” When he comes again, he will separate the precious from the vile, the true saint from the mere pretender.

5, 6. *Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.*

He will not depute this office to another. He knows the details of each case, he knows the motives that have been at the back of every action, he knows the law, and he knows what sentence ought to be passed in every instance: “God is judge himself.”

7-9. *Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds.*

Observe what contempt God expresses, in this Psalm, for all mere ceremonial sacrifices. They were ordained by God, and were acceptable to him when offered with a right motive, but apart from that motive, and apart from their spiritual significance, what was there in them to make them acceptable to the Most High? Doth the Lord delight in the fat of bulls or the blood of goats? There can be nothing in these things, in themselves that can please his infinite mind, so he says of them. “I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds.” Where the heart was not given with the offering, it could not be well-pleasing unto the Lord.

10, 11. *For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.*

If any man thinks that he can make God his debtor by any offering that he brings to him, what a great mistake he makes! Whatever you bring to God, you will only bring to him what is already his. The silver and the gold are his as well as “the cattle upon a thousand hills.” What we willingly bring to him out of heartfelt gratitude, he will graciously accept; but if we imagine that there is any merit in what we give, he will have nothing to do with it.

12, 13. *If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?*

“Think you that there is any offering that man can present to me which can appease my wrath, or give me pleasure?”

14. *Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:*

The offering of the heart is better than the gift from the purse. The praise and thanksgiving that come out of the very soul, these God will accept.

15, 16. *And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me. But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?*

There were, in those days, wicked priests who taught the people what they did not themselves practice, just as there are, in these days, men who because of their official position, have dared to stand up, and declare the gospel of Christ by which they were not themselves saved, and in which indeed, they were not even believers. Are they the men to preach the truth? Are they fit to teach others? Assuredly not: “Unto the wicked God saith, “What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?”

17-20. *Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother’s son.*

How then canst thou hope to please God with thy formal ceremonies, with thy mere attendance at the house of God while thy

heart is estranged from him? Thou dost but mock God with all this empty formalism.

21, 22. *These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, --*

“Consider this,” you who are full of heartless religiousness, you who are so particular in your observance of the outward forms of religion, and yet do not think of God as you should; “consider this,”

22. *Ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.*

What a terrible God is this Jehovah whom we serve! If our hearts are not right towards him, if we dare to mock him with solemn sounds uttered by false tongues, this verse warns us as to how he will deal with us.

23. *Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.*

So that what God really desires is living, loving hearts; and holy gracious lives; and, therefore, if we do not give him our hearts and our lives, our sacrifices and oblations are all in vain, they are an abomination in his sight.

PSALM 50

A Psalm of Asaph. It is mentioned, in the life of Hezekiah, that “the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer,” so that very likely this Psalm was sung in the temple after it had been cleansed and reopened for worship. The first part of the Psalm contains a majestic prophecy of the Second Advent.

1-3. *The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.*

He came once under the old legal dispensation, and then “there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount; ... Sinai was altogether on a smoke because the Lord descended upon

in it fire,” and when Christ shall come, in the latter days, with equal splendor, there shall be fire and tempest to swell the pomp of his court.

4. *He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.*

Heaven shall yield up the blessed who are already there, and earth shall give up those that are alive and remain until Christ’s coming, and so the whole company of the redeemed shall stand in the presence of their great Lord and Saviour when Christ shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.” This is the summons that is to ring out to the heavens above and the earth beneath: —

5, 6. *Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.*

Now the subject of the Psalm changes; but let not the doctrine of the Second Advent pass from our thoughts. Christ will surely come again, but are we all prepared to meet him? Shall we behold that glorious appearance with joy or with sorrow? When he reigns with his ancients gloriously, shall we share in the splendors of that reign? Lord, call us to thyself now; help us to suffer with thee now; help us to bear reproach for thee among men now, and then, though — “It doth not yet appear how great we must be made,” — yet we know that “When we see our Saviour here, we shall be like our Head.” Now the Lord addresses his own people: —

7. *Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God.*

Note then that, with all the faults which Christ can find in his people, he is still their God. All the sins of the saints cannot separate them from Christ. They may blot the indenture, but it is only a copy of the covenant made by Christ on their behalf; the real title-deeds are in heaven, beyond all risk of loss. Sinner though thou art, O child of Israel, yet God is thy God still, and not all thine imperfections, follies, and backslidings can ever rob thee of thine eternal interest in him.

8-13. *I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is*

mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

The Lord puts a slur upon the Levitical sacrifices in comparison with evangelical offerings. He sets prayer and praise before the blood of bulls or the sacrifices of goats. Yet we are not to understand that God despises the gifts of his people. If you give to God as though he needed your help, he will have none of it but our gracious God is so condescending that, although he needs nothing, he permits his people to bring their thank-offerings, and to lay them at his feet. My God, wilt thou accept a gift from me? Then I will not be slow to give it to thee. Let every one of us feel in his heart that, though God needeth nothing from us, yet we need the privilege of giving to him.

14, 15. *Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High; and call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*

See the three ways of praising God. One is by giving him your grateful thanksgiving. Banish your murmurings; sweep away your mistrusts; and let your mouth be filled with his praise all the day long. Then the next way of praising God is by paying your vows unto him; let your constant prayers and offerings to God prove the gratitude of your heart. And the last and sweetest way of praising God is to call upon him in the day of trouble. There are many of you who are in trouble at this moment, therefore call upon God. Perhaps you say, "That will benefit me, but how will it glorify him?" Why, God getteth much honour out of hearts that dare to trust him. If thou canst cast thy burden upon the Lord, thou wilt as much honour him as angels do when, with veiled faces, they cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." We adore his wisdom, his faithfulness, his love, his grace, his truth, his power, when we believe that in the darkest night he can bring us sudden daylight, and that in the ebb-tide of our affairs he can bring the floods back again. Christian, honour thy God by calling upon him. With all thy difficulties, and doubts, and fears, call upon God, and he will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify him. Now comes another change: —

16. *But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?*

Unconverted preachers, unsaved Sabbath-school teachers, what answer can you give to this question of the Most High?

17-20. *Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and has been a partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son.*

Slander, you see, is put side by side with adultery and theft; and indeed, I do not know whether it is not the worst of the three. You might almost as well cut a man's throat as slander his character. You had better steal his purse than steal his good name. "What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper." There are no coals hot enough to burn slanderous tongues; there are no punishments severe enough for those who slander their own mother's son.

21. *These things hast thou done, and I kept silence;*

A wonderful thing is that silence of God, that longsuffering with sinners and another wonderful thing is the impudent interpretation which the sinner gives to that silence.

21. *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.*

"I will do what I have not yet done. If thou thinkest me in arrears, I will clear myself with thee soon. I will ease me of mine adversaries." When God arises in judgment, he may make it to be a slow work, but he will make it to be a sure work.

22, 23. *Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.*

How blessed, then, is it to praise the Lord both with the lip and with the life!

PSALM 50:1-10

A Psalm of Asaph.

Whether this means that Asaph wrote it, or that it was committed to him to sing, we do not know. Certainly Asaph did write some Psalms. There are twelve ascribed to him in the book of Psalms. He wrote some, and it is equally certain that some others were dedicated to him. He had the leadership of the orchestra, who sang the Psalm in the temple. This is a very marvelous Psalm. If we only consider the poetry of it, it is one of the chief of the Psalms, but its matter is very deep — august. It should be read with great reverence of spirit. The Psalm begins with a prologue in which the scene is introduced. God is represented as coming forth out of Zion to judge those who profess to be his people — to discern between the precious and the vile — to separate between mere professors and pretenders. The first six verses represent God as coming.

1. *The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.*

The Hebrew hath it, “El Elohim, Jehovah hath spoken” — three names of God — great and mysterious — the strong God, the only God, the self-existent God. He speaks — calls upon the whole earth from the east to the west to listen to his voice.

2. *Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.*

There he dwelt. Now in this scene he is represented as shining forth from it. As he had described the earth as being lighted by the sun from the east to the west, so now God himself, who at first speaks and demands a hearing, now shines forth with beams of glory which altogether eclipse the brightness of the sun. “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.”

3. *Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.*

The voice was heard saying that God would come, and then the beams of glory which warned men that he was coming; and here his people stand attentive, expecting him to come. “They expect him to speak.” Fire and rushing wind are usually used in Scripture as attendants of the throne of God, fire representing justice in action, and the tempest representing his power when it is displayed. Think of God’s coming thus. The poet here pictures it, but it will be so in very deed. “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in

flaming fire, taking vengeance upon thee that know not God.” He will even come after this manner, “for our God is a consuming fire.”

4. *He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.*

Do you catch the thought? There comes the great Judge with the fire burning before him. He rides upon a cherub — yea, rides upon the wings of the wind, and then he calls heaven, with all the angels and glorified spirits,

and he calls to earth, with all its inhabitants, to stand and witness what he does while he judges his people.

5. *Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.*

God has a separated and chosen people. It will be a part of the proceedings at the last great day to gather these together unto God. There will be a day when he will make up his jewels — a time when he will gather his wheat into his garner. But as this Psalm stands, this is a large gathering. It refers to a picture of all professing saints being brought before the throne of God — true saints that made a covenant with God by sacrifice. They see Jesus Christ, who ratifies the covenant of grace by blood, and they have laid their hands on Christ, and the covenant made between them and God. But there were others in the Psalmist’s day who had offered sacrifice and pretended to have made a covenant with God, and there are their representatives in these days. They are now to be gathered before the throne of judgment, for God has come to judge them.

6. *And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.*

The very heavens, as they look down upon the august assize where God himself, not by deputy, but in the person of his dear Son, shall sit and judge — the heavens shall declare his righteousness. Now I doubt not the heavens often wonder how it is that God permits the ungodly to be mixed with the righteous in his Church. But ah! when the fan shall be in his hand, and he shall thoroughly purge his floor — when he shall lay justice to the line and righteousness to the plummet — the angels shall wonder at the exactness and accuracy of the divine judgment. “Selah.” Pause, rest, consider, admire, adore, humble yourself, pray. It is good to have a pause when such a scene as this is before us. Now from the 5th verse

down to the 15th verse you have God's dealing with his people. The Judge is sitting on the throne. He begins to speak thus: —

7. Hear, O my people, and I will speak: O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God.

It is with his national people, the Jews; it is with his visible Church, God is now dealing. He himself has seen the ways of his professing people: he need not, therefore, call any witnesses. He who cannot err will testify against us; and he declares himself here not only as God, but under that name, "thy God." It was thus the law began. "I am the Lord thy God that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage." It is thus the judgment and rebuke begin: "I am God, even thy God."

8. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me.

He is going to deal with weightier matters than that. Whether they have, or have not, offered abundant sacrifices, that is not the thing which God looks at. "I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices. Nay, I have done with thy sacrifices."

9. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds.

"Do you think that these things in themselves are of any value to me. O ye formalists? I will not even take them."

10. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.

Though men call them theirs, yet they are thy God's.

PSALM 50:14-23

In the first part of this Psalm God has solemnly expostulated with his people as to the utter worthlessness of sacrifice and ceremony apart from living faith in him, and holy life as its fruit; and he sums it all up in the searching question of the 13th verse, "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Have ye such a groveling opinion of me, your God, as to conceive that I am satisfied with these things?" See what contempt the Lord pours upon sacrifices — even those that were of his own ordaining — when men rested in them and made them their confidence and their end.

14. Offer unto God thanksgiving:

This is what he wants — heart-work.

14. *And pay thy vows unto the most High:*

This is what he demands — obedience.

15. *And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*

Thus you see God has spoken to his professing people — to those who were moral, decent, and observant of outward ritual. He now turns to some others — some others, perhaps, quite as outwardly religious, but their lives were immoral; their conduct was a breach of his law. At first he speaks of their neglect of the first table, which says, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,” and shows that it is not bullocks and rams which can make amends for forgetfulness of God. Now he turns to the second table and shows that no amount of sacrifice can make up for breaches of the law of God as it touches our fellow men.

16. *But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?*

Your unholiness, even though you were of the tribe of Levi, would disqualify you from declaring my statutes. Your mouth full of slander, how should you dare to use it to speak of my covenant with it?

17. *Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.*

As if they were worthless things to be thrown away — as if they were obnoxious things to be thrown behind thy back where thou couldest not see them. “Dost thou talk about worshipping me, whilst thou art neglecting my words?” Now it is a very solemn thing when a man boasts about the covenant, or about the doctrines of grace, or about outward ceremonies, and yet there are parts of God’s Word that he neglects — there are portions of God’s will that he dares not look in the face. If ever I meet a text that I am afraid of, I begin to be afraid off myself; and if I feel any tendency to take away from a text any of its swooping charges or its strong demands, I feel that surely I must have quarreled, with this text, because it has quarreled with me. How can we think we are offering to God acceptable sacrifice when any of his words are cast behind our backs?

18. *When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.*

“When thou sawest a thief thou consentedst with him,” and some professors do this. If they do not themselves rob, there are some who will employ their clerks to tell lies in writing. They consent in the bad trade of others. They become accomplices, helping to make excuses for others.

“And hast been partaker with adulterers.” Can a man profess to be religious, and yet do this? Well, I have known such, and such will creep into the Church of God still — unclean, unchaste men, who nevertheless will come and sit as God’s people sit, and sing as God’s people sing. And, indeed, any one who listens to lascivious talk, or who smiles at an unchaste jest, is himself a partaker with adulterers more or less.

19. *Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit.*

How many do this, and yet think they are the children of God? They ruin other characters most remorselessly; they will spread false reports, if not actually invent them, and yet think themselves the people of God.

20. *Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother’s son.*

When a tongue has once learned the habit of calumny, it will spare none. The nearest relative and the dearest will become victims to the habit — first of gossip and afterwards of actual detraction and lying. Oh! the misery, the pain, that is caused in the world by this habit which is so rife! And can we imagine ourselves to be the people of God when we delight in repeating false stories about others? Have we forgotten the truth of that word, “All liars shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone”? As surely as God is true and loves truth, if we love lies, where God is we can never come. It matters not how much we may pretend to have reverence for God, and to have an experience of his truth; we are not of the truth, neither are we of God.

21. *These things hast thou done, and I kept silence;*

God, in his long-suffering, bears with these sinners. “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.” These men came at last to say, “Pooh! the prophets make too much fuss about holiness. You can serve God, and yet, after all, live as we do. So long as we give God a tithe, it matters not how we get our property. If we offer him the bulls, he will be quite content.” Ah! to what do

men degrade their God! Some made him of old to be like unto a bullock that hath horns and hoofs; but many men now-a-days think God to be like themselves, and that is worse.

21. *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.*

“I will lay thy sins out before thee — parcel them out, ‘Item this’ — Item that.’ I will classify them: I will set them like a dreadful army in array before thee. I will let thee see that, though I had patience with thee, I was neither blind nor deaf, but heard and saw all that thou hast done, and noted it all.” Oh! what a vista this opens up for unholy professors — for ungodly members of Christian churches!

22. *Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.*

What solemn words! What dreadful words? God never plays at threatening; and his ministers, when they speak of wrath to come, are not to speak with velvet mouths and soft words, for “Oh! the wrath to come,” as George Whitefield used to say with uplifted hands and streaming eyes, “The wrath to come! The wrath to come — how dreadful will it be!” God himself proves it. “Beware ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver.”

And then the Psalm finishes up with this kind word of gracious address which drops like raindrops out of the bosom of the tempest that went before:

23. *Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me:*

More than he that offers bullocks.

23. *And to him that ordereth his conversation aright.*

The man that strives in the sight of God to walk a holy life: this is the man to whom:

23. *Will I show the salvation of God.*

If he wants saving, let him order his conversation as he may, he will owe all to sovereign grace. He will have no merit of his own; “but where I by grace,” saith the Lord, “lead a man to order his conversation aright there will I show more and more fully, and at last perfectly in him, the salvation of God.”

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM. 50:14-23; Ezekiel 36:21-38.

PSALM 51

This is a portion of Scripture, which can never be read too often. If any among us have never found mercy, let them use this Psalm as their own personal prayer; while those who have found mercy can read between the lines, and read the sweetness of pardon into the bitterness of sorrow for sin. This Psalm was written by David when Nathan came to him after his great sin with Bathsheba. He needed Nathan to come to him to rebuke him. If David had not been in a very sad state of heart, he would not have fallen into the sin; and it was that state of heart which left him so hardened, so obdurate, that he needed Nathan pointedly to say to him, "Thou art the man." After that, he wrote and prayed this truly penitential Psalm.

1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness*

He used to talk about being God's servant; but he says nothing about that now. He used to speak of God's great love to him; but he cannot realize that now. Yet he appeals to God for mercy: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness."

1. *According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

"There they are, they stare me in the face; nobody but thyself can blot them out; do it, Lord, for thy sweet mercy's sake. Blot them out of existence, and out of memory; and when thou hast blotted them from thy book of remembrance, then blot them from me, too."

2. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.*

"If washing will not do, use fire, use blood, use anything; but cleanse me from my sin."

3. *For I acknowledge my, transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*

"Lord, do help me. There is my sin; I cannot shut my eyes to it. I dare not deny it, or excuse it; I make a clean breast of it. I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me."

4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight*

"I have sinned against others; but this is the foulness of the blot, the venom of the sting, that I have sinned against my God."

4, 5. *That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was sharpen in iniquity and in sin did my not mother conceive me.*

“Behold,’ for this is a wonder, and I look at it, and I mourn over it; behold, before I had a shape, I was out of shape. Before I saw anything, still there was sin antecedent to my very existence.”

6. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

“But, alas! Lord, what thou desirest, is not there. In my inward part, I find falsehood; in my hidden part, I find folly. Lord, what thou desirest thou must also bestow, or else I shall never have it. Oh, hear thy servant’s supplication now!”

7. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

This is delightful pleading on David’s part. He had seen the priest take the sprigs of hyssop, and dip them in the blood, and then sprinkle the leper therewith; so his prayer is, “Lord, give me purification through the atonement. ‘Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.’ “ It requires strong faith, when under a deep sense of sin, to be quite sure that God can put the sin away. It is a grand thing to be able to say, “Wash me, foul as I am wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

8. *Make me to hear joy and gladness;*

“Lord, I have heard nothing but groans lately, and I have made no sound but sighs; ‘Make me to hear joy and gladness’

8. *That the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*

When God makes us feel the weight of sin, it is a bone-breaking operation, he seems to strike as though he would kill; and only he that thus strikes can afterwards heal. Then he makes each fragment of the bone to sing and praise him.

9. *Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.*

You see that the psalmist has many names for sin, for evil, like a great rogue, has many aliases. So it is sometimes sin; sometimes it is transgression, passing over the line of right; and sometimes it is iniquity, or a departure from perfect equity. “Call it by whatever name it may be called, Lord, let me be rid of it. ‘Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.’”

10. *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

“My Creator, I am spoiled; come and make me over again. My heart has grown foul. Thou who didst make me, clean me.” The watchmaker best cleans the watch that he made. “Create in me a clean heart, O my Creator, and renew a right spirit within me.”

11. *Cast me not away from thy presence;*

“I have acted as if you were not present, but, oh, do not fling me away!

Do not take away thy presence from me.”

11, 12. *And take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;*

“I was so happy once. Oh, give me back my joy!”

12. *And uphold me with thy free spirit.*

“I have fallen foully; let me not fall again. Henceforth, I cannot trust myself; do thou uphold me. I have made free to sin. Lord, send me a freer spirit, that I may be free to follow after righteousness.”

13. *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;*

He would turn preacher if God would but bless him. He would tell others what great things God had done for him.

13. *And sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

He felt sure that, if he once told his tale of love, others would be melted, and would turn to God; and no doubt it was the case.

14. *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

Oh cleanse me from my sin, and I will sing thy praises forever; and I will sing earnestly, too: ‘My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.’”

15. *O Lord, open thou my lips;*

He felt as if he was going too fast when he promised to speak and to sing, so he prayed: “O Lord, open thou my lips”-

15. *And my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.*

When good men have had a fall, they walk very tenderly afterwards. Put them on their legs, and they are very careful how they move. They are afraid to speak except as God opens their lips.

16. *For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it*

David remembered that, under the law, there was no sacrifice appointed for the expiation of adultery. There were some sins that were left out of the catalogue, and this was one of them.

16, 17. *Thou delightest not in burnt offering.*

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. Even for the man who has committed the most atrocious crimes, there is still acceptance if he brings to God the sacrifice of a broken spirit.

17, 18. *A broken and a contrite heart, O God thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.*

Now that he feels himself forgiven, he begins to pray for the good estate of the Church of God and the Lord's people everywhere. We cannot do that when sin is breaking our bones; but when we get peace and rest, then the first instinct of the newborn life is to pray for God's kingdom "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

19. *Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

PSALM 51

Although we may have been preserved by divine grace from any gross and open sin, yet let us read this Psalm in the spirit of penitence. I always feel afraid of myself if I cannot read this Psalm from my heart. Surely some pride must have entrusted my spirit, and taken away its humility and its tenderness, if I cannot join in David's penitential prayer. I think that all of us who have the Spirit of God within us will feel that these words are suited to us as well as to poor broken-hearted David.

1. *Have mercy upon me, O God,*

"I cannot do without mercy, though I am thy child; and thou must give me great mercy, or it will be no mercy to me, for little mercy will not serve my turn. 'Have mercy upon me, O God,' without stint, and without end.

1. *According to thy lovingkindness:*

"If I must set thee a measure, let thine own nature be the measure of thy mercy; I would view thee in the tenderest, brightest light: according to thy kindness, — ah, thy lovingkindness." Surely,

that is one of the sweetest words in our dear mother tongue, and no other language contains a sweeter one: “according to thy lovingkindness.”

1. *According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

“Thou canst not blot out such multitudes of sins unless thou hast multitudes of mercies; but inasmuch as there is no counting of thy mercies any more than there is counting of my sins, let the bright drops of thy mercy be equal to the black drops of my transgression. When I view my sin in its blackness, then I cry for mercy according to thy lovingkindness; and when I view my transgressions in their multitude, then I cry for pardon ‘according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies.’ “Is not this a blessed prayer? It could not have come from David if he had not felt the greatness of his sin; and it will not suit you, dear friends, unless you also are taught by the Spirit of God to know what a bitter thing sin is.

2. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*

What a washing that is! The penitent desires to have it done thoroughly: “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity.” “Leave not a single spot, for one speck would be sufficient to shut me out of heaven; I must be spotless to be admitted there. ‘Wash me thoroughly.’ Wash not only this outward stain, but this inward defilement. Wash me through and through, — ‘thoroughly,’ — till there is no trace of my sin. So wash me till I am cleansed, and made perfectly clean.” There is none but the Lord himself who can wash us after this fashion. Each of us may say with Job, “If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands ever so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch and mine own clothes shall abhor me.” If we made the sea to be our bath, we should sooner crimson every wave with our iniquities than one single stain of guilt should be washed away by the waters of the ocean. It is a divine work to cleanse from sin; therefore say, dear friend, “Lord, thou must wash me if I am to be washed; but do it thoroughly: ‘Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.’”

3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*

It is a great mercy when it is so with us; for when our sins are before our face, God will put them behind his back. When we do not see our sin, then God sees it; but when we see it aright, then God will not see it, for he will put it away forever. As for you who think yourselves innocent, by that very fact you are proved to be naked, and poor, and blind, and miserable; but you who are in a spiritual sense poverty-stricken, you who confess your guilt, shall find pardon, for the plea of "Guilty, my Lord," is that which God answers by a sentence of acquittal.

4. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

David's great iniquity was a sin against many, but he had been brought to learn what few see, that the virus of sin lies in its being against God. Last Sabbath evening, our subject was that "sin is the transgression of the law," and I tried to show that the very essence of its sinfulness lies in the fact that it is rebellion against the will of God. So, David here puts his finger on the great black blot, and shows that he knew where the chief mischief lay: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." Let God do what he will with us, he cannot treat us worse than we deserve. If we were banished from his presence into a hopeless eternity, we should not dare to complain. He is justified when he speaks, he is clear when he judges.

5. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

"I am bad from the fountain-head of my being, and wrong all through. It is not only what I do that is wrong, but I myself am wrong; I am a double-dyed traitor, and of a traitress born." I doubt not that David's mother was as good as any mother probably she was a true child of God; but, for all that, David and all of us have the old tendency to sin from the very fact of our descent from fallen parents. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one."

6. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Ah, friends, that is the troublesome part of the matter! We might be able to rectify the external wrong, and to reform our outward

actions; but who can make his heart clean? You can prune the tree, you may cut it to almost any shape you like; but you cannot make the deadly tree bring forth healthy fruit, you cannot change the sap, or alter the nature of the tree's roots. What but a power divine can do this? "In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom;" but nobody else can.

7. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

I do think that this is grand faith, for a man, blinded by his tears, broken-hearted through his sin, to feel that God can make him clean. "Take thou the hyssop, as I have seen my father do on the Passover night, when the lamb was slain, and the blood of it caught in the basin. Have I not seen him dip the hyssop in the blood, and then sprinkle it on the lintel and the side posts of the door? Have I not seen the priest dip his bunch of hyssop into the sacrificial blood, and then sprinkle all the people, and so make them ceremonially clean? Lord, thou hast a better hyssop dipped in better blood. 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' " Possibly you know, dear friends, that the verse may be read in the future tense: "Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." This is grand faith. I do not know that the faith of Abraham, as a saint, when he offered up his son, was greater than the faith of David, as a sinner, when he believed that God could make even him whiter than snow.

8. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

Beloved, it is a sweet thing when we come to close dealings with God like this. David wants cleansing, but he will not have it except from God; he wants peace and comfort, but he will look only to God for them: "Make me to hear joy and gladness." If you go out into the streets when you are sad, you may hear sounds of joy and gladness, which will seem like a mockery of your sorrow. "As vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart." But when God speaks in mercy, when he opens the ear to hear his melodious accents of pardon, then the very bones which have been broken begin to rejoice. Probably there is no more refined pleasure of a human kind than that which comes to a man who is getting convalescent, one who is gradually being restored after a very

severe illness; so there is certainly nothing more sweet than that calm quiet happiness which comes of pardoned sin when the broken heart begins to be healed: "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice."

9. *Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.*

It is not, "Let the evil be hushed up, let not my people hear about it," but, "Hide thy face from my sins." It is not, "Help me to forget that I have been a criminal." No; but, "Hide thy face from my sins." "And, Lord, when thou art blotting out mine iniquities, blot them all out; those that have never come to such a public head as this great sin with Bathsheba. Lord, when thou dost begin blotting out my sins, make a clean sweep of them all. Draw thy pen right down the page of my guilt; strike out every item that ever has been recorded there: 'Blot out all mine iniquities.'"

10. *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

Do you notice how David blends justification with sanctification? His prayer for pardon is always accompanied by a prayer for purity also. He does not want to have his sin blotted out, and then to continue sinful; but he cries "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." "I have marred it; so come, Lord, and renew it. Thy handwriting on my conscience has grown dim; come and write upon me in bolder characters which can never be effaced."

11. *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.*

Are you praying these prayers, dear friends, as we are reading them? I am sure you are if you have ever enjoyed the presence of God, if the Holy Spirit is your daily companion. And if you have lost that heavenly company, if you have lost that comfortable presence, I know that you are crying to get it back again; and it will come back at your cry.

12. *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*

"Make me happy, O Lord, but oh, make me steadfast! In delivering me from my sin, deliver me from ever going into it again. Make me like a burnt child that keeps clear of the fire. O my God, come back to me!"

13. *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

Dear friends, there is nothing that helps us to preach so well as a sense that we are sinners, and that God has had mercy upon us. Come up fresh from the washing, dripping with the blood of cleansing, and every drop will seem to plead with sinners that they, too, would come and be washed. Live near to the cross, and there is no fear about your preaching so that sinners shall be converted unto God. Sometimes, we seem to get into a kind of spiritual rosewater; we appear to be so very superfine ourselves, that we have to condescend to poor sinners, and preach down to them from our supreme heights, and they never get a blessing that way; but when, by deep experience, we are put upon their level, and feel that, as Christ has saved us, so he can save them, then do we speak with power and unction.

14, 15. *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.*

David is going to preach, and to sing, too; and he will do it all himself; just now he wants nobody to help him. He is so given up to the service of his Master that he will be preacher and preceptor, too. He will say, and he will sing, that God is a righteous God That was a singular theme for a blood-washed sinner: "My tongue shall sing aloud o! thy righteousness." But, believe me, nobody understands the righteousness of God but the man who understands sin, and who also understands the wondrous mercy by which it is put away through the bleeding sacrifice of Christ. When we have reached that point, then can we, and then will we, show forth his righteousness.

16, 17. *For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:*

Bring these sacrifices, dearly beloved, bring them to God now. Bring your broken spirit, bring your troubled conscience, bring your bleeding heart, bring all your trembling on account of sin; bring it all to God's altar now.

17-19. *A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.*

Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar. There must be great sacrifices of joy when great sin is put away by a great ransom: "Then shall they offer bullocks" — not lambs, but bullocks,—"upon thine altar." God help each of us henceforth to offer bullocks upon his altar, not the poor little things, such as we have previously brought; but some great consecrated offering let us bring unto the God who hath forgiven all our transgressions, and blotted out all our iniquities.

PSALM 51

A Psalm of David, after Nathan had rebuked him, and he had been convinced of his great guilt in having sinned with Bathsheba. The music to which this Psalm can be sung must be composed of sighs, and groans, and sobs, and cries. I believe that many of us here present have prayed this prayer of David many times; and he who has never prayed it has need to begin to do so at once. That is an old proverb, but a true one: "There is no road to Heaven except by Weeping Cross." He that has never repented will have to repent if he is ever to enter into life eternal. Hear, then, the prayer of David.

1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, —*

"Nothing but mercy will meet my case. Thy justice frowns upon me; thine anger frightens me. 'Have mercy upon me,' — great mercy, unmeasured mercy, undeserved mercy, — 'Have mercy upon me, O God,'" —

1. *According to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

David cannot bear himself while he reads the black record, so he prays, "Lord, blot it out! Blot it out from the sight of my eyes; but, chiefly, blot it out from thine eyes. Let not the record stand against me in thy Book of Remembrance. I cannot blot it out; — not even with my blood, much less with my tears; but thou canst blot it out with a Saviour's blood. Lord, blot it out, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies."

2. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*

You see, the psalmist multiplies the expressions he uses because he sees the indelible character of sin apart from a miracle of mercy.

“Wash me, O Lord! Water must be used; but if that will not cleanse me, then use fire; use anything; only do cleanse me. First, blot my sin out of thy book, and then blot it out of my nature. Take my sin away, O God! What can I do unless thou dost wash me and cleanse me?”

3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions:*

That is the great point; there can be no cleansing, no washing, no blotting out of our guilt till there is a fair and square acknowledgment of it. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

3. *And my sin is ever before me.*

“Wherever I go, I see it, as though it were painted on the very ball of my eye. I cannot see anything without seeing my sin. It stares me in the face: it is ever before me.”

4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight:*

Oh, what an awful thing, to commit adultery in the sight of God! It is horrible; but what must it be to commit any sin in the sight of God? Will a rebel talk treason in the presence of his king? Most men court the darkness that they may not be seen to do evil; but it is the venom of our sin that we commit it when God is present, and looking on. Ah, me!

4. *That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

Another judge has to decide by the evidence that is brought before him; but this Judge has seen the evil for himself. It was done before his very eyes, and therefore he is clear when he judges.

5. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

“If I had not been bad, I should not have acted so badly. The streams betray the fountain. If I had not been wicked at the core, I should not have acted so wickedly; but the evil tree has brought forth evil fruit.” It is well when actual sin leads us to feel the depth of our original and natural sin.

6. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

The outward part is very important, but the inward part is much more so, because the outward springs from the inward, and a man

would not be outwardly guilty if he were not first inwardly evil. Hence, David cries for cleansing and truth and wisdom in the inward parts.

7. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:

“Take the bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood of the lamb, and then purge me with it, and I shall be clean.” What a wonderful faith this is! “I who am so black, I who am black as hell; yet, if thou dost but purge me with the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ, I shall be clean.”

7. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Again, I say, what grand faith this is! The faith which believes that another can be cleansed, is very easy. The faith which, in times of joy, believes that the soul can be cleansed, is very simple; but when guilt lies heavy on you, and the hand of God seems to break you into pieces in his wrath, it is grand faith to be able then to say, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” May God give every sinner here thus blessed faith!

8, 9. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

“Do not look at my sins, Lord. Forget them; turn thy back upon them; and blot out all mine iniquities.” David comes back to his first prayer. “End my sins, Lord; blot them out, as when an account stands against a debtor, and the creditor erases it from the book. Do just so with my sin.”

10. Create in me a clean, heart, O God; —

Yes, we need our Creator to come, and deal with us again. None but God can save us. The omnipotence that made the heavens and the earth must be put forth to make us anew.

10. And renew a right spirit within me.

Are you praying this prayer, dear friend? Is your heart praying it while we read it?

11. Cast me not away from thy presence; —

“Dismiss me not thy service, Lord.” “Chase me not out of doors; banish me not from where thy face may be seen: ‘Cast me not away from thy presence.’”

11. And take not thy holy spirit from me.

“For, if thou do so, I am utterly undone. I shall go from bad to worse;

I shall never repent; I shall never believe. I am as good as damned already if thou take thy Holy Spirit from me; therefore, O Lord, take not thy Spirit away from me.”

12. *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; —*

“I had it once, Lord; restore it to me, bring it back.”

12. *And uphold me with thy free spirit.*

“That I shall not turn aside again. O lift me up, and keep me up, and help me to rise higher and higher!”

13. *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

Pardoned sinners make fine preachers. The man who has never felt the burden of sin is not fit to preach to burdened souls. Oh, but when that burden is taken off our backs, and our hearts, we are ready to leap for joy! Then we cry, —

“Now will I tell to sinners round
What a dear Saviour I have found;
I’ll point to thy redeeming blood,
And say, ‘Behold the way to God.’”

14. *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, —*

It took David a long time to come to that point, and to call his sin by its right name. He had really been the murderer of Uriah, and he tried to cover his guilt by saying, “The sword devoureth one as well as another.” But now he tells the whole truth: “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,”—

14. *Thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

“Once let me get rid of my great sin, and I will give thee great praise. Wash my bloodguiltiness away with the blood of Jesus, and then I will never leave off proclaiming the glory of thy grace.”

15, 16. *O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:*

“Bullocks, rams, lambs, — thou carest not for these?”

16, 17. *Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

Come, poor souls, you that are heavy with guilt, you that lie at death's dark door, condemned by reason of a whole life of sin, offer to God this sacrifice that he will not despise. The Jews brought their bullocks; come you and bring your broken hearts and contrite spirits. They presented to God the fat of fed beasts; come and bring your broken-hearted groanings, for God will not despise them.

18, 19. *Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering, and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

If sin is pardoned, we may offer to God anything that we can, and he will accept it; but first of all we must get pardon, — pardon through Jesus Christ, — or else our offerings are a vain oblation. God bless the reading of this Psalm to every one beneath this dome, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PSALM 51

1-5. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

“It is not merely that I have sinned in practice, but I am a sinner by nature. Sin would not have come out of me if it had not first been in me. I am a mass of sin, and must therefore be loathsome in thy sight”

6, 7. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, —*

Take the bunch of hyssop as the priests did, dip it into the basin filled with sacrificial blood: “Purge me with hyssop.” Apply the precious blood of Jesus to me, —

7, 8. *And I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*

He feels like a man whose bones are broken, and he asks the Lord, by putting away his sin, to bind up those broken bones till every one of them should sing a song of gratitude to the Divine Healer.

9-13. *Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clear heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

“If thou wilt only save me, I will tell everybody about it; I will be a preacher as well as a penitent. Rising from my knees, where I have been confessing my sin, rejoicing that thou hast blotted it all out, I will hasten away, and tell to others what a good God thou art, and they will believe my testimony, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

14. *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, —*

David had been guilty of the death of Uriah. It is a proof of, his sincerity that he does not mince matters, but calls a spade a spade, and prays, “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,” —

14. *Thou God of my Salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

“I will not only preach, but I will also sing. I will be preceptor as well a preacher. A Christian man can never do too much for the Lord who has so graciously pardoned him. David feels that he cannot do anything aright, either singing or preaching, by himself; so he adds, —

15. *O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.*

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. God cares little for the mere outward forms of worship; Ritualistic observances are nothing to him: “Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.” Though these were the fixed ordinances of the Lord under which David lived, yet he was enabled to look beyond them to something higher and better.

17-19. *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good*

pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

When we come to God, and are saved by him, then ordinances take their proper place. You cannot teach a man how to live until he is born, and you cannot teach him what his spiritual life is to be until he is born again; all religious rites and ceremonies which precede the new birth go for nothing.

First there must be the inward life, the broken heart, the contrite spirit, and then everything else drops into proper order. Mind this; God help us all to mind it well!

PSALM 51

A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, and rebuked him, in the name of God, for his great sin with Bathsheba.

1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

This is not a Psalm to be sung to the joyous music of the harp and the viol, but rather to the minor music of sighs, and groans, and tears. You must have the picture of weeping David before your mind's eye if you would really get to the heart and soul of his language here. There is only one thing on the psalmist's heart, and that is the consciousness of his great sin, which seemed to swallow up everything else. He feels that he must have that sin forgiven; he cannot rest until he knows that it is pardoned. Note how he makes his appeal to the lovingkindness and tender mercies of God. A sinner under a sense of sin has a keen eye for the mercy of God, for he knows that there is his only hope, and therefore he looks for it as a mariner at sea looks for a star, and will not allow even one to escape his observation if there be but one visible between the rifts of the clouds. David urges the most powerful plea with God: "According to thy lovingkindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

2. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*

For he loathes it, it is abominable in his sight, his whole spirit seems sickened at the very recollection of it. He not merely prays, "Wash me," but "Wash me thoroughly." Wash me thoroughly, not only from sin, but from the inequity of it, the wrongdoing of it, that wherein it was essentially sin, and when thou hast washed me, cleanse me, for, perhaps, washing will not be enough; there may need a cleansing by fire. Lord cleanse me anyhow, only do cleanse me from my sin."

3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*

He had tried to forget it, but he could not, for it haunted him wherever he went. He had put it behind his back, but now it had got in front of his eyes.

It seemed as if it were painted on his eyeballs, and he could not see without seeing through his sin. This is how God makes men repent, — how he makes sin to be like gall and wormwood to them.

4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

David had sinned against a great many others beside God, but the virus, the very poison of the sin, seemed to him to lie in this, that he had sinned against God. The unregenerate usually take no account of that, they care nothing about sinning against God. Offending men, doing some injury to their fellow-creatures, may cause them trouble, but as for offending God they snap their fingers at that, and count it to be something not worth even thinking of. But when a man is really awakened by divine grace, he sees that sin is an attack upon God, an offense against God's very nature and this becomes the heaviest burden to him. Do you know what this experience means, dear friends?

5. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

David has got further than seeing sin upon him, he sees that he is himself sinful, that his nature, his very being, is steeped and dyed in sin. The evil is, not merely that thou hast sinned, but that thou art a sinner. Sin would never come out of thee if it were not in thee. And, oh, what mine of sin, what a bottomless deep of sin, there is in human nature! No wonder that it bursts forth as it does. As the

volcano is but the index of a mighty seething ocean of devouring flame within the bowels of the earth so any one sin is only a token of far greater sinfulness that seethes and boils within the cauldron of our nature: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."

6. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts:*

"Alas, O Lord, it is not there! I have looked there, but have seen only sin. It is not truth, but the reverse of truth, that I find in my inward parts Lord, thou wilt never have what thou desires to see in me unless thou dost put thy hand to the work."

6. *And in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

Yes, God can teach us. Even those hidden parts which no human teaching can reach, God can touch, and there he can make us to know wisdom.

7. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:*

"Sprinkle the blood of atonement upon me, give me a sacrificial cleansing, and then I shall be clean."

7. *Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

To my mind, this is a wonderful expression of faith, I do not know of any Scripture that seems more full of holy confidence than this is. David had such a deep sense of his sinfulness that it was a wonderful thing that he should have, side by side with it, such a perfect confidence in the power of God to cleanse him. It is easy enough to say, "I shall be whiter than snow," when we do not realize what scarlet sinners we are, but when the crimson is before us, and we are startled by it, it requires a real and living faith to be able to say to God, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

8. *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou had broken may rejoice.*

God has a way of making our sins come home to us like the blows of great bone-breaking hammers. I suppose that no pain can be much worse than that of a broken bone, but God can make the pain of sin in the conscience to be as continuous and as intense as that of broken bones, and then, blessed be his name, he knows how to heal the bones which he has broken, and to make each broken bone to sing and rejoice. Whereas it groaned before, he can give it a new power, and make that very bone to be a mouth out of which shall come praise to God.

9. *Hide thy face from my sins,*

“Lord, look no more at them. Do not hide thy face from me, but hide it from my sins.”

“O thou that hear’st when sinners cry,
Though all my crimes before thee lie,
Behold them not with angry look,
But blot their memory from thy book!”

9. *And blot out all mine iniquities.*

“Do not let them be recorded any longer, O Lord! Run thy pen through them; let them not stand against me in thy books of remembrance!”

10. *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

Here the truly quickened man speaks. It is not salvation from punishment he asks for, but salvation from the power of sin. He wants a new heart. He wants to have removed from him the defiling power of sin over his affections; “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” It will need the Creator to do it. Only the God who made the world can make me what I ought to be.

Great Creator, put thy hand to this work: ‘Create in me a glean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.’”

11. *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me, “O Lord, do not thrust me into a dungeon, and say, ‘Thou shalt never be a favoured child of mine again.’ ‘Take not thy Holy Spirit from me. That I should dread beyond everything else.”*

12. *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*

“Lord, I shall slip again unless thou dost hold me up, and, since thou canst not trust thy little child by himself, come and teach me how to walk.”

13. *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

“If thou wilt but teach me, and save me, and cleanse me, then I will tell to others what great things thou hast done for me. I will tell out the story of thy love that others also may prove its power.”

14. *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

This was a wonderful prayer, but it was not wonderful that David should get relief when he called his sin by its right name. Another man, in his place, might have said, "I did not kill Uriah. It is true that I had him put where he was likely to be slain, but then the sword devoureth one as well as another." That was the way that David did hypocritically talk at first; but now that his conscience has been aroused, he confesses that he is a murderer: "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God."

15, 16. *O Lord open thou my lips: and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.*

How wonderfully a true sense of sin puts a man on the track of Evangelical doctrine, David could see that sin was too grievous a thing for the blood of sheep and bullocks to wash it away, and though he did not despise the ritual which God had ordained, he looked beyond it to something greater and better of which it was but a type.

17, 18. *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.*

This is a blessed end to David's mournful Psalm. He felt that his sin had a tendency to do injury to the Church of God, — that he had, in fact, pulled down the towers of Zion by his iniquity, so he prays "Build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

19. *Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

PSALM 51

May God graciously grant to all of us the grace which shall enable us to enter into the penitential spirit which is so remarkable in this Psalm!

1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, —*

He breaks the silence at last, and he does so by crying to God for mercy. Ere he says anything else, he appeals to this attribute of mercy, which is so glorious a trait in the character of Jehovah; and he casts himself, all guilty as he is, upon the absolute mercy of God: "Have mercy upon me, O God," —

1. *According to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

David talks as if the Lord had said to him, “What is the measure of the mercy that you want?” and he knows of nothing by which he can measure it except the boundless and infinite lovingkindness of the Lord. “O God!” he seems to say, “deal out mercy to me according to the measure of thine own boundless nature. Let thy mercy be the only judge of the mercy that I need.”

2. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,*

The forgiveness of sin is not enough for the true penitent; he wants the defilement, which he has incurred through sin, also to be removed. If washing will not suffice, he asks the Lord to try any other method that will accomplish the desired end.

2. *And cleanse me from my sin.*

“If fire is needed to purify me, use fire, O Lord, only ‘cleanse me from my sin.’”

3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*

David felt that there was a multitude of transgressions recorded against him in God’s unerring register, yet he specially realized the guilt of that one sin which Master Trapp calls the devil’s nest-egg, to which so many other sins were added. That first sin was a peculiarly foul one, but he added lying, deception, and murder to it, in order to try to cover it, and thus he made it even greater than it was at first. It was well that he confessed that great sin, which was ever before him.

4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. “The essence, the virus, the climax of my sin consists in its assault upon thee, my God; therefore, O God, if thou condemnest me, thou wilt be just!”*

There is nothing that can be said against the severest verdict of thine infallible justice; yet, O God, I still appeal to thy mercy, and pray thee to forgive me, and to put away all my sin!”

5. *Behold,*

David is full of astonishment and amazement; his one great sin has opened his eyes to see the sinfulness of his whole nature.

5. *I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

“I was ‘shapen in iniquity’ when I was shapen, and ‘conceived in sin’ when I was conceived.” He sees that the sin is in himself, and that it does not happen to him as an accident, but flows from him as naturally as foul water runs from a polluted spring.

6. Behold,

Here are more wonders.

6. *Thou desirest truth in the inward parts:* —

First he wondered when he saw how sinful he was; now he wonders as he sees the purity which God demands: “Thou desirest truth in the inward parts:” —

6, 7. *And in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop,* —

“O Lord, thou hast ordained means by which leprous sinners may be cleansed; the outward sign is the bunch of hyssop dipped in sacrificial blood. O Lord, give me in every deed what that sign means! Give me the cleansing influence of the blood of the great sacrifice: ‘Purge me with hyssop,’ “ —

7. *And I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

I cannot help once more remarking, though I have often before made the same observation, that we have here the evidence of wonderful faith on David’s part. He has a very real consciousness of the blackness of his sin, yet he also has a triumphant conviction that God can put that sin away, and can make even his defiled nature to become clean and pure: “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

8. *Make me to hear joy and gladness;* —

How late in the Psalm that prayer comes! He writes seven verses before he dares to pray for joy and gladness; and those seven verses are all either confessions of sin or petitions for deliverance from sin; and, my sinful friend, you must not first seek to get rid of your sorrow; but, rather, be thankful for your sorrow for sin, and pray that you may never lose that sorrow until you lose the sin that causes it: “Make me to hear joy and gladness;” —

8. *That the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*

If God’s children fall into sin, the Lord does not wink at their sin, but he chastises them so severely that he sometimes even breaks their bones; but God’s pardoning mercy can set those bones, and

make each broken and mended bone to become a mouth for holy song: “that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.”

9. *Hide thy face from my sins,*

“Do not look at them, O Lord! Even take pains to put them out of thy sight.”

9. *And blot out all mine iniquities.*

“Obliterate them; as though they had been written upon tablets of wax, and thou didst, with a hot iron, put the whole record of them away: ‘blot out all mine iniquities.’ “

10. *Create in me a clean heart, O God;*

He feels that he needs his Creator to again perform his great creating work. David knows that he needs a clean heart, but he does not ask the Lord to make his heart clean, he knows better than to present that request. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh,” so David’s cry to God is, “ ‘Create in me a clean heart,’ — let it be a new creation; give me a new heart, and a clean heart.”

10. *And renew a right spirit within me.*

There was once a right spirit in man; but, through sin, it has lost its beauty, its tenderness, its delicacy, its sensitiveness, its holiness; so each one of us needs to pray, “O God, renew a right spirit within me!”

11. *Cast me not away from thy presence;*

“I cannot bear to be away from thy presence; I must see thy face, or I cannot live.”

11-13. *And take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

One of our proverbs says, “A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind;” and he who knows by bitter experience what sin is, talks tenderly and sympathetically to his fellow-sinners; and God is sure to bless such earnest personal testimony, and so sinners will be constrained to turn unto him.

14. *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation:*

He called his sin by its right name. He knew that he had really been the murderer of Uriah, so he confesses his guilt in all its hideousness: “Deliver me from bloods (see marginal reading), O

God, thou God of my salvation.” It is remarkable that, when David confesses his sin in the strongest language that he can use, he at the same time lays hold upon God with the boldest faith that he can exercise. So, the deeper the sense of sin in us is, the stronger can the grace of God make our faith to be.

14. *And my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

Should not David have said, “My tongue shall sing aloud of thy mercy”? That would have been quite right, yet David knew that God had a way of bestowing his mercy in complete consistency with his righteousness; and this being the more singular part of divine forgiveness, the most astonishing wonder of all, he selects that, and says, “My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”

15. *O Lord, open thou my lips; —*

In the eighth verse, he had prayed, “Make me to hear;” and now he does as good as say, “Make me to speak.” Sin puts all the organs of the human body out of order, and grace is needed to put them all right again: “O Lord, open thou my lips;” —

15, 16. *And my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; —*

The offering of bullocks, and lambs, and rams amid the pomp of priestly ritual: “Thou desirest not sacrifice;” —

16, 17. *Else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:*

This is all sacrifices put into one, and the man who brings a bleeding heart to God is accepted when the one who brings a bleeding bullock is rejected; and he who brings a bleeding Saviour brings the best sacrifice of all.

17, 18. *A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion:*

David seems to say, “Whatever thou doest with me, O God, do bless thy people!”

18. *Build thou the walls of Jerusalem.*

“My sin has helped to pull them down, and so has done great mischief; but, O Lord, wilt thou not undo the mischief that I have done, and build again the walls of thy Zion?”

19. *Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

Never do men give so freely to the cause of God as when they are rejoicing over pardoned sin. Keep a deep sense of your indebtedness to God alive in your soul, and you will feel that you can never do enough for him who has forgiven you so much.

PSALM 51

It is a Psalm, and therefore it is to be sung. It is dedicated to the chief Musician, and there is music in it, but it needs a trained ear to catch the harmony. The sinner with a broken heart will understand the language and also perceive the sweetness of it; but as for the proud and the self-righteous, they will say, “It is a melancholy dirge,” and turn away from it in disgust. There are times, to one under a sense of sin, when there is no music in the world like that of the 51st Psalm, and it is music for the chief Musician, for “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth;” and this is the Psalm of penitence, and there is joy in it, and it makes joy even to the chief Musician himself.

1. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Here is a man of God, a man of God deeply conscious of his sin, crying for mercy, vying with all his heart and soul, and yet with his tear-dimmed eyes looking up to God, and spying out the gracious attributes of Deity, lovingkindness, and tender mercies, multitudes of them. There is no eye that is quicker to see the mercy of God than an eye that is washed with the tears of repentance. When we dare not look upon divine justice, when that burning attribute seems as if it would smite us with blindness, we can turn to that glorious rainbow of grace round about the throne, and rejoice in the lovingkindness and the tender mercies of our God.

2. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

“If washing will not remove it, burn it out, O Lord, but do cleanse me from it; not only from the guilt of it and the consequent punishment, but from the sin itself. Make me clean through and through. ‘Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.’”

3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*

“As if the record of it were painted on my eyeballs I cannot look anywhere without seeing it. I seem to taste it in my meat and drink; and when I fall asleep, I dream of it, for thy wrath has come upon me, and now my transgression haunts me wherever I go.”

4. *Against thee, thee only, have sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

This is the sting of sin to a truly penitent man, that he has sinned against God. The carnal mind sees nothing in that. If ever it does repent, it repents of doing wrong to man. It only takes the manward side of the transgression; but God’s child, though grieved at having wronged man, feels that the deluge of his guilt—that which drowns everything else— is that he has sinned against his God. It is the very token and type and mark of an acceptable repentance that it has an eye to sin as committed against God.

Now observe that the psalmist, having thus sinned, and being thus conscience of his guilt, is now made to see that, if the evil came out of him, it must have been in him at first; he would not have sinned as he had done had there not been an unclean fountain within him.

5, 6. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts:-*

Then it is not sufficient for me to be washed outside, and being outwardly moral is not enough. “Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: “-

6. *And in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

In that part which is even hidden from myself, where sin might lurk without my knowing it, there wouldst thou spy it out. I pray thee, Lord, eject all sin from me, rid me of the most subtle form of iniquity that may be concealed within me.

7. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

This is a grand declaration of faith. I know not of such faith as this anywhere else. The faith of Abraham is more amazing; but, to my mind this faith of poor broken-hearted David, when he saw himself to be black with sin and crimson with grime, and yet could

say, “ Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,” is grand faith. It seems to me that a poor, trembling, broken-down sinner, who casts himself upon the infinite mercy of God, brings more glory to God than all the angels that went not astray are ever able to bring to him.

8. *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we cannot sin with impunity. Worldlings may do so as far as this life is concerned; but a child of God will find that, to him, sin and smart, if they do not go together, will follow very closely upon one another’s heels. Ay, and our Father in heaven chastens his people very sorely, even to the breaking of their bones; and it is only when he applies the promises to our hearts by the gracious operation of his Holy Spirit, and makes the chambers of our soul to echo with the voice of his lovingkindness, that we “ hear joy and gladness again. It is only then that our broken bones are bound up, and begin to rejoice once more.

9. *Hide thy face from my sin,*

David could not bear that God should look upon them.

9. *And blot out all mine iniquities.*

“ Put them right out of sight. Turn thy gaze away from them, and then put them out of everybody’s sight.”

10. *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

“Make me over again; let the image of God in man be renewed in me. Nay, not the image only, but renew the very Spirit of God within me.”

11, 12. *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;*

“Lift me up, and then keep me up. Let me never sin against thee again.”

12, 13. *And uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy way’;*

There are no such teachers of righteousness as those who have smarted under their own personal sin; they can indeed tell to others what the ways of God are. What are those ways? His ways of chastisement,-how he will smite the wandering; his ways of mercy,-how he will restore and forgive the penitent.

13. *And sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

He felt sure that they would be converted, and if anything can be the means of converting sinners, it is the loving faithful testimony of one who has himself tasted that the Lord is gracious. If God has been merciful to you, my brother or my sister, do not hold your tongue about it, but tell to others what he has done for you; let the world know what a gracious God he is.

14. *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

I like that confession and that prayer of David. He does not mince matters, for he had guiltily caused the blood of Uriah to be shed, and here he owns it, with great shame, but with equal honesty and truthfulness. As long as you and I call our sin by pretty names, they will not be forgiven. The Lord knows exactly what your sin is, therefore do not try to use polite terms about it. Tell him what it is, that he may know that you know what it is. “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation.” “But surely,” says someone, “there is nobody here who needs to pray that prayer.” Well, there is one in the pulpit, at least, who often feels that he has need to pray it; for what will happen if I preach not the gospel or if I preach it not with all my heart? It may be that the blood of soul shall be required at my hands. And my brothers and sisters, if anything in your example should lead others into sin, or if the neglect of any opportunities that are presented to you should lead others to continue in their sin till they perish, will not the sin of bloodguiltiness be possible to you? I think you had better each one pray David’s prayer, “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation.” ‘. And then, O Lord if I once get clear of that, ‘my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.’”

15. *O Lord, open thou my lips He is afraid to open them himself lest he should say something amiss.*

Pardoned sinners are always afraid lest they should err again.

15, 16. *And my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest no sacrifice; else would I give it:*

“Whatever share is in the whole world that thou desirest, I would gladly give it to thee, my God.”

16-18. *Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion -You see that the psalmist loves the chosen people of God. With all his faults, his heart is right towards the kingdom under his charge. He feels that he has helped to break down Zion, and to do mischief to Jerusalem, so he prays, “ Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: “-

18, 19. *Build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon shine altar.*

Once get your sin forgiven, and then God will accept your sacrifices. Then bring what you will with all your heart, for an accepted sinner makes an accepted sacrifice, through Jesus Christ.

PSALM 51

Let us read two Psalms of penitence. Repentance, and faith go hand in hand all the way to heaven. Repenting and believing make up a large measure of the Christian life. First, let us read the 51st Psalm, penned by David after his great sin with Bathsheba, when, by the instrumentality of Nathan, he had been led to repentance. What if we have not fallen into any gross open sin. Yet, mayhap, if we could see our hearts, as God sees them, we should be as much ashamed as the Psalmist was when to the music of his sighs and groans, he poured out this Psalm.

1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

What delicious words those are! “Thy loving-kindness.” I have sometimes felt glad to be a Saxon, that I should speak a language that had such delightful words in it. “Loving-kindness,” “tender mercy.” Now, the eye that is quickest to see the tenderness of God is the eye of repentance, for the sinner who feels condemnation in his own heart looks so keenly after everything that may make for his comfort, and his eye lights on the tender mercies and loving-kindness of God. The prayer is for pardon; nay, it is for purification, as well as pardon.

2. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*

Take out this plague spot. I cannot bear it longer. Oh! cleanse me from every trace of it, my God, I beseech thee.

3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*

I tell it to thee because it haunts me. It is always present to my mind. It seems painted on my eyeballs. I cannot but see it, turn whichever way I may.

4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

He had sinned against his people, setting them an ill-example — sinned against Bath-Sheba and Uriah; but he sees the whole evil concentrating itself, as it were, upon his God. He felt that the virus of the whole thing was that he had done dishonour to the name of the Most High, whose servant he was.

5-7. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me. and shall be whiter than snow.*

“Behold,” says he, as if to go to the bottom of it, and to show that sin was not an accident with him, but that he himself was sinful. It was a grand faith — it was an Abrahamic faith — that when a man had such a sense of sin as David had, he at the same time could believe in the cleansing power of the blood. For you do not know what sin is, and who have never groaned beneath the burden, to talk about the pardoning blood — oh! it is easy enough, and there is nothing in it; but for a soul that knows the guilt and feels it. and is burdened by it, still to believe in the power of the atoning sacrifice — this is faith indeed. David had seen the priest take the bunch of hyssop and dip it in the warm blood of the goat or the bullock, and then sprinkle it; and he says, “Lord, do the same with me — with that richer blood of divine atonement “ — that blood which, in David’s day, was yet to be shed. “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

8-10. *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

Lord, the mischief lies deep. Strike at the root of it. I would not have thee to wash out a spot only, but go to my heart and renew that, that I may sin no more.

11-14. *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways: and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

In that verse there is one of the surest mares of David's sincere repentance, namely, that he calls his sin by its right name — “blood-guiltiness.” I have no doubt that he had said to himself that Uriah died by accident, and pleaded very much to excuse and extenuate his guilt. But now he outs with it. That is the word — “blood-guiltiness.” It is no use trying to apologize and excuse yourselves before God. As long as that is done, no pardon will ever be applied to the conscience; but when the sin is seen in its true colors, then shall those colors be washed away, and we shall be whiter than snow. “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways.” He felt that if God would pardon him, he would be the man to tell of God's way of mercy to others. And I trust, dear friends, if we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, our witness will never be silent about the goodness and the mercy of the Lord. If you have never spoken to others, begin Tonight. Teach others the ways of God to you

15-19. *O Lord open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

Sure to be good times when men are under a sense of pardoned sin. None serve him so well as those whose sins are washed away — who feel the same within. Now, we will read the **32nd** Psalm.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 51 AND 32.

PSALM 51

There are many sweet notes in Christian music, but to my own heart there is none so softly, tenderly, sweet as the note of repentance. Full assurance rings out her clarion trumpet strain, and we ought to be able to send it forth, but sometimes we are unable. Conquest over sin gives us Miriam's timbrel to dance to, and it is well; but for everyday use commends me to the harp-strings of penitence. We ought always to be able to play on those strings. They always befit our guilty fingers. They are always sweet to the ear of the Most High. Mr. Rowland Hill used to say that there was one friend of his whom he could not take to heaven, and whom he thought he should regret to leave, and that was sweet repentance. I suppose when God wipes every tear from our eyes we shall not be able to weep for sin, but until then:—

“Lord, let me weep for naught but sin,
And after none but thee;
And then I would-(oh that I might!)—
A constant weeper be,”

for these bitter sweets—these sweet bitters—are almost the choicest of our sorrow joys or joyful sorrows that we have this side of heaven. Thus David sings.

1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

And really, brethren, if we cannot feel that we have need to say, “Have mercy upon me,” and if, indeed, this is not the habitual language of our soul, there must be something more wrong about us than even open sin. Not to be able to confess sin, and not to be able to mourn it, is one of the direst estates of sin, in which even sin can be found; but to be able to say from the very soul, “Have mercy upon me: blot out my transgressions,” indicates that there is a soundness in us still by divine grace. Do you notice what a quick eye David has here for the softer attributes of God? Did ever any man put words together more pleasantly? “According to thy lovingkindness”—“according to the multitude of thy tender mercies.” God never looks more beautiful than when he is seen through a tear. If, under a sense of sin, you see him as the strangely forgiving ‘God, oh! how pleasant a God he is, and how our hearts love him!

2. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

It is not the punishment. The child of God has got away from the legal fear that dreads the punishment. The sin—the sin—is that which he loathes and hates. “Lord, get rid of it. I seem to want double cleansing. Wash me; wash me thoroughly; and when thou hast done that, cleanse me, for there are stains that washing will not get out. Try fire, Lord, if water will not do it; but somehow wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”

3. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

It is thrown out on the surface. Health comes back when the disease manifests itself by an outward eruption. It is when you do not acknowledge it—it is when it is not before you—when you cannot perceive it—will not confess your sin—it is then that it is at the heart-strings killing you, murdering you. Confessed sin has the teeth taken out of it: but sin that is not felt and known, and still is there, breeds the canker of self-conceit and pride, and is deadly to the heart.

4. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

For, in sin, this is the essence of it—that it is sin against God. You cannot get the worldly man to feel that. “I have done no hurt to my neighbour. I have not injured society.” But how different it is with the child of God. It is against God that he has sinned. What if he has never left his chamber—if he has never done an action or said a word? Yet that proud heart of his that rebelled when he was full of pain—that murmuring spirit that would not brook the Lord’s will—that is enough to lay him in the dust; and he mourns it and confesses it. “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.”

5. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me.

It is not merely that I sinned, but I am sin. I am a lump of sin—a heap of iniquity—by nature so. It is not merely in me, but it is me—my very self. It is in my blood, my bones, my marrow. O God, canst thou cleanse me from this?

6. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

And sin is a lie, and sin is folly. God desires truth and wisdom. Can he give us both of these? Yes, and he will; only let us own the untruthfulness and confess the unwisdom, and put ourselves into his hands for his infinite grace to deal with us; and he will do it yet. “In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.”

7. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

“With hyssop.” Just as the priest took the bunch of herbs, and put it into the basin full of blood, and stirred it round and round till he soaked the hyssop in the crimson and then sprinkled it upon the penitent, oh Lord, apply the blood of Christ to my soul. Purge with me hyssop”-“ And I shall be clean.” I shall not be clean any other way. This is the only cleansing-purgation by the sacrificial atonement. And thou alone must do it. Lord, do it now.

8-9. *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.*

I do not want to hear it unless thou make me to hear it. I would not be comforted unless thou comfort me. Dread above everything, dear friends, false comfort—false judgments of yourselves—high notions about your own attainments—grand ideas of your own standing in yourselves.

10. *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*

For there must not merely be a creation, but a daily renewal, or else what thou hast once created will soon be blotted and marred as thy first natural creation was. Go on from day to day to make and keep my heart pure within.

11. *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.*

Do not fling me away as a man pulls up a weed by the roots and throws it on a dunghill.

“Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.” Oh! how often will the child of God have to pray this prayer? The Holy Spirit is in him, and he knows it, but he grieves the Spirit; and when his heart is very

tender this is his daily fear—lest the Spirit of God should depart from him. “Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.”

12. *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*

I did know it once. What joy it is—the joy of thy salvation. Give it me back, O Lord. I cannot live on the old mercy. The recollection does not satisfy. It only makes me hunger. “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.”

13. *Then I will teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

Nobody ever teaches the mercy of God so well as he that tastes it. Sinner, do you know what a good God my Lord Jesus is? He has forgiven my innumerable sins, and therefore I love to speak of him, and to speak of him to such as you are, such as I am. “He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him.” Dear friends, if you know the Saviour, be sure you tell all you know; or if you cannot tell it all, tell as much as you can, and as long as you have got breath left. And it may not be long. You may not have many mere opportunities, for sickness comes so suddenly, and puts the strong man aside so soon. Do use for God what time you have, and tell of his love while yet you are in the land where men can hear it, and where you can speak of it. Let this be your prayer: “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

14. *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

He said that he would, be a preacher; nay, he said that he would be a singer. God’s people feel that they cannot do too much when they get a sense of pardoned sin. They will be both preacher and precentor. They will preach; they will sing. They will have all the irons in the fire. They will not be afraid of turning their faculties to too many accounts.

15-17. *O Lord open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

What a sweet verse that is! Have you got a broken heart tonight, dear friend, and do you feel almost ashamed to bring it, because it is

in such a broken condition? It is in the best possible condition. I have read accounts of meetings of God's saints met by the ten days together, and talking all about great things that have been done for them and from the first to the last no indication of a broken heart or of a contrite spirit. I confess I could not understand it, and did not want to understand it. I would rather stand with the poor publican behind the door five minutes, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," than sit ten days with perfect brethren to magnify and glorify God about what I thought he had done for me, because I am persuaded that in the latter case I should be always in danger of magnifying myself, rather than God; whereas in the former case I should be near the truth, and near where I ought to be. Oh! keep you to this, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

18, 19. *Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

Notice this. David felt that he had done something to pull down the walls of Zion. His bad example would do mischief to the cause of God; and his prayer to be forgiven is not a selfish one, which deals only with his own particular blessing, or his own desire for mercy. He wants the church to prosper; he wants God's work to go on; and so he cannot close the prayer, even of a penitent and broken heart, without crying, "Build thou the walls of Jerusalem." In proportion as we think less of ourselves we shall think more of the church of God, and more of the work of God in the land. To despise yourself is the way to honour God and his people. But when you honour yourself, you will first despise others, and it will go on by degrees to a dishonouring of God himself from which may the Lord save us!

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 51. AND ROMANS 7:7-25.

PSALM 51

1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

There may be some people who think themselves so holy that they cannot join in this Psalm. I can, for one, and I believe that there

are many of you who can join with me. Just let us for the time being forget all others, and let us come, each one for himself or herself, with David's language on our lips or in our hearts so far as it applies to our individual case.

2-19. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is, ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressions thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering, then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

This exposition consisted of readings from NUMBERS 19.; AND PSALM 51.

PSALM 51

This Psalm is dedicated to the chief musician, so that it was intended to be sung. Yet it is not by any means a joyous piece of music. It seems more fit to be sung — or sighed — as a solo for the solitary penitence of a broken heart than for the united songs of believers. Yet, in God's ear, it is clear that the voice of penitence is full of music, for this penitential Psalm is dedicated to the chief musician.

1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness:*

No eye can spy out the tender attributes of God like an eye that is sore with weeping on account of acknowledged sin, so David prays, “Have mercy upon me O God, according to thy lovingkindness.” This word “lovingkindness” is a rich double word, and it was specially suitable just then, for he who has a broken heart — bruised and broken on account of sin, needs double mercy from God.

1. *According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

“They are on record, and I cannot erase the terrible lines, nor canst thou erase them, O Lord, without displaying a multitude of thy tender mercies. It will need omnipotence itself to get rid of this gravure in the brass; therefore, according unto the multitude of the tender mercies blot out my transgressions.”

2. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity.*

“Wash me through and through, O Lord; wash me thoroughly!” A hypocrite is satisfied with the washing of his garments, but the true penitent cries, “Wash me. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity. It is almost the only thing that I can really call my own, and it is most sadly mine, O Lord, wash mine iniquity right away!”

2. *And cleanse me from my sin.*

“If washing will not suffice, put me in the fire; but somehow, anyhow, O Lord, cleanse me from my sin!” You notice that David’s prayer is not concerning the punishment of his sin, but concerning the sin itself. That is the one thing which is eating into his heart; see how many words he uses to describe it: “My sin, mine iniquity, my transgressions.” He cries to God to help him to get rid of that which is the source of all his sorrow. The thief dreads the gallows, but the penitent fears not the punishment of his sin, it is the sin itself that terrifies him.

3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*

“I cannot get away from it and I cannot get rid of it. It stares me in the face, it haunts me in my lying down and my rising up. I am obliged to acknowledge my sin, for it is ever before me.”

4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight:*

“It is true that I have grieved others, and that I have done much injury to others by my sin; but, in all this, I have sinned most against thee. The virus — the essence of my sin is that it has been committed against thee, O my God!”

4. That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

“My sin was committed within thy jurisdiction, and against thy law, O Lord; and, therefore, as I am summoned to appear at thy court, I cannot disobey the summons. I am compelled to give an answer to the charge brought against me; and my answer is that I am guilty, without any extenuating circumstances that I can plead before thee, O Lord! I am guilty through and through.”

5. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

David does not say that by way of making an excuse for himself; but rather to aggravate his own guilt. He admits that his guiltiness is really a part of himself. He does not say, “Lord, I was acting contrary to my nature when I committed this sin. Thou knowest that it was not like me to do that.” Oh, no! but he says, “Lord, thou knowest that I was acting quite in accordance with my nature, it was just like me to fall into this terrible sin.” We have sometimes heard people say that they were surprised to find that they had been guilty of certain sins; let it not be so with you, but rather be you surprised to find yourself kept from guilt, wonder when you are preserved from sin, for the whole tendency of unrenewed human nature is towards iniquity. “In sin did my mother conceive me.”

6. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

As much as to say, “Lord, that which thou desires” to see in me is not there; and though thou hast made me also to desire it, yet I fear that I have not at present gone beyond the desire, for still within me, in my secret soul, there lies a tendency to evil, and unless I keep a strict watch over myself, I soon go astray. Lord, make me inwardly clean; I cannot bear that it should be otherwise with me.”

7. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:

As the priest purges the unclean man by dipping the bunch of hyssop into the blood of the sacrifice, and then sprinkling him with it, so, “purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.”

7. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

“That is to say, I shall be clean if thou dost wash me, O Lord! My own washings make me no cleaner; my own purgations make me fouler than I was before; but if thou wilt purge me, and if thou wilt do it with the sacrificial blood, then I shall be whiter than snow.” This is grand faith on David’s part. I cannot help calling your attention to it, — that he, with a sense of his sin heavy upon him, and bowed down to the very earth with the consciousness of his great guilt, yet dares to say, “Wash me,” —adulterous, murderous David, — “wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” No faith brings greater glory to God than the faith of the audaciously guilty when they dare to believe that God can forgive them.

Not even the unfallen seraphim can render to God purer homage than when thou, a defiled and condemned sinner, darest to believe in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and so to believe as to say, with David, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

8. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

If a good man ever goes astray, he may depend upon it that his sin will be very costly to him, and the better a man is, the more expensive will his sin be to him in the long run. God breaks the very bones of his children when he chastens them for their sin. I do not doubt that, many a time, their pilgrim way has been all the more weary in their later days by reason of their sins in their earlier days. There is many a pain, that shoots through old bones, that is meant to remind the old bones what they were when they were young. God will certainly chasten us for our iniquities if we are his own people.

9. Hide thy face from my sins,

“Lord, do not look at them. Refuse to see them. Hide thy face, not from me, but from my sins.”

9. And blot out all mine iniquities.

See how he comes back to that note again and again; he is never long away from it. There are certain tunes in which one note is constantly repeated, so is it here. David prays, “O God, put away my sin, blot out my sin, forgive my sin.” He cries for nothing else but that: “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.” He longs for the time when not one of them shall be in existence.

10, 11. *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.*

These are the groanings of a true child of God. Never has a man, without the Spirit of God within him, prayed to God in this fashion. David, therefore, notwithstanding all his sin, still had the life of God within his soul, and when Nathan came to reprove him, the sacred fire began to burn again. Here are some of the sparks of it, and some of the smoke of it, too:

“Cast me not away from thy presence.

Dismiss me not thy service, Lord.”

“Say not, I can no longer use you. You shall no longer stand in my courts, for you have disgraced my livery; get you gone from my presence.’ ‘Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.’”

12. *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*

David longs for his Lord to come back to him. When God flogs his children, they still cling to him, and they cry to him. They do not wish to run away, and hide themselves from him. No, their only comfort is to weep upon their Father’s bosom, and to wait for the kiss of forgiveness from his lips. So David prays, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

13. *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

Do you not see, brothers and sisters, that we must be in a right state of heart if we are to serve God well? We cannot teach transgressors his way, with a confident hope that they will be converted unto him, unless we ourselves possess the joy of God’s salvation, and are upheld by his good Spirit. If we go to God’s work out of order, we shall make a mess of it, and accomplish nothing that is really worth doing; but when God gives us his comforting grace within, and his upholdings on every hand, then shall we teach with power, and sinners shall learn to profit: “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

14. *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

None sing so loudly the praises of redeeming grace as those who have been forgiven great sins. There is no music, outside heaven, that has such a volume of God-glorifying praise in it as the song of the man who loves much because he has had much forgiven: "My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness."

15. *O Lord, open thou my lips; —*

He felt as if he could not be trusted to open his own lips; and, certainly, he was not to be trusted to open his own eyes, for when he had aforesaid opened them, he had looked on that which led him into sin. So now he would have God to keep his very lips, that he shall never speak again except as he shall be guided from on high: "O Lord, open thou my lips;"-

15, 16. *And my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:*

Very naturally, David's mind began to think of the multitudes of bullocks, and lambs, and rams, that were burnt upon Jehovah's altar. There is nothing that makes a man so spiritual, and so Evangelical, as a deep sense of sin. You cannot be a sacramentarian and a ceremonialist long if you have a broken heart. Those pretty toys do very well for the kind of "miserable sinners" who do not know what either misery or sin means; but he who really has had his heart broken, on account of the guilt of his sin, cannot be content with the mere outward sacrifice, he must have that which is spiritual: "Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:"

16, 17. *Those delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are as broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

David has to feel that it is better to have one genuine sigh for sin than to make ten thousand bullocks shed their blood upon the sacrificial altar; and if thou art truly broken from thy sin, — if thou dost really hate it, and cry to God for the pardon of it, — if the Spirit of God has really given thee complete cleansing from thy guilt by the precious blood of Jesus — this is better than all the material sacrifices offered in all the temples that were ever built, and overlaid with gold. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

18. *Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.*

As much as though David said, "I have done great hurt to Zion, I have pulled down the walls of Jerusalem by my sin; now, Lord build them up again; undo the mischief which thy poor foolish servant has wrought by his backslidings." So may any backsliders amongst us pray to the Lord, "Visit thy Church so graciously, Lord, that my sin may not injure her!"

19. *Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

Oh, yes, we are sure to bring to God the best that we have when we once get our sins forgiven. After we have looked to Christ, who is the one great sacrifice for sin, then we bring to God all that we can to show how grateful we are for his pardoning mercy.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 51. and 142.

PSALM 51

We will first read Psalm **51**: If we need any music to this Psalm, we must have the liquid melody of tears, sighs, cries, entreaties. It is above all the others, the penitential Psalm. It is the Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had committed his great sin with Bathsheba.

Thus, David prayed:-

1-3. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*

And there is no hope of pardon unless we do this. We must not try to cloak or hide our sin from God; but we must acknowledge our transgressions. Our sin must be ever before us,-a ghost that haunts us, a black cloud that hangs over us, which we greatly dread.

4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

Whatever God may say to us, however sharp it is, and whatever God may do to us, however terrible it is, we deserve it; and when we are in a penitential frame of mind, we feel that it is so.

5-7. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

David does not hope to wash himself, he does not trust in outward ceremonies: but he appeals to God, the God against whom he has sinned: “Lord, cleanse me. Thou alone canst do it.”

8. *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*

When God’s Spirit deals with sinners, he does not play with them. A sense of sin is like the breaking of bones; but God, who breaks the bone, can heal it. He that takes away our joy, when we are under a sense of sin, can give us back that joy by a realization of pardon.

9. *Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.*

“And when thou hast done that, change my nature, that I may not sin again.

10, 11. *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.*

He might well be afraid that, after so foul a fall, so disgraceful a crime, God would cast him away; but he prays that it may not be so: “Cast me not away from thy presence.”

12, 13. *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

“I will tell others what thou hast done. Thy free grace, thy pardoning mercy, shall not be hidden away in my breast; but I will begin to be a preacher of thy love; ay, and I shall have converts, too, for the news of thy grace to me shall draw others to thee: ‘Sinners shall be converted unto thee.’”

14. *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

He puts his finger on the sin. He might have said, and at one time he did say, that he did not kill Uriah the Hittite. Ah, but when he is right with God, he makes no pretences! He does not mince the matter, but he confesses the blood guiltiness, for he was guilty of

Uriah's death: "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness." Be honest with God. You will not receive pardon till you are. He can see through you: what is the use of attempting to hide anything from him? Out with it, man, that God may out with it, too.

Confess it, that God's pardon covering thy confession may cover all thy sin.

15-17. *O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

Are you bringing this sacrifice to the Lord? Are there some in this house of prayer who have greatly sinned, and who are now greatly ashamed of themselves? Take heart of hope, poor sinner, for God delights to accept a broken and contrite heart.

18, 19. *Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

Now turn to the prophecy of Zechariah, chapter xii., verse 10.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 51; AND ZECHARIAH 12:10-14; 13:1-6.

PSALM 51

There are seven penitential Psalms, but this seems to be the chief one of the seven. The language of David is as suitable to us today as it was to him, and though much was lost to the cause of righteousness by David's sin, yet the Church is enriched for all ages by the possession of such a Psalm as this. It is a marvelous recompense. Surely here the Lord reigneth, bringing good out of evil, blessing generation after generation through that which in itself was a great evil.

1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

Observe he appeals to mercy, and mercy only — to mercy, abounding mercy in its tenderest and kindest aspect. "According to thy tender mercies." Note here David does not use his name. He does not say, "Lord remember David": he is ashamed of his name. And he does not seem to want God to remember that, but to

remember mercy: and to have pity upon this nameless sinner. He does not say, “Save the son of thine handmaid,” or “Deliver thy servant,” as he was wont to do; he just appeals to mercy, and that is all. And observe it is not “Have mercy upon me, oh! my God.” He is far off now: he has lost the comfortable assurance of the covenant of grace, and so it is rather more like the cry of the prodigal when he returned and said, “I am not worthy to be called thy son”: have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness — according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out — (or as more correctly it might be rendered, “wash out” — “wipe out”) — my transgressions. The allusion is rather to a dish — wipe it out, turn it upside down, and turn out all that is in it, sweep it away — wipe out all my transgressions. Or it may be as a withdrawal of a record in court when the indictment is withdrawn, “Lord be pleased to quash the indictment against me; blot out all my transgressions.”

2. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Nothing about the punishment observe — he does not mention that. The true penitent, though he dreads punishment, much more dreads sin. It is sinfulness — sin that he would be delivered from. “Wash me.” Thou must do it; no other washing will suffice. Wash me thoroughly, till I am perfectly cleansed: cleanse me from my sin — my sin. I do not lay it on anyone else; cleanse me from it.

3. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

Unless sin is before us, we shall not be likely to spread it before God; but when we have knowledge of it, then we shall make acknowledgment of it to God. “My sin is ever before me.” He was in such a state of heart that the remembrance of sin seemed painted on his eyeballs. Even in his dreams he remembered it: he was never free from the dread remembrance of it.

4. Against thee only have I sinned.

Yet he had sinned against many more; but just now the thought of his sin against God swallowed up all else. All his offenses against his fellow men were trivial compared with the high treason which he had committed against his God. This is the virus of sin, that it is sin against God.

4. And done this evil in thy sight.

Whilst thou wast looking on. For a thief to steal in the presence of the Judge is impudence indeed, but yet in thy presence, O my God, I have done this evil.

4. That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

As much as to say, "I make this confession of sin, which is so black, that if thou shouldest judge me, however severely, or sentence me to however exemplary a punishment, thou wilt be quite clear and quite just. I could put in no plea against whatever thou shouldest command. I richly deserve all thy wrath can bring upon me."

5. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin, did my mother conceive me.

The black stream leads him to look at the black fountain. How can we expect from parents who have sinned that there should be born unto them pure and spotless children. No! the tendencies in us all towards evil are there at the very first. He does not at all venture to excuse himself, but rather to aggravate his sin, that he had been a sinner from his very birth.

6, 7. Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:

He had seen the leper pronounced clean when the hyssop was dipped in blood and sprinkled on him; but then the leper had to be clean beforehand before this could make him ceremonially clean. He is leaping through the first process and coming to the closing one, his soul anxious to be accepted with God at once.

7. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Yet what can be whiter than snow? Snow is not like a whited wall that is but white on the surface: it is white all through. And yet when God washes the believer, he makes him whiter than snow, for the snow soon becomes tainted, soon loses its purity; but we never shall if God shall wash us. There was no provision made for the cleansing of an adulterer under the law. David, therefore, had to look beyond all the sacrifices of the law to the cleansing power of the great coming sacrifice, and he so believed in it that with a brave faith — (I know no more brave expression in all Scripture than this)

— he says, “Wash me, filthy as I am, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

8. *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*

The original expression is “bones cracked,” or, as one puts it, smashed. His sense of sin had been so great that he felt as one might feel whose very bones had been smashed by some terrible blow. So he seems to say that, as there may be a delightful pleasure in having every one of these broken bones restored, such would be his pleasure if God would pardon his sins.

9. *Hide thy face from my sins,*

If we set out sins before our own faces, then God will turn his face away from our sins. If we hide our sins from our faces, God will set them before his face, but when they are ever before us they shall be never before him.

9, 10. *And blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God:*

It is a creation: the very word is used which is employed concerning the creation in the first chapter of Genesis. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

11. *Cast me not away from thy presence: and take not thy holy spirit from me.*

I have put thee away from my presence by forgetting thee, but put me not away from thy presence. I have been filled with an unholy spirit, but oh! take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

12. *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me.*

He feels how much he needs it. The burnt child dreads the fire. “Uphold me with thy free spirit.”

13. *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways: and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

And David has been doing that ever since, for this Psalm has been a continual sermon to sinners, teaching them God’s ways in pardoning sin; and many, I doubt not, have been converted unto God by his Spirit through the language of this Psalm. When you and I find Christ, let us tell of our blessed finding. Hast thou honey? Eat it not all thyself: go, tell thy fellow men. Art thou saved? Tarry not, but go and spread the news that others may be saved too.

14. *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation;*

His faith is growing. He has humbled himself. It is the way to rise. Weaken thyself before God, and thou shalt grow strong. Empty thyself, and thou shalt be filled; bow low, and he will lift thee up. “Thou God of my salvation.”

14. *And my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

Those tongues that confess sins are the best tongues to sing with. That tongue which has been salted with the brine of penitence is fitted to be sweet with the honey of praise.

15. *O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.*

You know the leper when he was unclean — what did he do? He covered his lips, as much as to confess that he was not fit to speak. So here the unclean David, with the covering over his lips, will not venture to speak until the Lord has taken away his sin, and opened his mouth for him. It was this that Isaiah meant when he said, “Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips”; but when it was said concerning the live coal, “Lo, this hath touched thy lips,” then he spake right eloquently. “Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.”

16. *For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.*

Here we have what God does desire, and what he does not. If you turn to the sixth verse, you will see what he does desire. “Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.” Now here he does not desire the mere outward and external worship rendered by sacrifice. It was not the type alone that satisfied him.

17. *The sacrifices of God are a broken Spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

There are some spices that are never perfect in fragrance till they are pounded with the pestle in the mortar, and so is a broken heart. If it be made to suffer and to smart, yet there is sweet pleasure to the Lord when he perceives in his people the smart concerning sin — when they hate and loathe it.

18, 19. *Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of*

righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

Gratitude ascends when sin is forgiven, and when God appears to bless his church, then she blesses her God.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 51., PSALM 119:145-168.

PSALM 55:1-17

To the chief Musician on Neginoth, Maschil, A Psalm of David. It needed the chief musician to sing such a Psalm as this; it is so full of sorrow, and yet so full of confidence in God. It is a Psalm upon the stringed instruments, and it sings not of man only, but of that Son of man — that greatest of men, who was also greatest in grief as greatest in faith. Maschil: that is, “instructive,” “full of teaching.” The experience of one child of God is instructive to another, and especially the experience of the great First-born among many brethren. A Psalm of David — David, that many-sided man, who seemed not one, but “all mankind’s epitome.” Who has not found his own experience when he has read the Psalms of David? It is a looking-glass — this Book of Psalms — which reflects us all. See how he begins.

1. *Give ear to my prayer, O God;*

All the saints pray. There is no exception to this rule. And in their times of trouble they pray with greater vehemence than ever. They delight in prayer. But observe how eager they are that God should hear them. It is not praying for praying’s sake — for the use of good words only. “Give ear to my prayer, O God.”

1. *And hide not thyself from my supplication.*

When a man passes by his fellow in his distress, he is said to hide himself.

O God, do not pass me by, When thou hearest my plaintive voice, do not hurry on and leave me to my woes. Forget not, beloved, that our Lord Jesus Christ did suffer the hidings of God’s face. You and I may trust that in our hour of prayer we shall not have to do so. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” But even if we should have to drink of that cup, better lips than ours have tasted its bitterness long ago.

2. *Attend unto me, and hear me:*

That is three times he thus implores God to give him a hearing. It reminds me of that Gethsemane pleading of our Lord when thrice he prayed using the same words. Here David begins — makes his exordium in prayer with a threefold cry to God. “Give ear to me; hide not thyself from me; attend unto my prayer, and hear me.”

2. I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise;

Sometimes prayer is scarcely articulate. “I make a noise.” He was very free with God. He spoke out his heart as best his heart would speak, and he seemed to ramble. I believe that some of our sweetly-composed prayers have no prayer in them, and some of our broken petitions are those that reach the heart of God. “Groanings that cannot be uttered” are prayers that cannot be refused. There may be most strength in the passion of the soul when there is least order in the expression of the soul. “I mourn in my complaints, and make a noise.”

3. Because of the voice of the enemy,

He can speak, and speak clearly too. Malice is never short of language, “because of the voice of the enemy.”

3. Because of the oppression of the wicked:

The best men have often been the most oppressed of men. Men have often spoken worst of those who have deserved the best. David is in that plight, and so was our Lord. He, too, knew the voice of the enemy and the oppression of the wicked.

3. For they cast iniquity upon me,

They bespatter me with their mire; they slander me. They speak evil of my good.

3. And in wrath they hate me.

It is the old story. The seed of the serpent naturally hates the seed of the woman. Even our Lord had a bruised heel. Know ye not that Ishmael persecutes Isaac, the child of the promise? All down history there runs this line — the mark of blood and suffering. It must be so, “for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me.”

4. My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me.

I suppose that David may have written this after he had been driven out of Jerusalem by the party under the leadership of his son Absalom and Ahithophel. When it is all over he sings his song of

dolour, and yet of confidence before his God. You know that our Lord Jesus Christ could use this language with very great emphasis. “My heart is sore pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me” — as if mid-night came down upon his soul — came down from God. “Are fallen upon me.” Descended therefore; and those are the heaviest of griefs which seem to come down just when we expected that showers of mercy would come down. Our Saviour knew what this meant.

5, 6. *Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.*

If he could not have the wings of an eagle to fight out the conflict, he begged for the wings of a dove to fly from it. But what would you and I be if we had wings? Where could we go if we had wings, but, like the dove of Noah, fly to the Lord? And we can get there without wings, brethren. We can get there by faith in him. It is a vain wish, then, and yet how many have sighed: — “Oh! for a lodge in some vast wilderness, Some boundless contiguity of shade, Where rumor of oppression and deceit might never reach me more.” Ah! we sigh for solitude, and when we get solitude we sigh to get out of it.

7. *Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah.*

Why, David had been in the wilderness, and then he sighed to get back to the temple of God; but such foolish creatures are we at our very wisest that we know not what we sigh for. It was good for David that he had not wings, and it is good for you that you cannot run away. God has made you no armor for your back because you must go forward. Long ago he burnt our boats. We cannot return. We must “forward” now to the eternal victories in his strength.

8. *I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest.*

But he that would fly away from slander must fly very fast. How can we escape it? That cruel tongue, that wicked tongue walks through the earth and smites with its sword the best of God’s people. Now, like a soldier, David prays as his Master would never pray.

9. *Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues: for I have seen violence and strife in the city.*

That was not a bad prayer, for God heard it. He did divide their tongues. The counsels of the wicked were put to naught, and so they made a mistake, and David escaped through their divisions. I see not how a king driven from his throne and hunted by rebels, can pray differently from this.

If he be a warrior and fights at all, he must wish for victory. Yet let me remind you that these verses need not be read in the imperative, neither may they necessarily be understood to be prayers. They can be read as prophecies. “God will destroy and divide the tongues of the wicked.” The divisions of error are the hope of truth. God divides the tongues of those who use their tongues against his Word, and so his truth conquers.

10. *Day and night they go about upon the walls thereof: mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it.*

Remember, Jerusalem was in the hands of a band of wicked men.

Everywhere sin prevailed when David had quitted it.

11, 12. *Wickedness is in the midst thereof: deceit and guile depart not from her streets. For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him:*

Here you get to the center of David’s grief. Ahithophel had betrayed him, and here you begin to see the portrait of Christ coming out on the canvas.

David seems to be painted first, and then there is painted an image of our Lord, which is seen here and there. “It was not an enemy; then I could have borne it.”

13. *But it was thou,*

In the original it runs thus: “But thou.” The ardor of poetry is upon the Psalmist. He sees him: “Thou.” And he looks at him with indignation: “Thou.”

13, 14. *A man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.*

It is Ahithophel; it is Judas Iscariot; it is either; it is both. Oh! what a grief it is to be betrayed by one whom we have trusted, one whom we treated as our equal, one whom we followed as a trusted guide, one to whom we told our secret and linked our heart. “Mine

acquaintance.” One whose friendship was sanctified by the sanctions of religion. “We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company.” Have any of you had to suffer from this serpent’s tongue? Be not surprised. Your Master endured it before you. And now David bursts out in words of prayer, “Let death seize upon them. Let them go down quick into hell.”

15. *Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them.*

And this prayer also was heard, for Ahithophel was hanged with a rope,

and Absalom without one; and their followers perished by thousands in the wood of Ephraim; and so God swept away the good man’s slanderers.

16. *As for me,*

What would I do? Plot against their plots, and set cunning against their cunning? No, not I.

16, 17. *I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.*

He would pray often, but not too often. Where time sets her boundaries there are we to set up our altars: evening and morning, and at noon. It seems natural that our undertakings should be begun, continued, and ended in God, and that each day. Oh! pray much when your enemies plot much. If, morning, noon, and evening, they are seeking your ill, then just as often seek you good from God. How beautifully he puts it. “He shall hear my voice.” He does not pray at a peradventure. He is certain that prayer will come up to God. Yea, more than that, he anticipates a blessing; he foresees, nay, he sees the blessing.

PSALM 56

1. *Be merciful unto me, O God for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me.*

“Man has no mercy upon me, but, O God, be thou merciful unto me! If thy justice doth for a while let loose mine enemies upon me, let thy mercy diminish their power over me, for they are very cruel. They would make a complete end of me if they could, devouring me utterly.”

2-4. *Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.*

In God I will praise his word, —

David means, “Through his grace, I will praise his word,” for we cannot rightly praise God unless he gives us the grace to do it. To receive from God, is more easy for us; but to return gratitude to God, is impossible to us except as his grace enables us to do it. “In God I will praise his word, —

4, 6. *In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.*

Every day they wrest my words: This is a common calamity of God’s servants and a common crime of the oppressors of God’s people in all ages: “They wrest my words:”

5, 6. *All their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul.*

“They watch to see if they can find some matter of accusation against me, or some opportunity for tempting me to turn aside from my God. ‘They mark my steps,’ as the huntsman follows the trail of the lion he seeks to kill, so they follow my track to see if by any means they may slay me.”

7, 8. *Shall they escape by iniquity? is thine anger cast down the people, O God. Thou tellest my wanderings:*

David’s was a life of wandering, from the sheep-folds to his father’s house, then to the palace of Saul, then to the camp of Israel, then to the palace again, then to the cave Adullam, then among the Philistines, — I scarcely remember all the places where he went, but there were at least twelve great changes in David’s life, and God had them all written down, and so he has all yours, you who believe in Jesus, all your wanderings are recorded because God sets a high value upon everything that happens to you. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without being noticed by him, and not a single step is taken by you without being noted by him.

8. *Put thou my tears into thy bottle:-*

This is thought by some to have been an allusion to an old Roman custom of catching the tears of the friends of the dying in a lachrymatory, or small bottle, and then burying them in their tomb. I

see no reason to believe that David meant anything so absurd. There is probably a very much better meaning than that to be attached to these words. Bottles, large capacious bottles, were used to catch the copious drops which streamed forth from the wine-press, and David felt that his tears would be in God's sight, as precious and as plentiful as the grape drops, and that a great bottle would be needed to hold them, such a bottle as the Jews used for holding milk or wine. Though his soul suffered much sorrow, he believed God would treasure it all up: "Put thou my tears into thy bottle:"-

8. *Are they not in thy book?*

"Are they not all duly recorded there?"

9. *When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back:*

"When I cry, they shall fly, So swift is prayer to reach the ear and heart of God, and so kind is God to me."

9-12. *This I know; for God is for me. In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Thy vows are upon me, O God:*

"I am bound to praise thee, I am bound to love thee, and I will, come what may."

12, 13. *I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 56, AND 57.

PSALM 56

To the chief Musician upon Jonathelemrechokim, Michtam (a golden Psalm) of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath.

1, 2. *Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up: he fighting daily oppresseth me. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High.*

David was in such peril from man that he cried to God to come to our rescue. Man was merciless to him, so he prayed, "Be merciful unto me, O God." His enemies were many and mighty, so he appealed to the One who was almighty; who could destroy them, or put them all to flight.

3. *What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.*

He is a happy man who can trust in God when he is afraid, but he is still happier who can say, "I will trust, and not be afraid."

4. *In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.*

The trusting soul is a singing soul, and it soon becomes a courageous soul. Faith in God drives out the fear of man: "In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me."

5, 6. *Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps when they wait for my soul.*

David had many enemies, Saul, Doeg the Edomite, the Philistines, and some even in his own household, but all their malice and craft were in vain since the Lord was on his side. We too have enemies who wrest our words, whose thoughts against us are evil, who lay traps for us, and lie in ambush to take us unawares; but we need not fear any of them, not even the great adversary himself, if we are trusting in the Lord.

7. *Shall they escape by iniquity? in thine anger cast down the people, O God.?*

They sought to cast him down, so he prayed to the Lord to cast them down, and we know how graciously the Lord answered his supplication.

8. *Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?*

David was such a wanderer at that time that he might not remember all the places where he had hidden away from Saul, but God had a record of them, and even of his tears: "are they not in thy book?" There is nothing that concerns the Lord's chosen people that is not noted and remembered by him.

9. *When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me.*

David's confidence in God was not misplaced, he who can truthfully say, "God is for me," need not fear however many may be against him.

10, 11. *In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word.*

In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. He repeats the declarations he made in verse 4; such holy

confidence may rightly be published again and again. It is most pleasing and honouring to the Lord, and it is most likely to lead other tried believers to follow such a worthy example. The praising and trusting man fears not what man can do unto him.

12. *Thy vows are upon me, O God I will render praises unto thee.*

David had not forgotten the vows that he had made unto the Lord. Vows should not be lightly made; but, once made, they should be sacredly remembered, and faithfully performed.

13. *For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?*

So the Psalm ends, as it began, with prayer, a prayer that was most graciously answered, as we can see if we turn to Psalm 116:8, 9: “Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.”

PSALM 57

1. *Be merciful unto me, O God —*

He begins with the same note as in the last Psalm; it is a note that cannot be too often on the believer’s tongue: “Be merciful unto me, O God,” —

1. *Be merciful unto me:*

As an old writer says, “The tongue of the bell strikes on both sides, and the note is the same in each case, ‘Be merciful unto me, be merciful unto me.’” You cannot have that petition offered too often. David feels his deep need of mercy, and the great value of mercy, and therefore he prays again and again, “Be merciful unto me, be merciful unto me.”

1, 2. *For my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpass. I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me.*

“That perfecteth all things for me,” so it may be read; “that perfecteth all his mercies, all his promises, — and that will perfect all that concerneth me whatever it may be, — unto this God will I cry.”

3-5. *He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.*

“Exalt thyself by overcoming all thine enemies. If they be very great, be thou greater still; if they be mighty, be thou the more mighty in my defense,

and so glorify thy holy name.”

6-11. *They have prepared a net for my steps, my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah. My heart is fixed, God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens and thy truth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 56, AND 57.

PSALM 57

To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtaim of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.

This is one of the “Destroy not” Psalms; for that is the meaning of the title, Altaschith, which is used here, and in Psalms 58., 59., and 75. Michtam of David. David’s golden Psalm, “when he fled from Saul in the cave.” In this Psalm we see the calmness of David’s heart when he was in great peril. He was a man of peace; and to be hunted cruelly, as he was by Saul, greatly pained him. Yet, with all the sensitiveness of his nature, he did not fall into unbelief; for his sensitiveness was balanced by his confidence in his God. You will see how, greatly as he was afflicted, he was greatly strengthened.

1. *Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me:*

He pleads twice; for his was an urgent case. He would have the Lord help him at once; for, perhaps, if the Lord’s mercy came not to

him at once, it would be too late; so he cried, “Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me.”

1. For my soul trusteth in thee:

This is the feather on the arrow of prayer that guides it straight to the heart of God. This is the condition attached to the promise, “According to your faith be it unto thee.” If you can truly plead that your soul is trusting in God, you may be assured that he will not deny you his mercy.

1. Yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.

What a sweet realization there is here of the power of God to protect him! Just as the little chick hides beneath the mother’s wing, and knows no fear, so says David, “in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge.” There was no refuge to be seen; but David does not ask to see; an unseen God is all that faith wants. If it be only a shadow, yet the shadow of Jehovah’s wings is substantial enough for our confidence: “In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.” They will be overpast; the worst calamity will not last forever. We shall think differently of these rough times by-and-by; we ought not to give up in despair, and cast away our confidence while we are in the thick of the fight.

Until the calamities are overpast, it should be our joy to run under God’s protecting wings, and hide ourselves securely there.

2. I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me.

Faith is never dumb; true faith is a crying faith. If thou hast a confidence in God of such a kind that thou dost not need to pray, get rid of it; for it is of no use to thee; it is a false confidence, it is presumption. Only a crying faith will be a prevailing faith. “I will cry unto God most high:” the very height and sublimity of God is an attraction to faith; for though he is so high, he can and will stoop. Though God is so high, he can lift me up above the storm; for he is above it himself, and he can set me above it, too. “I will cry unto God most high;” and David sweetly adds, “unto God that performeth for me.” The translators have inserted the words, “all things”, and very properly, too; but David leaves, as it were, a gap, so that we may fill in anything that we please. Thus do we- “Sing the sweet promise of his grace, And the performing God.” He is not

one who gives us promises, and then puts us off without the thing promised; but he fulfils the promises he has made, he is the Faithful Promiser: "God that performeth for me."

3. *He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up.*

If he cannot find any means upon earth for saving David, he will send from heaven to do it; but he will save him. God is sure to find an ark for his Noahs if the floods should cover the whole earth; and when they cannot be preserved any longer on the earth, he will catch them away to himself in heaven; but he will surely take care of his own: "He shall send from heaven, and save me." If there were only one of his people in danger, he would rend the heavens in order to save him: "He shall send from heaven and save me," not only from the danger to my life, but from danger to my character: "from the reproach of him that would swallow me up." Often, the enemies of the righteous are so fierce and cruel that they would, like some huge python, swallow up the godly man, devour him, make an end of him, make one meal of him, if they could; but God will not allow them to do so. He will send from heaven, and deliver us from the reproach of them that would swallow us up.

3. *God shall send forth his mercy and his truth.*

The Psalmist had only prayed for mercy; twice he had said, "Be merciful unto me." But God always answers us more largely than we ask in our prayers; he does exceeding abundantly above what we ask or even think. So his truth comes with his mercy, as a double guard to protect his people: "God shall send forth his mercy and his truth."

4. *My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword.*

Yet, notice that David says, "I lie" there, that is the emphatic word; and the force of that word conveys this idea, "I recline there; I feel at ease, notwithstanding the danger of my position; I recline, and rest, even among them that are set on fire." Oh, the calm confidence of the faith that forgets the adversary when once she has hidden herself under the shadow of Jehovah's wings! The description given of ungodly persecutors is very strong: "whose teeth are spears and arrows." Their mouth seems to contain a deadly

armoury; they have no molars to grind their food, they are all canine teeth, cruel, cutting. You must know some such critical spirits, that seem to be all teeth, and whose every tooth is a spear or an arrow. But their tongue is worse than their teeth, for it is not only a sword, but “a sharp sword”, a sharpened sword. Oh, how tongues will cut and wound!

You may heal the cut of a sword; but who shall heal the cut of a deadly, cruel, malicious, slanderous tongue? Yet for all that, David was not dismayed, but he said, “I lie down among such men, my soul is among lions.” Like Daniel among the lions, so does this man of God take his night’s rest, as calmly as though he were sleeping in his own bed at home.

5. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.

David so rises above his present circumstances that he begins to praise his God. O beloved, there is no condition in which God ought to be robbed of a song! What if I am sick? Yet my Lord must have my music, even if the harp-strings are not well tuned. What if I am poor? Yet why should I be poor towards him, and deny him my need of praise? What if I am busy? Yet I must still find time for praising him. How sweetly David seeks to exalt and glorify his God, “Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.”

6. They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves.

They hunted him as they spread a snare for a bird, or as they sought to entrap a wild beast by digging a pit, and covering it over that he might stumble into it. David scarcely has time to tell us of their devices before he discovers that their plans have come to nought: “they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves.” You may go calmly on, my persecuted friend, for those who seek to do the righteous hurt, will only hurt themselves; their bows shall be broken, their arrows shall fall back into their own bosoms. Only be thou still, and let the wicked alone; let God fight for thee, and do thou hold thy peace.

7. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.

That is enough for me, I will not stop my singing for all my adversaries. Let them howl like lions, I will sing on. Let them dig their pits, I will sing on. I find this my best employment, to keep on praising my God.

“All that remains for me, Is but to love and sing,
And wait until the angels come, To bear me to the King.”

8. *Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. My tongue, the glory of my frame, be not thou silent! Bestir thyself!*

“I myself will awake early,” or, “I will awake the dawning.” I will call the sun up to be shining; I will bid him wake to shine to the honour of my Lord. With the earliest birds I will make one more singer in the great concert-hall of God. I will not want more rest, or a longer time to myself to consider all my troubles, I will give my best time, the first hour of the day, to the praise of my God.

9. *I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations.*

I will make the Gentiles hear it. They that know not the Lord shall be astonished when they hear me praising him, and they shall ask, “Who is this God of whom this man makes so much?”

10, 11. *For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. Be thou exulted, O God, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth.*

God give us that same calm praiseful frame of mind that David possessed if we are called to endure such trials as fell to his lot!

PSALM 57:1-6

1. *Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.*

The heading of this Psalm — “To the chief musician, Aitachith Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave,” — tells us when it was written. It is one of David’s “golden Psalms.” What a mixture of feebleness and strength there is in this first verse, — the feebleness so beautified by being clothed with the strength of faith! What a turning away from man, and what a turning wholly unto the Lord! And, in coming to the Lord, what humility, and what pleading for mercy, and for mercy only! “Be merciful unto me, O God, be

merciful unto me.” Yet what holy boldness also! “ For my soul trusteth in thee.” And what joyous confidence and what sweet repose in God! “Yea, in the shadow of thy wings, will I make my refuge.” “If I cannot see the brightness of thy face, the shadow of thy wings shall be enough for me. Only let me get near thee, — only permit me humbly to trust thee, and it shall be enough for me, ‘unto these calamities be overpass.’”

2. I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me.

Do you pray like that, my brother, my sister? I hope you do “cry unto God most high;” but do you pray to him as the One “that performeth all things” for you; — not merely who can perform all things for you, but who is actually doing it at the present moment, — working out your lasting good by everything that is transpiring around you?

3. He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah.

If all the forces on earth are not sufficient to save his saint, God will send sufficient reserves from the ranks of the heavenly host to preserve his people; or if he does not determine to preserve them on earth, he will take them away from the earth, to be with him in glory; but, in one way, or another, they shall be eternally secure.

Mark what the psalmist says of the voracity of his enemy: he speaks of Saul as “him that would swallow me up;” and the believer in Jesus is, at times, such an object of the unbeliever’s detestation that he would annihilate him if he could; but God will sooner send help from heaven for his people than that such a calamity should ever happen.

3, 4. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. My soul is among lions:

What peril David was in, and what dangers often surround the best of the men, — if not from arrows, and swords, and spears, from the hellish artillery of unbridled tongues! A human tongue is soft, but it can cut to the very quick; and the wounds from a cruel tongue are not easily healed. Many a man will bear, as long as he lives, the scars that were made by a slanderous tongue. God can save us, however, even from this great trial, and enable us actually to rejoice in this sharp affliction. It is no strange thing that has happened unto

us, for so evil men persecuted the prophets that were before us, as they said all manner of evil against them falsely. God himself was slandered by the old serpent in the garden of Eden, so it is not surprising that his children should be still slandered by the serpent's seed.

4. And I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.

A grand burst of praise, and all the grander because of the condition of the man from whom it came. "My soul is among lions," says he; "but, 'be thou exalted, O God;'" as if he would say, "It does not matter what becomes of me, I shall be content even in this den of lions, so long as thou art exalted above the heavens, and thy glory above all the earth."

6. They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah.

He knew that it would be so, and he looked upon it as already accomplished; their nets and pits would only injure themselves. Now look at the next verse in the light of the prayer David had been praying. See what a marvellous act of faith, and what a grand result of unwavering confidence in God it is, for a man to be able to sing as David does even when his soul is among lions, and fierce and powerful enemies are all round him, seeking his hurt.

PSALM 57:7-11

Let me say, before we begin our reading, that the 108th Psalm is made up partly of the 60th and partly of the 57th; yet we are sure that the Holy Spirit is not short of language, so that he needs to repeat himself. It is always a pity to think that any portion of Scripture can be tautology. It cannot be; there is some good reason for every repetition; and you will see that, in the two Psalms, which we are about to read, the latter part of the 57th coincides with the first part of the 108th; and that, in the 57th Psalm, we have prayer and praise, and, in the 108th, we have praise and prayer. It is well that we should see how these two holy exercises can change places, — so that, sometimes, we begin with prayer, and pray ourselves up into praise,

and, at other times, we begin with praise, and find in it the strength we need to aid us in prayer.

7. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.

Let the lions open their cruel mouths, and roar, and let wicked men, “whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword, do their worst against me; let my every footstep be among the nets and pits that they have set and dug to catch me; even in the midst of danger, ‘my heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I still sing and give praise.’”

8. Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early.

“I will awake the dawn,” — so the Hebrew has it; — “I will wake up the morning and chide it for being so long in opening its eyes to look upon God’s works. David did this, notwithstanding all the trials of his surrounding circumstances. He calls on his “glory” — perhaps he means his tongue, — possibly, his poetic faculty, — perchance, his musical skill, — it may be that he means his intellect, — whatever his “glory” is, he calls upon his highest powers to awake to praise his God. Then he takes his psaltery and harp, — strange companions for a man whose soul is among lions but saints know how to evoke sweetest music even when their enemies are fighting fiercely against them; — and he sings, —

9-11. I will praise thee, O lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth.

Have not some of you found God’s mercy to be “great unto the heavens”? It even seemed to reach above the heavens; and as for God’s truth, you followed it till you could follow it no further, for it had ascended above the clouds. We could scarcely, I think, ever expect to understand here all the truth which God has pleased to let us hear or read. It reaches “unto the clouds,” and there we must leave it for the present. When God ceases to reveal anything, we may cease to inquire concerning it. I saw, in Florence, a picture of “The Sleeping Saviour.” He is represented as sleeping in the manger at Bethlehem, and the artist depicts the angels hovering round him, with their fingers on their lips as though they would not wake him

from his holy slumbers. So, when God bids truth sleep, do not try to wake it. There is enough revealed for thee to know, and more that thou wilt know by-and-by, so, pry not between the folded leaves; but wait your Lord's appointed time to teach you more of his will.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 57:7-11; AND 108,

PSALM 62

1. *Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.*

Waiting upon God, if not true and sincere, is only a mockery; it is also an insult to the Lord; and, so far from bringing us a blessing, it would only bring us a curse. The Hebrew hath it, "Truly my soul is silent before God," for faith asks no questions, raises no objections, starts no difficulties, but is content to wait quietly God's time, believing that all will be well. David meant, "My soul in silence waits only upon God: from him cometh my salvation, and from no other quarter; — not from the Assyrians, nor from the Egyptians, nor from my own might or wisdom, but from God alone." I hope that we have not only come up to this service in our bodies, but that we have brought our souls also to wait upon God. It is unutterably sad when we go to a place of worship, and leave our souls somewhere else. Soul-worship is the very soul of worship, but worship without the whole heart and soul is soulless and dead.

2. *He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.*

He may be moved as an old oak is moved in a storm; its branches are shaken, but its trunk stands fast, and its roots get all the firmer grip upon the soil. He may be moved like a ship which is tossed, but which still doth not drag its anchor, so he can truly say, "I shall not be greatly moved."

3. *How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence.*

David's enemies were very many, yet see how he speaks of their enmity: "How long will ye imagine mischief?" He speaks as if it were nothing but imagination, that would never come to anything more; and, blessed be God, they who think of destroying God's people do but imagine what will never come to pass. Their dreams and imaginings shall never become facts.

Saul and his sons, and his servants were slain upon mount Gilboa; and the prince of darkness and all his hosts must fall before the arrows of our conquering King. "As a bowing wall shall ye be." You have, perhaps, sometimes seen a wall which has a mass of earth pressing upon it on the other side, and therefore it bows out through the excessive weight and through its own weakness.

So have you seen a fence which totters, and is ready to fall. The wood has grown rotten, the nails have dropped out, and the old posts have perished in the ground. These are true pictures of the enemies of God's people.

They are bowing walls, — a child may push them over; they are tottering fences, — at the blast of God's breath in his wrath, they shall be blown to the ground at once.

4. They only consult to cast him down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly.

This has been the typical character of the enemies of God's people in all generations, — oily words on their tongues, but sharp daggers in their hearts. If they would speak as they feel, then they would be easily recognized; but they do not, and therefore are they like wolves in sheep's clothing. The Lord deliver me from all such enemies! Blessed be his name, if we truly wait upon him, we shall be delivered from them all in due time.

5, 6. My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defense, I shall not be moved.

Some people only pray if they are in a good frame of mind, but we ought to pray to get ourselves into a good frame. That is what David did. You notice that he improves as he goes on. In the second verse, he says, "I shall not be greatly moved," but now, in this sixth verse, he says, "I shall not be moved." His faith grows as he prays, and as he praises; and we also ought not only to pray when we feel most in the spirit of prayer, and to sing when our hearts are merry but, sometimes, like David, we may strengthen our faith while we pray and we may sing our griefs away till the spirit of praise shall fill our souls.

7, 8. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times; —

Say, with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." "Trust in him at all times," even when he seemeth to be angry, and hideth his face from you. "Trust in him at all times" even in the stormy and dark day. It is among the many excellences of faith that it can see in the dark, that it can walk abroad in foul weather, that it can ride at anchor in a storm and that, when lions are in the way, it makes nothing of them. Well, then, troubled Christian, trust in him now, at their present time, leave your cares, and sorrows, and afflictions in this house of prayer, and go away with a song in your heart, if not in your mouth. "Trust in him at all times;" —

8. *Ye people, pour out your heart before him: —*

The prophet Jeremiah bade the people pour out their heart "like water before the face of the Lord;" — not like oil, some of which clings to the glass but like water, which runs away to the last drop. So, sinner, pour out your whole heart before the Lord, for this is the way to be saved. Bring your heart, all full of sin and sorrow, turn it upside down, pour the whole of its contents out at the foot of the throne of grace, and then wait until God fills your heart with peace and joy.

8. *God is a refuge for us.*

Not for David only, but for all who, by a simple, sincere faith, can find shelter and safety under the shadow of his wings.

9. *Surely men of low degree are vanity,*

They promise what they cannot perform.

9. *And men of high degree are a lie:*

They often promise what they will not perform. The many-headed multitude are vanity, put the whole of them into the scales, and how much do they weigh? Just nothing: and as for the aristocrats, those great men that would ride roughshod over the whole world if they could, they are worse than nothing; for, while the "men of low degree are vanity," the "men of high degree are a lie," and that is worse than vanity.

9. *To be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.*

Put in Caesar, and the senators and nobles of Rome, and then put in the populace of Rome: "they are altogether lighter than vanity." Therefore it is no use to trust to men. If any man builds his comfort upon popularity he builds upon the sand, or if any build their hopes upon some great noble or prince, they build upon a lie, for he will

fail them when most they need help. Blessed is the man who trusts in his God, but cursed is he that trusteth in man.

10. *Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.*

They will be as deceptive to you as the multitude or as the prince.

11. *God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.*

Hear that, Christian, and from this day forward place no reliance upon thyself, or upon thyself any but thy God.

12. *Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.*

God gives to each Christian grace proportioned to his work, and then he gives a reward — not of merit, but of mercy, in proportion to the work done. God grant us the grace to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest this most instructive Psalm, until our souls, like David's, truly wait only upon God!

PSALM 62

In this Psalm the royal singer casts himself entirely on God. Here we see the foundation of his expectation laid bare. He has no confidence anywhere but in God. The Psalm begins in the original with the word “Only.” I always call it “The ‘only’ Psalm” because it harps upon that word. David had no mixed reliance; he had not built upon a foundation partly of iron and partly of clay; it was all in harmony throughout; his trust was in the Lord alone.

1. *Truly-*

Or, as it is in the margin, “Only” —

1. *My soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.*

It is a blessed thing to wait truly and only upon God. You have proved everything else to be a failure, and now you hang upon the bare arm of God alone. There is certainly enough for you to depend upon there. Most people want something to see, something tangible to the senses, to be the object of their confidence; but David says, “Only my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.” It is already on the road; it is coming now; it is a salvation from present trouble and from present temptation. A complete salvation is on the road for all those whose souls are waiting only upon God.

2. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.

“Though I have no other shelter, yet,” says he, “God, but God alone, is my rock fortress. Though I have no other deliverer he is my salvation, and though thousands seek to do me hurt, and none will stand up for me, yet he is my shield and my defense.” Then he adds, “I shall not be greatly moved.’ I shall be like a well-anchored ship; I may suffer some tossing, but I cannot drift far away, my grace holds me fast.”

3. How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence.

See how he laughs at his enemies. He tells them they are like a wall that came over, bulges out, and shakes and totters, with a push, it will go over. “You think that you will destroy me,” says he, “but you will yourselves be destroyed.”

4. They only consult to cast him down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah.

It is a sure proof that they delight in lies because they are guilty of telling them. They can speak soft oily words all the while that they are harboring curses in their hearts. God save us from having a tongue that talks in a different way from that in which our heart feels! But those that delight in lies are never better pleased than when they can find a man of God upon whom they can spit their venom; and of all cruel things slander is the worst, and it deserves the worst punishment. Well did the psalmist ask, “What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper.” Such punishment as that a slanderer’s tongue well deserves to feel.

5. My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.

First he said that his salvation came from the Lord, and now he says that his exultation comes from him. All that he needs, and all that he wishes for, he gets from his God. “Let my foes slander me,” he seems to say, “but, O my soul, do thou wait upon God! Let their tongues keep on inventing their diabolical falsehoods; but, O my soul, take thou no notice of them! Sit thou down at Jehovah’s feet,

and patiently wait then he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.”

6. *He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defense; I shall not be moved.*

Notice how David’s faith grows. In verse 2, he says, “I shall not be greatly moved;” but now he says, “I shall not be moved at all.” What strength faith gives to a man, and what strength prayer gives to a man! We may begin our supplication tremblingly, but as we draw near to God we become confident in him, and filled with holy boldness.

7, 8. *In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times;-*

I cannot tell what “times” you may be passing through just now, yet I can repeat David’s exhortation, “Trust in him at all times.” In your darkest hours, in the most terrible times that you ever have, when all seems lost, when the dearest object of your heart’s love is taken from you, or when you yourself are coming to the swellings of Jordan, still trust in the Lord: “Trust in him at all times;” —

8. *Ye people, pour out your heart before him:-*

That is the way to get rid of all your troubles; take your heart, and turn it upside down, and pour out all that is in it. Do not save a drop or a drag: try not to hide one secret sorrow from your God, nor one slight grief that nestles in a corner of your spirit. “Pour out your heart before him.” It will not be wise for you to pour it out before your fellows, for they will misunderstand you and misrepresent you; but “pour out your heart before him:” —

8, 9. *God is a refuge for us. Selah. Surely men of low degree are vanity,*

There is nothing in them; they are only the very essence of vanity.

9. *And men of high degree-*

They must surely be better. No, they are even worse: “Men of high degree” —

9. *Are a lie:*

Their presence of being better because they are of high degree is mere presence. Well but, if we mix them up, and get some poor men

and some rich ones, some peasants and some peers, can we not make something solid out of this mixture? Oh, no!

9. *To be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.*

The men of low degree alone were vanity, but when the men of high degree were put with them, they became lighter than vanity; so that there seems to be a propensity in the men of high degree to make those that are of low degree even lighter than they are by nature; and whether men are high or low, if we trust in them, we shall be deceived. He who tries to base his happiness upon the good opinion of his neighbours, he whose happiness depends upon human esteem, builds not on sand, but on mere breath, which is no more solid than the bubble that our children blow.

10. *Trust not in oppression,-*

An ungodly man says, "Well, if I cannot trust in others, I will trust in myself; my own stout arm shall win me the victory, and I will tread others down beneath my feet." "I will get money," says another; "somehow or other, I will get money." To both of these, David says, "Trust not in oppression," —

10. *And become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.*

If you do, they will either fly away from your heart, or else they will fly away with your heart, which would be the greater evil of the two, for, when riches carry a man's heart away from God, his greatest gains are his heaviest losses. He is poor indeed who prizes his gold more than his God.

11. *God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.*

Where ought we to put our confidence? Why, where true power is. If there were any power elsewhere, we might put a measure of confidence elsewhere; but when twice the heavenly message declares that power belongs to God, our wisdom will be shown in putting our trust in God.

12. *Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy:-*

Almighty power would be terrible if it were separated from infinite mercy; but it is not so.

12. *For thou renderest to every man according to his work.*

Thou givest him enough strength with which to do his work. Thou dost not send him to do a work beyond his power, and leave

him to fail; but unto all thy children thy mercy brings thy power to help in every time of need. Thy faithful promise is, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” Come, my brothers and sisters in Christ, let us be of the same mind as David was when he wrote the first verse of this Psalm, and let each one of us say, “Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.”

PSALM 63

This is said to be “A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.” I suppose, therefore, that it was composed when he fled from Jerusalem because of the cruel treachery of his son Absalom. He must have been heart-broken, and stricken with the greatest possible sorrow as he fled away with his faithful followers into the wilderness of Judah. But even there he praised his God; and he did not sing unto him with old and stale Psalms, but with a new song. How restful and calm he must have been, in his great sorrow, to sit down even in the wilderness of Judah, and make a new hymn of praise unto the Lord! How gloriously he begins!

1. *O God, thou art my God;*

The psalmist has no doubt about this great fact, he does not hesitate or falter, but he makes the positive assertion, “O God, thou art my El, my mighty God, strong to deliver me.” In the sixty-second Psalm, he had finished up with the power of God: “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.” So he begins this new song with the great name El, which expresses the might and power of God: “O God, thou art my El, my mighty God;”

1. *Early will I seek thee:*

People in the wilderness have hard beds to lie on, and they sleep all the fewer hours. David was up in the morning early, and he began the day with prayer to God: “Early will I seek thee.” “While the dew is on the grass, the dew of the Spirit shall be upon my soul.” He means also, “I will seek thee at once, immediately, now, without delay.” But how could he seek the God who was already his God? “Thou art my God; early will I seek thee.” Brethren, nobody ever seeks another man’s God. Till God is your God, you will not want to seek him; and when you have him, you will seek him yet more and more.

1. *My soul thirsteth for thee,*

He had a strong passion for God. There is, sometimes, an unbearable, insatiable pang of the body, which you cannot forget; and David had an insatiable longing of soul, which nothing could make him forget: "My soul thirsteth for thee."

1. *My flesh longeth for thee-*

Even his flesh, his body-not his carnal nature,-but his body mastered by his soul, was caused to yield its little help towards the making of this verse: "My flesh longeth for thee-

1. *In a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;*

And this world is just like that. To the most of Christians, the six days of the week take them through the wilderness, and the Sabbath brings them to an oasis in the desert, an Elim, a place where there are wells of living water. But oh! what longings they have after God! What did David want when he was in the wilderness?

2. *To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.*

He did not want the sanctuary so much as to see God in the sanctuary. Brethren, it is well to have a love to our own place of worship, but it is infinitely better to have a soul longing for the God we worship, and to feel that the place of worship is nothing unless God be there.

3. *Because thy lovingkindness is better than life my lips shall praise thee.*

"In the wilderness, when my comforts are cut off, when my son, who was my darling, is seeking my life, my lips shall praise thee, for still thy lovingkindness is better than life."

4. *Thus will I bless thee while I live:*

"As long as I live, I will praise thee; every breath of mine shall be perfumed with thankfulness and adoration."

4. *I will lift up my hands in thy name.*

"In astonishment at the power of thy great name, and in confidence will I lift them up when they have been hanging down in weakness. I will go forth in holy activity, with uplifted hands, in thy name."

5. *My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness;*

Oriental, in their feasts, are very fond of fat such as you and I would hardly eat; they think that the choicest part of their diet. So

David, using his own metaphor, says that God would satisfy his soul as with the very marrow and fatness of joys.

5. *And my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:*

A heart full of grace makes a mouth full of praise. When God makes thee inwardly to be content with himself, thou wilt be outwardly full of thanksgiving and praise.

6. *When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.*

Of course, in the wilderness, they had to set a watch against Absalom and his men; and David very likely could hear the noise in the camp as they changed the sentries, and marked the hours of the night. "Oh!" said he, "while I lie awake, and the watchers are on guard all around, I will make the night to be a time of spiritual feasting: 'My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness;' and I will make a song at night unto the God who giveth songs in the night: my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips."

7. 8. *Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth hard after thee:*

If he could not keep pace with his Lord, and did in some measure lose the joy of walking with God, then he would run after him. If thou canst not lean on Christ's arm, keep close at Christ's heel; be as near him as thou canst, like a dog who keeps close to his master: "My soul followeth hard after thee." Where did David get the grace and the strength thus to follow after God? Listen.

8. *Thy right hand upholdeth me.*

There is the secret upholding of divine grace, even when the soul cannot attain the fellowship at which it aims. When we are struggling to be near to God, let us thank the Lord who, by his Spirit, worketh in us the heavenly ardor that makes us run to him. The last three verses of the Psalm describe what would become of David's enemies.

9. *But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth.*

The wicked always grovel, they never rise to higher things; and their course shall be downward,-downward to the grave, downward to eternal death.

10. *They shall fall by the sword:*

They took the sword; they shall perish by the sword. They were seeking to slay David; they shall be themselves slain.

10. *They shall be a portion for foxes.*

Not for lions; but for foxes, or jackals, for that is the word; the jackals shall gnaw them in pieces.

11. *But the king shall rejoice in God;*

David was the king; so you see that he did not rejoice in the slaughter of his enemies, but he did rejoice in his God.

11. *Every one that sweareth by him shall glory:*

Those who were true and loyal to the king would have reason for rejoicing when the rebels were overthrown; and those who were true and loyal to God would have still greater reason for exultation.

11. *But the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.*

Every true man must be glad that it is so. The mouths of liars will be stopped by the sexton with a shovel full of earth, if in no other way; but every lying tongue in all the world shall be silent one day at the judgment bar of God. The Lord bless to us the reading of his Word! Amen.

PSALM 63

“A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.” Shall we praise God in the garden and not praise him in the wilderness? No; we will sing a new song when we come into the desert; for, even if we are in a desert, that is no reason why there should be a desert in us, so let us praise God even in our wilderness experience.

1. *O God,*

Two very solemn words; never use them, I pray you, as hasty, thoughtless expressions. God’s name must never be taken in vain; I fear that there are some who do this, and are not rebuked for it. When we say, “O God,” there ought to be something solemn to follow.

1. *Thou art my God;*

The second word “God” signifies “my strong one, my mighty one, to whom I can bring all my weakness and all my care; for thou art strong enough to take care of me even in the wilderness.”

1. *Early will I seek thee:*

That is, “at once.” “I will not delay, but immediately will I seek thee. I will not so much seek to get out of the wilderness, or seek for comfort in the wilderness, as seek for everything in thee.”

1. *My soul thirsteth for thee,*

This is a blessed experience. It is a sad thing to be without God in any degree, but it is a blessed thing when we cannot rest without him.

1. *My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; —*

“My flesh” — that lowest part of me, — even that has been awakened and quickened: “my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” “Where there is no water, no well, no cloud, no rain, I am longing for thee, my God.” “My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;” —

2. *To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.*

David remembers better times that he had enjoyed in the past, and he longs to have them back again. He wants again to know, and feel, and enjoy, all he has ever known, and felt, and enjoyed; and, blessed be God, he will grant us that boon.

3, 4. *Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live:*

“Whether I live in a sterile wilderness or in a fertile land, I will bless thee while I live.”

4. *I will lift up my hands in thy name.*

“I will pluck up spirit; I will begin to pray; I will begin to work. I will look toward heaven: ‘I will lift up my hands in thy name.’”

5. *My soul shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:*

There is everything that is satisfactory in God. If we do but enjoy his presence, we cannot lack anything. Are we not put, as it were, into heaven itself when we are brought near to God? Are we not willing to remain for a while on earth, and to keep out of heaven, if we may but have the Lord with us, and constantly enjoy his company?

6. *When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.*

When one is living near to God, he is not afraid of sleeplessness. He would be glad of the rest that sleep brings, but if he cannot sleep, he finds a sweeter rest in God. I remarked, one day, to one who lives very near to God, that it was a weary and sad thing to lie sleepless, and he said to me something that stuck by me. "I do not think so," said he, "for, when I wake in the night, my Heavenly Father talks so sweetly to me that I do not want to go to sleep, and when he does not want to speak to me, I speak to him in prayer, and so the hours glide away most happily."

7. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy refuge will I rejoice.

"If I cannot look up, and see the light of thy face, the very shade of thy wings shall make me glad, and I will sing like a nightingale, in the dark."

8. My soul followeth hard after thee:

The Hebrew is, "My soul is glued to thee." "I am like a dog that keeps close to his master's heels, and will not leave him."

8. Thy right hand upholdeth me.

We should not follow the Lord if his hand were not still underneath us to keep us going.

9, 10. But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes.

The jackal is the creature meant here, for he haunts the battlefield, and devours the slain. So it came to pass with many of David's foes. They fell in battle, and the wild beasts devoured them.

11. But the king shall rejoice in God: every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.

If they cannot be stopped by reason or by repentance, they shall be stopped with a shovelful of earth, for God will stop the mouths of all are in one way or another.

PSALM 63

1. O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: Because thou art mine, therefore will I seek thee."

A sense of possession makes us long for the enjoyment of all that is really ours.

1. *My soul thirsteth for thee my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;*

“Nothing but thyself can content me; everything else, or everyone else falls short of my desire. There is no water that can slake such a thirst as mine unless I drink from thee, thou overflowing well.”

2. *To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.*

Past enjoyment of our Lord’s presence inspires us with earnest desire for fresh manifestations of his face. If we have ever seen God’s power and glory when we have come into the courts of his house, we long to see them again, whether we are in the wilderness or in the sanctuary.

3. *Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.*

Is not that word “lovingkindness” one of the noblest terms in our own or any other language? The word kin is at the root of kind and kindred, so that lovingkindness, lovingkinnedness, or lovingkinness, is such conduct as we may expect from those who are akin to us. God’s kindness to us, through Jesus Christ his Son, and our Saviour, brings to us a lovingkindness that is better than life, and for which our lips can never praise him enough.

4. *Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.*

“For very joy, I will lift them up, and clap them before thee. Though, aforesaid, they hung down, as though I were dispirited, and could never work again, yet now, ‘ I will lift up my hands in thy name.’”

5. *My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness;—*

God’s flowers always bloom double. God’s blessings are like marrow and fatness; there is in them a double satisfaction of the most intense kind: “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness;”—

5. *And my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:*

The psalmist speaks as if each of his lips had a separate joy; and as though, together, they would express the double joy for the double satisfaction which his God had given to him.

6. When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.

“Even then shall I have joy, for thy presence makes even the darkness to be light.”

7. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.

“If I cannot get into the light of thy countenance, the very shadow of thy wings shall make me glad. Only let me be near thee; that is all I crave.”

7. My soul followeth hard after thee

“I am like a dog who loves to keep close to his master’s heels.”

8-11. *Thy right hand upholdeth me. But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes, But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.*

Stopped with a shovelful of earth, in many cases; for it seems as if some liars would never cease lying as long as they are alive.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 16., AND 63.

PSALM 63

A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah, exiled, ill at ease, hunted, exposed to danger. Yet he could sing. And some of the sweetest Psalms came out of the bitterest afflictions. God’s songsters are like nightingales that reserve their sweetest music for the night. Whenever you and I come to be in the wilderness may we refresh ourselves with such a Psalm as this.

1. *O God, thou art my God;*

Everything else has gone, but thou art my God. There are gods of the heathen, but thou, the true and real Jehovah, art my God. Oh, what a blessed thing it is to take a firm grip of God after this fashion, “O God, thou art my God.”

1. *Early will I seek thee:*

“Oh,” says one, “why did he seek God if God was his?” Would you have him seek another man’s God, then? No; it is because he is

ours that we seek him and desire his company. If thou knowest God to be thy God thou will not be satisfied unless thou art living near him. “Early will I seek thee.” I will not wait. I cannot wait. I cannot tarry. I must not tarry. Early will I seek thee.

1. *My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;*

Thirst is one of the strongest longings of our nature. Hunger you can appease for a while, but thirst is awful. There is no staying that. When it is once upon a man he must have water or die. “My soul thirsteth for thee. My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is.” No means of grace; nothing to help me; no believers round about me; left alone thirsting for my God. And yet it is so precious a thing, so sure a mark of grace to thirst for God anywhere that one may be thankful even to be in a dry and thirsty land if one possesses a true thirst after God.

2. *To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.*

He had seen God in his holy place, and he longs to see him again. They that never knew God do not want to know him. But they that have known him desire to know him more and more. If thou cost not long for the bread of heaven it is because thou didst never taste it. He that has once tasted it will sigh and hunger till he is satisfied with it.

3. *Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.*

“Better than life”; and surely life is better than anything else. “Skin for skin; yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.” Life is better than meat. Life is better than riches; and if the lovingkindness of God is better than life then we have a very high price set upon it, but none too high a price. Oh, that you and I may know how sweet, how precious, is the lovingkindness of God; and then we shall say that it is better than life. And because it is so my lips shall praise thee. Not only my heart, but I will do it openly. I used to speak vanity when I served vanity. Shall I not now speak out for God when I have come to serve him? My lips shall praise thee.

4. *Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.*

I will confess thee. I will rejoice in thee. I will work for thee. I will encourage myself in thee. I will lift up my hands in thy name. Are any of you cast down? Do your hands hang down? Then lift them up in God's name. Nothing else can make you strong. The name of the Lord shall be your strength.

5, 6. *My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.*

God's people know what perfect satisfaction means. When God reveals his love to them and Christ draws near in the fullness of his grace, then they would not change value with the kings of the earth. Not all the richest dainties that were ever served up at royal banquets are equal to the love of God. My soul, not my body but my inmost self, my very life, shall be satisfied even as with marrow and with fatness. The Oriental's idea of luxury is to eat fat. How they will eat what we could not endure, but we, dear friends, understand the metaphor and appreciate what is meant by David. God will satisfy us with the best of the best, with marrow and fatness. He will make that satisfaction double as with marrow and fatness; and we shall be so satisfied that we shall have nothing left to do but to praise. "My mouth shall praise." Says our poet,

"All that remains for me,
Is but to love and sing,
And wait until the angels come
To bear me to their King."

He that wrote that verse knew what was meant by this, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips."

7. *Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.*

That is God's logic. One likes to see "therefore" in scripture. They are inferences drawn with great accuracy. Thou hast been my helper. Well, then, thou wilt be my helper; and if I cannot see thy face I will rejoice in the shadow of thy wings. I know that thou art there, if I cannot see thee; and if I only know that thou art there by the shade that thou dost cast over me-that calming cooling shade which damps the ardor of my worldly spirit-if this be all that I get from thee, yet in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.

8. *My soul followeth hard after thee:*

I am after thee, my God, hard after thee, following hard after thee longing for thee, like a dog at the heels of his master's horse, going with all his might, following hard after thee. Oh, this is a healthy condition to be in. If thou canst not yet reach thy God, yet if thou followest hard after him it is well with thee, for notice the next sentence:

8. *Thy right hand upholdeth me.*

No man follows after God unless God helps him so to do. It comes of the grace of God. When thou art seeking God it is because God is seeking thee, and though thou knowest it not there is a vast amount of grace couched in this desire.

9, 10. *But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes.*

Or jackals, as his name did become.

11. *But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.*

Very hard work to stop it though, for they are always breaking out in a fresh place. They have always some new falsehood. A shovelful of earth will do it, if nothing else will. Let every one here who is accustomed to slander or to speak evil of his neighbour listen to this prophetic voice: "the month of them that speak lies shall be stopped," "but the mouths that speak the praises of God shall go on singing forever and ever. May such mouths be ours.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 91. AND 63.

PSALM 63

I will read the 63rd Psalm first, as somewhat representing the state of heart into which I would we could all come tonight.

1. *O God, thou art my God; —*

Read that sentence how you will, it is unspeakably precious. If we say "O God, thou art my God," it brings out the possession which the believer has in God. If we say "O God, thou art my God," it shows the greatness of the possession which we thus have in having this God to be our God forever and ever. And if we say "O

God, thou art my God, it leads us to think of God and not of his gifts as our chief good.

1, 2. *Early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.*

Long after the old times over again — for those times of heaven upon earth — those special seasons when the Lord made the veil between us and heaven to be very thin indeed, and allowed us almost to see his face. “To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.” Well, then, let us go to the sanctuary again, or make the place where we are a sanctuary. Even the stony pillar may mark the site of Bethel, and every spot may be hallowed ground.

3-5. *Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.*

My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: Satisfaction, absolute satisfaction; satiety of every desire, full to the brim to the running over only because God’s is our God; we want nothing beyond that to make our mouth praise with joyful lips.

6, 7. *When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.*

If I cannot see thy face the shadow of thy wing shall be enough for me, for that shall shelter me from all harm and I will, yea I will rejoice. Under the wings we are near the heart of God, and he who knowest God’s heart of love must needs be glad.

8-10. *My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me. But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foes.*

All our sins, and all other things or beings that are the enemies of our soul, Christ has overcome, and he will leave them upon the field.

11. *But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.*

Now a short passage in the New Testament, about Mary, the sister of Martha.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 63.; LUKE 10:38-42; AND JOHN 12:1-8.

PSALM 66

1, 2. *Make a joyful noise unto God all ye lands: sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious.*

In a company of advanced saints, silence may be sometimes profitable. The first verse of the previous Psalm should read, according to the Hebrew, "Praise is silent for thee, O God, in Zion." Full-grown saints may have their times of waiting in silence before the Lord, but when the heathen are to be brought in, and when new hearts are to be taught new songs, then there must be a noise, and not merely a noise, but a noise that is full of joy: "Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands." This should be the chief point about it, that it should be a joyful noise. Many of the newly invented tunes, which have put the good old tunes out of favor, appear to have been made to rattle through the hymn as quickly as possible, as though the composer had written, "Let us praise God at express speed and get it done; and the quicker, the better." But I prefer those tunes in which we can sometimes repeat the words, and roll them under the tongue until our heart gets thoroughly saturated with the spirit of them. "Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands;" but let that joyful noise be orderly, not like the shouts of those who cry around the ear of Juggernaut. Let it be joyful singing unto the Lord: "Sing forth the honour of his name." God is worthy of the highest honour, so let our praise of him be given in such a way that it shall really honour him. "Make his praise glorious." It is only giving back to God what rightly belongs to him when we give him glory, and it is our highest earthly glory to be giving glory to God; we are never so near to the condition of the glorified saints above as when we are, with heart, and soul, and voice, glorifying God.

3. *Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works!*

Our praises should be directed to God: "Say unto God." Our hymns should be a form of speaking unto the Most High, and an ascription unto him of his own glory. The first attribute of God that influences men is the attribute of power, which fills them with terror of his awful majesty and might. Afterwards, they perceive more of

his love, and goodness, and wisdom, and other attributes; but, at first,-ay, and perhaps at last,-there is a time in which there is much solemn stately music in this utterance, "How terrible art thou in thy works!"

3, 4. *Through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee. All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name.*

From the marginal reading of the 3rd verse, it appears that God's enemies will only "yield feigned obedience" to him; but whether the submission is feigned or real, it shall not be possible for any man or any power finally to resist his omnipotence, and the day shall come when all the earth shall worship him, and sing unto him.

4. *Selah.*

Here is a little pause for the lifting up of the heart and of the spirit and well there may be, for what a joyful thing it is to think of all the earth worshipping God, and singing unto him! I know of no topic that is more calculated to excite the admiring gratitude of God's servants than the prospect of the universal supremacy of one God and of his Christ.

5, 6. *Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men. He turned the sea into dry land:-*

You must often have noticed that the sweet singers of Israel are never singing very long unto God without mentioning that wonderful deliverance that he wrought at the Red Sea. What God did when he brought his people out of Egypt will be the subject of joyous and grateful song unto God forever, for even in heaven "they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." The Red Sea as the grand type of redemption, and the Lamb as the great Worker of redemption are joined together in that triumphant song of "them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name."

Here, the psalmist sings of what God did for his people at the Red Sea:

"He turned the sea into dry land:" —

6. *They went through the flood on foot; there did we rejoice in him.*

Perhaps some of you say, "But we were not there." No, we were not personally there; but do you not remember what the prophet

Hosea says about God meeting with Jacob at Bethel? It is written, "There he spake with us." We were not personally there, yet believers have been everywhere in the Bible where other representative believers have been before them. "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." What God spoke to any one of his people he has spoken to all of whom that one was typical. Paul tells us that the Lord hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," yet it was to Joshua that he said that; but, as he said it to Joshua, he virtually said it to me, for I am a believer even as he was. All the promises belong to us who are in Christ Jesus, for the heavenly inheritance is left to all the spiritual seed; and if we are in the Lord's family, we shall share alike with all the rest of the children. "There did we rejoice in him." Then, if we rejoiced in the Lord there, let us rejoice in him here. Brethren and sisters in Christ, let us rest assured that, when our turn to go through the sea shall come, we shall find that the Lord has "turned the sea into dry land" for us, whether it be a sea of troubles or the sea of death. "They went through the flood on foot;" and so shall we. The God who made a way for them through the sea, virtually made a way for us also, for the army of God is one, and when the first ranks of the innumerable host passed through the flood, the army itself began to pass through, and that army can never be divided. So we are passing through the flood at this moment, and rejoicing in the God who cleaveth the sea in twain to make a highway for his people.

7. He ruleth by his power forever;

What he did in the past, he is still doing in the present, and he will do in the future.

7. His eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves.

The rebellious may for a while exalt themselves; but they will, sooner or later, be pulled down. These eagles may fly as high as they will, but God's arrow can always reach them. The Lord pulled down the haughty Pharaoh from his throne, but he lifted up the people whom the proud monarch had trodden down and oppressed. The Lord overthrew the hosts of Egypt; but as for his people, he led them forth like sheep, and guided them through the wilderness, even as he is doing at this very moment.

7. Selah.

That is, pause again, and lift up the heart and the sacred strain too; and when all the strings of your heart and of your harp are screwed up, then go on with your music again.

8, 9. *O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard: which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved.*

I do bless God for this verse, and as many of you as have found it true should also praise and bless him. Observe the two things that are mentioned here,-living and standing: "Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved." There are some who have a certain standing in the church, and who keep up their reputation among their fellow-members, yet they are not spiritually alive. It is a dreadful thing to be standing, and yet not living; like those in Sardis who were only living in name. Then there are those who are living, but not standing,-at least, not standing fast. They are often caught tripping, and falling, and wounding themselves. They go with broken bones on their way towards heaven by reason of their many falls. But what a blessing it is to be kept both living and standing, and what reason there is to bless God for this great mercy,-not congratulating ourselves on our steadfastness, and being exalted and proud, but magnifying the Lord for his grace in granting to us this double blessing,-living and standing!

10. *For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.*

That is, with fierce furnaces, and with carefully graduated heat, for silver needs delicate refining. Christ still sits as the Refiner of silver, patiently watching until the process is complete.

11. *Thou broughtest us into the net;-*

Did not our enemies entangle us? Oh, yes; but God often uses our enemies to carry out his divine purposes; he over-rules all things; so, when you are caught in the net, do not sit down, and say that such-and-such a person did it, or that the devil did it. No; but look to the Great First Cause. If you strike a dog with a stick, he tries to bite the stick because he does not know any better. But you are not a dog, so do not you look at the second cause of your troubles, but learn to sing, as the psalmist does here, "Thou broughtest us into the net;" —

11. *Thou laidst affliction upon our loins.*

Not merely upon our backs, where we might be better able to bear it, but right on our loins, so that we were pressed and squeezed almost out of our very life.

12. *Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads;*

And when they mount their high horse, they vow and exalt themselves over God's afflicted servants.

12. *We went through fire and through water:*

They were subjected to double that, for what fire does not burn water will drown, yet God's people "went through fire and through water." There is no fire that can burn them. Nebuchadnezzar tried it, and failed. And there is no water that can drown them. Even though their bodies may be burned or drowned, their real selves shall still survive, and stand upon the sea of glass mingled with fire, triumphant over both fire and water.

12. *But thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.*

That is to say, the Lord brought the Israelites out from all manner of oppression under Pharaoh, and brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey. Nothing that Pharaoh could do could destroy the chosen nation, he tried to kill all the male children that were born, yet the Israelites still increased and multiplied, and they came at last to Canaan. It will be just so with God's people in all times and all climes, they shall not die, but live, and shall ultimately come into that most wealthy of all places, even the heavenly and better Canaan. We cannot fully tell what joy awaits us there. We cannot measure the height of our joy by the depth of our sorrows, for, after all, our sorrows are shallow, but the glory of God, which the saints are to share, is a depth unfathomable, a height that no man can measure. O Lord, bring us into that wealthy place right speedily if it be thy holy will!

13. *I will go into thy house with burnt offerings:*

Here is one worshipper breaking away from the rest,-a child of God who is not satisfied by merely joining in the general praise of the whole assembly, so he brings his own personal thanksgiving and thankoffering to God. Dear brother, dear sister, try to do this. Break away from all the rest of us, and say to the Lord, "I will go into thy house with burnt offerings."

13-15. *I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. I will offer unto thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings,*

“I will give thee the best that I have.”

15. *With the incense of rams;*

Not only one of the best, but the best of two kinds of offerings.

15. *I will offer bullocks with goats.*

“I will present to thee great services and smaller sacrifices. I will obey thee in the great ordinances and in the lesser ordinances also. I will bring both bullocks and goats. I will make an all-round offering. I will try to do all that I can for thee, my God, since thou hast done so much for me.”

15. *Selah.*

Here the psalmist pauses again while the smoke of the sacrifice ascends; let us also pause, and meditate upon the better sacrifice which Christ offered for the sins of all who put their trust in him.

16,17. *Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. I cried unto him with only mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue.*

“I mixed crying and singing together. I cried when I was in trouble, and I extolled the Lord as soon as he delivered me from it. Nay, by faith expecting to be delivered, I began to extol him even while I was yet crying unto him.”

18, 19. *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but verily God hath heard me;*

It is a blessed thing to be able to say that; and if you can truthfully say it, I pray you to say it: “Verily God hath heard me.” Some people tell us that there is no such thing as an answer to prayer; they say that it is a piece of superstition on our part. Well, I believe that I am as honest a man as anyone who denies the power of prayer, and I can truthfully say, “God hath heard me.” There are scores of us—there are hundreds of us—there are thousands of us who can stand in the witness-box, and each one of us can say, “Verily God hath heard me.” If our testimony is not accepted by unbelieving men, we cannot help that. We know what we do know, and we know that God has heard and answered our prayers again and again.

19, 20. *He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.*

PSALM 66:1-15

1. *Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands:*

Let not Israel alone do it. Take up the strain, ye nations. He is the God of all the nations of the earth. “Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands.”

2-4. *Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious. Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee. All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah.*

I still must always cling to the belief that this whole world is to be converted to God, and to lie captive at the feet of Christ in glorious liberty. Do not fall into that lethargic, apathetic belief of some that this is never to be accomplished — that the battle is not to be fought out on the present lines, but that there is to be a defeat, and then Christ is to come. Nay, foot to foot with the old enemy will he stand, till he has worsted him, and until the nations of the earth shall worship and bow before him.

5, 6. *Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men. He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in him.*

Where God is most terrible to his enemies, he is most gracious to his friends. As Pharaoh and his hosts went down beneath the terrible hand of God, the children of Israel lifted up their loudest hallelujahs, and sang unto the Lord, who triumphed gloriously. And so shall it be to the end of the chapter. God will lay bare his terrible arm against his adversaries but his children shall meanwhile make music. “There did we rejoice in him.”

7-9. *He ruleth by his power forever: his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah. O bless our God ye people and make the voice of his praise to be heard. Which holdeth our soul in life and suffereth not our feet to be moved.*

Loudest among the singers should God’s people be. If others can restrain their praise, yet let the love of Christ so constrain us that we must give it a tongue, and tell forth the majesty of our God. It is he alone who keeps us from perdition — which holdeth our soul in life.

It is he alone who keeps us from falling foully, ay, and falling finally, “and suffereth not our feet to be moved.”

10. *For thou, O God, hast proved us:*

All God’s people can say this. It is the heritage of the elect of God. “Thou has proved us.”

10-11. *Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net.*

Entangled, surrounded, captive, held fast. Many of God’s people are in this condition.

11. *Thou laidst affliction upon our loins.*

It was no affliction of hand or foot, but it laid upon our loins — a heavy, crushing burden.

12. *Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water:*

It was the full ordeal. One was not enough. Fire destroys some, but water is the test for others, but God’s people must be tried both ways. “We went through fire and through water; but” — . Blessed “but.”

12. *But thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.*

Out of the fire and out of the water they came, because God brought them, and when he brought them, it was not to a stunted, barren heritage, but into a wealthy place. Oh! beloved, when we think of where the covenant of grace has placed every believer, it is a wealthy place, indeed.

13-15. *I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my vows Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth have spoken, when I was in trouble I will offer unto thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams; I will offer bullocks with goats. Selah.*

The best, I think. “The best of the best will I bring thee, O my God. I will bring thee my heart; I will bring thee my tongue; I will bring thee my entire being.

PSALM 68

This was a Psalm sung, at the removing of the ark, when it was taken up to its resting-place on Mount Zion. All the tribes were gathered together, and, in full pomp, they marched along, bearing

the sacred chest. As they tramped forward, the trumpets sounded, and this Psalm rose up to God.

1. Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him.

That is the way to move,—God first, and his people following closely after him. That is the true order of revival,—the Lord in the lead, then all his children, quick of step, to follow where he leads. The psalmist seems to take it for granted that there would be no fighting if God should arise, for all his enemies would be put to flight by his presence.

2, 3. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice.

The courtiers of God ought to be clad in the silks of joy, and to be bright with the jewelry of rejoicing.

4, 5. Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.

In the wilderness, the Israelites were like a company of fatherless people: but God was their Protector, and in all their trials and dangers he was their Defender.

6. God setteth the solitary in families he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

They had been in a sad condition in Egypt, scattered and driven hither and thither. God promised to bring them all together, in great families, and richly to bless them.

7, 8. O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah: the earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

If the translators had given us the original words, we should have valued this Psalm much more, for it contains nearly every name of God. This verse would run, “Even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of Elohim, the ‘Elohim of Israel.

9, 10. Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary. Thy congregation

hath dwelt therein: thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor.

It rained manna, and it rained quails. There are no difficulties about the commissariat of an army when God is the Commander-in-chief. All shall be provided for those who put their trust in him.

11. *The Lord—*

Or, Adonai—

11. *Gave the word: great was the company of those that published it.*

When God speaks, he always has publishers of his message. Our Lord found a woman at the well, and sent her back to the men of the city as his messenger, and he will find many others before his work is all done.

12, 13. *Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil. Though ye have lien among the pots,—*

Grimy among the brick kilns, covered with clay, and black with smoke,—despised, rejected, earthbound,—“ Though ye have lien among the pots,”—

13. *Yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.*

There are good times ahead for God’s people. Rich and rare blessings are laid up in store for them that fear him. Therefore, let us rejoice in him even now.

14. *When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon.*

Driven from the bare, bleak mountain-side in gusts like feathers, the snow flies before the wind; and so, when God scatters the mighty, they cannot resist him: “It was as snow in Salmon.”

15. *The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan.*

This hill of Zion is not high at all, it is a mere knoll compared with the lofty peaks; yet it was highly favored. So, to carnal eyes, Christ’s kingdom on earth was little in comparison with the kingdoms of this world; yet, in the sight of God, it is greater than all of them.

16. *Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the LORD will dwell in it forever.*

There are grander places than Zion, but if God chooses to dwell there, his presence gives her a glory and a greatness that no other spot can have. The forces at the disposal of Zion's King are boundless; note how the psalmist enumerates some of them.

17, 18. *The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.*

As the ark went up the hill of Zion, so has Christ ascended to the eternal glory. He is the true Ark of the covenant, and he is also the true Mercy-seat; wherefore, let our hearts rejoice in our ascended Saviour, who has "led captivity captive" "Thou hast received gifts for men"; yea, for the rebellious also." "In due time, Christ died for the ungodly." "He made intercession for the transgressors." Let rebellious sinners catch, at this great truth; and, touched by the love and grace of God, let them cease to rebel any longer.

19, 20. *Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah. He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.*

All glory be to his thrice-blessed name for all that this verse includes!

21, 22. *But God shall wound the head: of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses. The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea:*

Wherever his people may have gone, God will bring them all together again, "from Bashan," or "from the depths of the sea."

23-35. *That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of the dogs in the same. They have seen thy goings, O God; even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary. The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after, among them were the damsels playing with timbrels. Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel. There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah, the their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali. Thy God hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us. Because of thy temple at Jerusalem*

shall kings bring presents unto thee. Rebuke the company of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people, till every one submit himself with pieces of silver: scatter thou the people that delight in war. Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord; Selah: to him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old; lo, he doth send out his voice, and that a mighty voice. Ascribe ye strength unto God: his excellency is over Israel, and his strength is in the clouds. O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places: the God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God.

The Psalm ends with an ascription of praise unto God. So let our reading end, and our worship, and our lives: “Blessed be God.”

PSALM 69:1-21

We shall read together at this time a part of the 69th Psalm, and afterwards two passages in the New Testament. Although there is no doubt that this Psalm is intended to describe a very large class of sufferers, but we think it never had its full meaning perfectly carried out, until our blessed Lord and Master suffered at the hands of men. We shall read the Psalm believing that it is full of Christ. It is absolutely certain that we have references here to his advent, his passion, and his resurrection.

To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, a Psalm of David.

1. *Save me, O God; for the waters are come into my soul.*

The waves have not only teased the bank, but they have dashed over the bulwarks, and there is a flood within, as well as a flood without.

2. *I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me.*

We had this text explained to us last Friday night, when the traveler told us he saw a man sink in the mud, almost swallowed up by it, till by a very desperate grasp of the beat he made his escape. Christ was, as it were, sucked in by the great deeps of his afflictions, as if he would be swallowed up quickly.

3. *I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried:*

He had been so long in the garden in that awful agony, with strong crying and tears.

3, 4. *Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.*

They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: him now in the street being led away to Mount Calvary; a vast multitude has congregated there, all eager to see him die.

4. *They that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty:*

They have the Roman soldiers at their backs, while the mob applauds them.

4. *Then I restored that which I took not away.*

Christ did not take away our innocence, nor our safety, nor our honour, but he restored them all to us. He hath made us clean; he hath made us accepted in the Beloved; he hath put a crown of pure gold upon our heads, and set our feet upon a rock.

5. *O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.*

These words are not applicable to our Lord, except so far as they may refer to our foolishness and to our sin, which we know were all laid on him; except that one commentator says that he is here speaking according to the manner of the people. They called him foolish; they charged him with sin, but he appeals to heaven, "Lord, thou knowest whether I have been foolish, whether I have any sins or not." In that sense we might apply it literally to the Saviour.

6. *Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those who seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel.*

"Let not the shame of my cross destroy their faith; grant unto them such confidence in me that they may take up thy cross daily, and follow me: that they may even learn to say with my apostle, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

7. *Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face.*

It was for his Father's sake, that he might bring honour to Jehovah, that he thus suffered reproach. "Shame hath covered my face"—that face which is brighter than the sun, and which angels desire to gaze upon.

8. *I am become a stranger unto my brethren,*

“Peter says he knows me not; all of them have forsaken me.”

8, 9. *And an alien unto my mother’s children. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up, and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.*

Every hard word that was spoken of the Father fell upon the Son: the iniquities which were rebellions against Jehovah all fell upon the Man of Nazareth.

10. *When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach.*

That was scandal unto them.

11. *I made sackcloth also my garment; and I became a proverb unto them.*

Just as Michael said of David, “How glorious did the King of Israel become in the eyes of his handmaidens.” out of mockery, so did they reproach Christ, “How glorious was the King of Israel, so daintily arrayed in a peasant’s robe, or stripped naked upon his cross.”

12. *They that sit in the gate speak against me;*

The judges who there dispensed justice, the merchants who there trade their wares, the idlers who were there to loiter, to hear the news, these speak against me.

12. *And I became the song of the drunkard.*

They made ballads of him, we may understand that to mean; they issued lampoons; every now and then there came out a caricature.

13, 14. *But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation. Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters.*

Think you hear your Master as he silently prays this prayer in the streets of Jerusalem; the mob is hooting, but he is praying; women are weeping, and he is weeping, too.

15-20. *Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. Hear me, O Lord, for thy loving-kindness is good: turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies. And hide not thy face from*

thy servant; for if am in trouble: hear me speedily. Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies. Thou hast known my reproach and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee.

Reproach hath broken my heart. This is one of the most extraordinary verses in Holy Writ.

20, 21. *And I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.*

Now, let us read the incidents in the history of Christ, of which this Psalm is a sort of prophecy and exposition.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 69:1-21. MARK 15:15-23. LUKE 23:26-33.

PSALM 71

This Psalm, written by an old man, is specially suitable for an old man. It is numbered seventy-one, and it may suit those who have reached that age; but it is also appropriate to us all in prospect of the days of feebleness that will come to us, sooner or later, if we are spared to grow old.

1. *In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion.*

“Stand by me, O Lord, for I only stand as thou upholdest me; and if thou shouldst leave me, after I have trusted in thee, what could I say or do? Therefore, O Jehovah, since I put my trust in thee, ‘let me never be put to confusion.’”

2. *Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape:*

“I am like a poor dove taken in a net, I cannot get away. Stretch out thine hand, O Lord, and tear the net, and so deliver me, and cause me to escape. I cannot do anything for myself, except pray to thee to deliver me.”

2. *Incline thine ear unto me, and save me.*

“My prayer is weak; therefore, O Lord, bend thine ear down to my lips, that thou mayest catch my faintest accents; listen to my lispings, O Lord, and save me.”

3. *Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress.*

If David wrote this Psalm after the rebellion of his wicked son Absalom, I think there is an instructive illustration here. You remember that, when the troops went out from Mahanaim to fight with Absalom, David commanded the three captains of the host, Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." They might slay his followers, but he commanded them to spare him. Alas, David's command was ineffectual, for Joab slew Absalom; but God's command was certain to be obeyed, so the psalmist wrote, "Thou hast given commandment to save me," with the full assurance that he would be saved; and all God's people can say to him, "Thou hast commanded angels and men, 'Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm;'" and each believer can say to him, "Thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress."

4, 5. *Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hated of the unrighteous and cruel man. For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth.*

Happy is the man who can truthfully say that, "Thou art my trust from my youth." God does not cast off his old servants, as men often do. Those who give him the best of their days will not find that he will desert them when the feebleness of age creeps over them.

6. *By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee.*

We do not think, as often as we should, of what we owe to God for his care over us at the time of our birth. Our mothers returned thanks on their own behalf and ours; but, as we look back, we are bound to return thanks too for that kindly care of God in our extremest weakness, when the little candle of life was scarcely lighted, and might have been so easily blown out. Then, as God took care of us in our first infancy, do you not think that he will take care of us when we get into our second childhood? We are never likely to be quite as weak as we were then; but, as the Lord guarded us at that time, will he not guard us in those dark days which are already looming before some of us? Of course he will; wherefore, be of

good courage, for he shall strengthen your heart, and your praise shall be continually of him.

7. I am as a wonder unto many;

A prodigy to some, a monster to others, a marvel, a mystery, a riddle to all, but here is the solution to the problem that puzzles so many: —

7. But thou art my strong refuge.

Even the weak are strong when God is their refuge; the most defenseless are safe when God is their defense. Wonder not at the mysterious life of a Christian, for this truth explains the mystery, “Thou art my strong refuge.”

8. Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day.

What a blessed mouthful, and what a sweet mouthful this is, and what a blessed means of keeping the mouth from saying unkind, slanderous, or murmuring words!

9, 10. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. For mine enemies speak against me; and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together,

When the lion is sick, every cur is bold enough to bark at him. Men were afraid of David when he was strong; but when he grew feeble, they began to howl at him, and gather round him like a pack of hounds around a wounded stag. Worst of all, they uttered this monstrous lie, which was most grievous to David’s heart, —

11. Saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him.

If they had possessed even ordinary compassion, they would have said, “Since there is none to deliver him, let us not attack him. If God has forsaken him, he is in misery enough, so let us try to comfort him.” But, instead of doing this, they acted after the fashion of their father, the devil, who has no tenderness, and nothing of a compassionate spirit within him.

12. O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help.

Notice the still more intense grip of faith in the second clause. The psalmist first says, “O God,” then he says, “O my God.” It is grand pleading when we so grasp God with the personal grip of faith that we cry, “O my God, make haste for my help.”

13, 14. *Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.*

Hoping and praising are among the very best styles of living. Hoping honours God in secret, and praising honours him in public. Oh, for more of these two good things!

15. *My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof.*

When David spoke of those who hated him without a cause, he said that they were more than the hairs of his head. He could not count them, but he went as near to doing so as he could; but when he began to speak of God's mercies as displayed in his righteousness and his salvation, he did not draw any comparison, or attempt to number them. This is a calculation in which we are utterly lost; our system of numeration fails us altogether when we come to deal with the lovingkindness of the Lord.

16. *I will go in the strength of the LORD GOD: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.*

He did not reckon that any other righteousness was worth mentioning; —and certainly not his own. The best of men, those who have been the most noted for their good works, have always been the first to feel that they had no works in which they could put any trust. One godly man, when he was dying, said to a friend, "I have been trying to separate my good works and my evil works from one another, but I have found the task too great for me; so I have thrown them all overboard, and now I will float to heaven upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone."

17. *O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works.*

I pray very earnestly for you young people, and I beg you to pray for yourselves, that you may have the great privilege of being able to say, with the psalmist, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth." They make good scholars who go to school early, and keep at school long, and have such a blessed Schoolmaster as the psalmist had: "O God, thou hast taught me." David's mother taught him much that was good, but it was better still for him to have God as his Teacher. Then, after being a scholar, he became a pupil-teacher.

He still went on learning, but he also began to teach: "Hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works." All God's scholars ought to be pupil-teachers, ever learning more and more from him, and then teaching to others all that they learn.

18. *Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.*

Old men ought to tell to younger men what God has done for them. There is great weight in the testimony of a godly man of ripe experience. Full of years, he speaks of what he knows, and testifies of what he has seen, and tasted, and handled of the truth of God. We want many a Nestor in the camp of Christ, whose valor in former times, and whose experience in days of battling for the right, may inspire with valor the younger men to whom he speaks.

19. *Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto thee!*

The more we know of God, the less we think of all others. We sink ourselves out of sight, and all other creatures seem to be as nothing in comparison with our God.

20. *Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.*

This we shall experience in part even in our present lifetime; but we shall much more fully experience it on the resurrection morning, — "When Christ his risen saints shall bring From beds of dust, and silent clay, To realms of everlasting day."

21. *Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.*

Think of poor old David talking like this when he was driven into exile, and many of his former friends had forsaken him: "'Thou shalt increase my greatness.' I shall get good out of this evil; I shall rise by this fall; I shall be a gainer by these losses."

22. *I will also praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God:*

"When I have proved thy truth; when my joyful experience has proved that every promise of thine is true to thy servant, then I will praise both thyself and thy truth, O my God."

22, 23. *Unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel. My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee;*

That is the best kind of praise to God when our very lips are happy in singing, when we do not merely sibilate the sound, but when the meaning wells up from our heart, and our lips are glad to sing it out.

23, 24. *And my soul, which thou hast redeemed. My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame that seek my hurt.*

PSALM 71

1-8. *In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion. Deliver me in thy righteous, and cause me to escape: incline thine ear unto me, and save me. Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. For thou art my hope, O Lord God thou art my trust from my youth. By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother bowels my praise shall be continually of thee.*

David had enjoyed the mercy of God from his very birth. We are apt to forget the tender care of God over our infancy, but we ought to remember it: and it will be a great comfort to us, if we come to a second childhood, to remember how kindly God took care of us in the first.

7-11. *I am at a wonder unto many, but thou art my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. For mine enemies speak against me, and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together, saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there it none to deliver him.*

Surely that ought to have been the reason for letting him alone. With right-minded persons it would have been so, but the devil and his children are arrant onwards, and their argument is, "Persecute and take him: for there is none to deliver him." You might as well expect tenderness in a wolf as anything like bravery and chivalry in a persecutor.

12-14. *O God be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my hell. Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt. But I will hope continually, and will yet raise thee more and more.*

How was he going to do it? Already his mouth was filled with God's praise, so, surely, he would fill his whole life with it, and his actions which would speak more loudly than his words, should bear daily testimony to the goodness of God.

15, 16. *My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof. I will go in the strength of the Lord God:-* “

This shall be my praise; my very movements, my goings, my progress shall be in the ‘strength of the Lord God’”

16, 17. *I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only. O God, thou hast taught me from my youth.*

Here is the same kind of argument again: “ O Lord, I went to school to thee, so I must teach others what thou hast taught me.”

17. *And hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works.*

“Thou madest me a preacher, and I have stuck to my word. Hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works.”

18-20. *Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation and thy power to every one that is to come. Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto thee! Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again,*

“Thou shalt not merely deliver me from my great and sore troubles, but thou shalt give me more life, thou ‘Shalt quicken me again.’” Divine quickening is the best remedy for a troubled heart.

20. *And shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.*

“Though I seem to be like a man buried in the depth of the earth thou wilt bring me up again.”

21, 22. *Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side. I will also praise thee-*

God blessing us, and we in return blessing him, so it ought to be. The more God does for us, the more we ought to do for him, is it not

so, brother? Is not this good argument? Art thou carrying it out? Let thy conscience answer.

22, 23. *With the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God: unto thee will I sing with the harp. O thou Holy One of Israel. My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee.*

Singing unto God ought to be the gladdest of exercises, when it is done in a doleful, dolorous way, it is not singing, but groaning.

23. *And my soul, which thou hast redeemed.*

“The sprinkled blood is on my soul, and therefore it shall leap for joy. Rescued from captivity, bought back from slavery, “my soul, which thou hast redeemed; shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee.”

24. *My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt.*

PSALM 71:1-14

1. *In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion.*

There is his trust, and there is his fear; his trust he dares to avow, his fear he turns into a prayer.

2, 3. *Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape: incline thine ear unto me, and save me. Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress.*

“Be thou my strong habitation whereunto I may continually resort.” Not merely now and then a hiding-place in emergency, but my constant abode, my home, so that from morning to night I may come to thee, and feel myself secure. “Thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress.” You see he knows that God has commanded nature, and providence, and grace to protect him; he has commanded his angels, indeed, he has commanded all his forces, to protect David for this reason, that David feels an inward rest and peace in God. That calm, that divine repose expressed in the words “Thou art my rock and my refuge,” are the tokens that God has given commandment to save us.

4. *Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.*

Two iron hands are trying to pull him down, but he cries to God, whose one almighty hand can set him free.

5. *For thou art my hope, O Lord God: thou art my trust from my youth.*

Happy man that can look back upon a youth spent in God's fear; for if we have trusted God in our youth, depend upon it, he will never cast us away.

6. *By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee.*

When we could not help ourselves, in the very moment of our birth, God took care of us; and he will take care of us even to the end. Men and women who are old should remember how carefully the Lord nursed them when they were infants; and if you come to a second childhood, you shall still have the same God.

7. *I am as a wonder unto many;*

They cannot make me out, I am a blessed problem and puzzle to them: it seems so strange that being so much afflicted I am yet so much upheld.

7. *But thou art my strong refuge.*

Aye! There is the answer to the riddle. If God be with us, men may well wonder; but he will always help us.

8-9. *Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day.*

Cast me not of in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.

A prayer which both young and old may offer, for if we live long enough, that time of weakness will surely come on. There are many men who do cast off their old servants; but God does not. When we are worn out, he will still bless us.

10-14. *For mine enemies speak against me and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together, saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him. O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help. Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them*

be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt. But I will hope continually and will yet praise thee more and more.

In the 8th verse he had said, "Let my mouth be filled with thy praise." That is a mouthful, now he says, "I will praise thee more and more." As if he wanted more mouths wherewith to praise more room for his heart's grateful thanksgiving to God, "I will praise thee more and more."

This exposition consisted of readings from ROMANS 5:1-11; AND PSALM 71:1-14.

PSALM 72

This is a Psalm which relates to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, not as the Man of sorrows, but as the King of glory; — not as David, struggling to secure the throne; but as Solomon, seated upon it, and reigning in peace.

1. Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is both a King and the Son of a King. He is King of kings, and therefore our Sovereign by his own native right; but he is also our sovereign Prince as the Son of God. Oh, that the Lord would visibly give into his hands power over all the people of the earth! "Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son."

2. He shall judge thy people with righteousness and thy poor with judgment.

It is the peculiar characteristic of the reigning Christ that he has his eye chiefly upon the poor. Most princes rule in the interest of the great ones around them, but our King rules for the good of the poor of his people.

3. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.

The reign of Christ is the reign of righteousness, the rule of true uprightness; and consequently it is the reign of peace, and love, and joy. Oh that his gentle rule were acknowledged by all the kings of this world!

4. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.

This is the King we want to reign over us. Oh, that the day were come for him to take the crowns from all other heads, and to wear

them on his own, and to take all sceptres from other hands, and gather sheaves of them beneath his arms, and himself to be universally proclaimed “King of kings, and Lord of lords”! Then would the world’s loud hallelujahs rise as with the sound of mighty thunderings. O God, how long shall it be before this glorious King takes to himself the power that is his by right?

5. They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations.

All other kings and princes and rulers pass away; our King alone has an everlasting kingdom. Where are the dynasties that have ruled over vast empires? They have passed almost out of remembrance, but the promise to our King still abides: “They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations.”

6. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth.

The reign of Christ even now is to the poor dispirited sons of men like rain upon the mown grass, and when he shall come in his glory as he will shortly come, his coming shall be as blessed to this world as the gentle showers are to the grass that is newly mown.

7, 8. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.

This is God’s decree. As surely as he has set his King upon his holy hill of Zion, so surely will he make him to “have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.” I do, therefore, expect greater glory for the cross of Christ than any that the world has hitherto seen. The crescent shall wane, and fade away in eternal night, but the light of the cross of Christ shall burn brighter and brighter unto endless day.

9, 10. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents:

Commerce with all its wealth shall yet lend its homage to the Saviour; and every ship that crosses the sea shall yet bear its cargo of praise unto his glorious name.

10. The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.

Their barbaric splendor shall find a higher glory in being consecrated to the King of kings.

11. *Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him that has no helper.*

That is what we look for as the true recognition of religion. The true recognition of religion in a State is not the setting up of some favored sect to be indulged above the rest, there is something better than that reserved for the Christ of God. He must have the first place all the world over: "All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him."

12. *For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper.*

Again I remind you that this is the distinguishing mark of the Christ of God, that he has a special eye to the poor and needy.

13-15. *He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight. And he shall live,*

With all our hearts we cry, "Long live the King!" And our King shall live forever; to him alone of all kings may it be truly said, "O King, live forever!" "He shall live," —

15. *And to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised.*

One of the marks of sovereignty is the king's visage upon the coinage of the realm, and the use of his name in public prayer; and Christ claims this homage of all his followers: "Prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised."

16. *There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.*

The cause of Christ in the earth may be so reduced as to be only comparable to a handful of corn, and that handful of corn may be, as it were, sown on the bleak mountain-side; yet it shall grow and increase until it fills the whole earth. His kingdom is without end.

17-19. *His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen.*

Is not that double Amen the very mark of the Christ? Often when he preached, he commenced his sermons with “Amen, Amen;” that is, “Verily, verily, I say unto you.” He is God’s great “Amen, the faithful and true Witness.” But interpreting the word in the other sense, do not you and I most heartily say, “Amen,” and again “Amen,” to this royal prayer? “Let the whole earth be filled with his glory.”

20. *The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.*

This is the end of the second great division of the Book of the Psalms; it is therefore most appropriately closed with this verse: “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.” But I think that David, when he had reached this point, felt that he could not ask for anything more than he had already requested in this great petition. If the whole earth should be full of the glory of God, the psalmist would then have gained the utmost that he could desire. Is it not so with us also? If the name and the glory of Christ did but cover the whole earth, what more could we wish for? What more could we ask of God? Till that blessed consummation is reached, let us keep on praying, “Let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen and Amen.”

PSALM 72

A Psalm for Solomon.

This was David’s dying bequest to his son Solomon, but a greater than Solomon is here, for this Psalm concerns the reign, triumph, and everlasting dominion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1, 2 *Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king’s son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment.*

It is the distinguishing mark of Christ’s kingdom that he cares so much for the poor, whereas in other kingdoms they are generally pushed to the wall, and men of great estate and consequence get all the good positions. In Christ’s kingdom the poor are exalted.

3. *The mountains shall bring peace to thee people and the little hills, by righteousness.*

Those mountains, in whose caves robbers lurked, and from whose heights enemies often came down, and swept away the little estates of the lowlanders, even these shall bring peace and comfort.

“No strife shall vex Messiah’s reign.” When Jesus Christ comes a second time to this earth, we shall see these prophecies literally fulfilled; and until then we delight to know that the reign of Christ is a reign of peace.

4-6. *He shall judge the poor of the people shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth.*

After being mown the grass is tender; should there be a long period of burning sunshine, the roots left exposed might soon be dried up, and the lower portion of the stem, bereft of moisture, might become hard. Never does rain seem so refreshing to the grass as just after the mowing; so is it in Christ’s kingdom. Upon you whose broken hearts are like mown grass, upon you who have been cut down by the sharp scythe of affliction, and who have seen your hopes withered before your eyes, Jesus shall come on gently like rain upon the mown grass; and as the showers fertilize the barren earth, so shall the presence of Christ make your hearts to be fertile and fruitful. If any of us are like the parched earth or the mown grass, may we have this gracious promise fulfilled to us.

7. *In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.*

Under other kings sinners have flourished, and great oppressors have walked in public, but in Christ’s days the righteous shall flourish; “and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.” There have been some times of truce, there have been some periods when the temple of Janus has been shut; but when Christ comes, the Lord shall break the bow, and cut the spear in sunder; not lay them by in store for days of warfare in the future, but break them up as there will be no further use for them.

8, 9. *He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust.*

The Arabs, the wandering Bedouin tribes, unconquered and untamable, “shall bow before him;” and his enemies shall not merely be beaten once or twice, but they “shall lick the dust,” they

shall be so entirely broken that there shall be no fear of their rebelling in the future.

10. *The Kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents:*

Britain and some of her sister islands shall do homage to this great Solomon.

10. *The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.*

Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God, and men of swarthy skin shall own the King of the Jews as Lord over all.

11. *Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.*

There is a great future for you, Christians, a glorious future for our holy religion. The handful by the side of the lake shall yet become an all conquering host. As it was when that cake of barley bread fell into the midst of the camp of Midian, and overthrew the tent, so that it lay along, and as it was when the shout was heard, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon," so shall it be with us ere long. God's people having no strength of their own, shall nevertheless break the power of their enemy, when the war-cry shall be heard, "The sword of Christ and of the Lord of Hosts!"

12, 13. *For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy.*

Now, needy one, here is a promise for thee. Is there one here that hath no helper? Then let that one know that Christ is the Friend of the friendless, and the Helper of the helpless.

14-16. *He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight. And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised.*

There shall be an handful of corn on the earth- Only a handful! O ye birds of the air, how ye long to eat it all up! O ye thorns, how soon would ye choke it to death! It is only a handful of corn.

16. *Upon the top of the mountains;*

That is a bad place for corn; surely it will die there; the winter snows will chill it; and, exposed to every stormy blast it will never fill the arm of the reaper. But is it so? Listen: —

16. *The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon:*

Just as there are peculiar noises heard in a great forest when the wind sweeps through it, — there is an allusion to this in the Hebrew, — there should be such an abundance of fruit from this handful of corn that, as when the forest bows its head before the whirlwind, so shall there be heard a sound as of God rushing among the multitude of his saints.

16. *And they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.*

They shall be so many that one might as well attempt to count the blades of grass as to reckon the number of God's saints.

17-20. *His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.*

He had nothing more to pray for. He had his heart's highest and best wish, and therefore he closes his prayer where God had given him all that he could ask.

PSALM 72:1-4

1. *Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son.*

“Give the king thy judgments, O God.” The right to reign was transmitted by descent from David to Solomon, but not by that means alone: Israel was a theocracy, and the kings were but the viceroys of the greater King; hence the prayer that the new king might be enthroned by divine right, and then endowed with divine wisdom. Our glorious King in Zion hath all judgment committed unto him. He rules in the name of God over all lands. He is King “*Dei Gratia*” as well as by right of inheritance. “And thy righteousness unto the king's son.” Solomon was both king and king's son; so also is our Lord. He has power and authority in himself, and also royal dignity given him of his Father. He is the righteous King; in a word, he is “the Lord our righteousness.” We are waiting till he shall be manifested among men as the ever-righteous Judge. May the Lord hasten in his own time the long-looked-for day! Now wars and fightings are even in Israel itself, but soon the dispensation will change, and David, the type of Jesus

warring with our enemies, shall be displaced by Solomon the prince of peace.

2. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment,

“He shall judge thy people with righteousness.” Clothed with divine authority, he shall use it on the behalf of the favoured nation, for whom he shall show himself strong, that they be not misjudged, slandered, or in any way treated maliciously. His sentence shall put their accusers to silence, and award the saints their true position as the accepted of the Lord. What a consolation to feel that none can suffer wrong in Christ’s kingdom; he sits upon the great white throne, unspotted by a single deed of injustice, or even mistake of judgment: reputations are safe enough with him. “And thy poor with judgment.” True wisdom is manifest in all the decisions of Zion’s King. We do not always understand his doings, but they are always right. Partiality has been too often shown to rich and great men, but the King of the last and best of monarchy deals out even-handed justice, to the delight of the poor and despised. Here we have the poor mentioned side by side with their King. The sovereignty of God is a delightful theme to the poor in spirit; they love to see the Lord exalted, and have no quarrel with him for exercising the prerogatives of his crown. It is the fictitious wealth, which labours to conceal real poverty, which makes men cavil at the reigning Lord, but a deep sense of spiritual need prepares the heart loyally to worship the Redeemer King. On the other hand, the King has a special delight in the humbled hearts of his contrite ones, and exercises all his power and wisdom on their behalf, even as Joseph in Egypt ruled for the welfare of his brethren.

3. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.

“The mountains shall bring peace to the people.” Thence, aforetime, rushed the robber bands which infested the country; but now the forts there erected are the guardians of the land, and the watchmen publish far and near the tidings that no foe is to be seen. Where Jesus is, there is peace, lasting, deep, eternal. Even those things, which were once our dread, lose all terror when Jesus is owned as Monarch of the heart: death itself, that dark mountain, loses all its gloom. Trials and afflictions, when the Lord is with us, bring us an increase rather than a diminution of peace. “And the

little hills, by righteousness.” Seeing that the rule of the monarch was just, every little hill seemed clothed with peace. Injustice has made Palestine a desert; if the Turk and Bedouin were gone, the land would smile again; for even in the most literal sense, justice is the fertilizer of lands, and men are diligent to plough and raise harvests when they have the prospects of eating the fruit of their labours. In a spiritual sense, peace is given to the heart by the righteousness of Christ; and all the powers and passions of the soul are filled with a holy calm, when the way of salvation, by a divine righteousness, is revealed. Then do we go forth with joy, and are led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills break forth before us into singing.

4. *He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.*

“He shall judge the poor of the people.” He will do them justice, yea, and blessed be his name, more than justice, for he will delight to do them good. “He shall save the children of the needy.” Poor, helpless things, they were packhorses for others, and paupers themselves, but their King would be their Protector. Happy are God’s poor and needy ones; they are safe under the wing of the Prince of peace, for he will save them from all their enemies, “And shall break in pieces the oppressor.” He is strong to smite the foes of his people, Oppressors have been great breakers, but their time of retribution shall come, and they shall be broken themselves, Sin, Satan, and all our enemies must be crushed by the iron rod of King Jesus, We have, therefore, no cause to fear; but abundant reason to sing, —

“All hail the power of Jesus’ name!
Let angels prostrate fall,
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown him Lord of all.”

It is much better to be poor than to be an oppressor; for both the needy and their children find an Advocate in the heavenly Solomon, who aims all his blows at haughty ones, and rests not till they are utterly destroyed.

PSALM 72:1-16

“A Psalm for Solomon” — much more for one who is greater than Solomon, the true Prince of Peace.

1. *Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son.*

So it is decreed, and so it has been accomplished, that Jesus, who is both a King and a King's son, should have all judgment delivered into his hand. And now at this time Christ is the judge. It is he who discerns between the precious and the vile. He sits as King in the midst of Zion.

2. *He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment.*

The kingdom of Christ has a special eye to the poor. They are generally passed by and forgotten in the scope of legislature among men, but Christ makes even his poor people — the poor in spirit also — to be the objects of his judgment.

3, 4. *The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.*

In the reign of Christ there shall be no treading down of the little by great — no pressure put upon the feeble by the strong, but his right hand shall get to the weakest cause the victory.

5. *They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations.*

For the kingdom of Christ renews itself. It is never broken in pieces by the power of the enemy, but every piece becomes a new root, and it springs up again. There are some plants of which they may that the more you tread upon them the more they will spread, and certainly it is the case with the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. As long as there is a sun in the heavens, and a moon to gladden the night, so shall the kingdom of Christ endure.

6. *He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth.*

Christ shall not come like fire to burn up and to destroy, but his kingdom is one of mercy and grace. When the grass has just been wounded with the scythe, he shall come down to bring it

refreshment, that it may spring up again. In plenteous showers of grace shall he visit wounded spirits.

7. In his days shall the righteous flourish: and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.

There have been empires which have been propitious to the flourishing of great wrongs. Some of the worst and vilest of men have flourished under certain empires, which have but lately passed away; but in the empire of Christ the righteous alone shall flourish. Everything about him and about his power shall make it go well for them, and his empire is peace the most truly — “abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.”

8. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.

Universal monarchy is to be the monarchy of Christ. This is the fifth great monarchy, and there shall never be another. No king or potentate that shall ever rise can possibly have universal dominion again. We need not fear that, for the fifth empire is that of the Christ of God, and behold he cometh to claim it.

9. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust.

The most distant tribes — those that wander and have no settled dwelling-place — shall, nevertheless, bow before him. The Arab boasts that he never knew a master — that even Caesar could not penetrate into his deserts and subdue him; but Christ shall be his Lord, and he will be glad to own him.

10. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.

We need not be afraid if this Psalm refers to Christ, and we do not doubt that it does. He must reign. The end of the world is not coming until there shall be a conquest for him. He may come before that time, but certainly there shall be no winding up of history until this shall be literally true. “The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents.”

11, 12. *Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper.*

The Psalmist seems glad to dwell upon that. It seems to be the joy note in his mind — that the great King — the greatest of all

kings — will care for the lowly and the humble. Let us rejoice in this, dear friends. Christ is chosen out of the people and exalted by God; and he is the Christ not only ready to save the highest, but to save the lowest. From his kingdom we may say: —

“None are excluded hence but those
Who do themselves exclude;
Welcome the learned and polite,
The ignorant and rude.”

13-15. *He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight. And he shall live, They say,*

“O king, live for ever.” It can never happen to their kings, but to our King it will happen. “He shall live.”

15. *And to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba:*

He shall have the best the world can find willingly given to him. I am sure that we who know his love think that we have nothing good enough for him. We would render to him all that we have.

15. *Prayer also shall be made for him continually;*

With the gold shall come the golden prayer — the prayer for Christ. But how can we pray for him? Why, that he may have the reward of his sufferings, may see of the travail of his soul — that his kingdom may come, and that his name may be dear in the hearts of men.

15. *And daily shall he be praised.*

He shall have praise as well as prayer and gold.

16. *There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.*

It was corn — good seed corn, but there was only a handful of it. So there were saints in the world, but there were very few of them. And where were they? On the tops of the mountains. A strange place for corn; not a likely place for a harvest. So have God’s servants been pushed into the corners of the earth. There they were in the valleys of Piedmont for many a year fighting for dear life. And, in all lands, those that have been faithful to God have been put away into the corners — driven, as it were, to the mountain-tops. But what has come of it, and what will come of it? Why, the fruit

shall shake like Lebanon. The golden corn, standing upright in its strength, adorned with its ear, shall wave in the breeze as pleasing a sight even as the cedar of Lebanon.

PSALM 73

You may have noticed that the 73rd Psalm and the 37th Psalm are on the same subject; it will help you to recall this fact if you remember that the figures are the same, only reversed.

1. *Truly God is good to Israel, —*

Settle that matter in your hearts, whatever doubts may distress or disturb your mind, fix this point as certain: “Truly God is good to Israel,” —

1, 2. *Even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.*

He was a good man, one of the leaders in Israel, yet he had to make this confession, “My feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.”

3, 4. *For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.*

Many of them have so stifled conscience that it does not trouble them even in that last dread hour, and they pass into eternity with blinded eyes, self-deluded to the last.

5. *They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.*

They are not the children of God, and that is why they escape the rod of God. The rod is not for strangers, but for the children of the family. Yet the psalmist began to envy these people because, said he, “they are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.”

6. *Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain;*

They wear it gladly, and think it to be an ornament.

6-9. *Violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, —*

As though they would blow them down, as the wind blows the clouds that are full of rain.

9. *And their tongue walketh through the earth.*

Like the ravening lion of the pit, seeking characters that they may destroy or devour. There is no end to the mischief that such people can do. If they are not in trouble themselves, they make much trouble for other people; and while they set themselves on so high a pinnacle, they are mean enough to slander the characters of the good.

10. *Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.*

They have to drink of the bitter cup again and again; it seems to them to be always full; and the wicked have their full cup, — filled, as it seems, with the juice from the very finest fruit.

11. *And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?*

They admit that there is a God, but they ask, “What does he know, and how does he know?”

12-14. *Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.*

It was one of his greatest sorrows that, the more holy he was, the more troubled he seemed to be; and the more closely he endeavored to follow his God, the more it seemed as if God only frowned upon him. Yet the psalmist's was no exceptional case, of which there is only one in all history; there have been many such, and there are many such to this day.

15. *If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.*

You know that some people have made up a kind of proverb like this, “If you think it, you may as well speak it;” but it is not so. Bad thoughts should never be spoken. If a man has a bottle of whisky in his house, or in his pocket, that is bad enough; but if the cork is never taken out, it will do no very great hurt to anybody. So, if a man has evil thoughts, but does not utter them, the mischief will not be so great as if he were to make them known to others.

16. *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;*

He could not bear the thought of offending God's children; but, at the same time, the problem itself, concerning the righteous and the wicked, until he could solve it, was too painful for him.

17. *Until I went into the sanctuary of God;*

When he went into God's holy place, — when he began to understand God's purposes and plans, and looked beyond the present life into the dreadful future of the ungodly, he could say: —

17. *Then understood I their end.*

And understanding their end, his difficulty ceased, his puzzling problem was solved.

18. *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places:*

As if they stood upon a ridge of ice, from which they must slip down; — who wishes to be lifted up upon an Alp of prosperity, from which he may be dashed down at any moment? If you knew that there was a man standing on the top of the cross of St. Paul's at this moment, I do not suppose that any of you would envy him; certainly I should not. Let him have a patent for standing there, and let nobody else ever attempt it. And an ungodly man, in the elevated places of prosperity, is in such a perilous position that we need not envy him.

18. *Thou castedst them down into destruction.*

Down they go! If not in this life, yet in the next, and who will envy them then?

19, 20. *How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.*

When a man wakes up, the image that was before his mind, in his dream, is gone; and when God wakes up to judgment, these wicked men, who were but as images in a night dream, shall pass away.

21. *Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.*

In the tenderest and most vital parts of his being, he felt an inward and terrible pain.

22. *So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.*

Judging as the beast judges, that can only see the little grass around itself, and fattens itself, knowing nothing of the shambles, and of the butcher's knife that is being sharpened to kill it there. "So," says the psalmist, "I was like that, I forgot about the future, I

did not judge as an immortal being should judge concerning the infinite and the eternal, but I judged things as a beast might judge by the narrow compass of its little grazing ground.

23. *Nevertheless —*

This phrase is most delightful, coming in connection with his previous confession: “I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless” —

23. *I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.*

That is your portion also, Christian. However few your pounds, however short your supplies, you are continually with God, and he holds you by your right hand. Will you envy the ungodly after that?

24. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*

There is where your chief possession lies, locked up in that which is marked “Afterward.” Not today, possibly not tomorrow, but “afterward” is your inheritance: “afterward thou wilt receive me to glory.”

25. *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*

Here is the Christian’s heavenly and earthly portion and treasure. He has his God, both here and hereafter; and this is better than all that can fall to the lot of the worldling.

26, 27. *My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.*

That is, setting their hearts on unlovely things, and forgetting to love God.

28. *But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.*

The Psalm ends jubilantly, as it began, though part of it had been in a minor key.

PSALM 73

Here you have the psalmist in a fainting fit. He has allowed the flesh to conquer the spirit. The observant eye of reason has for awhile rendered dim the clear vision of faith.

1. *Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.*

That must be true. Whatever we have seen or felt, it cannot be doubted but what God must become a good God to his own people, "Such as are of a clean heart."

2, 3. *But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

I began to envy those whom God hates, and to think that it would be better for me to have been one of them.

4. *For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.*

Their unbelief helps them to die in peace, mocking at God even to the last.

5, 8. *They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.*

They justify themselves in treading others down; they laud it over others; they bully them; they rob them; they crush them; yet speak as if they had a perfect right to do so.

9. *They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.*

Leaving nobody alone, sparing no character, however pure.

10, 11. *Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?*

They get to doubt the personality of God. If they will not precisely say that there is no God, yet they go as near to it as they can; they come to what is about the same thing. They have a God who does not know, and who does not perceive.

12. *Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.*

And this is what the good man said,

13, 14. *Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.*

“Is this all I am to get by my righteousness? Is this the reward of following after God, to be whipped as soon as I wake, and to be sent to bed sore with grief?”

15. *If I say, I will speak thus; behold I should offend against the generation of thy children.*

So he did not say what he thought. Some have said, “If you think so, you may as well say so.” But not so. You might as well say if you have a match, you may as well burn your house down. Bad thought is bad to yourself, but it ends there; turn it into words and tell it to others and it may do an infinite mischief.

16, 17. *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.*

He went and hid himself in his God; he got near his God. It does not mean that he went to some place of worship, but that he went to the God whom he worshipped — hid himself in his God.

18. *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction.*

“On hills of ice I see them stand,
While flaming billows roll below,
melting down their foundation.”

19, 22. *How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my veins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.*

It is a man of God that talks thus about himself. He feels that he had got to act and think as a beast might do; for a beast only calculates things according to time present; it crops the grass, and is satisfied, and lies down; but an immortal man ought to take a wider sweep and range in his thought, and not merely think of today and of this present life, but of the end of time and of the eternity that lies beyond this present mortal state. And because he had failed to do so, he calls himself foolish and ignorant, and says: —

23, 28. *Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my*

portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.

He finds all his comfort in his God. He comes to the conclusion that, whatever the portion of the ungodly may be, his is infinitely better than theirs, because they have not God, and he has God, who is all in all.

PSALM 73

The psalmist here works out the problem of the prosperity of the wicked. He was troubled in his own mind about it; he knew that he feared God, but he also knew that he was greatly tried, whereas he saw many, who had no fear of God before their eyes, who seemed to be always prospering. Their flourishing condition was a puzzle to him; but he examined the problem, and unraveled the mystery. I think I have before told you, as a little exercise for your memory, that the seventy-third Psalm and the thirty-seventh Psalm are both on the same subject. You can easily remember this, as the same figures are used in each instance, only they are turned the two ways, 73 and 37.

1. *Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.*

The psalmist knows that it must be so; he cannot doubt it, he lays it down as a proposition not to be disputed. Assuredly, "Truly, God is good to Israel."

2. *But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.*

"I was almost seduced to sin; I seemed as if I must fall into iniquity."

3. *For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

It really looked as if the big rogues did prosper, as if the great infidels were happy, as if, after all, religion brought trouble, and irreligion brought pleasure.

4. *For there are no bands in their death: but their strength was firm.*

Some of them so stifle conscience that they even die stupefied, with no sense of the dreadful wrath that is coming upon them: "There are no bands in their death."

6. *They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.*

They do not seem to have the afflictions of God's people, and certainly they are not plagued with soul-conflict such as Christians have, they seem to make themselves very merry at all times.

6. *Therefore pride accompanieth them about as a chain;*

They wear it as my Lord Mayor wears his collar, for a badge of honour.

6. *Violence covereth them as a garment.*

They are not a bit ashamed of it; they put it on as if it were their workday dress.

7, 8. *Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.*

What big words they utter! How they boast! How they despise the poor! How they sneer at religion! It is dreadful to hear them; and for a child of God, who is conscious of doing right, and of suffering for it, it is a hard task to hear them talk thus.

9. *They set their mouth against the heavens,*

As if this earth did not contain room enough for their malice, "They set their mouth against the heavens."

9. *And their tongue walketh through the earth.*

Letting nobody alone, having a hard word for everybody except their own chosen coterie.

10, 11. *Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most high?"*

They pretend that God is, as it were, only like King Log, taking no account of what is done by the sons of men. "He does not notice our feastings, or listen to our blasphemies;" so they say.

12. *Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.*

And yet why do we wonder at this? The bullock that is intended to be killed is the first to be fatted, and he that is doomed to destruction will often be allowed to prosper. Would you not let them have as much pleasure as they can have in this life, for they will have none in the next? Oh, envy them not their short-lived joys! Yet the psalmist did so when he was down in the dumps, and in an evil

humor. He said, "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches."

13. *Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.*

"Surely," said he "my holy life, my desire to be right with God and man, is a good-for-nothing thing. I do not prosper; I do not increase in riches, but it is the very reverse with me."

14. *For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.*

Cannot you imagine a son of very wise parents, and very loving parents, saying, "Why, look at that boy in the street! He has no father to flog him, no mother to scold him, he can do just as he likes; but, as for me, if I do a little wrong, I am whipped for it?" Ah, my lad! the day will come when you will not envy the street-boy and you will be thankful then that you were not in his position. The child of God, if he sins, will have to smart for it; and there is nothing more dreadful than to be allowed to sin without being made to suffer. God save us from being given up to such a state as that!

15. *If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.*

Do not always speak what you think. "But if you think it, you may as well say it," says one. Oh, no! There may be an evil spirit in yonder bottle, but nobody will get drunk upon it if you keep the cork in; so there may be evil thoughts in your hearts, but they will not injure other people if you do not, as it were, draw the cork by uttering them. It is well always to think twice before you speak once. "So," said the psalmist, "I cannot speak thus, because such talk would grieve God's people."

16. *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;*

It was too painful for the psalmist to think of it, too painful to speak of it; and yet too painful for him to hold his tongue.

17. *Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.*

When he came near to his God, when he went into the holy place, and communed with the Lord, then he saw what would be the end of the wicked. Ah, what a difference it makes when we look at the ungodly from the right standpoint! "Then understood I their end."

18. *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places:*

Up there ever so high;

18. *Thou castedst them down into destruction.*

When the time comes, down they are hurled from those slippery heights into the awful depths below.

19. *Now are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.*

When the ungodly reach the next world, where are their riches, where are their feasts, where are their merry jokes, where are their lofty words? Listen: “How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.”

20. *As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.*

When a man wakes, his dream is over and gone. When God awakes to judgment, and comes to deal with ungodly men, then all those who prospered in wickedness shall melt away, like the baseless fabric of a dream.

21, 22. *Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.*

For the beast only measures by the day and the hour, as far as its eye can see. Give it a meadow deep with grass, and it is perfectly happy, but when good men get measuring by the day, and by the hour, and by the lifetime here below, they are foolish, and like brute beasts.

23. *Nevertheless I am continually with thee:*

Oh, what a mercy this is for believers! If we are ever so poor, we are continually with God. What if we be chastened every morning? It is clear that we must be with God then, for a chastening God must be near.

23. *Thou hast holden me by my right hand.*

“Even when thou didst whip me. Everywhere thou hast a grip of me. Thou holdest me with thy right hand.” The psalmist does not envy the wicked now; he has risen a stage higher than he was a little while ago.

24, 25. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*

Now he finds in God his riches, his joy, his prosperity, his portion.

26, 27. *My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.*

To love the world, to love riches, to love sin, to love self, this is to be unfaithful to our marriage covenant with God; let such conduct never be ours.

28. *But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works.*

Thus, you see, the psalmist went down to the depths, but he came up again all right, and his heart was made glad in the Lord his God. So may it be with any of us who, like him, have been envious at the foolish, when we have seen the prosperity of the wicked.

PSALM 73

“A Psalm Of Asaph.” He was a great singer, but he could not always sing. In the first part of the Psalm he felt rather like groaning than singing; and you shall find that those who sing the sweetest the praises of God sometimes have to hang their harps upon the willows, and are silent. The strong temptation through which Asaph passed is one which is very common. You find another account of it in the 37th Psalm. It may help your memory to notice that it is the 37th and the 73rd Psalm (transpose the figures) which are both upon the same subject—the temptation caused to the people of God by the prosperity of the wicked.

1. *Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.*

It must be so. Whatever argument my son may hold about it, I will set that down, to begin with, as a certainty—“Truly, God is good to Israel.” He cannot be unkind or unfaithful to his own people. It cannot be possible, after all—however things may look—that God is an ill-God and an ill-Master to his own servants.

2. *But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh dipped. Am I, then, one of his people or not? I know he is good to them; but how about myself? Perhaps some here will never question themselves in that way, and if they were led to do so, they would think it was of the devil. I do not think so. I think it is rather of the*

devil to keep us from questioning ourselves. I remember what Cowper said:—

“He that hath never doubted of his state,
He may—perhaps he may too late.”

Let us delight in full assurance, but let us keep very clear of presumption; and that assurance which cannot bear self-examination is presumption, depend upon it. When a man declines to search himself and test himself, there is something doubtful, if not rotten in his estate; and it is time he did begin to say, “As for me, my feet were almost gone: my steps had well nigh slipped.” This is how it came about:—

3. *For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. I know that wicked men are fools.*

Asaph and David had often said that before. Yet says he, “I was a greater fool, still, that I was envious of these fools—when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

4, 5. *For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.*

Many of them keep up a hypocritical profession through a long life, and die in a stupefaction, so that conscience never awakens, and they pass out of the world loaded with guilt, and yet talk about being accepted before God. How can this be? Where is the justice of it?

6. *Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain;*

As kings wear chains of gold, so is their pride to them.

6. *Violence covereth them as a garment,*

They are not ashamed of it. They get to be so bold in sin that they wear it as an outside cloak.

7. *Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.*

Superfluities. They never have to ask where a meal will come from. They have more than they want.

8, 9. *They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens,*

Such big mouths—such blasphemous words—have they, that they attack God himself. There is nothing too high for them to drag it down—nothing too pure for them to slander. “They set their mouth against the heavens.”

9. *And their tongue walketh through the earth.*

Like the lion seeking its prey, they take long walks in their slander. Nobody is safe from them.

10, 11. *Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?*

God's sorrowing children have to drink of the bitter cup, while these proud ones are eating of the fat of the land.

12-14. *Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.*

When Asaph got into this unbelieving state of mind, it did look as if all his care of his character and all his desire to serve God was wasted, for the wicked prospered, while he was chastened. It is a strong description which he gives of his state. "All the day long have I been plagued." Not by the half-hour, but by the whole day, plagued, and weeping as soon as he was out of bed—chastened every morning. He seemed almost to be sorry that he was a child of God, to be so roughly handled. He almost, but not quite, wished that he could take the portion of the wicked, that he might enjoy himself as they did, and might prosper in the world as they did.

15. *If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.*

That was very wise of Asaph. He thought but he did not speak. Some persons say, "You may as well out with it." You may as well keep it in; nay, a great deal better. If you have it in your own heart, it will grieve yourself, but if you speak it out, you will grieve others. If you wear sackcloth, brethren, wear it round your own loins, but do not wear it as your outside garment. There is enough sackcloth in the world without your flaunting it before everybody else's face. If you must fast, remember your Master's words, "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast." He gave us that precept in order to avoid pharisaic ostentation; but we may also follow it from another motive, namely, that we may not spread sorrow in the world. There is enough of depression of spirit, enough of despondency, enough of heartbreak, without our saying a word to increase it among the sons of men.

“Bear and forbear, and silent be:
Tell no man thy misery,”

Lest thou bring another into it, unless, indeed, thou meet with a strong man who can help thee. Then thou mayest tell thy sorrow to get relief. But tell it not to the children.

16. *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me.*

“Too painful” to keep it: “too painful” to speak it out and grieve other people.

17. *Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood their end.*

Asaph went to his God. He got to Christ, whom he foresaw, for the person of Jesus Christ is the sanctuary of God. Some people call these buildings sanctuaries. They have no authority for so doing. “God dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” He may have done so under the old covenant, but not now. Christ is the sanctuary of God, and when we get to him and come into fellowship with God in him, then we begin to learn something. “Then understood I their end.”

18. *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places:*

There they are—on a mountain of ice, bright and glittering: up aloft, where others see, admire, and wonder at them. But oh! how dangerous their pathway!

18. *Thou casteth them down into destruction.*

They are not left to slip, but a hand overthrows them—flings them down from the heights of their prosperity to the depths of unutterable woe.

19, 20. *How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.*

As if God slept today, and let these images of prosperity exist as in a dream; but by-and-by he wakes. His time of judgment comes, and where are these prosperous men? They have gone. The “baseless fabric of a vision” has melted into thin air, and “left not a wreck behind.” It is not. It is gone.

21. *Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.*

I felt a heart-pain. I felt my whole nature go amiss, as if there had been calculi causing the deepest possible misery in my reins.

22. *So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.*

I saw no farther than a goose. Like a beast that cannot look into the future, I judged these men by today—by the pastures in which they fed, and the fatness which they gathered there. “I was as a beast before thee.” Now notice the splendid connection of these two verses. I will read them again—the 22nd and the 23rd. “So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee.”

23. *Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.*

What a strange mixture a man is! And a godly man is the strangest conglomerate of all. He is a beast, and yet continually with God. View him from one side, he is ignorant: view him from the other, and he hath an unction from the Holy One, and he knows all things. View him from one point of the compass, and he is naked, and poor, and miserable: view him from another quarter, and behold he is complete in Christ and “accepted in the Beloved.” They know not man who do not know that every true man is two men.

24. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*

I, the fool that envied fools, yet “thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”

25. *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*

Now he has got out of the temptation. He is not going to seek for prosperity that he may rival the wicked in their wealth. No! He sees that, in having God, he has all he wants. Even though he should continually be plagued all the day long, and chastened every morning, his portion in God is quite enough for him. He will not murmur any more.

26. *My flesh and my heart faileth:*

I see what a poor thing I am. I allowed my flesh and my heart to get the mastery over me, and I got caught in this trap.

26, 27. *But God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.*

A strong word, but none too forcible; for every heart that seeks delight away from God is an unchaste heart. It has got away from true purity even for a moment in pouring out its love upon the creature.

28. *But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 73; 37:1-10.

PSALM 77

This Psalm is headed “To the chief Musician, to Jeduthun,” He was one of the great singers; there is opportunity given in the Psalms for each of the sinners to take his turn.; it does not do for any of us to be idle in reference to the praise of God. It is called, “A Psalm of Asaph.” His Psalms have usually a dark tinge about them; he was a meditative man, “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”; but also a man of strong faith, and of an exulting spirit. You need to do business in great waters to understand Asaph; he is one who does not wade, but he gets into “waters to swim in.”

Thus he begins:

1. *I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.*

The use of the voice in prayer is not essential; but usually, when men grow earnest, they use the voice as well as the mind. It was because of the intensity of his prayer that the psalmist felt compelled to cry, not to use stilted, stately language, but the natural cry of pain: “I cried unto God with my voice.” You will find it very helpful in private prayer to use the voice; many of us do. Some have not the opportunity of doing so; but if you can be unheard of men, and can use your voice, you will find it helpful. Twice says the psalmist, “I cried unto God with my voice.”

2. *In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord:*

This is the best place to go in the day of your trouble.

2. *My sore ran in the night,*

A better rendering would be, My hand was stretched out in the night.” The psalmist continued to pray.

2. *And ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted.*

Rightly so, if the comfort came from man, if the comfort were doubtful and ineffectual; wrongly so, when right comfort was presented to him, comfort from God. I am afraid that, in the time of our trouble, we often increase it by being unwilling to be comforted.

3. *I remembered God, and was troubled:*

What! trouble even from remembering God? Then this is trouble indeed.

And yet this has been the experience of the saints of God many a time:

I remembered God," his holiness, his justice, my offenses against him, and was troubled."

3. *I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.*

Turned over, overwhelmed; without comfort, or hope of comfort.

3. *Selah.*

Screw up the harp-strings; they have gone flat through such hard striking.

These deep notes have put the strings out of order. The man in his grief cannot sing well; and he had need to say "Selah." Sursum corda. Lift up the heart; prepare yourself again for song.

4. *Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak.*

Yet he was speaking; but it did not seem to him like speaking. It was rather an inarticulate wail than the language of a man.

5. *I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.*

A little holy history is good reading for a heavy heart. You will often stumble on a record of God's providential dealings, or a paragraph concerning his wonderful love, that will cheer your heart. Yet it did not cheer the heart of the psalmist just then.

6. *I call to remembrance my song in the night:*

"How I used to sing like the nightingale, with the thorn at my breast, I call that to remembrance." But we cannot always sing old songs. Old experiences may have but little fire in their ashes, though often in their ashes live their wonted fires.

6. *I commune with mine own, heart:*

A very proper thing to do; but not much comfort generally comes of it. It is like stirring water that is already muddy; the more you stir it, the more muddy it becomes.

6. *And my spirit made diligent search.*

When a man can deal with himself like this, his trouble will not last long. God save me from a dumb sorrow, sorrow that cannot think, and cannot judge, and cannot weigh itself!

Now listen to the psalmist's questions. Does doubt question your faith? Then let faith question your doubts. Here is a catechism for a desponding heart. I commend it to you who are in trouble. Put your soul through its paces, ask these questions.

7. *Will the Lord cast off for ever?*

Has he ever done so? He may seem to cast off for a little while; but "Will the Lord cast off for ever?"

7. *And will he be favourable no more?*

It is a long lane that has no turning. The Lord may take down the rod; but will he always use it? Will he always chide?

8. *Is his mercy clean gone for ever?*

If his favor is gone, yet is his mercy gone? Does not the Psalm say, "His mercy endureth for ever"? If I cannot claim favor as a saint, may I not hope for mercy as a sinner? "Is his mercy clean gone for ever?"

8. *Doth his promise fail for evermore?*

Oh, what a question that is! God's promise may tarry, but it never fails; and if it seem to fail for the time being, will it fail for evermore?

9. *Hath God forgotten to be gracious?*

What hot shots these are for unbelief! I warrant you that, however deep your unbelief may be tonight, if, by earnest prayer, with the help of the Holy Spirit, you ply it with these questions, it will have to yield.

9. *Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.*

Can it be so? Was it ever so to any of God's people? Now comes "Selah" again. Turn those screws once more; put the harp-strings tight again. We shall have sweeter music from this time.

10. *And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.*

"But I will remember" is added by the translator. Surely it was to the psalmist an infirmity to be thus in trouble; he called it Benoni, son of sorrow; but it was not infirmity to God; he called it Benjamin, son of the right hand. There is a sort of parallel between Asaph and the woman who named her child Benoni. Certainly it is a great infirmity, it is a sin, to doubt God, and to be cast down, and troubled.

11. *I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old.*

Think of what God has done for his people, how he has delivered them, how he has lifted them from the dunghill, and set them among the princes, even among the princes of his people. Think of his wonders of grace, and be no more discouraged.

12. *I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.*

Those who talk ought to meditate; otherwise they grind wind. Those who meditate will talk; otherwise the miller grinds only for himself.

13. *Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary:*

Or, “in holiness.” God’s way is always a holy way, a righteous way.

13. *Who is so great a God as our God?*

When we think of the greatness of God, if we simply dwell upon his power, we make a mistake. The greatness of God lies mainly in his moral attributes, in his completeness, his wholeness, his holiness.

14, 15. *Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people. Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.*

“Selah” again. In looking back, the psalmist has remembered the history of the whole nation. He thinks of what God did for his ancient people; indeed, he is on the verge of a great song; well may he tune the strings again. He has in thought gone back to the Red Sea. He is standing like Miriam, by the waters that devoured the foes of Israel, and he must sing as she did. In a high poetic strain he writes:

16. *The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled.*

At the very sight of God the sea began to flee, to lay bare its depths. “The floods stood upright as an heap,” in their fear and dread of the presence of God, “and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.”

17. *The clouds poured out water:*

The floods above answered the floods below; and came to the help of the Lord, “to the help of the Lord against the mighty.”

17, 18. *The skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook.*

There was a great storm; thunder and lightning gathered about the sea.

When God spoke, the waters rolled back, and swallowed up all the chivalry of Egypt. Heaven and earth joined in battle against God's foes; not only did the sea flee, but there appears to have been also an earthquake.

19. *Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.*

Not foreknown. Who could have foretold that God would lead his people through the sea? His footsteps are not now to be found. God's ways we cannot guess; and even when we have seen them, we cannot understand them. Child of God, does the sea roll before you tonight? Are you in extreme distress? Are you crying as the psalmist did? With your voice do you cry unto God? Then expect deliverance from him.

20. *Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

Moses and Aaron did not lead them; God led his people, "like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron." Here the Psalm breaks off with great abruptness. Had it been a human composition, it would have been rounded off with great discretion; but God knows best where to stop. I sometimes wish brethren would do the same in their prayers; they need not keep on till they have worn us out; they may break off short if they like. So may we in our sermons; perhaps they would be better remembered if the second half was never spoken.

PSALM 77

The Book of Psalms, though it is divinely inspired, is also marvelously human; it is everywhere instinct with life, and life in its most, sympathetic forms. However glad you are, there is always a Psalm suitable for you to sing; and you are never so sad but a Psalm could be found to help you, in the very depths, to pour out your complaint before God. This 77th Psalm is the song of a man in deep depression.

1. *I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.*

It was only a cry; a cry monotonous, redoubled, and full of sorrow. Yet the Lord gave ear unto him who cried. There were some who would have stopped their ears, and have got out of the way, for the sound made them melancholy, and they could not bear it; but the Lord gave ear unto his sad servant's cry. Oh, how sweet is this! Though he hears the songs of angels, and though the hallelujahs of the blood-bought in glory never cease before him, yet he stoops from his throne of majesty, and listens to the cry of misery. "He gave ear unto me." Are any of you troubled? Pour out your hearts before the Lord, and he will give ear unto you as he did to the writer of this Psalm.

2. *In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord:*

That was a very wise thing to do; where else should he go, in the day of trouble, but to him who sent the trouble, to him who could help him to bear the trouble, to him who could sanctify the trouble, to him who could, if he pleased, remove the trouble? "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord." I have heard of some who fly to strong drink to drown their troubles; that will never do, it is like leaping into the fire to escape the flame. Some run to their fellow-creatures for comfort; that is a poor way of acting; better by far do as the psalmist said he did, "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord."

2, 3. *My sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled:*

'Yet he says that he sought God. It is a grand thing when your faith leads you to seek God, even though he troubles you. It is better to knock at God's door when he is angry than to go to any other door. Even if he shuts the door in your face, still wait upon him. Though he may seem not to heed your cry, there is no door like that of God. Therefore, continue there still.

Yet there are times when even believers in God are so conscious of sin, so conscious of departure from him by unbelief towards him, that, as they remember God, they are troubled.

3-5. *I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.*

What God did with others of his people in their times of trouble, how he rescued them, the splendor of his power in the ages long since gone, —these are among the things which the psalmist considered. It is well sometimes to live in the past. If the present seems to be like a fire that has gone out, snatch a live coal from the altars of the past, and set the fuel alight again.

6. *I call to remembrance my song in the night-*

“How I was once like a nightingale, and learnt to sing with a thorn at my breast; how, in former times, I triumphed in the hour of trouble and affliction.” It is good to recollect all this; for, though past experience will not do to live upon, yet sometimes we are like the men with their barges when they push ‘backwards to send the barge forward. We may think of the past to help us in the present.

6, 7. *I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.*

Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Come, what think you? Will such a loving, faithful God as ours cast off for ever? Can you harbour such a thought concerning him? Will he be favorable no more after all the favor he has already shown? Can he change?

Will he deny himself? Think you that God will play fast and loose with you? “Will he be favorable no more?”

8. *Is his mercy clean gone for ever?*

We sing, “His mercy endureth for ever;” is that a lie? Can it be?

8. *Doth his promise fail for evermore?*

Does it ever fail at all? And if it does tarry a while, will it always wait? Will God be found untrue at last? Come, children of God, in your trouble face these questions, and answer them; for you must get comfort out of the only reply that you can give to them.

9. *Hath God forgotten to be gracious?*

Is he the same God that he used to be? Or has he been overtaken with a fit of forgetfulness? Has he a failing memory, like yours and mine?

9. *Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.*

Can it be? Has he not said, “as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee”? Can it be, then, that in anger he has shut up his tender mercies?

10. *And I said, This is my infirmity:*

And so it is. Worse than that; it is sometimes our iniquity, our sin, to think such hard things of God. But inasmuch as faith was there, battling, struggling, and striving, the little temporary victory which unbelief seemed to gain was the result of infirmity.

10. *But I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.*

The glorious years of his electing love; the years in which he has loved his people, and never changed that love; the years in which we ourselves have realized his presence, and been at his right hand, enjoying day by day a sense of his love.

11, 12. *I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.*

They will bear talking of, they will bear turning over, and meditating upon; for they are full of comfort.

13, 14. *Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people.*

Whenever the Hebrew mind was full of exulting joy concerning God's greatness and might, it seemed inevitably to turn back to Egypt and the Red Sea. Just as we, believers in Jesus, love to sing the song of the Lamb, so did these old believers sing it by anticipation. We may fitly join with them, and together we may sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and of the Lamb. Here is a part of it, —

15. *Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.*

There is no song like that of redemption. Whatever our troubles may be if we are trusting in Christ, we are a redeemed people. Whatever our sins or infirmities, or imperfections, we are a redeemed people, like Israel of old. They were redeemed by power, as well as by price; so we read,-

16-18. *The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook.*

This is what Egypt saw when God turned the dark side of the cloud towards the Egyptians, and greatly troubled them through that wild tempestuous night.

19, 20. *Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

And so will he continue to lead his people by one and another, till all their wanderings are over, and they rest in peace at his right hand for ever; “wherefore, comfort one another with these words.”

PSALM 77

This “Psalm of Asaph” has a mournful tone in it; at times the writer is in the deeps; but we may be quite sure that he will end the Psalm cheerfully because he begins it with prayer. No matter what sorrow falls to your lot, if you can pray, you will rise out of it. When Jonah went to the bottoms of the mountains, in the belly of the fish, and took to praying, it was well with him. If thou, dear troubled soul, canst but pray, thou needest not despair.

1. *I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.*

You see, he cried, and he cried again, and at his second call the door of mercy was opened to him. God sometimes makes petitioners wait that they may become more earnest, and that they may really feel the value of the thing they are seeking. So Asaph says, “I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice.” That is the way to get the blessing. You will often find, dear friends, that it helps you to pray if you use your voice in prayer; there is no necessity to speak, you can pray without the use of the lips; but it often helps your thoughts if you are able to express them aloud.

2. *In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted.*

He could not sleep, so he took to prayer. Which is the greater mercy, —prayer or sleep, — I cannot say. In the psalmist’s case, I should suppose that prayer just then was better than sleep. His trouble so pressed upon him, that it gave him no respite whatever, so all through the night he continued to cry unto the Lord.

3. *I remembered God, and was troubled:*

God is the fountain of all comfort, yet there are times when even a godly man can find no comfort in God. Asaph perhaps remembered the dark side of God's attributes. Justice seemed to stand over him with a drawn sword.

Holiness frowned upon him. Power threatened to crush him. Truth stood up to condemn him. He could not find any comfort, even in his God.

3. *I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.*

He was covered right up, like a ship that has gone down in deep water: "I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed Selah." Whenever you see this word, "Selah," it means lift up the notes; tune up the strings of the harp; get the mind and heart ready for something in a rather different strain.

4. *Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak.*

You thought that the psalmist was going to say, "I cannot sleep." He has given up the attempt to do that, so now he tries to talk; but utterance fails him. Shallow brooks sound as they flow, but deep griefs are still; and a man may be so troubled in heart that he cannot speak; he can only explain his sorrow by groaning and tears.

5, 6. *I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night. I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.*

He looked back into the records of ancient history to see if God did ever forsake a praying man. He thought upon his own experience, and he recollected how, when it was night with him before, God made him to sing like a nightingale, in the darkness; so he asks himself, "Has God changed? Will he give me no songs now? Will he leave me to perish?" Thus have the best of men, in their sore troubles, had to put to themselves solemn questions, and they have not always been able to answer them.

7-9. *Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fall for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.*

If you are a child of God, yet never had to ask these questions, you ought to be very grateful; but if you have to ask them, be very thankful that Asaph asked them before you; and believe that, as he

had a comfortable answer to them, so shall you. It is always a comfort when you can see the footprints of another man in the mire and the slough, for if that man passed through unharmed, so may you, for his God shall also be your Helper. But only think of this inspired psalmist, this sweet singer of Israel, being so troubled and broken in spirit that he says, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?"

10. *And I said, This is my infirmity:*

"This is a trouble appointed to me, I must bear it." Or, "This is because of the weakness of my faith. God has not changed; it is I who have changed.

"This is my infirmity."

10. *But I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.*

"I will remember what God has done with that right hand of his. I will remember when I used to sit at his right hand. "What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!

How sweet their memory still!

But now I find an aching void

The world can never fill."

It is a good thing to make a record of your experiences when they are sweet; you may want that record one of these days. I do not believe in keeping a diary always, for one is apt to put down more than may be true; but there are times of special mercy when I would say, "Write that down for a memorial, and keep it by you, for the day may come when that record will minister comfort to you."

11, 12. *I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, —*

"I will not have any more of my works; I will meditate on thy work. I will get to thee, my God, and think of what thou hast done; especially of thy works of grace, how brightly they shine! I will meditate also of all thy work," —

12, 13. *And talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary:*

Or, "is in holiness." God's way is sometimes in the sea, but it is always a holy way. God never deals with his people, or with any of his creatures, unjustly or unrighteously. "I cannot trace God," said Luther once, "but I can trust him;" and from that saying of his we have coined the phrase, "To trust him when you cannot trace him."

When you are unable to see God's footprints because he rides upon the storm, yet still say, "Thy way, O God, is in holiness."

13, 14. *Who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people.*

See how the psalmist comforts himself with what God had done; and he went right back to the Red Sea for his illustration. Somehow, God's people in the olden times always liked to sing the song of Moses; by a kind of instinct, they thought of the Red Sea, as if to remember the redemption that God wrought out for his people when he destroyed Pharaoh and all his host. Let us go there, too, and think of the Red Sea of our Saviour's blood where all our sins were drowned.

15-17. *Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph Selah. The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad.*

I suppose that there was a storm at the time of the passage of the Red Sea, so that the deep-mouthed thunder spoke to the quaking heart of Pharaoh, while the flashing lightnings set the heavens on flame, and made Egypt's chivalry tremble as the horse and his rider went down into the sea.

18, 19. *The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. Thy way is in the sea,—*

Where you cannot see his footprints; "in the sea," where there seems to be no way at all, there God makes a highway. Are you in such trouble, dear friend, that you cannot see the possibility of escape? Remember this verse: "Thy way is in the sea," —

19, 20. *And thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

There the Psalm stops, just when you thought there was more to be said. The Holy Spirit knows how to leave off, and he closes abruptly with a sublimity seldom equaled. God's people need to know no more than this, that God is leading them. Asaph does not say that Moses and Aaron led them: "Thou leddest thy people." Moses and Aaron were only the Lord's servants and under-

shepherds: “Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” May he be ever our Leader! Amen.

PSALM 77

1. *I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.*

The writer was in very deep trouble. The trouble forced from him a loud and bitter cry. His heart was wrung with anguish, but the cry which was the weakness of the flesh was, by divine grace, turned upward, and so became the strength of his grace. He cried, but it was to God, not to men, as many of us do. “Unto God,” says he twice over, “did I cry.” But God hears when others hear not, and, blessed be his name, he answers when others cannot. There are so many instances in which God has heard the prayer of persons in deep trouble, that the most troubled of all men ought to be encouraged to pray. Did not Jonah pray, even out of the belly of the whale, and God delivered him? Did not Manasseh pray out of the low dungeon? Great sinner as he was, God delivered him — Oh! let us believe that there is power in prayer, for God hearkens to the request of those that seek his face.

2. *In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted.*

He would not take the common comfort which friendly words would have yielded him: his case was so desperate that he must have divine comfort, and nothing else. I will not be comforted till Jesus comfort me, and this is a very good and holy resolution. I wish that some who snatch at comfort — unhealthy comfort — too soon, would resolve upon this, “My cry shall go to God, and God only, and I will take no comfort till God the Holy Spirit bring it to me.”

3. *I remembered God, and was troubled:*

Yet it was the right thing to do to remember God — the most comfortable thing in the world, and though it failed at first, it did not fail in the long run,

3. *I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.*

It is no new thing, then, for the best of God’s people to be in the deepest trouble. The path which you are traveling, O mourner, is well marked with footprints.

3-5. *Selah. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.*

Turned through the experience of thy people written in thy Word to see if ever thou didst forsake one of them.

6. *I call to remembrance my song in the night:*

To see whether thou didst forsake me in days gone by — marked my past experience of thy faithfulness.

6-9. *I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?*

Will he be favorable no more? Very proper questions to put. They answer themselves when we put them plainly, but while they lie festering in our spirits, misshapen things like ghosts that haunt our heart, then they alarm us. It is well to come to plain dealings, with our soul and to say, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul; why art thou disquieted within me?”

9-10. *Selah. And I said,*

When I came to reckon all up, and make a righteous judgment; when I bid my fears lie still awhile, and let me listen to reason, I said: —

10. *This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.*

I will remember God’s faithfulness in the past, in years when I lived at his right hand and basked in the sunlight of his love: I will snatch firebrands from the altars of the past to light up the fires of today.

11-13. *I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary:*

Or better, “Thy way is in holiness.” What thou doest is right, my God. I feared and trembled, but now I know it is so.

13-14. *Who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people.*

Oh! if we could all tell out what God has done for us, we could prove it true that God has declared his strength among us; the might of his grace has he displayed in our case.

15. *Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob an Joseph.*

Saints in the olden times were very fond of falling back upon the redemption of Israel out of Egypt. It was a favorite subject of their contemplation; it yielded them great comfort, and very, very frequently they turned it into sacred song. Now in heaven we shall do the same, for we shall sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Let not the Church in modern times forget to draw consolation out of that well. Here the Psalmist gives us a description, as I think it is, of the passage of the Red Sea — giving it as a sort of type of the way in which God will always deliver his people to the world's end.

16-20. *The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

For one moment just look at this picture. You will be delivered, and God will be glorified in your deliverance just as he was in the coming out of Egypt, but it will be by a mysterious way, perhaps — way little guessed at by you. God's path will be in the great waters. You will see the power, but before you see it you will little guess how it will be displayed. Only follow where he leads, for as amidst the thunder and the lightning he led his people as calmly on as a shepherd leads his flock, so shall you, whatever happens, with Jehovah for your shepherd, be led safely on till you come to the celestial city. Let us sing the song of the Red Sea.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 77; REVELATION 1:15-20.

PSALM 78:9-72

This story of the children of Israel, after they came out of Egypt, is like a looking-glass in which we may, with great sadness, see ourselves reflected.

9. *The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.*

They had every opportunity of serving their God; he had provided them with fit weapons for the war, but they were cowardly, so they “turned back in the day of battle.”

10, 11. *They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; and forgat his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them.*

Let each one of us ask, “Does the psalmist describe me?”

12, 13. *Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap.*

What a marvelous miracle that dividing of the Red Sea was! Did it not make an abiding impression upon them? I will be bound to say that many of them said, “We shall never doubt God again.” Yet, soon they did doubt, and murmur, and rebel against him!

14-16. *In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers.*

It seemed as if there was nothing that the Lord would not do for them; all that they needed for food and refreshment was given to them freely.

17, 18. *And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust.*

He had given them food for their necessities, but now they must have meat for their lusts.

19. *Yea, they spoke against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?*

So you see, dear friends, what speaking against God really is; I am afraid that we also have often done that. To question God’s power, is to speak against him. Perhaps you have thought lightly of your unbelieving speeches, but God does not think lightly of them; to my mind it seems that there is hardly anything that so grieves him as the doubts of his people concerning him.

20. *Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?*

There ought to have been no question as to the Lord's power; the God who could fetch water out of a rock could, if he pleased, make loaves of bread out of the sand under their feet, or cause the very stars to drop with meat for them if necessary.

21. *Therefore the Lord heard this, and was wroth:*

He was really angry with his people because they doubted him. He loved them, and because he loved them, it cut him to the quick that they should have questioned his power to bless them.

21-23. *So a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation: Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven,*

Unbelief is very hard to kill. God opens the doors and windows of heaven to feed his people; yet, nevertheless, the next time they are in trouble, they begin to stagger at the promise. Oh, shameful unbelief!

24-29. *And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full. He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven : and by his power he brought in the south wind. He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: and he let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations. So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire;*

Yet that was not a blessing to them; and, brethren, let us ever be afraid of our own desire, unless that desire comes from the Lord. You know how David puts it in the 37th Psalm: "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." If, however, thou findest thy delight in any earthly thing, it shall be a plague to thee to have the desire of thy heart: "He gave them their own desire; " —

30. *They were not estranged from their lust.*

For the more last gets, the more lust wants. It is like the daughter of the horse-leech, that always cries, "Give! Give!" God can satisfy the longing soul, but all the world cannot satisfy the cravings of lust.

30, 31. *But while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel.*

They received what they pined for, but they had a curse with it. Affliction with a blessing is far better than prosperity with a curse.

32. *For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works.*

They were dyed ingrain with unbelief, so that it seemed as if it could not be washed out of them.

33. *Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble.*

A great part of our trouble is the fruit of our own unbelief. It is like hemlock in the furrows of the field. They who distrust God are making a rod for their own back; and before they have done with it, they will have to rue the day in which they thought themselves wiser than God.

34-36. *When he slew them, then they sought him : and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.*

Some men are like dull animals that will not go without the whip. Many of us cannot be kept right without constant affliction; if our God gives us a little smooth walking, we go half-asleep, or we trip and stumble; so he is compelled, as it were, to make our way very rough, and often to strike us with the rod, to keep us from falling altogether into sinful slumber. How many there are who, when they do seem to turn to God, in times of sickness, are not truly penitent! A death-bed repentance may be true; but, oh, what a risk there is that it may be false!

37-51. *For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again. How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not his*

hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy. How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan : and had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them. He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts. He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them. He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; and smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham:

This is what God did with their enemies who had oppressed them, that he might set his people at liberty. After all that, ought they not to have trusted him as a little child trusts its mother, without ever a question or a doubt While he thus overthrew their enemies, see what he did for his own people.

52-56. *But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, even to this mountain, which his right hand had purchased. Be cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents. Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies;*

This sad note seems to come over and over again, as if they never could have too much of grieving God; yet the Lord was still tender towards them. Well may we sing, —

“Who is a pardoning God like thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?”

57-64. *But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand. He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance. The*

fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage. Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation.

They were dumb with excess of grief. When God chastises his children, he does not play at it. Sometimes, when he is angry at their sin, he lays on the blows fast and heavily, till their very bones are broken, so that they may hate sin as God hates it, and seek after holiness even as God loves it. So, dear friends, I pray that, if any of us have lost the consolations of God, and are feeling the weight of his rod, we may begin to inquire what secret thing it is in us which has angered him, and go back to him, and seek to stand before him as once we did; for, otherwise, he will smite, and smite, and smite yet again and again. But, notice, that the Lord never delights in chastening his children; he is glad to have done with the necessary correction. So, when their enemies were most cruel with them, —

65-69. *Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach. Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: but chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved. And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever.*

You see that we are getting into clear water now; it was all broken water, storm and hurricane, while we heard of what Israel did; but when we come to deal with God in Christ, of whom David is the type, then how sweetly everything goes!

70-72. *He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: from following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.*

Blessed be God who puts away the sin of his people, because he delighteth in mercy!

PSALM 78:10-61

The story of how the children of Israel behaved themselves towards their gracious God.

10-16. *They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; and forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them. Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through, and he made the waters to stand as an heap. In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. He clave the rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers.*

In such a scene of miracles, surrounded by such prodigies of goodness, what did they do?

17. *And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness.*

What a fierce fire must sin be that it is even fed by the rivers of God's goodness, and burns by means of that which ought to have quenched every spark of it. Yet there is such a fire as that raging in our hearts, and even God's mercies will make us more sinful unless his abounding grace comes with them to teach us how to use them aright.

18. *And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust.*

Not for their needs, but "for their lust." It is a dreadful thing when prayer itself is prostituted, and the mercy-seat becomes a place for the expression of sinful desires which ought never to have been in our hearts. It was so, however, with these children of Israel.

19. *Yea, they spake against God;*

As you read that "they spake against God," you naturally suppose that they uttered some blasphemy, or some denial of his Deity. Listen and learn: —

19. *They said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?*

That is speaking against him, — to speak unbelievably, — to speak in a questioning way concerning his power. I am afraid that there are very few of us who can plead innocence on this score.

20. *Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people?*

These things, which they lusted after, they also turned into subjects for unbelief; and they even misused the miracle, which they dared not deny.

21, 22. *Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israe;. Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation:*

This was the provoking sin. The Lord would not endure such wanton and wicked unbelief as this. After he had turned the rocks into rivers, could he not turn the stones into bread, and the dust of the desert into flesh, if he chose to do so?

23-32. *Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full. He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by his power he brought in the south wind. He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: and he let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations. So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire; they were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel. For all this they sinned still,*

Mercy failed to move them, and judgment failed too. The right hand of God's gifts and the left hand of his chastisement were equally ignored.

32-34. *And believed not for his wondrous works. Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and enquired early after God.*

Perhaps some of them fought him even while they were dying; and the remnant that survived trembled, and "returned and enquired early after God."

35, 36. *And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.*

Oh, this is terrible! One would have thought that they would have been sincere when they were broken down with sorrow, but it was not so. And I fear that the kind of religion which has to be

whipped into us is never good for much. It must have in it the element of spontaneousness if it is to be sincere; it was not so with these people.

37-41. *For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again. How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.*

In their unbelieving imagination, they circumscribed his power; they thought that he could do something, but not everything; they believed him one day, and doubted him the next.

42-45. *They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy. How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan: and had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them.*

All these judgments fell upon their enemies, but they failed to remember them,

46-56. *He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts. He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them. He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; and smote all the firstborn in Egypt, the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham: but made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, even to this mountain, which his right hand had purchased. He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in*

their tents. Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies:

Oh, these terrible “yets”! Though God was faithful to the end, and kept his covenant, and brought them into the land which he swore to their fathers that he would give them. Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies.”

57-61. *But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images.*

When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 78:10-61; AND 1 PETER 4:1-13.

PSALM 80

1-3. *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

To whom could Israel go, in times of distress, but unto her God? It was well that her psalmists should teach her thus to pray. Notice the form of this prayer: “Come and save us. Turn us again, O God.” We cannot be saved except by being turned from the ways of sin into the path of holiness.

But who shall turn us? What power can reverse the current of the human soul? As well might Niagara begin to ascend of its own accord as for man to turn to God except as God turns him.

4-7. *O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure. Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves. Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

Israel was evidently in very deep distress, yet still God’s own. It is no evidence of our having ceased to be God’s people that we are

made to drink deep draughts of tears. We are not to imagine that God has cast us off because he chastens us; nay, rather are we to argue the other way, “for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.”

8-15. *Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river. Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it. Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself.*

Notice how a soul, in deep distress, usually gets to God. Under some aspect or other, by some way or another, the heart gropes its way till it finds him out. If poor Israel be as a vineyard given up to the wild boar of the wood, there is still hope through that “righteous Branch” of whom the Lord said to Jeremiah, “In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely.”

16, 17. *It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.*

“If thou wilt not hear us, yet hear him. If thou wilt put no honour upon us, we will ask thee to put the highest honours upon him. Save us for his sake. Deliver thy vineyard from the wild boar and restore the hedges that have been broken down, for is not this the vineyard of red wine which all belongs to him?”

18, 19. *So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 80; AND MATTHEW 9:36-38; AND 10.

PSALM 81

We have here an exhortation to praise God; and this is always in season. Perhaps we need more stirring up to praise than to prayer,

yet it ought to be as natural for us to praise God as it is for the birds to sing. Thus the Psalm begins, —

1. *Sing aloud unto God our strength:*

Yes, the strength which the Lord gives you should be spent in praising him. “Sing aloud.” Throw your whole soul into it. If the Lord makes you strong, then give your strength back to him in sacred song: “Sing aloud unto God our strength.”

1. *Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.*

Other gods, such as Moloch, and Ashtaroth, are worshipped with mournful cries and sorrowful lamentations, but the God of Jacob, the God that heareth prayer, the God of salvation, the God of the covenant, is to be worshipped with joy. He is the happy God, and he loves happy worshippers: “Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.” You do not need to be forced to praise him, but you will do it with alacrity and delight; the very sweetness of your song will consist in the cheerfulness of it:

“Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.”

2-4. *Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob.*

It is “a statute” that we should praise God; it is “a law” that we should make a joyful noise before him. Happy law, and happy men who are under such a law! Let us be quick to obey it, and let not the King’s statute be disregarded by any one of us.

5. *This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not.*

God understands his people’s language, and in very truth he understands everything; but here he uses a Hebraic to show that he did not care for the speech of the Egyptians: “I heard a language that I understood not.” This sentence is like that other expression, “I never knew you.” Of course, the Lord knows everyone as a matter of acquaintance, but not as a matter of affection. He cared not for the Egyptians; they were aliens to him; he went out against the land of Egypt. It was for Joseph, and for his own people who were under the leadership of Joseph in that heathen land, that he ordained this statute that they should praise the name of Jehovah.

6. *I removed his shoulder from the burden:*

Is not that true of many of you in a spiritual sense? Oh, what a burden of sin we used to carry! How have we got rid of it? Does not the Lord here remind us of how we lost that grievous load? “I removed his shoulder from the burden.”

6. *His hands were delivered from the pots.*

We used to be busy enough with the slave’s occupation of making bricks without straw. Hard was the task when we were under legal bondage, harder still the toil when under the bondage of our own sin, slaves of our own selves: who could ever have a more tyrant master than himself? But that is all over now, and the Lord can say, “I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.”

7. *Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee;*

What a gracious word is this! How it reminds us, in the most loving tones, of our obligations to the Lord!” Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee.”

7. *I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.*

A very humbling sentence this! God has often proved us, and he has often disproved us. When he has tried us, we have not endured the test as we ought to have done. We have murmured and complained, and the waters, which ought to have been waters of joy and of happy patience, have been waters of strife. “Selah “That is, “Pause,” screw up the harp-strings, lift up the heart. Such a Psalm as this is to be read by installments, with little halts on the road, for us to meditate and think upon the truth brought before us. We may well pause here when we hear the Lord reminding us of our faults and of his great mercy to us: “I delivered thee; I answered thee; I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.”

8. *Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me;*

What! Is there any question as to whether God’s people will hearken to him or not? Alas! sometimes our ears grow very heavy, we are so occupied with the cares of the world, so sleepy while passing over the Enchanted Ground, that we do not hear that dear voice to which we ought to give heed whenever it speaks: “Hear, O my people, O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me.”

9. *There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god.*

It is strange that we should ever wish to do so. Oh, that we might be wholly delivered from everything that looks like idolatry, and be enabled to cleave to the worship of the one living and true God with the serenity and certainty of faith!

10, 11. *I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.*

Oh, how plaintive is this lament! Is it not full of sorrow? “Israel would none of me.” Her own God, her own Friend, her own Benefactor, her own Husband has to cry, “Israel would none of me, — would not have my law, my promise, my guidance, myself, — Israel would none of me.”

12. *So I gave them up —*

Dreadful word! If God gives us up, even for a moment, there is no telling into what sin we may plunge; and if he were to give us up altogether, —ah, me! this were the most direful of sentences: “So I gave them up” —

12. *Unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.*

O God, save us from this awful state! This indeed is hell — to be given up of God. Pray, dear brothers and sisters, that such a terrible curse may never come upon you. Yet it is a most righteous punishment; if a man will not have God, and will give God up, what can be a more righteous retribution than that God should give him up? He does so at last with ungodly men, yet he does it very reluctantly, and he says, “How shall I give thee up?” May he never give up one of you!

13. *Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways:*

And can we not echo that lament, and say, “Oh, that we had hearkened unto God, and that we had walked in his ways”? What a happy life would the believer enjoy if he always had an ear for God’s commandments and a foot for his ways!” Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!”

14, 15. *I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD should have*

submitted themselves unto him; but their time should have endured for ever.

“Their time” — the time of his own people — “should have endured for ever.” They might have been always conquerors, always kings, always favored of God, always walking in the light, as God is in the light. So might it be with us if we would first hearken to God, and next, walk in his ways. The mark on the ear and the mark on the foot are two of the tokens of Christ’s sheep: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” May we all have both the ear-mark and the foot-mark!

16. *He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat:*

How sweet would gospel doctrine be if gospel precepts were observed!

When you do not enjoy the preaching of the Word, is it not because you are out of health, and your spiritual appetite is impaired: “He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat.” When the soul lives near to God, then the Word of the Lord is sweeter than honey and the honey-comb.

16. *And with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.*

You know what this “honey out of the rock” is. You have tasted it, and in days gone by you have feasted on it; perhaps you have not had much of it of late. If so, remember why this is. God will give his children bread, but he will not give them honey unless they live very near to him; you shall have the necessaries of life, but not luxuries. The high and heavenly joys of the divine life shall be denied to you if you work at a distance from your God; but if you keep close to him, you shall have the finest of the wheat, and you shall be satisfied with honey out of the rock. May the Lord bless the reading of his Word to us, and may he draw nearer to himself! Amen.

PSALM 81

1. *Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.*

In these days, the Psalm would have to be altered if they are to suit the dogmas of modern thought, for “the God of Jacob” is altogether rejected by those wondrous thinkers who think they know so much. The God of the New Testament, they say, is a very different Being from the God of the Old Testament. According to them, the Old Testament God is too stern; but the New Testament

God is far softer, quite effeminate, indeed, if they rightly describe him. But we do not hesitate to say, over and over again that the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob,-the immutable and unchangeable One,-the God of Sinai, is as much our God as the God of Calvary, so we delight “to make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.”

2-6. *Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob. This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not. I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.*

Child of God, have you forgotten the time of your deliverance? God has not; and here he reminds his people Israel of their deliverance out of Egypt. So he says concerning you, “I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.” Do you not remember the joy of that glad moment when the burden of sin was taken away from you, and the pots of your own self-salvation lay broken at your feet? Glory be to him who brought us out from that terrible house of bondage!

7. *Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.*

But how sadly did they stand the test! You and I, too, have not only received much mercy at the hand of God, but we also have had our testing-times. We can look back to the waters of strife with deep regret that there we failed so sadly.

8-10. *Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; there shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god. I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.*

What a wondering verse this is! We have been so accustomed to hear the expression, “I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt,” followed by the law; but here it is followed by a gracious encouragement to us to pray: “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” Whatever force the law derived from that preface, this

exhortation derives the same force, and no child of God ought to forget that. He who delivered you from the burden of sin bids you open your mouth wide, and he will fill it; and after your deliverance from guilt, do you not feel that you may well ask great things of such a gracious God?

11-15. *But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own heart lust: and they walked in their own counsels. Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued the enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever.*

Alas, poor Israel! Through what sufferings and captivities didst thou go because thou wouldst not trust in the Lord, and how often some of God's children have had to go through years of sorrow and spiritual captivity because of their lack of close walking with their God, and complete obedience to him! May we learn from the sins of others, and be helped to walk closely with our Master!

16. *He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.*

If the Word of God does not seem to feed us as once it did, it will surely be because we have not hearkened to our Lord, or walked in his ways. May he give us grace to render complete obedience to his holy will!

“So shall thy choicest gifts, O Lord,
Thy faithful people bless,

For them shall earth its stores afford and heaven in happiness.”

PSALM 83

This is a Psalm that is not often read, and very seldom expounded, I should think. According to the title, it is “A Song or Psalm of Asaph.” Asaph is one of a little group of poets who flourished side by side with David. This is a patriotic hymn. The nation was about to be attacked by many adversaries; so, like a true patriot, the poet desired that God would give the victory to his people, and deliver them. You may regard this Psalm as a prophecy, it reads like a prayer or wish of the writer, and no doubt it is so; but

it may also be read as a prophecy of what will happen to the enemies of God's people.

1, 2. *Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head.*

God's enemies are making a noise, and the psalmist's prayer is that the Lord himself will speak and answer them. God's voice made the heavens and the earth: "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." A single word from him will win the day. The poet's prayer is not, "Grant a leader bold and brave," but, "Lord, speak, speak!" "For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult." The enemies of Israel were the enemies of God. If they were our enemies only, we might keep silence; but as they are also the enemies of God, our loyalty to the Lord compels us to cry unto him to speak against them.

3. *They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones.*

Craft goes with power in plotting against God's people. The seed of the serpent are like him from whom they came, and of him it is said, "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made;" and the seed of the serpent are very full of crafty counsel and subtlety. This the psalmist mentions in his prayer, and then he looks to God to countermine their mines, to baffle their craft, and by his wisdom to save his people.

4. *They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.*

So terrible was the anger of these nations against God's people that nothing would content them but the destruction of Israel, the blotting out of its very name from the memory of men; and I am sure that, if the world could have its way, it would extinguish the Church of Christ. You notice, in these days of boasted liberality and pretended charity, that the charity is only for error; but for the old gospel there is no charity. The cry concerning it is, "Let it be cut to pieces; let it be destroyed. It is an old nuisance, put it out of the way." This is how the enemies of God would have it, "that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance."

5. *For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee:*

There were many nations of heathens, and they were agreed in nothing except in their hatred of Israel. There they were agreed, as Herod was the friend of Pilate while Christ was under examination, but not at any other time. The psalmist mentions ten different nations which had banded themselves together against God's chosen people Israel. Ten against one is long odds but then God was on the side of Israel. One man with God is in the majority, however many there may be on the other side, for God counts for more than all who can be against him.

6. *The tabernacles of Edom,*

These descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother, ought to have been the best friends of Israel, but they were the worst of their enemies. How often does it happen that kinship in blood makes no kinship in grace! "A man's foes shall be they of his own household."

6. *And the Ishmaelites;*

These again were near akin to the seed of Abraham and Isaac; but the Ishmaelites were always among the most bitter enemies of Israel.

6. *Of Moab,*

Moab was descended from a daughter of Lot.

6. *And the Hagarenes;*

Perhaps descended from Hagar by some other husband.

7. *Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek;*

All these were hereditary enemies of Israel, Amalek especially so, for God had determined that there should be war with Amalek throughout all generations.

7. *The Philistines —*

These were the old enemies of Israel. Remember how Samson fought with them, and what tugs of war David had with them.

7. *With the inhabitants of Tyre;*

What were they about in warring against God's people? They were merchants, shippers. Yes; but it sometimes happens that, when worldly craft is in danger, men of trade and commerce can be as bitter against true religion as anybody else.

8. *Assur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah.*

Here is a mention of the growing power of Assyria. What a host there was, what a band of enemies against God's people! Oh, dear friends, I trust that none of us will have our names written in this black list! Be not enemies of God and of his truth; for, if so, you will wage a losing battle. Let the tow fight with the flame, or the dust with the wind, they will speedily be overcome, and woe be unto the man who contends with his Maker! What can he do? Let us, brethren, be on God's side. God grant, of his grace, that we may never lift a hand against his cause!

Now comes the prayer or prophecy of the poet.

9, 10. *Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison: which perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth.*

In those great battles the enemies of the Lord and his people were utterly cut in pieces. Mighty men as they were, they left their corpses to manure the soil.

11. *Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna.*

These were four princes who were slain by Gideon and his allies; two of them bore the names of wolf and raven, — cruel names, and war is ever a cruel thing. But what had they done, these men of arms, these mighty warriors? The psalmist tells us: —

12. *Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession.*

They were not content with their own houses, they wanted God's houses; and there are some men who can never rest except when they are doing mischief to the cause and cross of Christ. Woe unto them, for the fate of Oreb and Zeeb shall be theirs in due time!

13. *O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind.*

Or rather, "Thou shalt make them a wheel," never still. The real translation, I think, would be, "Make them like those light dry flowers which are blown by the wind across the plains." Mr. Thomson, in his *Land and the Book*, speaks of the branches of the wild artichoke which form a sphere or globe a foot or more in diameter, and he says that he has seen thousands of them come wheeling along. Isaiah calls them, "a rolling thing before the whirlwind." A puff of wind would come and take them in one

direction, and then a contrary wind would drive them in quite another direction, they are so light, downy, gossamer-like, that they never can rest. Now this is just what happens to many men who set themselves against God and his grace. They are like rolling things never at rest, believing nothing, knowing nothing, hoping nothing, comforted by nothing, they are like a wheel. Oh, that we may never know by personal experience what this means, "Make them like a wheel, as the stubble before the wind"! You know how that is; the stubble is blown up, down, to the right, to the left, whichever way the wind blows. Are any of you like that tonight? Have you no stability? Have you no good hope for the future? When you think about death and eternity, are you like the stubble before the wind? If so, God have mercy upon you, and bring you to the only place where you can obtain salvation and stability!

14. *As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire;*

Travelers tell us that they have sometimes seen the sides of mountains all ablaze where the timber, growing old, and everything being dry in the heat of summer, a chance spark has set the whole on a flame. This is what God will do with his enemies. He will as certainly and as readily destroy them as the wood is burnt with fire, or the mountain's side is consumed by the raging flames. Who will stand against God then? Who will dare attempt it? Consider his great might, and flee from his wrath.

15. *So persecute them with thy tempest,*

Or, "Thou wilt so follow them up with thy tempest."

15, 16. *And make them afraid with thy storm. Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD.*

That is the prayer which we might pray tonight for all those who are denying the Godhead of Christ, and his great sacrifice of the Cross, and for all who reject the inspiration of Scripture and the blessed doctrines of grace. "O Lord, fill their faces with shame, that they may seek thy name!" Oh, that men did but know their own character! If they did but feel ashamed of their own sin, they might be led to seek the name of God.

17. *Let them be confounded and troubled for ever;*

Or rather, "They shall be confounded and troubled for ever." That is an awful passage, "Confounded and troubled for ever."

17, 18. *Yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: that men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth.*

You notice that, when I read the Scriptures, wherever I find the word LORD in capital letters, I read it as Jehovah, for so it should be. I wish that the translators of the Revised Version had had the courage of their convictions, and had so translated it, for we want that grand name back, Jah, Jehovah. Let me entreat you never to trifle as some do with that sacred word Hallelujah, or Hallelujah, praise to Jehovah.

PSALM 84

A Psalm for the sons of Korah. You remember how Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were destroyed because of their rebellion against the Lord, and their revolt against his chosen servant, Moses and Aaron, and you, no doubt, recollect how it is recorded that “the children of Korah died not.” Why they were spared, we cannot tell, except that it was an act of sovereign grace; and if so, I can understand why they were afterwards selected to be among the chief singers in the house of the Lord, for who can sing so sweetly to the God of grace as the men who have been saved by his sovereign, distinguishing grace This Psalm is “for (or, of) the sons of Korah.”

“Who can praise the blessed God,
Like a sinner saved by grace?
Angels cannot sing so loud,
Though they see him face to face;
Sinless angels ne’er can know
What a debt saved sinners owe.”

1. *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!*

The outer portions and the inner parts as well, — how lovely they all are!

To be among thy people, to have sweet fellowship with them, how delightful it is, “O Lord of hosts Thou dwellest in thy tabernacles, O Jehovah of hosts, like a king in the center of his army, and thy people encamp round about thee!

2. *My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD:*

Those children of God, who have been for even a little while exiled from the court of the Lord, prize them all the more when they get back to them.

2. *My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.*

There gets to be so deep a longing to appear once more in the house of the Lord that even this clay-cold flesh of ours, which with difficulty becomes warm towards good things, at last melts, and joins in the common cry of the believer's whole being: "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

3. *Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, —*

She is such a bold bird that she comes and picks up a crumb or two even in the courts of God's house; so, Lord, let me be one of thy sparrows today:

"Yea, the sparrow hath found an house," —

3. *And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God.*

God's house is dear to us for the benefit that it is to ourselves, but it is still dearer to us for our children's sake, as a nest where we may lay our young. What a double mercy it is when young people love to come with their parents to the house of God!

4. *Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.*

The psalmist felt that those who were always in the house of the Lord must always be full of music. I am afraid that it is not so in all cases, yet it should be so.

5. *Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.*

The man, who throws his whole heart and soul into his worship of the Lord, and his service for the Lord, is the man who gets the greatest blessing out of the holy exercises in which he takes part. Half-hearted worshippers are an insult to God, but blessed is the man whose strength is in the Lord of hosts, and whose heart is in his ways.

6. *Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.*

If they pass through valleys that are dreary and gloomy, they find them to be a benefit and a blessing, for they get refreshments on the road, and help to cheer other travelers also.

7, 8. *They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.*

David cannot go up with the multitude that keeps holy day; as, feeling like Jacob when he was all alone at the brook Jabbok, like him he wrestles with God for a blessing. You can hear him crying out in the wilderness: “O Jehovah God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob,” and he, who heard the prayer of lonely Jacob by the brook-side, hears the cry of David, and the cries of all his children who cannot join the great assembly of worshippers of God.

9. *Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.*

Jesus is the “shield” of his people, and he is “anointed” for his people and there is, in Jesus, so much of all that is good that, when the Father looks upon us in him, he can see goodness even in us poor sinners, for the goodness of Christ overflows to us, and is accounted ours.

10. *For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.*

Of course, the psalmist means that a day in God’s courts is better than a thousand spent anywhere else. See how he contrasts nearly three years with a single day, and he might have gone even further, and said, “Better be one day with God than a thousand years without him.” He gives us another contrast as he goes on to say: —

10-12. *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.*

May all of us know that blessedness, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

PSALM 84

May the Spirit of God bless to us every syllable of this familiar Psalm as we read it!

1, 2. *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.*

Perhaps the psalmist would never have said, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" if he had not been detained from them so long that he could truly say, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord." It is very sad, yet it is all too true, that we often need to be deprived of a mercy in order to be made to value it aright. Would it not be wiser, on our part, if we prized our privileges while they were yet spared to us? Still it is a good thing to have our love to the assemblies of God's house increased by temporary absence from them. See how fervent was the psalmist's desire. His longing turned even to fainting at the very thought that, perhaps, he would never go there again: "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord." And his very "flesh" also joined in the intense longing of his soul. You cannot often get your flesh to do anything that is good, or to desire anything that is right; yet, sometimes, even our very body seems to be so swayed by the Holy Spirit that it is compelled to go it the right way.

3. *Yea, the sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.*

The psalmist envies even the birds that twitter around the sanctuary, and wishes that he, too, had wings that he might fly to God's altar with them, and there take up his permanent abode.

4. *Blessed are they that dwell in thy house:*

The psalmist meant those priests who lived in the temple; and, in a spiritual sense, his words apply to those who dwell in God wherever they are, and who can truly sing, —

"Where'er we dwell, we dwell in thee,
Or on the land or on the sea."

"Blessed are they that dwell in thy house;" —

4. *They will be still praising thee. Selah.*

Constant communion leads to constant adoration.

5. *Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; —*

Who throws his whole soul into the worship; not such as come up to the house of God, and leave their hearts at home: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; —

5, 6. *In whose heart are the ways of them.* (Or, better, "are thy ways.") *Who passing through the valley of Baca* (or, "Weeping") *make it a well;*

Finding solace in their suffering, sanctification in their affliction.

6, 7. *The rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.*

Blessed are the pilgrims who are journeying to the upper Zion, the Jerusalem which is above, the mother of all the saints. The margin renders it, "They go from company to company;" or it may mean, "They go from strength of faith to greater strength," and so they pass on, — "Till each appears in heaven at length."

8. *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.*

"Thou art a prayer-hearing God. Didst thou not hear Jacob at the brook Jabbok? Then, O God of Jacob, give ear also to me! If I have not yet come to be like prevailing Israel, I am like wrestling Jacob; so, give ear to me, as thou didst to Jacob."

9. *Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.*

We hold up Christ before his Father, and say to him, —

"Him, and then the sinner see;
Look through Jesus' wounds on me."

10. *For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.*

He means, of course, better than a thousand spent anywhere else.

10. *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

"I had rather dust the mats in thy house than sit on Satan's throne; I had rather wash the feet of thy saints, or perform any menial duties for them, than rule over all the hosts in the realms of darkness."

11, 12. *For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.*

He will never walk uprightly unless he does trust in the Lord, neither will he receive the fullness of the blessing except as he learns to trust to the full, for the Master still saith, "According to thy faith, be it unto thee."

PSALM 84

1. *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts !*

“Though they are only tabernacles, temporary structures that are soon to be taken down, and carried away, they are very dear to us. Thy tabernacles are so lovely to us because thou dost meet us there.”

2. *My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.*

A little starving brings on an appetite for health-giving food, and a brief absence from the house of God, through sickness, or by reason of distance, makes a Christian sigh and cry for the dainties of the divine table. Even the heavy flesh, which is so slow to move, at last joins the heart in crying out for the living God.

3. *Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.*

He envies even the sparrows, which have no sort of bashfulness, but boldly enter God’s house, and find a house for themselves there. O Lord, make me like the sparrows, blessed in finding shelter in the courts of thy house ! As for the swallow, she makes God’s house a nest for herself, and a place where she may lay her young; and it is blessed when our children, as well as ourselves, love the house of God, — when they have been so nurtured and cherished that they are at home there. We may well envy the sparrows and the swallows when we and our families are unable to go up to the house of the Lord; and it is as sad for those who have to go up to a place where there is nothing good to be had, a place where the gospel is not preached, and so their souls are not fed.

4. *Blessed are they that dwell in thy house:*

The men who are always occupied in the Lord’s service, or those who are in God’s house even when they are in their own houses, — the men who are always at home with God, who feel that the canopy of heaven is the roof of God’s house in which they dwell, and who therefore never go away from God’s house, but always dwell there with him. “Bless’d are the souls that find a place Within the temple of thy grace.”

4. *They will be still praising thee. Selah.*

How can they do otherwise? When they are God's children, at home with their Heavenly Father, and behold his glory, what can they do but praise, and praise, and praise yet again ?

5. *Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.*

Or, as it might be rendered, "In whose heart are thy ways." The man whose strength is wholly derived from God, and who spends all his strength in God's service, — the man who has God's ways in his heart, and his heart in God's ways, must be blessed. This is the man to get the blessing that the Lord is waiting to give. Half-hearted worshippers do not even know what the blessing is like, but the whole-hearted not only taste of it but drink it down with delight.

6. *Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.*

They get a blessing on the road to God's house as well as a blessing in the house itself. It does their heart good even to be on the way to the assembly of God's people, and they sing, with good Dr. Watts, —

"How did my heart rejoice to hear
My friends devoutly say,
In Zion let us all appear,
And keep the solemn day !"

They also sing, with the same writer, —

"I love her gates, I love the road."

The very road to God's house has a blessing in it for those whose hearts are right with the God of the house.

7. *They go from strength to strength,*

They get stronger as they proceed on their happy, heavenward way. The men who love God, and who live with God, grow stronger and stronger ;

— not always in body, for the flesh may be growing weaker while "the inward man is renewed day by day." "They go from strength to strength," or, as it is in the margin, "They go from company to company," from the company of mourners to the company of hopers; from the company of hopers to the company of believers; from the company of the men and women of feeble faith to the company of those who rejoice in full assurance.

7. *Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.*

That is the glory of going to God's house, that we go there to appear before God, to spread our wants before him, to confess our sin to him, to sun our souls in the light of his countenance. It is little for us to appear before our fellow men, but to appear before God is a blessed prelude to that day "when he shall appear," and "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

8. *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.*

O God of wrestling Jacob, hear my prayer! O God, thou who didst make such a gracious covenant with Jacob, be a covenant God to me !

9. *Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.*

Look upon the face of Christ, O God, for he is "thine Anointed" !

"Him, and then the sinner see;
Look through Jesus' wounds on me."

10. *For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.*

That is, better than a thousand days spent anywhere else. Feasting and rioting with the ungodly are not worthy to be compared with feasting and praising in the courts of God's house.

10. *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

I hope many of us can say, again with Dr. Watts,-
Might I enjoy the meanest place
Within thy house, O God of grace !
Not tents of ease, nor thrones of power,
Should tempt my feet to leave thy door."

11, 12. *For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory : no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.*

Let us share that blessedness, dear friends, and be as happy as we can by trusting in the Lord of hosts as he deserves to be trusted.

PSALM 84

To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm for the sons of Korah. It is thought, by some interpreters, that Gittith signifies the

winepress. They must have been a very godly people who sang such songs as this in the time of the treading out of the grapes. Oh, that the day were come when the common places of our ordinary industries should be sanctified by psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs! Alas, at the winepress, men too often sing loose and lascivious songs; but these ancient people of God did not so. This Psalm is a song to the chief musician, and it is mainly concerning the house of God and the pilgrimage to it. Every sacred song should be sung at its best, we should call out the chief musician in every hymn that is dedicated to the service of the Lord.

“To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.” I have often reminded you that these sons of Korah owed their continued existence to an act of special sovereign grace. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and all their company, were swallowed up alive, they went down to the pit because of their rebellion; but in the Book of Numbers we read, “Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not.” Why they were spared, we cannot tell; but, ever after, they were made to be the singers of the sanctuary. They who are saved by sovereign grace are the most fit to praise the name of the Lord. The sons of Korah also became door-keepers to the house of the Lord; and hence, probably, is the allusion to a doorkeeper which we find in this Psalm.

1. How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!

“How amiable “ — how lovely “are thy tabernacles!” The temple was not then built; the Lord’s house was as yet only a tent, so that it is not the glory of architecture that makes the house to be lovely, the glory of it is the indwelling God. “How amiable are thy tabernacles!” That is to say, every part of it is lovely. The outer court, the inner court, the Holy of Holies, all the different parts in that ancient sacred shrine were lovely to the psalmist’s eye. He does not tell us how lovely they were; he leaves off with a note of exclamation, as if he could not measure with his golden rod this city of the great King. “‘How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Jehovah of hosts,’ —lovely because they are thine! They are our tabernacles if we gather in them; but they are thine because thou art there, and therefore are they most lovely to our eyes.”

2. My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.

His soul longed until, as it were, it grew pale, — for so the Hebrew may be rendered, — it grew white with faintness in the intensity of his desire to get up to the courts where God was to be found. God is a King, his ancient tabernacle was one of his royal palaces, so David longed to be a courtier there, that he might dwell in the courts of Jehovah. When he says that his flesh cried out for the living God, he does not mean flesh in the sense in which Paul uses the term, for in that flesh there dwelleth no good thing; but the psalmist means to express here the whole of his nature, “My soul, my heart, and my flesh.” The combination of his entire manhood, spirit, soul, and body, was moved with such intense agony of desire that it must express itself, and it could only express itself in a cry: “My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” If it be so with you, my brethren, at this time, you shall have a feast of fat things. He who cometh to God’s table with a good appetite shall never go away unsatisfied. It is want of desire which often hinders us from spiritual delight; but when the desire is set upon God, it shall be satisfied. I fear that we often come to the wells of salvation, and yet get nothing, because merely coming to the wells is nothing. We read in Isaiah, “With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” It is not the wells, but the water out of them, which will refresh the weary one. Do not be content with being here, in your pew, in the midst of this great congregation; but long after the living God himself, for he alone can refresh and revive your soul and spirit. Say, with David, “My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.”

3. *Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.*

These little birds, so insignificant in themselves, were full of holy courage, and with sweet familiarity they came even into the sacred place. They hung upon the caves of God’s house, they even dared to make their nests there.

“O make me like the sparrows blest,
To dwell but where I love!”

O my Lord, give me the privilege of the swallow; not only to dwell with thee, but to see my young ones, too, all round thine altars, that I may find with thee, my God., a nest where I may lay my young! Is not this your desire, my brother, my sister, to have

God for yourself, and God for your boys, and God for your girls, — to be yourself God’s servant, and to have all your children his children, too? If so, God grant you the desire of your heart! How sweetly does David address the Lord: “O Jehovah of hosts, my King, and my God!” The people of God are very fond of my’s, they love possessive pronouns: “my King, and my God.” God is good, but what is another man’s God to me if he be not mine? I must have him for my King, and my God, or else I shall not really long for him, or cry out after him, or delight in him.

4. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee.

The nearer to God you are in your life, the sweeter and more constant will be your song to him. They who dwell with God dwell where there must be singing.

“Where God doth dwell, sure heaven is there,
And singing there must be:
Since, Lord, thy presence makes my heaven,
Whom should I sing but thee?”

Blessed are they who always dwell where thou dwellest, O my God! “They will be still praising thee.”

4. Selah.

Screw up the harp strings, set the music to a higher key; lift up the heart also, let the soul rise to something sweeter still in praise of Jehovah.

5. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways —

Or,” Thy ways.” It is not every man who is in God’s house who is blessed; the blessed man is the one who has brought his heart with him. It is not every man who is in God’s ways who is blessed; but the man whose strength is in those ways, who throws his whole heart and soul into the worship. Half-hearted worship is dreary work, it is like a blind horse going round in a mill; but when the heart is in the service, we feel then as if we could dance for joy in the presence of the Lord our God: “Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are thy ways.”

6, 7. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

We do not know at this date what that valley of Baca was, for the land has been to so large an extent destroyed. This ancient song retains the name of the valley of Baca, but it does not explain to us where or what the place was. Peradventure, it was a dry and thirsty valley in which, in order to pass through it at all, the pilgrims digged wells that there might be refreshment for their journey. There are many such valleys on the road to heaven, —dark and lonesome, dry and barren, — but God’s people learn to dig wells there. Only mark that, though we dig the wells, the water to fill them does not rise up from the bottom, it falls down from above: “The rain also filleth the pools.” In the kingdom of heaven, there are some analogies with the kingdom of nature; but there are a great many heavenly things that have no earthly analogy at all, and you cannot with any accuracy argue from natural laws into the spiritual world. For instance, we have “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast,” and we throw that anchor up: “which entereth into that within the vail.” Whereas earthly mariners drop their anchors down into the sea, we fling ours up into heaven. That is odd, but it is true; so, we dig a well, but it does not get filled from the bottom: “The rain also filleth the pools.” This is a new kind of well, and it teaches us that we must use the means, but that everything depends upon God. We have not to depend upon the means, but upon the God of the means: “The rain also filleth the pools.” See, further, brethren, what the way to heaven is; it is a growing way, an increasing way: “They go from strength to strength.” Those who begin in their own strength go from weakness to weakness; but (hose who know their own weakness, and trust in the Almighty God, shall go from strength to strength. In the natural world, as we grow older, we get weaker; but in the moral and spiritual world, when it is as it should be, the older we grow, the stronger we become in God and in the power of his might. What a mercy it is to be on the road to heaven, which is a road ever upwards! From step to step, from hill to hill, from mount to mount, they climb who shall ultimately end their pilgrimage in the King’s palace above: “Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.”

8, 9. *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah. Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.*

See what a rise there is in the music here, from “Hear my prayer,” to “Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of

thine anointed.” “When thou canst not look on me, look on thine Anointed.”

“Him, and then the sinner see,
Look through Jesus’ wounds on me.”

When God looks at us, he may well be angry; but when he looks upon Christ, he must be glad and full of love.

10. *For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.*

That is, better than a thousand spent anywhere else. You see, we have not yet come to the country where we can keep at God’s public worship all the year together, we have to get it a day at a time. Have you not often wished that there were seven Sundays in the week? I am sure that you have when God has fed your souls, and made your spirits merry in the house of prayer.

Then have you sighed for the land —

“Where congregations ne’er break up,
And Sabbaths have no end.”

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall come there by-and-by; but, at present, you must be satisfied with a day at a time in the courts of the Lord, yet the Lord can crowd mercies into one day with such a marvellous compression of grace that we shall seem to get three years’ food in a single day. The Lord make this day to be a sort of millennial day “A day in thy courts is better than a thousand” spent anywhere else.

10. *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

As I said before, the sons of Korah were door-keepers to the house of the Lord, and this Psalm is for them. You know that our poor door-keepers generally have many to find fault with them, somebody or other is sure to feel disobliged; door-keeping is no very remunerative work, no very easy and pleasing task; “yet,” says David, King David himself, — “I would take off my crown of gold, and turn pew-opener; I would wish to be even a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, so long as I might but be with my God; and that position would be far better than feasting and rioting in royal pavilions with the wicked.”

11. *For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.*

Take notice of the whole of that last sentence; do not go and quote half of it, and say, "God has promised that he will withhold no good thing." It is only promised to "them that walk uprightly"; and if you walk crookedly, the promise does not belong to you. It is upright walking that brings downright blessing. You shall lack no good thing from God, when your whole heart is made good towards God.

12. *O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.*

May all of us know this blessedness! Amen.

PSALM 85

1, 2. *LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.*

Let us think of what God has done for his people. He has been very favorable to us in years past. He has lifted up the light of his countenance upon his chosen ones, and made them glad. "Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob." We were in captivity once, exiles far off from God and home; but he has led our captivity captive, and we are now in bondage no longer, blessed be his name! Note again what the psalmist says: "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people." What a joy that is! Forgiven sin is enough to make us sing to all eternity. If sin be pardoned, thou hast a mass of mercy in that fact too great for thee to estimate its value. "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people." See how the inspired writer puts it again: "Thou hast covered all their sin,-hidden it, put it out of sight with that divine covering of the atonement, which has hid for ever, even from the eyes of God, the sin of his people. There is a happy memory for us,-to see what God has done for us. Let us bless his name for it. Now comes another happy memory.

3. *Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger.*

"Thou didst stay thy bow even after it was bent. Even when thy right arm was bared for war, thou didst make peace for us. 'Thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger.' When it burned like fire, yet didst thou stay it through the great atonement of Jesus "Christ our Lord." Now comes in a prayer;

4. *Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.*

“Thou hast done all this for thy people; now do this for us who fear lest we are not thy people,-comfort us. Turn us, and then take thine anger from our conscience, and let us be at peace with thee.” How I wish that many in this Tabernacle would pray even now, “Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease!” It is the prayer of a church that is under a cloud; it is the prayer of a nation that is suffering for its sin; it is the prayer of a sinner who sees what God has done for his people, and who entreats the Lord to do the same for him.

5. *Wilt thou be angry with us for ever?*

“Surely we have not got into eternity yet. Lord, do not have eternal anger toward us. ‘Wilt thou be angry with us for ever?’ Wilt thou not hear our prayers? Wilt thou not have mercy upon us?”

5. *Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?*

“Shall our children also suffer? Wilt thou not have pity upon them?”

6, 7. *Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation.*

“We are such poor blind creatures that we cannot see; yet, O Lord, show us thy mercy, make us see it, reveal it to us; and grant us thy salvation? It must be a free grant, a grant of grace, a grant of love, therefore, grant us thy salvation.” Listen to this eighth verse.

8. *I will hear what God the LORD will speak:*

“I will be silent. I have spoken to him; now I will hear what his answer is. I will hold my ear attentive to listen to his voice.” O my dear hearers, when you are willing to hear God, there are good times coming to you!

8. *For he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints:*

There is peace, peace, nothing else but peace for them.

8. *But let them not turn again to folly.*

For if they do, the Lord will speak to them by rods and chastisements. They that get God’s peace must mind that they keep it. They must walk carefully, or else they will break the peace, and they may themselves get broken in pieces. “Let them not turn again to folly.”

9. *Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him;*

When you honour him, reverence him, worship him, his salvation cannot be far away from you.

9, 10. *That glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together;*

At the cross is their meeting-place. There, you shall see God's mercy and God's truth embracing each other over the great sacrifice of Christ. Mercy and truth seem set at variance in the sinner's case till they are reconciled by the blood of Jesus.

10. *Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*

It seemed impossible that God should be righteous and yet be at peace with sinners; but Christ has taken both parties by the hand, and at Calvary they kiss each other. God is as righteous as if he were not gracious, and as gracious as if he were not just. Yea, his justice and his peace are each of them all the brighter because of the other.

11. *Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven.*

Carpeted with truth, and canopied with righteousness; what a wonderful scene is before us! Truth is coming out of the ground, as though it had been a dead thing, which begins to live, and leaves its tomb; and righteousness is throwing up the windows of heaven, and leaning out to look down upon the sons of men. "Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven." What a wonderful meeting this is of truth and righteousness, - truth lifting up her hand to heaven, and righteousness putting down its hand to earth!

12. *Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase.*

It is all well when it is well with us in our relation to God. When we are reconciled to him, then all things are reconciled by that fact.

13. *Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps.*

Lord, hear the prayer of this Psalm, and answer it to us, for Jesus sake!

Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43:22-28, 44:1-8; AND PSALM

PSALM 85

In my brief comments upon this Psalm, I shall not feel bound to keep to the immediate occasion for which it was written, but shall seek to find a use for it in the present circumstances of God's saints.

1. *Lord, thou hast been favourable unto the land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob.*

Whenever you are in a low state of mind or heart, remember God's past lovingkindnesses. Recall the record of what he has done for his people in ages long gone by, for he is the same God for ever and ever, and, therefore, what he has done in the past, he will do in the future. As the wise man said, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the Sun." It is certainly so concerning God's dealings "Lord thou hast been favorable unto thy land," even when it was stoned with 'sin' "thou hast brought Back the captivity of Jacob." even when that captivity was brought upon the people by their own fault. Lord, bring back my captivity! Be favourable unto me; Deliver me from my spiritual declensions, and give me back my joy and peace:

2. *Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.*

What a sweet subject for our meditation we found, last Lord's-day morning, in those words of the psalmist, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities"! Now, if God has indeed blotted out the sin of his people, at a plea this is to use with him for all that we still need from him! Will he pardon us, and yet leave us to perish? Will he pay such a ransom price as the blood of his well-beloved Son to set us free from the bondage of sin, and then will he not help us even to the end? Will he not lift up our heavy heart, and revive our drooping spirit? Ah! that he will if we know how to plead his former mercy, and to urge upon him that, because he has forgiven our iniquity, and covered all our sin, he should now heal our diseases, redeem our life from destruction, and crown us with loving-kindness and tender mercies.

3, 4. *Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger. Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.*

“Let us have a special application of the general mercy. Thy wrath to thy children has passed away; so let us no longer sit down, and cower beneath it, fearful of its terrors. Lord, bring us back to thee! Our heart desires conversion, but thou alone canst give it to us to the full. Turn us, O God of our salvation, and we shall be turned.”

6. *Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?*

“Thou mightest well do so if thou wert dealing with us only according to the strict requirements of thy righteous law; but we are thy children, Lord; and is a father always angry with his children? Thou hast forgiven us our iniquity; and, therefore, the great cause of thy wrath against us is gone. Now, O Lord, reveal thy love to us! Let us not any longer be under the sense of our guilt, or feel the absence of the joy and peace which thou givest unto those whom thou forgivest.”

6. *Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?*

“We have got down very low, great God. We have been, these last six days, mixing with the world, and perhaps we have forgotten thee. Come to us, we pray thee. Give us fresh life; ‘revive us again.’ Many a time hast thou, spiritually, raised us up as from the grave’s mouth; wilt thou not do it again? All that thou hast done for us in the past will be lost if thou dost not continue thy mercy to us. ‘Wilt thou not revive us again?’ Thou lovest to see us happy, and thou art thyself the happy God; oh, make us happy, too,

by reviving us, ‘that thy people may rejoice in thee!’”

7. *Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation.*

So far, the Psalm is a prayer. Now the psalmist seems to stop, and wait for the answer to his supplication. Beloved, always do that when you pray. When you have spoken to God, wait for him to speak to you. Do not let it appear that your prayer needs no answer; but really expect a reply to it, and then, in patience and in silence, wait for it.

8. *I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.*

For, if they do, their darkness will return, and they will again have to mourn their Lord’s absence. Peradventure, the rod will fall

more heavily upon them, and their souls will sink into a deeper despondency. For a Christian to be a fool once, is a sad thing; but for him to turn again to folly, is a multiplied form of iniquity which God will surely punish.

9. *Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land.*

O beloved brethren and sisters, lay hold on that salvation which is nigh unto you, and exalt in it; and, even now, let your spirits feel the glow of his glory shining in your soul!

10. *Mercy and truth are met together;*

But only at one place,—the cross of Calvary, where Jesus died; there, “mercy and truth are met together;”

10. *Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*

Through Christ’s death, sin has been punished, sinners are saved, God’s law is vindicated, and the depths of his mercy are displayed: “Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

11. *Truth shall spring out of the earth;—*

Promises, which lay hidden in God’s Word, like seeds buried in the earth, shall spring up before our eyes, like flowers carpeting the earth with beauty: “Truth shall spring out of the earth;”—

11. *And righteousness shall look down from heaven.*

As if so pleased with the state of things brought about by the atoning sacrifice of Christ that it flung up the windows of heaven to look down and see this great sight: “Righteousness shall look down from heaven.”

12, 13. *Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps.*

May God thus revive us, by his Holy Spirit, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

PSALM 88

A Song or Psalm for the sons of Korah, to the chief Musician upon Mahaloth Leannoth, Maschil of Heman the Ezrahite. I think that this is the darkest of all the Psalms; it has hardly a spot of light in it. The only bright words that I know of are in the first verse the rest of the Psalm is very dark, and very dreary. Why, then, am I

going to read it? Because, it may be, there is some poor heart here that is very heavy; you cannot tell out of this great crowd how many sorrowing and burdened spirits there may be amongst us; but there may be a dozen or two of persons who are driven almost to despair. My dear friend, if this is your case, I want you to know that somebody else has been just where you are. Remember how the shipwrecked man upon the lonely island all of a sudden came upon the footprints of another human being; so here, on the lone island of despondency, you shall be able to trace the footprints of another who has been there before you. Hear how he prays

1. *O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee:*

It was only a cry, a cry as of an animal in pain, or at best the cry as of a child that has lost its mother: "I have cried day and night before thee."

2. *Let my prayer come before thee:*

"Give me an audience, O Lord. Do not shut the door in my face. My prayer has been knocking, knocking, knocking, at thy gate; open to it. 'Let my prayer come before thee.'"

2. *Incline thine ear unto my cry;*

"Stoop down to me out of heaven, O Lord. Bow that ear of thine to hear even my feeble and unworthy cry. I know that I do not deserve it. I know that it will be a great act of condescension on thy part; but do 'incline thine ear unto my cry.'"

3. *For my soul is full of troubles:*

"Full of troubles, brimming over with grief, and every drop of it is as bitter as gall."

3, 4. *And my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down into the pit:*

"They put me down as a dead man. They that see the lines of fierce despair upon my face reckon that I cannot live long: 'I am counted with them that go down into the pit.'" These were his pleas in crying unto God,-

Distresses round me thicken,
My life draws nigh the grave;
Descend, O Lord, to quicken,
Descend, my soul to save!"

4. *I am as a man that hath no strength:*

Here is one, in the time of manhood when he should be strongest, who yet says, "I am as a man that hath no strength." This subject may not interest some of you, just now; but it is here, so we must mention it; and it may be wanted even by you one of these days. Bright eyes are not always bright, and the earthly joy that leaps and dances does not abide for ever. The dry may come when you will turn to this Psalm with the two eights to it, and find comfort in it because it describes your case also.

5. *Free among the dead,-*

A freeman of the sepulcher, at home at death's dark door: "Free among the dead,"

5. *Like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand.*

This is perhaps the most awful depth of the whole Psalm. The writer bemoaned that he was not remembered even by God any more, and that he was cut off from God's hand at least, so he thought.

6, 7. *Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah,*

Very properly here comes a "Selah." Such a strain upon the harp-strings had put them all out of tune; so the players had notice to retune their harps, and the singers were bidden to lift up the strain of their song. It seems to me as if the writer here lifted his head above the waves of the tempestuous sea, and still kept on swimming.

8. *Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.*

This is the utterance of a soul imprisoned in solitary confinement, nobody able to come to it to breathe out consolation: "Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me. They cannot come to me, and I am shut up, and I cannot come forth to them."

9. *Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.*

Now hear how the psalmist pleads with the Lord. Prayer is always best when it rises to pleading. The man who understands the sacred art of prayer becomes a special pleader with God.

10. *Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah.*

“Shall the dead arise, and praise thee?” Not in this life, though the godly will praise the Lord in the world to come. But now, when a Christian man dies, God loses a chorister from the choirs of earth, there is one the less to sing his praises here; and the psalmist therefore pleads: “Lord, if I live, thou canst show thy wonders to me; but wilt thou show thy wonders to the dead? If I am alive, I can praise thee; but shall the dead arise, and praise thee?”

11, 12. *Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shalt thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?*

He pleads that, if he dies, he shall not be able to tell out the mercy of the Lord. God will lose a singer from his earthly choir, a witness from his earthly courts, a testifier of his lovingkindness, and faithfulness, and righteousness.

13. *But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer repent thee.*

“I will be up betimes, before thou comest to me. I will be first to approach thee. I will salute the rising sun with my rising prayer.”

14. *LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?*

Note again the earnestness of the psalmist’s pleadings. We have had many of them already; each verse has, I think, had at least two pleadings in it. If thou wouldst be heard with God, take care that thou dost reason with him, and press thine arguments with the Most High. He delights in this exercise of persevering supplication which will take no denial.

15-18. *I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.*

There the Psalm ends. It is a sorrowful wail, and it comes to a close when you do not expect it to finish. It really has no finish to it, as when men wind up their songs with proper finales; but it is broken off, like a lily snapped at the stalk. I have read you this eighty-eighth Psalm as an example of persevering prayer. The man

who wrote it—"Heman the Ezrahite"—kept on praying even when he did not seem to be heard, and thus he is a pattern to us. Yet notice how the next Psalm begins: "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord." It is not always the sorrowful sackbut that is to be in our hand; we can play the joyous harp as well. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever." "I will never leave off praising him." "With my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations."

PSALM 89

1, 2. *I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.*

Here is an eternal song concerning eternal mercy. The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, so the saints' praise for the never-ending mercy must itself be without end. The psalmist has made known God's faithfulness to all generations, not only by speaking of it, but especially by writing of it, for that which is written abides when that which is merely spoken is soon forgotten. God's faithfulness concerns heaven as well as earth, and he will establish it "in the very heavens."

3, 4. *I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah.*

The complete fulfillment of this glorious covenant promise concerns, not only David and his seed, but "great David's greater Son" and his spiritual seed, the chosen people with whom the Lord has made "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure."

5-7. *And the heavens shall praise thy wonders O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints. For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.*

A holy reverence is becoming in all who draw near to the thrice-holy Jehovah, whether in the upper sanctuary or in the congregation of the saints on earth. In his gracious condescension, he allows his people wondrous familiarity in their approaches to him, yet this

must never make them forget the infinite distance that separates the Creator from even the highest and holiest of his creatures.

8-10. *O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them. Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm.*

The ruling of the raging of the sea, the stilling of the stormy waves, and the breaking and scattering of the might of Egypt are used by the psalmist to illustrate the omnipotence of Jehovah, before which the mightiest monarchy on earth had no more power than if it had been a corpse.

11, 12. *The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fullness thereof, thou hast founded them. The north and the south thou hath created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.*

The psalmist rejoices in the Lord as the Creator and Possessor of the heavens above and the earth beneath. "All things were created by him, and for him."

13. *Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand.*

Amid all the varying expressions that the psalmist uses, he continues to admire and magnify God's majestic might. Whether for the defense of his people or the overthrow of his enemies, his arm is mighty, yea, more than that, for it is almighty. No human language can adequately describe that glorious hand which has only to be opened to satisfy the desire of every living thing.

14. *Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.*

What blessed heralds does the Lord employ! "Mercy and truth shall go before thy face." It is these gracious attributes, especially as they are displayed in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, that enable us even to welcome those sterner attributes, "justice and judgment," which are the habitation of God's throne.

15. *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound:*

There are many that hear it, but perhaps not one out of a thousand of them that really know it. The hearing of the joyful sound is not sufficient to make people blessed, though faith cometh

by hearing; it is the understanding of what is meant by the glad tidings, it is the reception of the gospel message which brings immediate and eternal blessedness.

15. *They shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.*

The practical effect of a saving knowledge of the gospel is a holy walk, a walk of communion with God. Dear friends, do you walk in that way? Do you know the joyful sound? Can you discern the difference between the true and the false gospel? Can you distinguish the contrast between the harmonies of the one and the discords of the other? Do you know the inner secret of the heavenly music? Has it ever vibrated in your own souls? Happy are ye if this be the case with you. The psalmist goes on to show how such people are blessed.

16. *In thy name shall they rejoice all the day:*

They shall not have mere passing fits of joy, but they shall be glad from morning to night.

16. *And in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.*

They shall mount to a higher platform of joy than that on which the men of the world are standing; they shall be lifted up in soul and spirit by the righteousness of God, especially as they see how that great attribute guarantees their eternal salvation.

17-19. *For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. For the Lord is our defense; and the Holy One of Israel is our king. Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people.*

This is the very marrow of the gospel; this is indeed “ the joyful sound “ which makes us truly blessed,-the feet that God did, of old, exalt “One chosen out of the people,” with whom he entered into an eternal covenant, pledging himself to bless us through him.

20. *I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him:*

David was the means of bringing great blessings to the people over whom he ruled. God blessed the whole nation through him, and the covenant made with David was virtually a covenant made with all the people of Israel. In like manner, the covenant made with “great David’s greater Son” is virtually made with all those for whom he stood as Surety and Representative. The essence of the

gospel lies in the covenant which God has made with his Son, Jesus Christ, on behalf of all his chosen people. Notice that God found David, and anointed him as king, even as he has taken the Lord Jesus, and anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows.

21. *With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him.*

The omnipotence of God is manifested in Christ, for he is “the power of God” as well as “the wisdom of God.”

22. *The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him.*

“The son of wickedness” did afflict David for a while, but afterwards he came to the throne, and ruled gloriously over God’s ancient people. So is it with our covenant Lord and King. The wicked cannot now exact upon him, nor afflict him; he sits upon the throne in glory far beyond their reach.

23. *And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him.*

Who can ever stand up in opposition to Christ? He is that stone of which he himself said, “Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

24. *But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted.*

God is ever with his Son, Jesus Christ, in the plenitude of his faithfulness and mercy, to make him a continual blessing to his people.

25. *I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers.*

Our King is a great King, and he rules over sea and land; there is no bound to his dominions, and there will be no end to his righteous rule.

26. *He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.*

All God’s children are a praying family, and his only-begotten and well-beloved Son sets a noble example in this respect as well as in everything else. He is still the great Intercessor before the throne of his Father.

27. *Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.*

Christ is indeed “higher than the kings of the earth,” for he is “King of kings and Lord of lords.” Do not your hearts rejoice as you think of this blessed King with whom God has entered into a covenant to bless all who are trusting in him, even the very poorest and feeblest of them? What a joy it is to us to see Jesus striking hands with the Eternal, and entering into an everlasting covenant on our behalf!

28, 29. *My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.*

There can never be an end to the throne of Christ, for his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; and there can never be an end to the family of Christ, for his seed shall endure for ever.

30-32. *If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then-*

“Then”-what? “I will destroy them, and sweep them away for ever”? Oh, no! “Then”-

32. *Will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.*

There is no sword in God’s hand to be used against his own children, but he does hold a rod, and that rod makes us smart, and causes the blueness of the wound which cleanseth away evil. We are grieved when we feel its strokes, yet there is covenant mercy in them. The rod of the covenant is one of the best things that ever comes to us, since it whips our folly out of us. God grant us grace to kiss the rod whenever we transgress against him, and he visits our iniquity with stripes!

33. *Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.*

Notice the use of the word “him” here, as if it was intended to teach us that God’s love to his dear Son, and to his people in him, is so great that though he may chasten us for our transgressions, he will never cast us away.

34-37. *My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie*

unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.

In the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the dynasty of David shall endure for ever, and the spiritual seed of Christ shall also never come to an end. By the most binding covenant, and the most solemn pledge, and the most saved oath, Jehovah has guaranteed the everlasting kingdom of his Son and the eternal endurance of “his seed.”

38-45. *But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed. Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. Thou hast broken down all his hedges; thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin. All that pass by the way spoil him: he is a reproach to his neighbours. Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries; thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice. Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword, and hast not made him to stand in the battle. Thou hast made his glory to cease, and cast his throne down to the ground. The days of his youth hast thou shortened: thou hath covered him with shame. Selah.*

Spiritually, this sad description reveals the sorrowful state of the professing church of Christ in the times in which we live.

46. *How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy wrath burn like fire?*

That was the wisest thing for the psalmist to do, and it is our best course also; in the darkest days of the most sinful age we can always resort to prayer, let us do so.

47, 48. *Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.*

The brevity of life makes it all the more important that we should waste none of it, and that we should appeal to the Lord to interpose, speedily on the behalf of the truth and those who love it.

49-52. *Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth? Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people; wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O*

LORD; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed. Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen and Amen.

The Psalm ends upon its keynote of praise unto Jehovah. There had been much to sadden the writer, as there is much to sadden us in these days; but we can unite with him in saying, "Blessed be the Lord for evermore. Amen and Amen."

PSALM 89:1-37

Psalm 89. Maschil of Ethan the Ezrahite. That is to say, an instructive Psalm, written by or for one Ethan, one of the great singers of David's day. He sings of the covenant, the covenant with David, ordered in all things and sure. There is no higher theme for song than the covenant of God's grace, one marvels that it has not oftener been sung by those who are the gifted children of poetry.

1. *I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever:*

Another subject might wear out, but this glorious topic will never be exhausted, Here is a theme which we can sing of in eternity as well as in time. Let others choose what subject they may, "I will sing of the mercies of Jehovah for ever."

1. *With my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations.*

God's faithfulness is the mercy of his mercy. It is the center-point of his goodness that his goodness endureth for ever. We are not only to sing; we are to teach. The Psalmist says, "With my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations." In telling his own experience, narrating what he had observed, as well as what he had proved of God's faithfulness to his promise and his covenant, he would do this so that following generations should know about it. We are the schoolmasters of the ages to come; I mean, saints who have experienced the mercy and the faithfulness of God. We ought to make known Jehovah's faithfulness to all generations that are yet to come.

2. *For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever:*

What a building, — Mercy! God's mercy is to be built up for ever.

2. *Thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.*

Like the great arch you see in the firmament on high, unbuttressed and unpillared, yet it stands fast. So shall God's

faithfulness be built up, settled, and established in the very heavens. And now God speaks: —

3. *I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant,*

Well might the psalmist say, in the second verse, “I have said,” when God in the third verse says, “I have sworn.” It is ours to say, it is God’s to say with such tremendous solemnity that doubt cannot be tolerated. “I have made a covenant with my chosen:” King David, who is, however, but the type of his greater Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the heir of the dynasty of David. With him is this covenant made for ever.

4. *Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah.*

Whatever may happen in the world, David’s Seed is always reigning; whatever kings may lose their crowns, King Jesus will never lose the many crowns that are on his head. God has sworn it: “Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations.” Then comes the word, “Selah.” Rest; meditate; and truly, here is enough to rest and meditate upon for many a day, if we went no farther into the Psalm.

5. *And the heavens shall praise thy wonder, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints.*

The psalmist meant to praise God at such a rate that the sun, and moon, and stars, should hear his song, while angels and the host redeemed by blood should learn to praise God better than ever. “Thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints:” one saint begins to sing of God’s faithfulness, and the others take it up, for God is not faithful to one only, but to all his people. This is a subject which, when once started, will produce an echo in every believer’s heart.

6, 7. *For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints,*

The holiest are always the most reverent. There is no fear of God in the assembly of the sinners; but he is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints.”

7. *And to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.*

The nearer they came to him, the more is their awe of him; the greater their love, the deeper is their humility. God will not have

those about him who are flippant and irreverent; he is “to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.”

8. *O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?*

Note how the psalmist harps upon that one string, — “faithfulness.” Ah, dear friends, there are times when this is the sweetest note in the whole scale! “Thy faithfulness”: we have a God who never forgets his promises, but keeps them to the moment; a God who never changes; a God who never turns away from his word. “Thy faithfulness.” Oh, what a blessed virtue is this in God! Let us praise him for it for ever. “Try faithfulness round about thee”: as if the Lord never went outside the ring of faithfulness, never did anything that broke his promises, or that made any of his children to doubt; and it is even so.

9. *Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.*

Are you now in a storm, my brother? My sister, are you now tempest-tossed? Listen to this word, and remember the Lord High Admiral of the fleet on the Lake of Galilee, and how, after he had been asleep for awhile, he arose, and rebuked the winds and the waves: “Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.”

10. *Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm.*

Rahab was Egypt. The word means “strong”, “mighty”, “proud”, all of which were the characteristics of Egypt, which God brake in pieces at the Red Sea. Pharaoh was the greatest of monarchs at the time, but, oh, how soon he had to yield when God’s right arm was bared for war!

11. *The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fullness thereof, thou hast founded them.*

Sometimes we are tempted to think that the earth cannot be God’s, all over the globe man is the master, he claims everything; if men could map out the heavens, we should have owners for every single twinkling star and, if they could have their way, we should have to buy our light by measure, and our sunshine by-weight. But “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof;” and the heavens also are his.

12. *The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon—*

East and West, as well as North and South, —

12. *Shall rejoice in thy name.*

There is not a place where God is not to be found. All the points of the compass are compassed by God. You cannot go where the Lord's love reigns not, nor where Providence will not follow you.

13-15. *Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand. Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face. Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound:*

There are some who hear it, and yet are not blessed. Blessed are they who "know" it, know its peculiar accent, know its inward power, know its omnipotence, know its unchangeableness, know it by having tried it and proved it, and rested in it: "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound."

15. *They shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.*

It is all the light they want. Let God but smile, it makes their day. If every candle were blown out, yet the favor of God would make life bright enough for them.

16. *In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.*

Even in God's righteousness. Until we know the Lord, we are afraid of his righteousness, but when we come to know him, his righteousness, which once frowned upon us, becomes our heaven. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." God is not unrighteous to cast away a soul that puts its trust in Christ. God is one with his people. When we rejoice all the day in his name, we are exalted in his righteousness.

17-19. *For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. For the LORD is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king. Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people.*

This is David first, but it is Christ high above David. One of ourselves, the carpenter's Son, yet has God made him to be the Head over all things for his Church: "I have exalted one chosen out of the people."

20, 21. *I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: with whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him.*

The full power of God is with Christ. That same arm, that bears the earth's huge pillars up, and spreads the heavens abroad, is engaged on behalf of the cause and kingdom of the Son of David.

22. *The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him,*

He had enough of that when he was upon the earth; but it is all over now. He has gone into his glory, and the enemy cannot touch him now.

23. *And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him,*

There is the portion of all haters of Christ. God will, somehow or other, in the order of his providence bring the evil home to them. If they will not have God's Son, they shall not have his mercy; they shall, sooner or later, be beaten down before his face.

24, 25. *But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers.*

He shall reign "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." We may go on to fight for him, for his triumph is sure.

26, 27. *He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.*

So he is. Firstborn among men, firstborn of kings, his throne is loftier than the most imperial power on the earth. Blessed be his name! Let us adore him tonight; and here, in the midst of his people, let us crown him Lord of all.

28-36. *My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing*

that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me.

The Son of David is still King in the midst of the true Israel. Still Jesus reigns; and on and on, for ever and for ever, great David's greater Son shall be King of kings, and Lord of lords.

37. *It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.*

Now let us read a passage from the New Testament, showing how the Lord Jesus dealt with the crowds that came to him.

This exposition consisted of readings from Psalm 89:1-37, And JOHN 6:22-40.

PSALM 89:1-37

1, 2. *I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.*

So far, the gracious man declares the resolution of his heart to praise his God for ever, and gives the reason for that resolve. Now he quotes the Lord's covenant with David —

3, 4. *I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah.*

That covenant, as you well know, was not only made with David, but it had a higher spiritual bearing, for it related to that great and glorious Son of David who still reigns, and shall reign for ever, and in whom every covenant blessing is secured.

5. *And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints.*

It is often very profitable, when we are enjoying fellowship with God, for us to speak to God, and then wait for God to speak to us. It is so here you see. First the psalmist says that he will praise God for ever, then God tells him of his covenant, and explains to him the reason why mercy shall be built up for ever, and then the man of God begins to praise God again. That will give you a hint for your own private devotion. Sometimes you feel that you cannot praise God, and cannot pray to him. Well, then, if you cannot speak to God, sit still, and let him speak to you. Read a portion of Scripture,

and then, perhaps, some suggestive verse or word in it will set you praying; and then, when you have prayed, stop a little while, and read again; and so a blessed conversation shall be carried on between you and your God. Thus the psalmist takes his turn again: “And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints.”

6, 7. *For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD? God is greatly to be feared —*

That is, revered, —

7-9. *In the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him. O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.*

He lets them arise, and he bids them sink down again. All the providential dealings of God seem to be illustrated in the ever-varying phenomena of the sea. The Lord sometimes lets tempests arise in our circumstances, and anon with a Word he stills them, and there is a great calm.

10. *Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces as one that is slain; —*

The great crocodile of Egypt; —

10-12. *Thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm. The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fullness thereof, thou hast founded them. The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.*

Oh, what a blessed spirit the spirit of true devotion is! There is such life in it that it seems to quicken all inanimate creation, and make the rocks and mountains to sing, and the trees of the wood to clap their hands, and the waves of the sea to praise the great Creator. So the whole world is like a great organ, and man, guided by God’s Spirit, puts his fingers on the keys, and wakes the whole to the thunder of adoration and praise. Oh to be taught of God to have a praiseful heart, for then all around us will be more likely also to praise Jehovah.

13, 14. *Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand. Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.*

There are wells of joy in this verse to those who know how to draw it up. It is a great delight to every man who is oppressed to know that justice and judgment stand, like armed sentinels, on either side of the throne of God and to every human soul, conscious of unworthiness, it is an unspeakable delight that mercy and truth, like royal heralds, go before God wherever he goes. It has been well said that a God all mercy would be a God unjust; but a God all justice without mercy would be terrible indeed.

15-21. *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. For the LORD is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king. Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: with whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him.*

David was a great blessing to the nation over which God made him king. Among the choicest gifts that God ever gives to men are men; and therefore we read, concerning Christ, “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men;” and those gifts were men, for “he gave some, apostles, and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” These were the choice ascension gifts of Christ. Yet, while these verses primarily refer to David the king of Israel, we must believe that a greater than David is here, even Christ, who deigns to call himself God’s servant, who has been anointed by the Spirit of God, with whom God’s hand is always established, and who is ever strengthened by the arm of Omnipotence.

22-25. *The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand also in the sea and his right hand in the rivers.*

Do not believe, dear friends, any of the prophecies that some men make concerning the destruction of the kingdom of Christ and the failure of his Church; but be certain that the Lord will not suffer Christ to fail or be discouraged, and rest assured that the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. The history of the Church of Christ is a history of conflict, but it shall be a history of victory before it is completed: "I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers."

26-34. *He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, or alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.*

If, then, you are in the covenant, you will have the rod; you may rest sure of that. If you do not walk in God's ways, but break his statutes, you will not be allowed to go unchastened. If a father saw some boys in the street breaking windows or otherwise misbehaving themselves, and he gave one of the boys a box on the ears, you may be pretty certain that the boy is his own son. And when God sees men doing wrong, he often permits the wicked to go unpunished in this life; but as for his own people, it is written, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Our heavenly Father's hand still holds the rod, and uses it when necessary; but it is in love that he corrects us. Let us, therefore, when he chastens us, plead the covenant that is here recorded, and say to him, "Thou hast said, 'Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.'"

35-37. *Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.*

PSALM 90

A Prayer of Moses the man of God. It may help us to understand this Psalm if we recollect the circumstances which surrounded Moses when he was in the desert. For forty years, he had to see a whole generation of people die in the wilderness. In addition to the deaths which might occur among those who were born in the wilderness, the whole of that great host which came out of Egypt, numbering, probably, between two and three millions of persons, must lie in their graves in the desert, so that there must have been constant funerals, and the march of the children of Israel could be perceived along the desert track by the graves which they left behind them. You do not wonder, therefore, at this expression of the awe of "Moses the man of God" as he was so continually reminded of the mortality of mankind, and you note how reverently and trustfully he turns to the ever-living and eternal God, and rests in him.

1. *LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.*

"Did not Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all our fathers dwell in thee?

And though we are now weary-footed pilgrims, who have no fixed dwelling place on earth, we do dwell in thee. Thou, Lord, art the true home of all the generations of thy people."

2. *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.*

God is the only being who has had eternal and essential existence independently of all others, and all others have owed their existence to him.

3. *Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.*

He sends us forth into life, and he calls us back again in death.

4. *For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.*

Yesterday, while it was with us, was a short period of four and twenty hours; but when it is past, it seems like nothing at all. A thousand years, all big with events which we consider to be full of weight and importance, make up a long period in which myriads of men come and go; yet these thousand years, in God's sight, "are but

as yesterday when it is past,” or but as the few hours in the night during which the mariner keeps watch at sea, and then is relieved by another. A thousand years are but “as a watch in the night” to the Eternal, and he needs no one to relieve him, for “he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”

5. *Thou carriest them away as with a flood;*
They have no power to stem the torrent.

5. *They are as a sleep:*

Our earthly existence is but “as a sleep.” Many things are not what they seem to us to be in our fevered dreams. The time of awaking is coming, and then things will appear very different to us from what they seem to be now.

5. *They are like grass which groweth up.*

Fresh, green, vigorous, lovely, restful to the eye.

6. *In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.*

It needs no long period, ages upon ages, to destroy its beauty; only let the swiftly-passing day come to its waning, and the grass “is cut down, and withereth.”

7. *For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.*

If we had to endure the flames of God’s anger, we should be consumed by it; but I think that Christians should not read this passage as though it applied to them. They are not under the divine anger, nor need they fear being troubled by the divine wrath, for his anger is turned away from them through the great atoning sacrifice of his Son Jesus Christ. But the children of Israel in the wilderness were being consumed by God’s anger, and by his wrath they were being troubled, so that the words of Moses did apply to them.

8, 9. *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.*

Like a romance, with which the Orientals still delight to beguile the passing hours. Such is the life of man: “as a tale that is told.”

10. *The days of our years are threescore years and ten; —*

This was a gloomy fact to Moses, who lived to be a hundred and twenty years of age, and who probably remembered other men who had been far older than himself. Yet it is well that the ordinary

period of human life has been shortened. It is still far too long for those who do evil, though it may not be too long for those who do good. Yet there are, even now, some who outlive their usefulness, and who might have been happier if they had finished their course sooner. "The days of our years are threescore years and ten;" —

10. *And if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow: for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

Whither do we fly? That is the all-important point. The cutting of the string that holds the bird by the foot is a blessing or a curse according to the way in which it takes its flight. If we fly up to build our nest on yonder trees of God that are full of sap, then, indeed, we do well when we fly away; and we may even long for the wings of a dove, that we may fly away, and be at rest.

11, 12. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

It has been well said that many men will number their cows, and number their coins, but forget to number their days. Yet that is a kind of arithmetic that would be exceedingly profitable to those who practiced it aright. Counting our days, and finding them but few, we should seek to use them discreetly, and we should not reckon that we could afford to lose so much as one of them. Who would be a spendthrift with so small a store as that which belongs to us?

13, 14. *Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

"If they are but few, yet let them be happy. Give us an abundance of thy mercy, O Lord, and let us have it at once, so that, however few our days may be, every one of them may be spent in the ways of wisdom, and, consequently, in the ways of peace and happiness."

15. *Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.*

"Balance our sorrows with an equal weight of joys. Give us grace equivalent to our griefs; and if thou hast given to us a bitter cup of woe, now let us drink from the golden chalice of thy love, and so let our fainting spirits be refreshed."

16. *Let thy work appear unto thy servants,*

May we have grace to devote ourselves entirely to God's service, and do the work which he has appointed us to do!

16. *And thy glory unto their children.*

If we may not live to see the success of our efforts, may our children see it! If the glory of that bright millennial age, which is certain to come in due time, shall not gladden our eyes before we fall asleep in Jesus, let us do the Lord's work so far as we can that our children may see his glory.

17. *And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us;*

Even if we die, let our work live. May there be something permanent remaining after we are gone; — not wood, hay, and stubble, which the fire will consume; but a building of gold, silver, and precious stones which will endure the fire that, sooner or later, will “try every man's work of what sort it is.”

17. *Yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*

PSALM 90

“A prayer of Moses, the man of God.” It is well to know the author, because it helps you to an understanding of the psalm. Remember that Moses lived in the midst of a pilgrim people who were dwelling in tents, journeying towards Canaan. He lived in the midst of a people doomed to die in the wilderness. Only two of them, Moses himself not one of them —only two of those that came out of Egypt were to be permitted to enter into the promised land. You may expect, therefore to find much that is somber about this psalm, and yet there is much that is very restful trustful, about it. If it is the prayer of Moses, it is the prayer of a man of God.

1. *LORD, thou has been our dwelling place in all generations.*

Thy chosen people have dwelt in thee. Thou art their rest, their refuge, their comfort, their home. It is just the same now as in the days of Moses.

God's people have no dwelling-place for their souls, but their God. They are happy when they get to him. In him they dwell at ease.

2. *Before the mountains were brought forth,*

Before they were born like infants, gigantic as they are.

2. Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Everything else changes. Thou dost not. We lose our comforts. We dwell, as it were, in tents which are taken down, and removed, but there is no change in thee. Beloved brethren, you know this truth, but do you enjoy it? I think there is no sweeter food for the soul than the doctrine of the immutability of the eternal existence of God — God that cannot die and cannot change — that is, and always is, God. Oh! he is our confidence and joy! As for men, what are they?

3. Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, return, ye children of men.

He has only to speak — no need to take the scythe and mow us down. He does but say, “Return, ye children of men,” and we go back to the dust.

4. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

A thousand years is a very long period in human history. If you fly back and try, in your knowledge of history, to recollect what the world was a thousand years ago, it seems, a long, long time ago; but to God, who ever liveth, all the age of the world must seem but as the twinkling of an eye. What are a thousand years to thee, thou glorious one, before whom the past is present, and the future is as now?

5. Thou carriest them away as with a flood;

Men stand, as they think, firmly; but as the best built buildings are swept away by a torrent trees, cattle, everything dispersed before the impetuous outburst — so, great God, dost thou carry men away as with a flood.

5, 6. They are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.

Have you ever watched a field of grass when in full bloom? There is, perhaps, no more beautiful sight. What variety of colors in the flowers, which are the glory of the grass! And then you come by, and the mower has done his work, and there it all lies. It has been withered by the sun’s heat. Just such are we. Our generations fall

before the scythe of death as falls the grass. And it is done at once. “In the morning it flourisheth: in the evening it is cut down.”

7. For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.

Whenever God’s anger does break forth against a people, it must consume them! Oh! what a blessing it is if you and I know that his anger is turned away, and he comforts us. Then we are not troubled by it any longer. Do not apply these words to yourselves. They belong to the Israelites in the wilderness, who were dying, consumed by God’s anger, and troubled by his wrath. But as for us who believe in Jesus Christ, we have love, instead of anger and the sure mercies of David, instead of wrath, and in this we may rejoice.

8. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

And what was the result of that but that they all had to die? Their carcasses fell in the wilderness. Oh! if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, this text is not true to you — does not belong to you. Here is another that belongs to you — “Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back “He has not set them in the light of his countenance, but he has cast them into the depths of the sea and you stand acquitted, justified, beloved. And yet there may be some here who feel their sins tonight, and know that God is looking at their sin. Do you know, dear friend, there is no hope for you but one, and that is written in the Book of Exodus: “When I see the blood, I will pass over you.” If you do but put your trust in the blood of Jesus Christ, God will turn away his eyes from your sins and look upon the blood of Jesus Christ. Yea, the blood of Jesus shall blot out your sins, and you shall rejoice.

9, 10. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten: and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

It is well to have such a sense of our mortality upon us as this psalm suggests, and yet it is better still to recollect that we are immortal — that, when we die after the flesh. we shall not die, but live in Christ, world without end. Life is cut off, and it is like a string that holds a bird by the leg: we fly away. Which way? If we

are God's own, we fly away above yon clouds. We reach the eternal fields where we shall sing for ever and ever.

11. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.*

Dread is God's anger, indeed. Who knows it? None of us do. The lost in hell begin to know it, but it will need eternity for them to learn it all. Oh! I charge everyone here who is unpardoned never to attempt to learn what God's anger means. It will be an awful lesson, the power of that anger!

Why, when it is let loose against a man, even in this life in a measure it crushes him. But what the power of that anger must be, who can tell?

12. *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

Count how many days have gone. Will not the time past suffice us to have wrought the will of the flesh? You cannot tell how few remain, but still, if you live to the longest period of life, taking that for granted which you may not take for granted, how little remains! Oh! that we might by the shortness of life, be led to apply our hearts unto wisdom, so as to live wisely. And what is the best way of living wisely, but to live in Christ, and live to God?

13. *Return, O LORD, how long?*

It is an earnest prayer, full of grief. The prophet of Israel, Moses, was attending one continual funeral. Whenever the tribes halted, they formed a cemetery, and buried another legion of their dead. I do not wonder that he prays, "Return, O Lord, how long?"

13, 14. *And let it repent thee concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy: that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

If they be but few, help us to live happily in them. Grant us the art of thy grace of knowing thyself, the source of happiness, that we may drink of bliss to the full.

15. *Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.*

Give us measure for measure — sweets in bounty, according to the bitterness. Surely God has done more than this to some of us. We can bless his name because his love has abounded, and he has made our cup to run over with his goodness.

16. *Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.*

We will do the work, and the next generation shall have the glory, We will be content to wait, plodding on. Jesus will come by and by. "Let thy work appear to us; thy glory to our children."

17. *And let the beauty of the LORD our god be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us:*

That, if we must go, we may do something that will live that we may not have lived in vain. "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us."

17. *Yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*

It is my daily prayer. My heart goes up to heaven often that the work that is done in this place may never pass away, but that God would make it such a work of true and real grace, that it may abide until the Lord himself shall come. We may expect it if we seek it at his hands. "Yea, the work of our hands, establish thou it."

PSALM 90

"A prayer of Moses, the man of God." I think this Psalm has been very much misunderstood, because the title has been forgotten. It is not a Psalm for us in its entirety: it cannot be read by the Christian man and taken as it stands. It is a Psalm of Moses as far as Moses can get. It goes a long way, but there was a Joshua that led the people into the promised land, and there is a Jesus who has "brought life and immortality to light by the gospel." That light shines through the gloomy haze of this dark Psalm. Please remember that Moses was a man peculiarly tried. We have never duly given weight to the afflictions of Moses. All the people that he brought out of Egypt, with two exceptions, died, and he saw most of them die: himself having the sentence of death in himself, that he, like the rest, must not cross into the Land of Promise; so that with two millions or more of people round about him, that forty years he stood in the valley of the shadow of death, and with all the mercies that surrounded him; yet, still, he must have had continual sorrow of heart, all his old friends and companions passing away one by one. It is a brave Psalm, if you read it in that light: it is a grand specimen of heroic faith.

1. *Lord, thou has been our dwelling place in all generations.*

All thy saints abide in thee. Thy fiery, cloudy pillar covers and protects us.

2. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Oh! that is grand to feel that there is something stable: there is a rock that never crumbles — god from everlasting to everlasting the same. As for us, what are we?

3. Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men.

A breath gave them life: a word makes them die.

4-6. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up, in the evening it is cut down and withereth.

We have seen this over and over again, as we shall see it yet again this year in the flourishing and the cutting down of the grass; but we forget it for ourselves. Too often we forget it for our companions: we think that they are immortal where all are mortal. Let us correct our estimate that we may somewhat correct our sorrows.

7. For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.

Which was true of that generation. They died because of God's anger; but we bless God: as many of us as have believed in Christ Jesus are not under the divine anger: it is taken away. When it does fall upon us it is as a father is angry with his children it troubles and consumes us; but, blessed be God we usually walk in the light of his countenance, and joy, and rejoice therein. Let us value his mercy as we see the misery of his wrath.

8. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

That is true of you that know not God. Your sins are always before his face, but it is not true of believers. Thou hast cast all their sins behind thy back. God has forgotten the sins of his chosen, according to his own promise, "Their sins and their iniquities will I

remember no more for ever.” O blessed gospel, Moses cannot reach to that.

9. *For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.*

“For all our days are passed away in thy wrath.” So it was with those that were round about Moses; but our days are passed in God’s goodness: they shall pass away in infinite love, “We spend our years as a tale that is told.”

10. *The days of our years are three-score years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

Speaking of the mass of men, this is all that can be said of them; but as for the godly, where do they fly? They fly into his bosom who has loved them with an everlasting love. What is death but an open cage to bid us fly and build our happy nests on high? Blessed be God that we do fly away. Have not we often wished for it and said, “O that I had the wings of a dove that I might fly away and be at rest” — that will come bye-and-bye.

11. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.*

As he is greatly to be revered, so is he greatly to be feared. But the Lord has said of his people, “As I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.” Blessed be his name.

12-14. *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto Wisdom. Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

Poor Israel was greatly afflicted. These deaths in the wilderness made her a perpetual mourner, but Moses asks that God will return to his people, cheer and encourage them, and let the few days they have to live be bright with his presence.

15-17. *Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*

PSALM 90

Psalm 90 is entitled “A Prayer of Moses the man of God,” and it furnishes a suitable prayer for every man of God. Any men of God who have had experience as deep, and trying, and varied as that of Moses will be the better able to enter into the spirit of the Psalm.

1. *LORD thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.*

“This world in which we live is no home for our immortal spirits. Thou givest us habitations for our bodies, but they are no dwelling places for our spirits that are of a nobler order. We dwell in thee, O Lord; thou art our home. Beneath thy wide wings we find blessed shelter, and in communion with thee our hearts are kept in perfect peace. Lord, thou art the home of thy people in all generations; — not only in the generations that are past, when Noah, and Abraham and Moses, and David, and all thine ancient servants found a refuge in thee, but even to this day thou art still our strong castle and our high tower our refuge and place of defense, our dwelling place even in this generation.”

2. *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.*

When compared with God, those hoary hills are but as infants of a day, and the whole round world itself is but as a new-born child. “From everlasting” has he existed, — when all created things slept in his infinite mind like unborn forests sleep in an acorn cup, and so on for ever, “to everlasting,” — when all created things shall have dissolved, when back to nothing this fair world shall have gone, — God shall still be the same. He is a rook that cannot be removed. There is no terra firma upon this earth; but while all things are whirling around us, we find a firm dwelling place beyond the stars in the ever-living and immutable Jehovah. No man’s home is safe unless it is built on something more stable than this poor trembling earth, but he who rests on God, and lives in God, has the best of all habitations wherein to dwell in safety for ever.

3. *Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.*

Man is mortal, conspicuously so. As we walk about our streets, how we miss our old companions one by one. They have returned to

the bosom of mother earth whence they first sprang. The inhabitants of this world seem to pass in procession before our eyes; those who were here a few minutes ago are gone past, and another rank has come, and another, and another and they will soon all be gone, and we shall be gone too. He, then, who hopes to find a home amongst the sons of men will miss it, but he who makes the eternal God his habitation shall still be at home in the Lord even when wife, and child, and brother, and friend all sleep in the silence of the sepulcher.

4. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

Our measurements of time are nothing to God. There is nothing past and nothing future with him, all things are present in the eternal Now of God. What a wonderful truth this is of the eternal existence of God, and what boundless comfort it brings to the man who feels that this God is his God, his Father, his Friend, and his All-in-all!

5, 6. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.

Such is the best estate of man, a field bedecked with daisies, kingcups, and other frail flowers, but the mower's scythe is near, you may hear him sharpening it; and, soon, along the sword all the sons of men shall fall, and thou who hast found thy hope, thy heaven, thy confidence here, how poor wilt thou be in the end thereof; but O thou who hast sent all thine hearts desires upwards to thy God, thou who art living in the future, living in the infinite, how secure art thou, for no rust shall fret thy gold, no moth consume thy garments! Thou art blessed indeed.

7. For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.

Yes, if the Lord lets even a little of his wrath out for a while against his servants, how greatly do we suffer! Blessed be his name, it never is real anger against his own chosen people. He does but hide his love under the form of wrath, just as a father never really hates his child, and even though he is angry with him for his faults, and chastises him, yet there is more love than wrath in every blow of the rod. Still, it is a sad thing to lose the sense of God's love in

the heart, it consumes us and troubles us. We could bear sickness, we could bear slander or persecution, or almost anything out the absence of the light of God's countenance; that is the worst of trials to his children.

8-10. *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

A long life or a short life, what a little difference it makes when the last hour comes! The patriarch as well as the child descendeth to the grave and all, as they sleep in their separate graves, seem only to have lived for a little moment, and then to have passed away.

11. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to they fear, so is thy wrath.*

God grant that none of us may ever know experimentally the power of his anger; but may we know it, as a matter of faith, so as to tremble concerning it, and so as to flee to Christ to be delivered from it! But what must it be really to feel the power of God's anger? I implore you never to believe any teaching that seems to make God's anger less terrible than you thought it to be. It is not possible to exaggerate here, the power of God's anger is immeasurable, and that is why the power of Christ's atonement is infinite.

12. *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

That is the great matter, after all, to get the heart applied to wisdom, to learn what is the right way, and to walk in it in the practical actions of daily life. It is of little use for us to learn to number our days if it merely enables us to sit down in self-confidence and carnal security; but if our hearts be applied to true wisdom, the Lord's teaching has been effectual.

13, 14. *Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

Dear young people, here is a suitable prayer for you to present to God: "O satisfy us early with thy mercy." Believe me, there is no joy for a lad like that of loving the Lord Jesus Christ while he is yet

young; and O ye maidens, there is no fairer jewel that you can ever wear than that of love to Jesus Christ.

“Twill save us from a thousand snares To mind religion young;
Grace will preserve our following years,
And make our virtues strong.”

And each one of us may pray this prayer. “Lord, now give us thy mercy! If we are unsaved, let us not remain so! If we have lost the comfort of thy presence for a while, restore it to us now! Leave us not long in darkness, but satisfy us early with thy mercy!”

15. *Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.*

It is right, then, to pray for joy. Indeed, joy is so conspicuous a blessing to a Christian, it is so closely connected with the healthfulness of all his virtues that he should seek after it until he finds it.

16. *Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.*

“Lord, let us see thy work here! Oh, for thy name’s sake, take thy right hand out of thy bosom, and work mightily in our midst! Withdraw not the working of the Holy Ghost from us thy people! Let thy work of conversion, thy work of edification, thy work of the conquest of the world, appear unto thy servants!”

17. *And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*

“Let not what we do for thee fall to the ground like a badly-built wall! Let not our work be consumed in the great testing fire, ‘but the work of our hands establish thou it!’”

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 90.; AND ACTS 27:1-26.

PSALM 91

A Psalm written for comfort, but it is not addressed to all mankind, neither I venture to say, to all believers, but only those who are described in the first verse.

1. *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*

It is not every worshipper that comes there who shall be thus privileged but those who dwell there, as Simeon and Anna dwelt in

the temple. So there are some that abide in Christ and his words abide in them. They live near to God. They receive therefore choicer favours than those who do but come and go. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High." He who has learnt to stand in the holy of holies, near the blood-besprinkled mercy-seat, to whom prayer is a matter of constant privilege and enjoyment-he dwells in the secret place. Such a man, living near to God, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. You know when you walk with a friend, in certain positions of the sun your friend's shadow falls upon you; but you cannot expect to have the shadow of your friend unless you are near him. We read in the Song, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight." There must be nearness to get under the shadow. So there must be great access to God-great familiarity with him -there must be something of the assurance of faith-before we shall be able to grip such a word as that which follows in this psalm. Read it again, and if you have not attained to it labour after it.

2. *I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.*

Observe the sweetness of making a personal application of any passage in the Word. "I will say." A general doctrine gives us little consolation till we can make a particular application of it. Oh, for faith-daring, personal faith-to say, "I will say of the Lord he is my refuge and my fortress" "That was saying a great deal, but it was saying a great deal more when the psalmist added, "My God." He could not say more than that. God is a refuge and a fortress to me, but he is infinitely more than that. We cannot tell what he is. Rather, we cannot tell what he is not; but we sum it all up when we say, "My God." And surely it is but natural to add, "In him will I trust." Why, who could help it? If this God is our God, and such a God; such a refuge and such a fortress to his people, surely we must trust him. Come, if you are troubled tonight. If you have got any doubts and fears, may the Spirit of God enable you to make this the blessed resolution of your Spirit. "My God, in him will I trust."

3. *Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler,*

You cannot see it. You do not know it to be a snare. The bird does not suspect the fowler. "Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird." If the bird knew it was a net it would not fly into it. You do not know your temptation, young man. Nay, and the oldest and most experienced Christian is not aware of the traps

which the fowler is setting for him. But surely he shall deliver thee if thou abidest near him-so near that his shadow falls on thee. If thou dwellest in secret with him, surely, he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler.

3. *And from the noisome pestilence.*

From the noisome pestilence of error which is the worst of pestilences because it preys upon the soul. Foul air which injures the bodily frame is bad enough; but what is that foul teaching which destroys the soul- which would, if it were possible, deceive the very elect? But surely if thou livest near to him he shall deliver thee from the noisome pestilence.

4. *He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.*

It is a marvelous verse. I do not think that any devout man would have been daring enough to use such language as this if he had not been led to do so by the Holy Spirit himself. Where the Holy Spirit leads the way we may safely follow; but it would have been unsafe for mere poetry's sake to talk of God's "feathers" and "wings." Yet see the condescension of God. He likens himself here to the hen that broods her little ones. O child of God, nestle down closely under the warm breast of everlasting love, and hide thyself beneath the mighty wings of the everlasting and eternal God. So shalt thou be secure.

5. *Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;*

For if this alludes to temporal dangers,
"Not a single shaft shall hit,
Till the God of love sees fit."

And if there be a covert allusion here to spiritual dangers-to the darts of the wicked one and to the alarms which fill the soul when the presence of God is withdrawn-if thou dwellest near to God thou shalt know no fear of these things, for neither death nor hell can injure the man that lives in God.

6-10. *Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge,*

even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

And it is very wonderful when men have lived near to God, and have received special faith to grasp such a promise as this, how they have outlived the most deadly pestilences. I collected sometime ago a little list of names of devout men who in the times of pestilence remained in the field to visit the sick and to attend to those who were dying, and it is marvelous that they outlived all, and their names stand now upon the catalogue of fame as benefactors of the race. They had special faith given, and they used that faith in trusting in God. I have already said that I do not believe that this applies to all believers, for good men die as well as bad men in days of pestilence; but there are some who dwell near to God to whom the promise comes with special power, and they have been able to do and dare for God without fear, and their faith has been abundantly rewarded.

11,12. *For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.*

They get special commandment to take care of the saints of God—the angels, those unseen but swift and mighty messengers of heaven. When David had the troops paraded before him, when they were going out to fight Absalom, he gave them all a charge that they should not touch the young man Absalom, and yet, you know, he died. But God’s angels keep his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word; and go when he gives them a charge of what to do he says, “O ye angels, this day watch over my people keep them in all their ways. Be to them as a nurse who bears up her child in her hands, and if they are likely to meet with even some minor trial, lest they should skip and sin, bear them up lest they dash their foot against a stone.” Now comes a glorious promise.

13. *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.*

God often gives victories like these to his people, so that Satan and all the powers of evil are trampled down by the holy child—take confidence of the man who is resolved to serve his God.

14. *Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.*

He loves me, and therefore I love him, and I will deliver him because he loves me. Oh, love the Lord all ye saints, love him more and more; for this love of yours shall bring to you a sweet reward.

15. *He shall call upon me, and I will answer him:*

Were there ever words fuller of consolation than these? “ He shall call upon me.” Grace will take care to give us the spirit of prayer. “ And I will answer him.” Grace will give the answer.

15, 16. *I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.*

Now, it is not a promise to every good man that he shall live for a long period, for some among the best of men die in very early youth, but still they have had a full life, for life must not be measured by years. Oh, how much do some men pack into a little time! How much of life there may be in the man whose course is finished ere he is thirty years of age, and how little may some live who expand their days into 80 or 90 years. Belzoni’s toad-you remember the piece of poetry into which some imaginative person has cast his diary, how once in a thousand years it crept from under a stone and winked with one eye. Well it did not live much in the course of two or three thousand years: it existed. But a man who is full of holy duties and earnest purposes lives long even though the time is short.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 91. AND 63.

PSALM 91

1. *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*

It is not every man who dwells there; no, not even every Christian man. There are some who come to God’s house; but the man mentioned here dwells with the God of the house. There are some who worship in the outer court of the temple; but “he that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High” lives in the Holy of Holies; he draws near to the mercy-seat, and keeps there; he walks in the light, as God is in the light; he is not one who is sometimes on and sometimes off, a stranger or a guest, but like a child at home, he dwells in the secret place of the most High. Oh, labour to get to that blessed position! You who know the Lord, pray that you may attain to this high condition of dwelling in the inner shrine, always near to

God, always overshadowed by those cherubic wings which indicate the presence of God. If this is your position, you “shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” You are not safe in the outer courts; you are not protected from all danger anywhere but within the veil. Let us come boldly there; and, when we once enter, let us dwell there.

2. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

This is a daring utterance, as if the psalmist would claim for himself the choicest privileges of any child of God. When you hear a glorious doctrine preached, it may be very sweet to others; but the honey lies in the particular application of it to yourself. You must, like the bee, go down into the bell of the flower yourself, and fetch out its nectar. “I will say of the Lord, He is my” — then come three my’s, as if the psalmist could grasp the Triune Jehovah, — “my refuge, my fortress, my God; in him will I trust.” What a grand word that is, “My God”! Can any language be loftier?

Can any thought be more profound? Can any comfort be surer?

3. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler,

If you dwell near to God, you will not be deceived by Satan. In the light of the Lord you will see light; and you will discover the limed twigs and the nets and the traps that are set to catch you: “He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler.”

3. And from the noisome pestilence.

The pestilence is something that you cannot see. It comes creeping in, and fills the air with death before you perceive its approach; but “He shall deliver thee from the noisome pestilence.” There is a pestilence of dangerous and accursed error abroad at this time; but if we dwell in the secret place of the most High, it cannot affect us; we shall be beyond its power. “Surely,” oh, blessed word! there is no doubt about this great truth, Surely, he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.”

4. He shall cover thee with his feathers,

The psalmist uses a wonderful metaphor when he ascribes “feathers” to God, and compares him to a hen, or some mother-bird, under whose wings her young find shelter. Yet the condescension of God is such that he allows us to speak of him thus: “He shall cover thee with his feathers.”

4. *And under his wings shalt thou trust:*

God is to his people a strong defense and a tender defense. “His wings” and “his feathers” suggest both power and softness. God hides not his people in a casing of iron; their shelter is stronger than iron, yet it is soft as the downy wings of a bird for ease and comfort. As the little chicks bury their tiny heads in the feathers of the hen, and seem happy, and warm, and comfortable under their mother’s wings, so shall it be with thee if thou dwellest with thy God: “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust.”

4. *His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.*

Twice is he armed who hath God’s truth to be his shield and buckler.

5. *Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night;*

Nervous as you are, and naturally timid, when you dwell near to God, your fears shall all go to sleep. That is a wonderful promise: “Thou shalt not be afraid.” If it had said, “Thou shalt have no cause for fear,” it would have been a very comforting word; but this is even more cheering, Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night.”

5. *Nor for the arrow that flieth by day;*

Both night and day thou shalt be safe. Thy God will not leave thee in the glare of the sun, nor will he forsake thee when the damps of night-dews would put thee in peril. We, dear friends, may have secret enemies, who shoot at us, but we shall not be afraid of the arrow. There may be unseen influences that would ruin us, or cause us dishonour, or distress; but when we dwell with God, we shall not be afraid of them.

6, 7. *Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.*

When God takes his people to dwell in nearness to himself, and they have faith in this promise, I make no doubt that, literally, in the time of actual pestilence, they will be preserved. It is not every professing Christian, nor every believer who attains this height of experience; but only such as believe the promise, and fulfill the heavenly condition of dwelling in the secret place of the most High.

How could cholera or fever get into the secret place of the most High? How could any arrows, how could any pestilence, ever be able to reach that secure abode of God? If you dwell there, you are invincible, invulnerable, infinitely secure.

8-10. *Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee,*

“There shall no evil befall thee.” It may have the appearance of evil; but it shall turn out to thy good. There shall be but the appearance of evil, not the reality of it: “There shall no evil befall thee.”

10, 11. *Neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.*

You remember how the devil misapplied this text to Christ. He was quite right in the application; but he was quite wrong in the quotation, for he left out the words “in all thy ways.” God will help us in our ways if we keep in his ways. When we meet with trouble and accident, we ought to inquire whether we are in God’s way. That famous old Puritan, holy Mr. Dodd, having to cross a river, had to change from one boat into another, and being little used to the water, he fell in, and, when he was pulled out, in his simplicity and wisdom he said, “I hope that I am in my way.” That was the only question that seemed to trouble him. If I am in my way, then God will keep me. We ought to ask ourselves, “Now, am I in God’s way? Am I really moving today and acting today as divine providence leads me, and as duty calls me?” He who travels on the king’s business, by daylight, along the king’s highway, may be sure of the king’s protection. “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” Come here, Gabriel, Michael, and all the rest of you,” says the great King of kings to the angels around his throne; and when they come at his call, he says, “Take care of my child. Watch over him today. He will be in peril; suffer no evil to come near him.”

12. *They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.*

What royal protection we have, a guard of angels, who count it their delight and their honour to wait upon the seed-royal of the universe, for such are all the saints of God!

13. *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.*

Strength and mastery may be united. The young lion and the dragon, but the child of God shall overcome them. Talk of St. George and the dragon! We ought to think more of the saint and the dragon. It is he that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High, who, by God's help, treads upon the lion and adder, and of whom it is written, "The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet."

14. *Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him:*

Does God take notice of our poor love? Oh, yes, he values the love of his people, for he knows where it came from; it is a part of his own love; the creation of his grace!

14. *I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.*

Does God value such feeble and imperfect knowledge of his name as we possess? Yes; and he rewards that knowledge: "I will set him on high."

15. *He shall call upon me, and I will answer him:*

Notice, that it is, "He shall," and I will." The mighty grace of God "shall" make us pray, and the Almighty God of grace "will" answer our prayer: "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him." How I love these glorious shalls and wills!

15. *I will be with him in trouble;*

"Whatever that trouble is, I will be with him in it. If he be dishonoured, if he be in poverty, if he be in sickness, if that sickness should drive his best friend away from his bed, still, 'I will be with him in trouble.'"

15. *I will deliver him, and honour him.*

God puts honour upon us, poor dishonourable worms that we are. One old divine calls a man "a worm six feet long"; and it is rather a flattering description of him. But God says, "I will deliver him, and honour him."

16. *With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.*

He will live as long as he wants to live. Even if he should have but few years, yet he shall have a long life; for life is to be measured by the life that is in it, not by the length along which it drags. Still, God's children do live to a far longer age than any other people in

the world; they are on the whole a long-lived race. They who fear God are delivered from the vices which would deprive them of the vigor of life; and the joy and contentment they have in God help them to live longer than others. I have often noticed how long God's people live. Some of them are speedily taken home; still this text is, as a rule, literally fulfilled, "With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation." He shall see God's salvation even here; and when he dies, and wakes up in the likeness of his Lord, he will see it to the full. May that be the portion of each of us! Amen.

PSALM 92

1. *It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High:*

It is good in itself; it is good for those who hear it; but it is especially good for our own hearts to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto the name of the Most High. Sometimes, when we are very heavy in spirit, if we would take care not to defraud the Lord of the revenue of praise that is due unto him, we should find that the readiest way to bring comfort to ourselves is to sing praises unto his holy name. Brother and sisters in Christ, it is not very notable work to praise God when all things go well with us; it is far grander work to praise him when everything seems to be against us. It is because the nightingale doth sing by night that he hath such excellence among the birds, and if you and I can praise God in the dark, then we shall find that it is a good thing for ourselves to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto the name of the Most High.

2. *To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithful every night,*

Begin the day by setting forth the Lord's lovingkindness. It was his lovingkindness that watched over you when you lay unconscious and defenseless, and could not therefore protect yourself; it was his lovingkindness that drew wide the curtain of the night, that touched your eyelids, and awoke you out of that sleep which was the image of death, and bade you look out upon the rising sun. Therefore take the key of the morning to open the day, and let it be the golden key of praise; show forth the Lord's lovingkindness in the morning.

And when night comes again, let us then sing of God's faithfulness. We have experienced it through another day, let us praise him for it. Now we see how he has borne with us, pardoned us, preserved us, supplied our needs, and continued to educate us throughout another day; let us therefore praise and bless his holy name, and so close the day, and commit ourselves to sleep again under his divine protection.

3. *Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound.*

Under the old dispensation, instrumental music seemed more congruous than it does now with the spiritual worship into which we have been introduced. If we must ever have instrumental music in our worship, let it be the same the very same as David had; and then I for one, though I should still think it be going back to the old dispensation long since superseded, would put up with it. I could never get much further than that, I think, for what instrument is there that is equal to the human voice, what music can be compared with it? All other sound is but the poor attempt of man to rival the creation of his God; but the human voice is full of charming melodies and harmonies, and if it be controlled by a true heart, there is nothing like it even to our ears, while it seems to me that it must be far more acceptable to God than the product of mere mechanism.

4. *For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands.*

There is a blessed verse to come from the heart and mind of a happy man who is praising God, and who looks on all the works of the Lord, in creation, providence, and redemption, and makes them all the subject of his joyous doing.

5. *O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.*

There is little that we know of the thoughts of God except as we gather them from his works or learn them from his Word, "for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." It is by divine revelation that we must know the thoughts of God, and the more we know of them, the more shall we realize that they are very deep.

6. *A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this.*

He looks at nature, and as he sees its varied operations, he observes certain eternal law as he calls them, but he does not see the power at the back of those laws which makes the laws potent for the government of the world. Nay, he lives and walks where God has displayed his power to the full, yet he fails to see him. It would be a strange proceeding for anyone to go into an artist's house, and look at his picture and his sculpture, and yet never to think of him, but this is what the brutish man does with regard to the works of God, and with regard to God himself.

7. When the wicked spring as the grass, —
Numerous, fresh, vigorous, —

7. And when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever:

That is the end to which they will surely come, no matter how much they boast, nor how they grow and flourish till they seem, like the grass in the meadow, to cover everything, that you can go nowhere without seeing them. Yet “they shall be destroyed for ever.”

8. But thou, LORD, art most high for evermore.

The psalmist began by calling the Lord most high, and now he says that he is “most high for evermore.” Yes, this is our joy that God never passes away; he abides for ever. Myriads of the ungodly have come and gone, empires of wickedness have risen to great power, and in due time have passed away like dreams, but we can still say, with the psalmist “Thou, Lord, art most high for evermore.”

9, 10. For, lo, thine enemies, O LORD, for, lo, thine enemies shall perish all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered. But my horn halt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil.

The believer, though he is very weak in his own consciousness, and utterly insignificant in his own esteem, shall receive fresh power from God; and when the wicked melt away, he shall grow stronger and stronger.

11. Mine eye also shall see my desire on mine enemies, and mine ear shall hear my desire of the wicked that rise by against me.

The translators put in the words *my desire* in both cases they are printed in italics to show that they are not in the original. No doubt

the psalmist means that his eye should see the end of his enemies, and his ears should hear of their total overthrow.

12. *The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.*

The palm tree flourishes amidst the desert sunshine, growing straight upright towards heaven without a branch that deviates to the right or the left, and bearing its great masses of fruit as near heaven as ever it can. It is a fine type of Christian life and growth and fruitfulness. A Christian should also be “like a cedar in Lebanon,” firmly rooted in his appointed place, and defying the winter’s snows which threaten to bury him out of sight.

13. *Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our Lord.*

Like trees planted in the courtyard, screened and protected, such are true believers; God is their defense, and they are screened within the court of the Lord’s house.

14. *They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing;*

When worldings decay, they shall still be fruitful. They shall not feel, as so many others do, that their age is a curse; it shall be to them a blessing, ripening them for eternity, and it shall be a blessing to all by whom they are surrounded.

15. *To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock,*

Can each one of you say that concerning the Lord, “He is my rock, my foundation, my refuge, my shelter”?

15. *And there is no unrighteousness in him.*

Say that when you have lost the dearest one you ever knew. Say that when your property has melted like the hoar frost in the morning. Say that when every bone in your body is aching, and some fell disease is hastening you to an early grave. . There is no unrighteousness in him.” How long have you known him? If it be seventy years or more than that, he has never been unfaithful to you, nor suffered a single promise of his to fail. Write this down as the testimony of the experience of all God’s people, “There is no unrighteousness in him.”

PSALM 94

Let us read this evening the ninety-fourth Psalm, and may the Spirit of God instruct us while we read it!

1. *O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.*

God is the God of justice, and when iniquity and oppression prevail, it is natural that his people should call upon him to come forth out of his hiding-places. Sometimes, when oppression and iniquity and error prevail, it seems as if God had hidden himself away. Hence the prayer of the psalmist, “O Jehovah, the God of recompenses (or revenges, as the margin has it), show thyself.”

2. *Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud.*

As one who is about to strike a heavy blow lifts himself up, to increase the force of the stroke, so the psalmist prays to the Lord, “Lift up thyself, thou Judge of the earth. The proud are lifted up; lift up thyself. They boast, they glory, Lord, show them how great a God thou art in the defense of righteousness; lift up thyself, thou Judge of the earth.”

3. *LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?*

That question, “how long?” uttered twice over, sounds a little like howling; and sometimes God’s saints get so dispirited that they cry unto God, and weep and wail before him until their wailing becomes almost like howling:

“Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?”

4, 5. *How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage.*

Their words are heavier than stones, and when they hurl them at the Lord’s people with cruel intent, they do great mischief: “They utter and speak hard things. All the workers of iniquity boast themselves.” It seems to be the mark of the righteous that they are humble and lowly, and the mark of the wicked that they are boastful and proud. They have nothing of which they ought to boast, yet they do boast very loudly. Pride is ingrained in our evil nature; and the more there is of sin in us, the more there is of boasting by us.

6. *They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless.*

Do you wonder that the psalmist prayed, “O God of vengeance, show thyself”? Can you see the fatherless robbed, and the widow and the stranger oppressed, without feeling your indignation burn? He who is never indignant has no virtue in him. He who cannot burn like coals of juniper against evil does not truly love righteousness. The psalmist was not a man of that sort, he was righteously angry with the wicked, who slew the widow and the stranger, and murdered the fatherless.

7. *Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.*

They were practically atheists, for, if they had a god nominally, they regarded him as a god who did not observe sins, a blind deity, a god who took no note of evil. Do you not think that this is the prevailing religion of today? Are there not many who say, “Jehovah shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it”? God is not in all their thoughts, he is to them a nonentity, not the Omniscient Jehovah, and hardly even a person, but a kind of secondary power or a feeble force, an unknown something or other not of much account: “Jehovah shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.”

8. *Understand, ye brutish among the people:*

When a man turns away from God, he casts off his manhood; he ceases to be a man, and becomes like a brute, a boar, for so this expression might be read, “Ye boars among the people.”

8, 9. *And ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?*

Did the Lord make men’s ears, and put them near the brain in the very best place for hearing, and shall he not himself hear? The argument is overwhelming. God gave us ears, and made us hear; is he deaf himself?

9. *He that formed the eye, shall he not see?*

God makes all eyes; is he without eyes himself? The supposition is an absurdity. It needs only to be mentioned to be held up to ridicule: “He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?”

“Shall he who, with transcendent skill,
Fashion’d the eye and form’d the ear
Who model’d nature to his will,

Shall he not see? Shall he not hear?"

10. *He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct?*

Whole nations were driven out of Canaan to make room for Israel. Many other nations have been crushed, doubled up, utterly destroyed, on account of their sin. Everybody who reads history knows that this has been the case, so the psalmist argues, "He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? "He that executeth judgment upon heathen nations, can he not deal with sinful man, and with single individuals? He that broke the power of Persia, and Assyria, and Greece, and Rome, will he not punish guilty men when they dare to set themselves up as oppressors of his people?"

10. *He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?*

Our translators finish the question by putting "Shall not he know?" but those words are not in the original, and they are not at all necessary to the argument. It is as if the psalmist broke off his utterances abruptly, as much as to say, "It is of no use arguing with you fellows," or else as if he said, "Finish my sentence yourselves; I put the truth so clearly before you that there is no escaping from it." "He that teacheth man knowledge:" if God has taught men all that they know, does not he himself know all that is to be known? The psalmist does not say so much as that in words; but he leaves us to draw that as the only inference from what he says.

11. *The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man,*

God knows not only men's words and acts, but their thoughts also. God knows thoughtful men, the best sort of men, when they are at their best, when they are thinking; and what does God think of the thoughts of man?

11. *That they are vanity.*

Yet people talk about the thoughtful men of the age, and want us to bow down and worship their thoughts. This boasting about man's thoughts is only like the cracking of rotten sticks: "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity."

12. *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law;*

Here is the truly blessed man; not the boaster, not the infidel, not the proud thinker, but the divinely-chastened man. He is sore through the chastening of the Lord, his bones are full of pain, his heart is heavy, and his home, perhaps, as a place of torture to him;

but still it is true that he is a blessed man: “Blessed is the man whom thou chasteness, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law.”

13. *That thou mayest give him rest; from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked.*

Christ has gone to prepare heaven for his people; it is a prepared place for a prepared people. So is it with the ungodly and their eternal inheritance, it is a prepared place, “prepared for the devil and his angels,” and when men make themselves like demons, and so are ripe for hell, then is the pit ready to receive them.

14. *For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.*

If any of you are deeply troubled, I counsel you to get a hold of this promise. Perhaps it seems to you as if two seas of sorrow had met around you and that you were in a whirlpool of trouble; then I say again, lay hold of this text, and grip it firmly: “Jehovah will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.”

15, 16. *But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it. Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? or who will rise up for me against the workers of iniquity?*

Well, David, you may ask the question; but we cannot tell you who among your fellow men will stand up for you. It sometimes happens that God’s people are left without an earthly friend; their case is so hard, their cause involves so much question, so much shame, perhaps, that nobody will stand up for them. If this be your trying condition just now, listen to the psalmist’s testimony: —

17. *Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.*

If it had not been for God, he would not only have had no hand to help him, but not even a voice to speak for him. He might not have suffered quite in silence, because he would have himself spoken; but what he would have said would only have made the matter worse. What would he have said if he had broken the silence?

18. *When I said, My foot slippeth;*

“It is going, it is gone; my foot is now slipping,” — what then?

18. *Thy mercy, O LORD, held me up.*

God is grand at holding up his people in slippery places, and not only in slippery places, but when their feet actually do slip. When

they think that they are gone, they are not really gone. “Underneath are the everlasting arms.” “Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.”

19. *In the multitude of my thoughts within me —*

“I cannot collect my thoughts, they will not be gathered into orderly array, they rush to and fro, there is a multitude, a mob of them.” It is good to have thoughts, but sometimes you may have too many of them; and they may come helter-skelter, blasphemous thoughts, perhaps, despairing, proud, unbelieving, all sorts of thoughts: “In the multitude of my thoughts within me” —

19. *Thy comforts delight my soul.*

“Comforts which thou dost bring me, comforts which arise from thoughts of thee, the comforts of the Comforter, the comforts of the God of all comfort, thy comforts delight my soul.” You must often have noticed that troubles seldom come alone; if you get one trial, you will probably have a whole covey of them. It very rarely happens, I think, to any one of us to have a lone sorrow. In another place the psalmist says, “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.” It is so with some of us at this time; we have a multitude of troubled thoughts within us. But have you also noticed that God’s mercies do not come alone? They come in flocks; the psalmist says, “Thy comforts” — not merely one comfort, but a great host of them, — “Thy comforts delight my soul, they not merely sustain me, and keep me alive, but they delight my soul. God never does anything by halves; when he gives us comfort, he does it thoroughly. The Lord’s flowers bloom double; he gives us not only comfort, but delight: “Thy comforts delight my soul.” Now the psalmist turns to God in prayer, and says: —

20. *Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?*

Oh, how strong are the wicked! They think they can have everything all their own way, that they can make what laws they like, and crush out anything that they despise. Yes, there are many thrones of iniquity, but God has no fellowship with them; and if God has no fellowship with a throne, that throne will tumble down, God will not uphold it. The day will come when he will no longer tolerate its iniquity, and then one blow of his mighty right hand shall shiver it to atoms.

21. *They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood.*

Agreed about nothing else, they all agree against Christ and against the holy seed: “the soul of the righteous.” They would blot out the righteous from under heaven if they could.

22. *But the LORD is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge.*

I commend these expressions to all believers, let them treasure them up. “My God.” Ah, you must personally appropriate God to yourself if he is to bless you! Another man’s God is nothing to you unless you can also say, “My God.” When you have said, “My God,” you have uttered the grandest words that human lips can frame. If God be yours, all things are yours, earth and heaven, time and eternity. “My God is the rock of my refuge.” You are on the rock; you are in the rock; you are behind the rock; you must be safe now.

23. *And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity,*

That is the punishment of sin. It seems strange that it is so, but sin is the punishment of sin. When a man has once sinned, it is part of his punishment that he is inclined to sin again, and so on ad infinitum. “He shall bring upon them their own iniquity.”

23. *And shall cut them off in their own wickedness;*

It needs no fire nor worm to torment the ungodly, their own wickedness itself is fire, and worm, and pit without a bottom, and the hell that endeth not.

23. *Yea, the LORD our God shall cut them off.*

“Surrounded by his saints, the Lord
Shall arm’d with holy vengeance come;
To each his final lot award
And seal the sinner’s fearful doom.”

God save us from being of that company! May we all be numbered with his people for ever and ever! Amen.

PSALM 94

This is the prayer of a man of God in great trouble, standing out for God in an evil day, when the Lord’s people were greatly oppressed, and the honour of God was being trampled in the mire. The prayer wells up from an oppressed heart struggling against great difficulty.

1. LORD God, —

“ O Jehovah, El.” Men of God in trouble delight to call upon the name of the Lord. His very name is a stronghold to them; the infinite Jehovah, the strong God, EL: “O Lord God,”-

1. *To whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.*

Vengeance does not belong to us; it is not right for any private individual to attempt to avenge himself; but vengeance belongeth to the just Judge, who will mete out to all the due reward of evil or of good. Hence, my appeal is to the Court of King’s Bench, or higher still, to the King himself: “O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.” When false doctrine abounds, only God can put it down. All the efforts of the faithful will be futile apart from him.

2-4. *Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud. LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter and Speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?*

That expression, “ How long?” repeated three times, is very sorrowful; it seems to get into a kind of howling or wailing; but a child of God, when he sees things going wrong with his Lord’s kingdom must grow somewhat impatient, and he vies out to his God, “How long ? How long ? How long wilt thou bear it ?” The very triumphs of the wicked, and the hard things they say, with which they seem to bubble over like fountains, (for that is the forge of the term “utter and speak” used here,) stir the heart of the man of God to its very depths. He gets by himself alone, and grieves before God of, and out of a full heart he thus cries to him, How long shall they utter and speak hard things ? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves ?”

5. *They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, —*

There is a strong plea. Hear that declaration, for the Lord of hosts says to his people, “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye.” In days of persecution the saints earnestly pray in this fashion, “They break in pieces thy people, Jehovah,”

5, 6. *And afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless.*

This made the appeal still stronger, for God’s is “a Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows.”

7. Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.

Yet this very God of Jacob came to the troubled patriarch at Jabbok, and blessed him there, and he said to heathen kings, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm," so can it be true that he does not see and regard what the wicked I do to his people? They dare to say so, and render themselves the more brazen in their sin because of this their infidelity.

8. *Understand, ye brutish among the people:*

Here the pleader turn into a prophet, and, after having spoken to God, he now speaks to men. Understand, ye boors," for so the word may be rendered, "ye swine among the people:"

9. *And ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shalt he not see?*

You say that God does not see, that he does not regard; but how can that be? You are mad to talk so. He that gave men the sense of hearing, cannot he himself hear? He that gave them sight, cannot he see

"Shall he who, with transcendent skill,
Fashion'd the eye, and form'd the ear;
Who modell'd nature to his will,
Shall he not see ? Shall he not hear ?
"Vain hope! His eye at once surveys
Whatever fills creation's space;
He sees our thoughts, and marks our ways,
He knows no bounds of time and place."

10. *He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct?*

He judges are nations, read the Book of Providence, and see how he deals out justice to nation after nation, so shall he not also correct the individual man :

10. *He that teacheth man knowledge,*

If you look at your Bibles, you will see that the translators have put in here the words "shall not he know " They are printed in italics because they are not in the original. The original is very abrupt, it is as if the psalmist had said, "There, I am tired of arguing with you. You can draw your own inference; I will leave you to do that for yourselves. Fools as you are, I need not draw the inference for you." "He that teacheth man knowledge." Does man really know anything

unless God teaches him ? Adam was taught of God at the first, and every particle of true science that man knows has been imparted by God. I do not say that God is the author of the science of today; much of that evidently comes from man; but all true knowledge is imparted to us by God. “He that teacheth man knowledge,” do you think, do you dream that he does not himself know everything?

10, 11. *Shall not he know? The LORD knoweth the thought of man, that they are vanity.*

He knows that men are vanity, that they are, according to one translation, a vapor. The men themselves are but a vapor; but as for their thoughts, their intellect, their power to think, that of which many men are most proud, what does God think of this? What a wonderful thing “modern thought” seems to be ! But listen to this, “The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are nothing.” Vanity is a negation, it is a bubble, a thing poked up, that has no substance in it: “The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.”

12. *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teach him out of thy law;*

These are two things that go well together, — a rod and a book; no man ever learns much without both rod and book. “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest.” The book is never properly understood without some touches of the rod, but the book must be there also: “and teaches” him out of thy law, “for, if it were all rod and no book, there would be plenty of sores, but there would be no learning. Have you got the two together, my dear friend ? Have you been of late very much with the book in a nook, and very much with the rod upon your bed ? Well then you are a blessed man, for the psalmist says, “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teaches” him out of thy law.”

13. *That thou mayest give him a rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked.*

In these days, the quiet virtues are not prized as much as they ought to be. Men are always busy, they must be ever on the trot; but blessed is the man who is so taught by the book and by the rod that he comes to a holy quietism, and learns to rest. The best rester is the best worker. He who knows how to sit at Jesus’ feet knows how to work for Jesus better than if he were continually running about, and

getting cumbered with much service. We never learn the secret of this rest by the book alone, or by the rod alone; but the rod and the book together teach us to rest from the days of adversity; they teach us not to lay the present too much to heart, not to fret because of things as they are today, but to think of what is to be in that day when the righteous shall be rewarded, and when the mighty Hunter shall have trapped his adversary and ours, when the pit shall be digged for the wicked, and Satan's power shall be for ever destroyed

14. *For the LORD will not cast off his people,*

He may cast them down, but he will never cast them off.

14. *Neither will he forsake his inheritance.*

Even men will not give up their inheritance. This is especially the case among the Jews; you remember how Naboth would not sell his inheritance, he would sooner die. And the Lord will not forsake his inheritance, there is a sacred entail upon his people that never can be broken; and he will never give them up.

15. *But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it.*

The wicked may be the upper spokes of the wheel just now, but they will be the lower spokes before long. Truth may be in the mire today, but she shall be upon them tomorrow. The revolutions of the wheels of providence produce strange changes. Wait; work; watch; for the Lord will set things right in his own good time.

16. *Who will rise up for me against the evildoers or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?*

The psalmist appeals for helpers, but he gets no response from man; and sometimes the man of God will have to stand alone, and that is an education for him. Blessed is he who has learned to hang on the bare arm of God; he is better off without his earthly friends than he was with them.

Here is the answer to the psalmist's question: —

17. *Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.*

You may be one of the best of God's servants, and yet that may be your experience. Here is another piece of testimony in which many of us can join: —

18. *When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.*

“My foot had slipped from under me, I was down; and then, even then, thou didst put underneath me thine everlasting arms. ‘Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.’”

19. *In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.*

“My thoughts” — so some read this verse, — “seem intertwined and interlaced like the many boughs of a tree. I cannot make them out myself, they are in such a tangle.” But the bird has learned to sit among the boughs, and sing: “Thy comforts delight my soul.” There are thoughts of grief, thoughts of fear, thoughts of disappointment, thoughts of desertion, thoughts of a broken heart, all sorts of thoughts, but God’s comforts come in, and delight the soul. You know what it is — do you not? — to be cast down, but not destroyed, to be troubled, and yet to be happy. “As sorrowful,” says Paul, “yet always rejoicing;” whereupon an old divine remarks that it is “as sorrowful” — quasi sorrowful; but it is not “as always rejoicing.” There is no “quasi” to that, but there is a real joy in the midst of a seeming sorrow. “In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.”

20. *Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?*

Lord, art thou on their side? Oh, no, and as thou art not on their side, I care not who is. So long as thou wilt not aid iniquity or help wrong-doing, I will fight the battle through.

21, 22. *They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood. But the LORD is my defense; and my God is the rock of my refuge.*

He gets away unto his God as he had been accustomed to hide in the cave of Adullam out of reach of his foes; and then he sits down in peace to sing.

23. *And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the LORD our God shall cut them off.*

PSALM 95.

1. *O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.*

The worship of God should always be joyful, hence there is to be much singing in it. God is not like Baal, who can be worshipped with crying and lamentation, and the cutting of the flesh with knives. We who believe in him regard him not as the destroyer or the avenger, but as “the rock of our salvation.” You who have hidden in that rock can truly praise him.

2. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving,

Let us not be afraid to stand in the immediate presence of God; on the other hand, let us not worship him with lightness and frivolity, but let us come before his presence with due reverence and solemnity; and when we come, let it be “with thanksgiving.” I need not remind you what innumerable reasons we have for thanksgiving. Let us render to God thanks according to what we have received from him.

2, 3. And make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

There are no other gods that are worthy to bear that name, but Jehovah is the great King above all that are called gods.

4. In his hand are the deep places of the earth:

The innermost caverns, the deepest mines of earth, and the far-down places in the depths of the ocean, these are all in God’s hand.

4. The strength of the hills is his also.

He is the God of the hills as well as the God of the valleys. Let us read this verse again. “In his hand are the deep places of the earth.” Are any of you there today? Then praise him out of the deep places. “The strength of the hills is his also.” Are you on the tops of the mountains today? Then give him the praise who placed you there lest through pride your feet should slip.

5. The sea is his, and he made it:

Men cannot parcel it out into estates, or cut it up into allotments, as they do with the solid earth; but “the sea is his;” there God reigns alone, and surveys the broad acres of the wild waste of waters as his own.

5. And his hands formed the dry land.

As though it were so much plastic clay, out of which he had molded this great globe, and fashioned the various countries in which the nations of mankind dwell.

6, 7. *O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

Blessed are we if we can say this in very truth, we are highly privileged to have this God to be our God, and to be ourselves his purchased inheritance, the objects of his daily care: “the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.”

7, 8. *To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart,*

It is a tender heart that hears God’s voice, and the heart that hears his voice is sure to be made tender. These two things act and re-act the one upon the other.

8-11. *As in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: unto whom I sware in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.*

They had seen God’s work, but they did not know his eyes; they had not the sense to perceive the hand of God even in his miracles, or when they did perceive it, they oft rebelled against him. Oh, that we may not be like that unbelieving generation that grieved the Lord for forty years in the wilderness!

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 KINGS 5, AND PSALMS 48, AND 95.

PSALM 95

1, 2. *O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.*

There must be, there should be, joy in our worship, it is the very juice, the wine that floweth from the trodden grape. It is the cream of the soul when the heart takes delight in God and joys in him. To worship as if it were mere duty would be but the reverence of slaves before one who is dreaded, but to worship with delight, this is the adoration of children who come to whom they love. God grant us that joy while we adore the Lord. Let us, however, mingle great reverence with joy.

3. *For the LORD is a great God, and a great king above all gods.*

“For the Lord is a great God.” Jehovah is a great God, “and a great King above all gods,” above all that are ever called gods, whether they be kings or magistrates, or whatever they may be.

4. *In his hand are the deep place of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also.*

Low and high, mysterious, sublime, the dominion of God encompasseth all nature.

5. *The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land.*

Creation is the best ground for possession: what he made is his own, the great freeholder, the sovereign lord of all.

6, 7. *O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God;*

“For he is our God.” Oh, that is the sweetest of it all, — “he is our God.” Let lords and lands have what masters they will, let us obey and worship our own God still.

7. *And we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

He is the shepherd, leading, feeding, protecting, guarding us every day.

7-10. *To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation.*

Was not that enough? Is there any need to grieve him again. Think with sympathy of what God endured from one generation, and let not another generation follow in their evil footsteps.

10. *And said, It is a people that do err in their heart,*

Not merely through ignorance, but “in their heart.” They were not alone with their feet and their tongue, but in their hearts.

10. *And they have not known my ways:*

They have seen them but not understood them. He says, “They saw my work,” but you may see and yet not know, for what is merely seen with the eye but not understood by the heart is not known; they were a willful, erring people, and an ignorant people.

11. *Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.*

Ah me!

PSALM 100

May the Spirit of God, by whose inspiration David penned these Psalms, bless them to us as we read them! This is entitled “a Psalm of Praise.” Note here that this is the only Psalm which bears that title; there are others which have titles very much like it, but this one is singled out from all the rest to be, in a very special sense, “a Psalm of Praise.” Martin Luther was very fond of it, and it has even been said that he composed the tune which are have just sung, and which is commonly called “the Old Hundredth”; though others attribute it to a German named Franc.

1. *Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.*

Do you notice the missionary spirit here? The Jews looked upon God as the God of Israel, and they had but very faint desires for the conversion of other nations; but the Holy Ghost speaks more by David than David himself may have known: Make a joyful noise unto Jehovah, all ye lands.” We ought to express the praise of God, not merely to feel it, and to express it by what is here called “a joyful noise”; and all our songs to God should have in them a measure of joyfulness. The gods of the heathen were worshipped with dolorous noises, with sorrowful sounds, and cries of misery, but the God of heaven is to be worshipped with a joyful noise: “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.” Oh, that the day were come when China, and India, and all Asia, Africa, America, and Europe, would take up the gladsome note of praise to Jehovah!

2. *Serve the LORD with gladness:*

What a text that is!” Serve the Lord, “obey him, yield to him your homage; but serve him “with gladness.” He wants not slaves to grace his throne, he loves willing worship, happy worship, for he is “the happy God.” “Serve the Lord with gladness.”

2. *Come before his presence with singing.*

Singing is delightful, but singing in God’s presence is heavenly. Do not the spirits that are made pure and holy come before his presence, and come before it with singing? I wish that whenever we sing, we would sing as in the presence of God. I am afraid that we sometimes go through the tune mechanically, and the words languish on our lips: “Come before his presence with singing.”

3. *Know ye that the LORD he is God:*

One says, "Man, know thyself," and another says, "The proper study of mankind is man." Not so; man, know thy God; the proper study of mankind is God. He who knows God knows himself; that is, he knows himself to be nothing. "Know ye that Jehovah, he is God." There is but one God, it is the same God in the Old Testament as in the New, Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

3. *It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves;*

Note the negative, as if to deny that we had any hand in our own making, and this is also worthy of notice spiritually. It is the Lord who hath made us Christians, and not we ourselves; he has created us in Christ Jesus. There are some who lay such stress upon the human will, and I know not what besides in man, that it is necessary to put in the negative as well as the positive: "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves."

3. *We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

Praise him, then. Praise him because he is your Maker; praise him more sweetly because he is your Shepherd. If we are his people, here is his electing love, here is his effectual calling, here is the grace of his Spirit that made us so. "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." He leads us, he feeds us, he protects us, he has bought us with his precious blood. Truly, this is good reason why we should make a joyful noise unto God, and serve him with gladness: "We are his people and the sheep of his pasture." Are you his people? O my dear hearer, ask thyself, art thou one of the sheep of his pasture?

4. *Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.*

Gratitude is that oil which makes the wheels of life revolve easily; and if anybody ought to be grateful, surely we are the men and women, for whom the Lord has done so much: "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise."

5. *For the LORD is good;*

Should we not praise so good a God?

5. *His mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.*

"His truth", — that is to say, his truthfulness, his faithfulness to his people. This is a blessed Psalm, and it seems to me to reach the

highest point of praise when it tells us that “The Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 100. AND 101.

PSALM 101

Psalm 101. The last Psalm was a Hymn of Thanksgiving, this one is a Psalm of Thanksgiving. I suppose it to have been written by David just when he assumed the throne, when he was about to become king over all Israel and Judah. Its title is, “A Psalm of David.” This is what he said to himself, —

1. *I will sing* —

That is right, David. In the one hundredth Psalm, he had exhorted other people to sing, now, in the hundred and first, he declares what he will himself do: “I will sing” —

1. *Of mercy and judgment:*

It is a mingled theme; there are the treble and the bass notes: “mercy and judgment.” There are some dear friends who, if they sing at all will have to sing this way, for they have a heavy sorrow on their heart, and yet great mercy is mixed with it. Oh, you who are troubled, and bow your head in grief, say, “I will sing of mercy and judgment.” Mix the two together.

1. *Unto thee, O LORD, will I sing.*

A second time the psalmist says, “I will sing.” It is well to make this firm resolve: “Unto thee, O Lord, will I sing.” Winter or summer, “I will sing;” poverty or riches, “I will sing;” sickness or health, “I will sing;” life or death, “I will sing.” “I will love thee in life, I will love thee in death And praise thee as long as thou lendest me breath.” “I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing.”

2. *I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way.*

This was a good resolve; but David did not carry it out to the full. There were evil times when he was not wise, and there were sad times when he was not perfect. Still, it is well to make such a resolve as this declaration of David when he came to the throne, especially when you are newly married, or just opening a business. Oh, that every young man and young woman would commence life with such a holy resolution as this, “I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way “I but notice the prayer that follows the resolve, —

2. *O when wilt thou come unto me?*

For I shall be neither wise nor holy without thee. “O when wilt thou come unto me?”

2. *I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.*

There is a great deal in the way in which a man walks in his house. It will not do to be a saint Abroad and a devil at home; there are some of that kind. They are wonderfully sweet at a prayer-meeting, but they are dreadfully sour to their wives and children. This will never do. Every genuine believer should say, and mean it, “I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.” It is in the home that we get the truest proof of godliness.

“What sort of a man is he?” said one to George Whitefield, and Whitefield answered, “I cannot say, for I never lived with him.” That is the way to test a man, to live with him.

3. *I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes:*

“I will not look at it, for if I do, I may long for it.” It is the tendency of things that are gazed at to get through the eyes into the mind and the heart, therefore is it wise to say with the psalmist, “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes.”

3. *I hate the work of them that turn aside;*

He means all those who practice dodges, the “policy” people, those who never go straight. Kings usually like such people as these. Do not men say that an ambassador is a gentleman who is paid to live abroad, and to lie for the benefit of his country? I suppose that is what diplomatists in David’s day generally did, but David resolved that he would have none of that sort of folk about him: “I hate the work of them that turn aside.”

3. *It shall not cleave to me.*

“If I touch it, I will not let it stick to me. Pitch defiles, so I will keep clear of it, and if any man tries to practice a trick for my advantage, I will have nothing to do with him.”

4. *A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person.*

“For, if I come to know him, one of these days I may be known myself to be a wicked person.” “Evil communications corrupt good manners.” No man can afford to be the friend of a man who is not a friend of God. If he does not love God, quit his company, for he will do you no good. Say with David, “I will not know a wicked person.”

5. *Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off:*

David was a king, and he meant to study the peace of his people by putting down slander. Oh, what mischief is wrought by backbiting tittle tattle! If we could have a race of men, — and for the matter of that, of women, too, — with no tongues, it might be of advantage, for there are some who use their tongues for very sorry purposes. David says, “Whosoever privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off.”

5. *Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.*

High looks and proud hearts are generally the characteristics of cruel, tyrannical, domineering persons; and King David would not have any such near him.

6. *Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me:*

Oh, that masters had more of an eye to the piety of their servants than they often have! They want “clever fellows.” Whether they are honest or not, is generally a secondary question. So long as they are profitable to their masters, they will not mind what they are to their customers; but David would not have servants of that sort.

6, 7. *He that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.*

He was a king, and he could choose his company, and he meant to select the truthful and upright. Now mark this. If David would not let a man who lies tarry in his sight, you must not expect that God will let such tarry in his sight. “All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone,” saith the Scripture. God grant us to have clean, truthful tongues!

8. *I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the LORD.*

What a practical Psalm this is! I have heard of a prince of Saxe Gotha, years ago, who, whenever he thought that one of his ministers or judges was not what he ought to be, used always to send him the hundred and first Psalm to read. It was commonly said of such a man, “He will get the hundred and first Psalm before long;” and, after reading it, if he did not mend his manners, the prince sent him his dismissal, and he had to go about his business. Oh, that all who profess and call themselves Christians would act

according to the tenor of this straight Psalm, which is like a line drawn by the hand of God, without a crook or a turn in it!

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 100. AND 101.

PSALM 102

Kindly notice the title of this Psalm: “Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD.” I call your attention to it in order to remind you what charges there are in the life of a believer. Here, in the 102nd Psalm, the afflicted saint is pouring out his complaint; and then, in the 103rd, the rejoicing believer is blessing the Lord in a jubilant song of grateful praise. Such are a true Christian’s ups and downs, nights and days, and I can see how the 103rd Psalm blossoms out of the 102nd. When the afflicted believer can pour out his complaint before the Lord, it will not be long before he will be able to cry, “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” If you carry your complaint in your own bosom, or tell it to some earthly friend, you will probably continue to have cause to complain; but if you pour out your heart before God, it will not be long before he will give you ease and relief.

1, 2. *Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble;*

“For that would make my trouble to be unbearable.”

“That were a grief I could not bear

Didst thou not hear and answer prayer.”

2. *Incline thine ear unto me:*

“Stoop down to me; bend over me; listen to the moanings of my darkness, the whispers of my weakness.”

2. *In the day when I call answer me speedily.*

“For I am brought so low that, if a delay be not a denial, it will be tantamount to it, for I shall be dead before the answer comes unless it reaches me speedily.”

3, 4. *For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.*

That is a very pitiful state for anyone to be brought into, in which the sorrow of the mind begins to weaken the strength of the

body; the soul itself is so inflamed that a fever is generated within the bodily frame, which seems “burned as a hearth.”

5. *By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin.*

By grief, he had brought himself down to such an emaciated state that his bones pierced through his skin.

6, 7. *I am like the pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert.*

I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top. He had got into such a melancholy state of mind that he shunned human company, sought solitude, and became as mournful a creature as “an owl of the desert.”

8-10. *Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.*

Observe that all David’s enemies could not make him weep. Mad as they were against him, they could not extort a tear from his eyes, but God’s indignation and wrath touched him to the quick, and made him mingle his drink with weeping. He felt that God was treating him as wrestlers treat one another, when a man deliberately lifts up his opponent in order that he may give him the worse fall: “Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.” All the joys that he had ever known seemed to make his sorrow the more bitter; the light of God’s countenance, in which he had formerly walked, made the darkness, in which he was enshrouded, to seem all the blacker.

11, 12. *My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass. But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations.*

That was David’s usual way, to comfort himself in his God when he could find no comfort in himself or in his surroundings. You remember that he did so on that memorable occasion when Ziklag was burned, and the people spake of stoning him: “David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” We shall be wise if we follow his example; for, when every other source of joy is dried up, when all earthly wells are stopped up by the Philistines, the stream of God’s mercy flows on as freely as ever.

13, 14. *Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.*

God is sure to bless his Church when the members of it take a deep interest in even the least things that appertain to God's cause: "Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof." I fear that, in many churches, the set time to favor Zion has been postponed by the apathy, the lethargy, or the carelessness of many of those who profess to be the servants of God.

15, 16. *So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.*

It was to God's glory for him to build up the ancient Jewish kingdom, and it is equally to his glory to build up his Church at the present time, quarrying the stones of nature, changing them by his almighty power, polishing them, by his grace, after the similitude of a palace, building them up upon the one foundation, that is, Jesus Christ, laying course upon course until the whole structure shall be finished.

17. *He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.*

There is a gracious promise for all destitute souls who cry unto God.

18. *This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.*

This is written for our comfort, dear friends; there it stands permanently, in this blessed Book, that, as long as there is a destitute and tried people of God, he will not despise their prayer.

19. *For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth;*

As if God was looking down from the battlements of heaven, observing, watching for something; and what is it that God is looking for?

20. *To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death;*

Is not that a delightful view of God? Watching, not for the music of sweet singers, nor for the noise of victorious warriors, but for

“the groaning of the prisoner”, the sight of those shut up in the condemned cell, “appointed to death.”

21-23. *To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem; when the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD. He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days.*

It is most instructive to notice how the psalmist ascribes all to God, not only his strength, but his weakness; not merely his extended life, but even the shortening of his days. It takes away the sting from our sorrow when we know that it comes from God. It helps us to bear any apparent calamity when we feel that it is our Heavenly Father’s hand that has wrought it all, or his will that has permitted it to happen.

24-27. *I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations. Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment, as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.*

The ever-living God is our constant comfort amidst the ever-changing scenes of this mortal life. Ay, and when we come even to the border of the land of death-shade, this is still our joy, “The Lord liveth,” for, from the midst of the throne, we hear our Saviour say, “Because I live, ye shall live also,

28. *The children of thy servants, shall continue,*

We pass away, but our children take our place. As Wesley said, “God buries his workmen, but his work goes on.” One generation passes away, but another comes in its stead.

28. *And their seed shall be established before thee.*

Blessed be the name of the ever-living God!

PSALM 102

1, 2. *Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily.*

Sincere suppliants are not content with praying for praying’s sake, they desire really to reach the ear and heart of Jehovah: “Hear

my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee.” When prayer is intensified into a cry, then the heart is even more urgent to have audience of the Lord.

3-7. *For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.*

The psalmist gives us here a very graphic description of his sorrowful condition at that time. He was moved to grief by a view of the national calamities of the chosen people, and these so wrought upon his patriotic soul that he was wasted with anxiety, his spirits were dried up, and his very life was ready to expire.

8. *Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me.*

Their rage was unrelenting and unceasing, and vented itself in taunts and insults. With his inward sorrows and outward persecutions, the psalmist was in as ill a plight as may well be conceived.

9-11. *For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down. My days are like a shallow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.*

This is a telling description of all-saturating, all-embittering sadness; and that was the portion of one of the best of men, and that for no fault of his own, but because of his love to the Lord’s people.

12. *But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations.*

All things else are vanishing like smoke, and withering like grass; but, over all, the one eternal, immutable light shines on, and will shine on when all these shallows have declined into nothingness.

13,14. *Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.*

They delight in her so greatly that even her rubbish is dear to them. It was a good omen for Jerusalem when the captives began to feel a homesickness, and began to sigh after her.

15-17. *So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.*

He will not treat their pleas with contempt; he will incline his ear to hear, his heart to consider, and his hand to help.

18. *This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.*

A note shall be made of it, for there will be destitute ones in future generations, — “the poor shall never cease out of the land,” — and it will make glad their eyes to read the story of the Lord’s mercy to the needy in former times.

19-23. *For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death; to declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem; when the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD. He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days.*

Here the psalmist comes down again to the mournful string, and pours forth his personal complaint.

24-27. *I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations. Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.*

God ever lives on; no decay can happen to him, nor destruction overtake him. O my soul, rejoice thou in the Lord always, since he is always the same!

28. *The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.*

PSALM 103

Let us read, dear friends, the one hundred and third Psalm, not because we do not know it, but because I trust that we know it by heart, and feel that it is a fit expression for our heart's thankfulness on this last Sabbath evening of another year.

1. *Bless the LORD, O my soul:*

He has been blessing thee; now begin thou to bless him. If, during the week, thou hast been busy about the things of the world now leave these unimportant matters, and come to the grandest exercise in which an intelligent spirit can be engaged. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Let there be no sleeping now, no coldness, no indifference; let it be real soul-work. His blessings have been real, let thy praises be real, too.

1. *And all that is within me, bless his holy name.*

Bless the whole of his name, and especially the holiness of it; be glad that thou hast a holy God. There was a time when this was a terror to thee, for thou wast unholy, and unable to delight in God's holiness; but he has cleansed and washed thee, and now thou canst rejoice in the whole of his character, in the wholeness, or the holiness, of his blessed name.

2. *Bless the LORD, O my soul,*

Do it again. If thou hast praised him now in thy heart, lift up thy heart yet higher. Let the praise come up from a greater depth, from the very bottom of thy heart, and let it rise to a loftier height, even to the highest heaven.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul."

2. *And forget not all his benefits:*

Thou hast a bad memory for good things; but now try to make thy memory awake, forget not any of God's benefits. If thou canst not remember all, yet do not wilfully forget any of them: "Forget not all his benefits." Here is a list to help thy memory:-

3. *Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;*

Canst thou not praise the Lord for this? One of those iniquities, like a millstone about thy neck, would be sufficient to sink thee into hell; but God forgives them all. He does it now as much as ever he did. He still forgives, for the forgiveness of God to his people is a continuous act. Do thou, then, continually praise him, and rejoice in him.

3. *Who healeth all thy diseases;*

None can set the human frame in order but he who made it. Medicines and physicians are of little service unless God blesses the doctor's skill. Especially does the Lord heal soul sicknesses; and they are very many and very terrible. Bless his name that he continues still to heal. As fresh complaints break out in thy poor flesh or spirit, and thy soul mourns over them, he comes, and gives the healing balm.

4. *Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;*

Keeping thee from the gates of the grave; and, better still, delivering thee from the jaws of hell.

4. *Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;*

The Lord has made a king of thee; and what an empire is thine! And what a crown is this, which thou dost wear! Other crowns make the head lie uneasy; but this is the softest, the best, the richest coronet that ever crowned head did wear. Thou mayest be content to keep it though all the Caesars should offer all their pomp to thee in exchange for thy crown; "He crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies.

5. *Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

The mouth of man is very hard to fill. There are some men's mouths that never will be filled until the sexton gives them a shovelful of earth; for they are covetous and greedy, and always hungry after more; but God has filled thy mouth, not with earth, nor with earth's treasure, but "with good things", the very best things. The best of the best he has given thee, all that thy heart desireth, in giving thee himself; so that thy youth, when thou growest old, and feeble in thy spirit, returns to thee once more. Bless the Lord, then, for all these mercies.

6. *The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.*

He lets the oppressor go on for a while; but sooner or later, there comes a terrible retribution. There is nothing of oppression in this world that can live long; for God is abroad, and oftentimes even the horrors of war make an end to the equal horrors of oppression. God interposes in dreadful judgments to execute vengeance on those that oppress the poor.

7. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

Bless him for this. Bless him for the Old Testament Scriptures. Bless him that he did not hide himself of old; but did speak to his people, and reveal himself by his prophets, and by the types and symbols of the law, Bless his name, and study much the revelation of his ways and acts, and get all the good out of it that thou canst.

8. The LORD is merciful and gracious,

Bless him, O my soul! Bless him for this, for where wouldst thou have been if he had not been merciful? Where wouldst thou be if he were not gracious, giving grace to keep thee what thou art, and to make thee better?

8. Slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

Blessed words! Any who are under a sense of sin will suck honey out of these choice expressions. "Slow to anger." God does get angry at last when grace has had her day; but he is "plenteous in mercy."

9. He will not always chide:

He will chide sometimes. He would not be a kind Father if he did not. That is a cruel father to his children who never chides them. This was Eli's sin, and you know how it brought destruction upon him and his house. Our Father takes care to chide us when we need it; but "he will not always chide."

9,10. Neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

Brothers and sisters, bless his name for this. Let every verse, as we read it, awaken fresh gratitude; and let us keep up the music of our souls in harmony with the language of the Psalm.

11, 12. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

They are gone. There is a chasm between us and our sins, which will never be bridged. To an infinite distance has the great Scapegoat carried away all the sins of his people; they shall never return to us.

13. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

The best of them need pity. There is something to pity in them; and because the Lord pities them, he will not lay too heavy a burden upon them, he will not demand too much of them, he will not give them over to their enemies. He deals tenderly with them because they are so weak.

14. *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*

Sometimes we do not remember that ourselves; we think that we are iron, and we fancy that we shall last for ever; but the Lord “remembereth that we are dust.”

15, 16. *As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

Before even the mower’s scythe comes, the hot eastern wind has dried up the grass, and it is gone. How little a thing carries us away! It seems as if it did not need death to come with a sharp scythe to cut down such frail creatures as we are; he does but breathe upon the field, and all the flowers are withered at once. Oh, that we might all be prepared for such a speedy end of our lives, and not look upon this world as a place for a long stay; but only as the meadow in which we, in common with other feeble flowers, are blooming out our little hour!

17. *But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him,*

Blessed be his name that mercy had no beginning, and shall never have an end. You and I are of yesterday, and therefore we pass away tomorrow; but God is ever the same, and of his years there is no end, because he is without beginning; and such is his love to his people, eternal, and unchangeable. Bless his name for this, dear friends. Do not forget what is to be the accompaniment to the reading of the Psalm; but constantly bless the Lord, praise him, and magnify his holy name.

17, 18. *And his righteousness unto children’s children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.*

Bless him for his goodness to our children. Some of us have seen the covenant of the Lord kept to our children as well as to ourselves. May we all have that blessing in the case of all that spring of us!

19. *The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.*

Bless him for his sovereignty. A God who did not reign would be no God to us; but “the Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice;” and let his people be glad because he “hath prepared his throne in the heavens,” beyond the reach of all man’s attacks or assaults. Beyond all time and change, the Lord reigneth on for ever and ever, “and his kingdom ruleth over all.” It extends over all things that are on the earth, and above it, and beneath it; angels and men and devils are all subject to his sway.

20-22. *Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.*

I think, before we pray, we must bless and magnify the Lord by singing Milton’s version of Psalm 136:–“Let us with a gladsome mind, Praise the Lord, for he is kind:

PSALM 103

1. *Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name,*

We ought to be always blessing God; this sacred employment should be like an atmosphere surrounding us at all times. Yet there are special seasons when we feel as if we must wake ourselves up, and brace ourselves up, for some special adoration, talking to ourselves as the psalmist does here

2. *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:*

Alas! that forgetfulness of God’s benefits is an evil kind of worm that eats into the very heart of our praise. Oh, for a retentive memory concerning the lovingkindness of the Lord! Come, my heart, thou hast been thinking of many things whilst thou hast been away from the house of prayer; now forget them. Perhaps thou hast even dwelt upon thy sorrows, and remembered the wormwood and the gall; if so, now let those sad memories vanish, “and forget not all his benefits.”

3. *Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;*

What a great “all” that is! From thy childhood until now, thou hast been full of iniquities, and the Lord has been equally full of forgiveness.

3. *Who healeth all thy diseases;*

There is no other physician like him; and all human physicians, whatever skill they may possess, derive it from him. Blessed be the healing God!

4. *Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;*

Else hadst thou, long ago, gone down into the pit; but redemption has kept thee out of it. Thy natural life and thy spiritual life have both been preserved to thee through the precious blood of Christ.

4. *Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;*

We talk about crowned heads; there are many such here in this assembly. Let everyone whose head is crowned “with lovingkindness and tender mercies” magnify the name of the crowning Lord.

5. *Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles.*

Thou wast down on the ground lately, with all thy feathers shed, but they have grown again, and thou art up on the wing once more. Thy youth has been given back to thee; renew, then, thy praises of thy God; with the dew of thy youth restored to thee, let the dew of thy gratitude also abound. Who would not bless the Lord when he knows the blessedness of sin pardoned, a wounded spirit healed, the life redeemed from destruction, youth restored like the eagle’s, and the whole being crowned with lovingkindness and tender mercies?

6. *The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.*

Therefore, let the oppressed praise him. Let the justice, which adorns his throne, be the subject of our constant delight. There is no act of oppression, on the part of the great ones of the earth, at which he will wink: “The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.”

7. *He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.*

Bless him for having thus revealed himself, giving us his Holy Word, in which we see him as in a mirror. When God makes himself

known to his people, then is the time for them to praise him. You can scarcely worship an unknown God; but when he makes himself known by special revelation in your heart, then you must and you will praise him.

8. *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.*

Therefore, again praise him. All who know and love the Lord should form a great orchestra continually magnifying his holy name.

9. *He wilt not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.*

So that, if you are just now being chidden by him, if you have some consciousness of his anger, begin to bless him that it wilt not last long: "He will not always chide," Behold the rainbow painted on the storm-cloud, and bless the name of the Lord even while you are under his afflicting hand.

10. *He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*

Therefore, praise him again and again. Had he dealt with us as we deserve, we should not have been here; but we are still here, on praying ground, and on pleading terms with the Most High; therefore, let us praise him.

11. *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.*

Such great mercy as this should have the highest praise of which we are capable. This verse speaks of the height of God's mercy; the next one tells of its breadth.

12. *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*

They are gone never to return; it is impossible that they should be imputed against us any more for ever; therefore, praise him to the very utmost.

13. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.*

Notice that, as this sacred song rises, it gets more tender; if it is not quite so jubilant, the praise is all the deeper, and quite as thrilling. One of the sweetest thoughts that we can have concerning God is that which relates to his fatherly tenderness toward his children.

14. *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*

Let his name be praised for this. Dust must be handled daintily, lest it should resolve itself into its separate particles, and God thus delicately handles us.

15, 16. *As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

Yet doth God think of us, even as he doth of the grass; and as he giveth to each blade of grass its own drop of dew, so do we seem to feel hanging about each one of us a glistening drop of mercy, for which let us praise his holy name as the sunlight of his favor sparkles in every drop of his lovingkindness.

17, 18. *But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.*

Then, surely, we must bless God for his favor to our posterity, for his lovingkindness, not only to ourselves, but also to our children, and our children's children. As we look back, we praise the God of our fathers; and as we look forward, we praise the God of our children's children.

19. *The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.*

For which again let us say, "Hallelujah!" The Lord of hosts is no dethroned monarch; he hath not lost his power to govern all whom he hath made: "His kingdom ruleth over all."

20. *Bless the LORD, ye his angels that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.*

Magnify him more than ever, if that is possible, ye mighty hosts who,-" Day without night Circle his throne rejoicing."

21, 22. *Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.*

The praise is spread widely now, over all the universe; yet, O my heart, do not thou forget thine own personal note in it: O Bless the Lord, O my soul."

PSALM 103

1, 2. *Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefit?*

Three times the psalmist says, “Bless, bless, bless.” Come, my heart, wake up, awake every faculty, but especially my memory: “Forget not all his benefits.” Here is a list of some of them; as we read each one, let our hearts say, “Bless the Lord for that.”

3. *Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;*

Hallelujah, bless the Lord for that! He who has felt the weight of his sin will leap for joy at the thought of the forgiveness of all his iniquities.

3. *Who healeth all thy diseases;*

He has restored some of us from the bed of sickness and extreme pain, and he is even now healing our spiritual diseases. Sometimes, it may be that he giveth the bitter medicine, but it is thus that “he healeth all thy diseases.” The process of sanctification is a healing process to the soul, so bless the Lord for it.

4. *Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;*

Can you ever praise God enough for your redemption from a doom so great as to be the destruction of every hope, and of everything worth having? “Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;” —

4. *Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;*

There is about your head, even now, a halo of love, invisible to all but the eyes of grace and gratitude, — a bright, shining crown of lovingkindness and tender mercies. Have I not often told you that kindness is the gold of the crown, but that lovingkindness is the velvet to line the crown to make it sit softly on the brow? Mercies these are the jewels; but the tenderness of the mercies is the ermine that makes the crown such that it cannot truly be said, “Uneasy lies the head that wears this crown.” No; but happy, happy, happy are all they who are thus crowned; bless the Lord if you are among them.

5. *Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.*

There is an inward satisfaction that God gives to his people. They are not satisfied with themselves, but they are satisfied from themselves, from that “well of water” which springs up within them

“unto life eternal.” What a mercy it is to be so satisfied as to get young again, to feel your spiritual youth coming back to you, — to be young in heart even if you are old in body: “Thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” Let me again pause here, and say, “Let us bless the Lord for this.” Do not let one of these mercies be passed over as if they made up a dry and uninteresting list, like the lots in an auctioneer’s catalogue; but let us bedew every one of these lines with a tear of heartfelt thankfulness.

6. *The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.*

Bless his name for this. In every age, he has broken the oppressor’s rod.

For a while, his people may be made to smart; but, by-and-by, he hears their cries, and he avenges their wrongs.

7. *He made known his ways unto Moses, his act unto the children of Israel.*

Bless him for this. He does not hide himself from his people, so that they do not know “his ways” and “his acts.” Revelation is a constant source of thanksgiving to those who understand it through the teaching of the Spirit who inspired it. God might never have spoken to us, or we might not have lived in a world wherein God had deigned to reveal his will. But that is not the case: “He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.”

8. *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.*

Surely, dear friends, we can all bless God for this truth; for, if he had been quick to be angry, where should we have been? If his mercy has been scanty, we should long ago have been destroyed, but he is “slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.”

9. *He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.*

Are you, just now, hearing the stern voice of his chiding? Does his anger, like a black cloud, seem to rest upon you, and hide from you his reconciled face? Then, bless the Lord that “he will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever” against his own chosen ones.

10. *He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*

Bless the Lord for that. Sweep your hand over the harp strings so as to fetch the sweetest music from them. How true it is of me and of you? "He hath not dealt with us after our sins!"

11. *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.*

Immeasurable mercy, illimitable grace, blessed be his holy name!

12. *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*

Here again I cannot tell how much we ought to bless him. It is not merely pardon of a temporary character that is given to us, but our sin is carried right away into a land of forgetfulness, so that it will never come back again to us. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

13. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.*

Let us praise him for his tender pity over our weakness, his forbearance with our infirmity and waywardness.

14. *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*

Some people do not remember that, they try to work us as if we were made of iron. But the Lord is very pitiful. He knows that we are nothing but a mass of animated dust, which the wind can soon carry away.

15, 16. *As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

In a very little time, unless Christ should first come in his glory, this is what will happen to all of us. A breath of fever-bearing wind, or some other disease, borne on the wings of the wind, will sweep over us, and the strongest of us will wither in an hour.

17. *But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him,*

Oh, bless him for that! He does not die; he does not change; he does not fail any who trust to him.

17, 18. *And his righteousness unto children's children: to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.*

Let us bless God for his love to our sons and our daughters. Some of us have great joy in our children, I pray that all of you may have the same joy, — that you may see that the Lord, who is your God, is also the God of your descendants, as the God of Abraham was the God of Isaac, and of Jacob, and of Joseph, and of Ephraim and Manasseh, from generation to generation. Grace does not run in the blood, but it often runs side by side with it. It is often the way with God, when he has blessed the father, to bless the son for the father's sake, so you, who are yourselves believers may pray with great confidence for your sons and daughters. Bless the Lord for this.

19. *The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.*

For this also we bless him. If there was any part of the world that he did not rule over, if there were any circumstances which he could not control, if there were any events which happened without his permission, if he were not King everywhere, this would be an intolerable world to live in; but now we bless him because “his kingdom ruleth over all.”

20. *Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.*

David calls in the angels to help him to praise the Lord; he wants to do it well, but feels that he is weak and feeble, so he calls in the best of help.

We also sing, —

“Angels, assist our mighty joys,
Strike all your harps of gold;
But when you raise your highest notes,
His love can ne'er be told.”

21. *Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.*

All who wait upon him, whether angels or men, or the lower creatures are called upon to glorify his great name; and they do so.

22. *Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.*

Do you notice that there is not a single petition in the whole of this psalm? It is all praise; and herein it is like heaven, where they cease to pray, but where they praise God without ceasing. We

cannot rise to that height here, but let us both praise and pray when we can.

PSALM 103

1. *Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.*

Come, my heart, be down in the dumps no longer, take thy harp from the willows, tune its strings, and begin to pour forth its music to the praise of love divine.

2-4. *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;*

This is a better crown than any emperor ever wore, unless he also was a child of God. Priceless gems and jewels rare adorn this wondrous coronet;

“who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.”

5-9. *Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide.*

Art thou suffering his chidings just now? They are good for thee, but they will not last for ever: “He will not always chide:” —

9,10. *Neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins;-*

It is all of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed: “He hath not dealt with us after our sins;” —

10-12. *Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*

Then, surely, he will also remove our troubles from us; but if not, as he has removed our transgressions so far away that they can never be brought back again, we have real cause for joy whatever happens to us here.

13. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.*

The very best of them are only objects of pity. Though they are the best, they need that he should look down upon them with infinite compassion.

14-19. *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heaven; and his kingdom ruleth over all.*

What a comfort this is for us! Over the great as well as over the little, over all parts of the earth, as well where war rageth as where peace reigneth “his kingdom ruleth over all.” Nothing happeneth without his permission, even the little things of life are ordered by him; the foreknown station of a rush by the riverside is as fixed as the place of a king, and the chaff from the hand of the winnowing is steered as surely as the stars in their courses; for, to God, nothing is little and nothing is great.

20, 21. *Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts;” —*

Let all the armies of heaven break forth into one song: “Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts;” —

21. 22. *Ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.*

PSALM 103

1. *Bless the LORD, O my soul: —*

Come, my soul, wake up, bestir thyself, for thou hast a great work to do.

1. *And all that is within in me, bless his holy name.*

Let no power or faculty exempt itself from this blessed service. Come, my memory, my will, my judgment, my intellect, my heart, all that is me is to be stirred up by his holy name to magnify and

bless. “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” for the music must begin deep down in the center of my being; it must be myself, my inmost self that praises God.

2. *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*

This shall be the first note of our grateful song, “We love him because he first loved us.” We have not to go abroad for materials for praise; they are all around us at home. “Forget not all his benefits” to thee, my soul; his overwhelming, his innumerable benefits, which have to be summed up in the gross as “all his benefits,” forget them not.

3. *Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;*

Come, my soul, canst thou not praise God for sin forgiven? This is the sweetest note in our song of praise: “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities,” not merely some of them, the blessed Scapegoat has carried the whole mass into that “No man’s land” where they shall never be found again.

3. *Who healeth all thy diseases;*

He is the Physician who can heal thee, my soul. Thy diseases are the worst diseases of all, for they would drag thee down to hell if they remained unhealed; but he “healeth all thy diseases.”

4. *Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;*

O my soul, praise God for redemption. If thou canst not sing about anything else, sing of “free grace and dying love.” Keep on singing “Those charming bells.”

4. *Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;*

What! canst thou wear such a crown as this, which is made up of living kindness and tender mercies, and yet not bless him who put it upon thy head? Oh, let it not be so, but let us each one break forth in spirit Holy’s song, “My soul doth magnify the Lord.”

5. *Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.*

This is heavenly feasting on heavenly fare. There is divine satisfaction to be derived from the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. O my soul, pray to God to give thee this satisfying food so that thy youth may be renewed, so that thy wing-feathers may grow again, that thou mayest mount as eagles do! Surely, dear friends, this little list of mercies, though such a short one, comprises an

immensity of mercy far beyond utmost comprehension; let us bless the Lord for it all.

6. *The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.*

Let the poor and the down-trodden praise the Lord who so graciously takes care of them. He is the Executor of the needy, and he is the executioner of those that oppress them.

7. *He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.*

Therefore let us bless the God of revelation, who does not hide himself from his creatures, but who makes known both his ways and his sets unto his chosen people. An unknown God is an unpraised God; but when he reveals himself to his people, they cannot refrain from blessing his holy name.

8. *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenty in mercy.*

Praise him for all this; at every mention of any one of his divine attributes let your hearts beat to the music of praise.

9. *He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.*

Therefore let the afflicted praise him, let the downcast and the despondent sing praises unto his holy name. If they cannot sing because of anything else, let them bless the name of the Lord that he will not keep his anger for ever.

10. *He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*

Let us all thank God that we are not in hell, and that we are yet on praying ground and on pleading terms with him, and some of us can praise him that we shall never come into perdition, for he hath saved us with an everlasting salvation. Truly, if we did not bless him, every timber in this house and every iron column that supported this roof might burst out in rebukes for our ingratitude.

11. *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.*

Look up to the blue sky, try to imagine what is beyond the stars, and then say to yourself, "So great is his mercy toward them that fear him;" and try to praise him as he deserves to be praised.

12. *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*

Let us therefore unstintedly praise him for such boundless lovingkindness and tender mercy.

13. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.*

He has an infinitely tender heart, he never strikes without regret, but his love always flows most freely. No earthly father or mother is half so pitiful as God is to his children.

14. *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*

Our bodies are just animated dust, and our souls are so weak and feeble that even they might be compared to dust in his sight, — not iron or granite, but simply dust. What men call “the laws of nature” are so stern that it is a wonder that men live as long as they do, for earthquakes and tornadoes and volcanoes are found that no man can bind; and when so many men are constantly crossing the sea it is a wonder that so many of them ever come to land again.

15. *As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.*

You are like the primrose by the river’s brink, or the buttercup and the daisy in the meadow that is mown with the scythe. That is all we mortals are; — not mighty cedars, not solid rocks, but just flowers of the field or as so much grass.

16. *For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

The hot winds of the East blow over a meadow, and it is burned up immediately. Even in the South of France, when the Sirocco has blown across from Africa I have seen the fairest flowers look in a short time as if they had been burned with a hot iron, and such are we when pestilence, as we call it, comes. It is but a breath of poisonous wind, and we are soon gone.

17. *But-*

This is a blessed “but” —

17. *The mercy of the LORD —*

That is not a fading flower, that is not a withering wind: “But the mercy of the Lord”-

17. *Is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children.*

Here are innumerable mercies all enclosed in the one mercy of the Lord; everlasting mercy, covenant mercy. If we do not praise

God whenever we think of the covenant of grace, what are we at? We must be possessed by a dumb devil if we do not praise him whose mercy “is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him.”

18,19. *To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandment, to do them. The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.*

Now, children of the King, will you go mourning all your days? You who dwell in the light of his throne, will not you be glad? Rejoice, O believer, for thy King liveth and reigneth for ever.

20. *Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.*

“Bless the Lord, ye his angels.” We cannot do it well enough yet, so help us ye angels “that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.” Your actions are your praises, O ye mighty angels of God; oh, that we had learned to do his commandments as ye do them! We are praying for this “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

21. *Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.*

All living things and all the forces and powers of nature are calling upon men to praise the Lord; and we cry to all the hosts of God, the ministers of his, that do his pleasure, “Bless ye the Lord.”

22. *Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.*

While all these glorious anthems are ascending to heaven, I must not be silent; but I too must praise the Lord with my whole heart: “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

PSALM 103

This is a song of exulting thanksgiving, of overflowing joy and praise. Let each one of us read it as speaking for himself. Let it, here and now, be our own personal tribute of peculiar mercy received by each.

1. *Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.*

If things without are not joyous, let all that is within wake itself up to praise my God. He will hear me, even though I speak not. If I

keep the praise within myself, he will hear the music of my soul. “Bless his holy name.”

2. *Bless the LORD, O my soul,*

Do it again. If thou hast blest him once, bless him again. Doth he not multiply to bless thee? Bless him repeatedly, continually, then. Never weary of the work. Repeat thyself in grateful praise.

2. *And forget not all his benefits:*

Thy poor memory has often been the grave of his mercy; but now call for a resurrection, and let his mercies rise before thine eyes, and let thy praises rise with them. “Forget not all his benefits.”

3. *Who forgiveth all thine iniquities:--*

Yes, that is done. Thou art a forgiven sinner tonight. “All thine iniquities,” and they were very many, have gone from thee once for all. Wilt thou not sing about that?

3. *Who healeth all thy diseases;*

Thou art raised up from the bed of pain. What is better still, the Lord is at work with thy sinful nature, purging and cleansing thee of thy corruption— healing thee of thy pride, thy sloth, thy unbelief. Wilt thou not praise him for this? “Who healeth”—goes on to heal—continues to heal—“all thy diseases.”

4. *Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;*

Who has redeemed thee with his own precious blood, and given thee a life above all life—the life of God within thee—a redeemed life. Oh! by the precious blood that bought thee, wilt thou be silent? Wilt thou not sing about redemption? Is it not the sweetest theme to sing about that ever can be imagined?

4. *Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;*

Treats thee like a king. As a king giveth to a king, so gives he his mercies unto thee—crowns thee. What! shall a crowned head refuse to praise him who crowned it? No. “Bless the lord, O my soul!”

5. *Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things;*

He might have left thee to pine in spiritual hunger; instead whereof he has fed thee—made thee to know what is good, and to love what is good, and to feed upon that which is good, and to rejoice in that which is good. Will thou not praise him for this?

5. *So that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Oh! thou art strengthened. Thou growest young again; thy faith is revived; thy hope is brightened; thy love has been stirred up, and the smouldering flame begins to burn anew with vigor. Wilt thou not bless him who restoreth thee after this fashion? Surely, thou canst not refuse to praise.

6. *The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.*

Let the poor of the earth praise him for this. Let the despised—those who are trampled on—exult in the fact that God is the executioner of the proud, and the executor of the poor. “He executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.”

7. *He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.*

He is a God who makes himself known. He might have hidden himself behind his works, instead of which he has given us a revelation—a revelation in the Old Testament which made David sing. But you and I have a revelation in the New Testament—not made to Moses this time, but to great David’s greater son. Shall we not praise him for making known his ways and his acts to us in the person of his son, in a bright and lustrous manner unknown before? “My soul, bless thou the Lord.”

8. *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.*

And should not this make us plenteous in song? So good a God to such great sinners! Mercy-full—full of mercy, and gracious, full of grace, and love, and kindness! So slow to anger, and so quick to forgive! O my soul, be thou slow to murmur: be thou quick to praise!

9. *He will not always chide:*

So that even you who feel his chidings tonight ought to bless him, because they last such a little while. Such are our faults that if he were always chiding, we could not find any fault with him. But he will not always chide. He will sometimes. He makes us know the folly of our hearts when we wander from him, but “he will not always chide.”

9. *Neither will he kept his anger for ever.*

It is very short-lived towards his people. In fact, it is not anger of that sort which he lets loose against rebels; for he has said, "I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee."

10. *He hath not dealt with us after our sins: nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*

Come: will you not praise him for this? If he had dealt with us according to our sins, we certainly should not have been in the house of prayer. We should have been now in the house of punishment. We should have been driven from his presence, instead of being invited to seek his face. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."

11. *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.*

Sing loud, then, and praise him greatly, for his mercy is so great!
"Loud as his thunders shout his praise,
And sound it lofty as his throne!"

What music can be equal to such mercy as this—"as high as the heaven is above the earth": Surely, the best music our lips can give, and better than that, should be offered to him.

12. *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*

Oh! what a mercy this is! In the third verse, you see, he gave us the note upon which here, in the twelfth verse, he enlarges: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities." How doth he forgive them? Why, "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." They were ours: we could not deny them; but he has removed them—taken them right away from us, and laid them on a scape-goat. That scape-goat has carried them away: they will never be found again. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Now comes in the next note. The third verse was, "Who healeth all thy diseases." This is what he says of it:—

13. *Like as a father pitieth his children., so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.*

While they are sick in body, and while he looks at them with great tenderness, feeling for them, suffering with them.

14. *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*

He knows that our sickness is but a premonition of that death which will dissolve this mortal frame, which is only kept together by a continuous miracle. It is strange that such a heap of dust as our body is does not dissolve much sooner. That it should return to the dust from whence it came is no wonder. The wonder is that it returneth not at once: and it would, were it not for that next mercy mentioned in the fourth verse, “Who redeemeth thy life from destruction.” He is singing about that now. “He knoweth our frame: he remembereth that we are dust.”

15, 16. *As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

Shall we sorrow about this? No: for we remember that we have another note yet in the fourth verse, “Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.” So he chants that over in the seventeenth verse.

17, 18. *But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children. To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.*

Mercy for ourselves: mercy for our children. What a blessing this is—that our father’s friend is our friend, and is the friend of our children, too! As David loved Mephibosheth for Jonathan’s sake, so doth God still look upon the children of his children, and keeps his covenant to them.

19. *The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens;*

Blessed be his name, he crowns us, and we are glad that he should be crowned, too: “Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.” And here we see him—who it is that crowns us. “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens.”

19, 20. *And his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the LORD, ye his angels, —*

As if he could not do it well enough himself, and so he called in the angels to help him. Ye bright spirits that behold him day and night, and circle his throne, rejoicing with your never-ceasing symphonies, lend me your harps end tongues. “Bless the Lord, ye his angels.”

20, 21. *That excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto this voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts;*

Sun, moon, and stars, the hosts of heaven, and all creatures that dwell in this lower sphere of whatever form ye be, burst forth into song and extol him; and oh! men—the beasts that should be the hosts of God—when ye are made willing in the day of his power, go forth to praise him. “Bless the Lord, all ye his hosts.”

21. *Ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.*

Ye servants of his, whether ye be, wind, and rain, and snow, or whether ye be intelligent agents, so long as you are doing his pleasure, praise him as you do it.

22. *Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.*

In the spirit of that, I think, we must ever sing our hymns of praise unto God. Nay, more, our whole life be a psalm of joyous thanksgiving and thanks-living.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 103. 1 CORINTHIANS 1:25-31.

PSALM 103

What more appropriate passage than the 103rd Psalm can we read, on this first Sabbath night of another year, to express the gratitude of our thankful hearts. I will only interject a sentence here and there; but let me beg all to try to worship God in the spirit while we once more read together the familiar words of this much-loved Psalm.

1. *Bless the LORD, O my soul:*

O my soul, be not thoughtless and wandering, but give this holy hour to the sacred employment of praising and blessing thy God!

1. *And all that is within me, bless his holy name.*

Let every string of my heart be now touched by the fingers of the Holy Spirit, let every faculty of my being wake up to praise the Lord: “and all that is within me, bless his holy name.”

2. *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:*

They are very memorable; they deserve to be “engraved as in eternal brass.” To be forgetful of them, will be a base form of ingratitude. Come, my memory, wake up: “Forget not all his

benefits.” Here are a few of the choicest of the gems in this cabinet; the jewels are too many for me to exhibit them all.

3. *Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;*

The Lord has done it, and continues to do it: “who forgiveth”—not some of thine iniquities, but all of them, so that you can sing, “The depths have covered them: there is not one of them left.” Why, there is enough to sing of in that alone; we need never leave off praising God for that one mercy of sin forgiven; it is the first of God’s favors, and prepares us to enjoy the rest.

3. *Who healeth all thy diseases;*

Many times has my heart had to sing about the gift from my God of this precious pearl: “who healeth all thy diseases;” and some of you have also had occasion, in your restored health, to praise the Lord for this privilege. But, oh, to think that, every day, he is healing us of the great disease of sin,— our very afflictions being, often, but the lancet and the knife with which he is removing from us the foul taint of evil “Who healeth all thy diseases.”

4. *Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;*

Thou hast a life that can never die, for he has redeemed it; then, bless thy Lord for redemption. If thou dost not sing for this cause, the very stones in the street will cry out against thee.

4. *Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;*

What a crown! What gems bestud it! No gold or silver can ever equal this:

“lovingkindness and tender mercies.” Every child of God is a crowned king; shall we not for this also sing aloud, “Bless the Lord, O my soul”?

5. *Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.*

If you enjoy sweet inward contentment and satisfaction with your God, you must praise him, “who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s” With renewed strength, can you, will you, be silent? I am sure you cannot; but you must use all the strength that God hath given back to you to his praise and glory.

6. *The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.*

Blessed be his name for this ! He is the supreme Governor of the world, and he will rectify all its wrongs in his own time and way. There is a great power that makes for righteousness, and that power is on the throne. "The Lord reigneth."

7-9. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.

Let your heart keep praising the Lord as we read every one of these sentences, for there is a theme for everlasting music in each line of this Psalm. "He will not always chide," Hallelujah! "Neither will he keep his anger for ever." And again we say, "Hallelujah !"

10. *He hath not dealt with us after our sins;*

Blessed be his holy name!

10. *Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*

For ever adored be his longsuffering and his tender mercy.

11. *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.*

Therefore praise him.

Loud as his thunders shout his praise,

And sound it lofty as his throne.

If he be such a God as this, you can never overdo his praises, it is impossible to exaggerate in your exaltation of him.

12. *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*

They are gone; they are removed to an infinite distance; they will never come back. It is not possible that they should ever again be laid to our charge.

13. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.*

Do not stop the music of thanksgiving; let your hearts, if not your voices, keep on saying, "Bless the Lord! Bless the Lord!" Oh, what pity you and I have needed! What tenderness and compassion! And —

Such pity as a father hath

Unto his children dear,

— such pity has God had upon us.

14-16. *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

As a congregation, we have had most grievous proof of this truth during the last two or three months. It has seemed to me as if everybody was dying; our ranks have been thinned wondrously; — And we are to the margin come, And we expect to die.

17-19. *But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.*

Do not believe the people who attribute sickness and death to the devil, and so try to make it appear that God has left his throne. He reigneth still; he reigneth ever, “King of kings, and Lord of lords, Hallelujah!” “Bless the Lord, O my soul!” “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.”

20-22. *Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.*

For well thou mayest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee! Lead thou the song, and may the whole world join thee in joyful adoration of the Triune Jehovah, Father, Son, and Spirit! Now we will read the passage that specially relates to the message I have to deliver to you presently in my Master's name. Turn to Isaiah 59., verse 16: —

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 103; ISAIAH 59:16-21; AND ISAIAH 60:1-16

PSALM 103

One's heart naturally turns to this passage when one desires to magnify the Lord. It is specially suitable for a New Year's meditation.

1. *Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.*

Come, my soul, wake up! Bestir thyself! Thou hast great work to do, such work as angels do for ever and ever before the throne. Let no power or faculty exempt itself from this divine service. Come, my memory, my will, my judgment, my intellect, my heart, all that in me is, be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless. “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” — for the music must begin deep down in the center of my being; it must be myself, my very self, that praises God.

2. *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:*

This shall be the first note: “We love him because he first loved us.” We have not to go abroad for materials for praise, they lie at home. Forget not all his benefits to thee, my soul, his overwhelming, his innumerable benefits, which have to be summed up in the gross as “all his benefits” —forget them not.

3. *Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;*

Come, come, my soul, canst thou not praise God for sin forgiven? That is the first note, and it is the sweetest note, in our song of praise. “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities,” — not some of them but the whole mass the blessed Scapegoat has carried into the “No man’s land of oblivion.”

3. *Who healeth all thy diseases;*

He is the Physician for thee, my soul: thy diseases are the worst of all diseases, for they would drag thee down to hell if they were not cured. But Jehovah Rophi healeth all thy diseases.

4. *who redeemeth thy life from destruction;*

Oh, my soul, praise God for redemption! If thou canst not sing about anything else, sing of free grace and dying love. Keep on ringing those charming bells.

4. *Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;*

What! can you wear a crown, and not praise him who placed it on your head? Can you wear such a crown as this, made up of lovingkindness and tender mercies, and not bless the Lord? Oh, let it not be so, let us each break forth in spirit in one song tonight, and say, “My soul doth magnify the Lord.”

5. *Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.*

Heavenly feasting on heavenly bread; divine satisfaction from the finished work of Christ. Oh, my soul, pray to God to give thee

new life tonight, so that thy youth may be renewed, so that thy wing feathers may grow again, and that thou mayest mount as eagles do! Surely, dear friends, this little list of mercies, so small for number, contains an immensity of mercy. Let us bless the Lord for every one of them.

6. *The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.*

Let the poor and the down-trodden sing unto the Lord. He will take care of you, he is the Executor of the needy and the Executioner of the proud. "The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed."

7. *He made known his ways unto Moses his acts unto the children of Israel.*

Therefore, let us bless him, the God of revelation, who does not hide himself from his creatures; but who makes known his ways and his acts unto his people. An unknown God is an unpraised God; but when he shows himself to his people, they cannot refrain from blessing his name.

8. *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.*

Praise him for this. Bless his name at every single mention of his divine attributes; let your hearts beat to the music of praise tonight.

9. *He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.*

Let the afflicted praise him; let the downcast and the despondent sinner praise him; if he cannot sing about anything else, let him bless the name of the Lord that he will not keep his anger for ever.

10. *He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*

Let us thank God we are not in hell; we are yet on praying ground, and on pleading terms with him. Some of us will never go into perdition, for he hath saved us with an everlasting salvation. Truly, if we did not bless him, every timber in this house, and every iron column beneath this roof, might burst out in rebukes for our ingratitude; we must bless his name.

11. *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.*

Look up into the blue sky, up, up beyond the stars, and say to yourself. "So great is his mercy." Let us therefore praise him accordingly.

"Loud as his thunders shout his praise,
And sound it lofty at his throne."

12. *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*

There is neither latitude nor longitude for praise. God's grace is boundless; let us therefore unstintedly praise him.

13. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.*

He has a tender heart: he never strikes without regret, but his love always flows freely. No father or mother is half so mild and loving as is the Lord of hosts.

14. *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*

Our bodies are but animated dust, and even our souls might be compared to dust in his sight. Not iron or granite, but mere dust are we. It is a wonder that men live so long when there are such mighty forces, even in nature, arrayed against them. Who can control earthquakes and volcanoes? And when men cross the sea in times of storm, it is a wonder that they come to land again.

15. *As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.*

You are like the primrose by the river's brim, or the buttercup and the daisy in the field that is visited with the scythe. That is all we are, not cedars, not oaks, not rocks, but flowers of the field.

16. *For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

Some of the hot winds of the East come over a meadow, and it is burned up immediately. I have seen the fairest and loveliest flowers look, in a short time, as if they had been burned with a hot iron when the Sirocco had blown across from Africa: and such are we. We speak of the breath of the pestilence; it is but a puff of wind, and we are gone.

17, 18. *But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.*

“But”, — and this is a blessed “but.” “But the mercy of the Lord” — that is not a fading flower, that is not a withering wind, — “But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.” Here are ten thousand blessings in one. You have everlasting mercy, covenant mercy. Oh, if we do not praise God when we think of the covenant, what has happened to us? We must be possessed with a dumb devil if we do not praise the name of him whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

19. *The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.*

Now, children of a King, will you go mourning all your days? You that dwell in the light of his throne, will not you be glad? Rejoice, O Zion, for thy King liveth and reigneth for ever! “The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.”

20. *Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.*

“Bless the Lord, ye his angels.” We cannot do it well enough yet; help us, then, ye angels that excel in strength; put out all your strength when ye praise him, “ye that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his Word.” Your actions are your praises, O ye angels! Would God that we had learned to do his commandments as ye do them! We are praying for this, even as our Lord taught his disciples to say, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

21. *Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.*

All living things, and all the forces and powers of nature, are calling upon men to praise the Lord; and all the hosts of God, the organs of Omnipotence, ring out the grand chorus, “Bless ye the Lord.”

22. *Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.*

I must not go grumbling up to heaven, nor stumbling among the works of God, I must gratefully come to him, and myself praise him, so with the psalmist I cry, “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

PSALM 104

I trust that we have already felt something of holy enjoyment while our hearts and voices have been praising the Lord our God. Perhaps this Psalm may help to keep us in a praising state of mind. First of all, David sang of the majesty of God in his works; then it seems as if the spirit of praise within him became like a strong-winged angel, and, mounting into the sky, he began to soar aloft over the varied landscapes of the world until the sun went down; and even then, he continued scudding along through the darkness till the sun arose again, and found him still praising his God. We will note, as we read the Psalm, this strange, mysterious flight of the spirit of praise.

1. *Bless the LORD, O my soul.*

There is the key-note. Strike it, my brethren, each one of you!

1-3. *O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters:*

Or, as we may read it from the Hebrew, “who maketh his halls in the waters;” those mysterious waters above the firmament are here pictured as being the cool, retired dwelling-place of the awful Deity.

3. *Who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind:*

A masterly picture, as if the Lord stood erect upon the two wings of the wind, and as if the wind, like a mighty spirit, went flying round the world, with the great Jehovah standing upon its wings, and so riding along.

4, 5. *Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire: who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever.*

Now comes a very graphic description of Noah’s flood.

6. *Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains.*

What a splendid act of divine energy, when the waters which, before, like tamed lions, slept in their dens, came hungry and fierce, and swallowed up the whole earth!

7, 8. *At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away. They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them.*

At the sound of God's voice, those mighty deeps went back in a great hurricane. Anyone who has seen water when it is traveling at a great rate, lashed with tempests, will have seen it tossed as into mountains, and then having huge holes like vast valleys in it; so, the waters rose up like mountains, and fell down like valleys, till they found the channels of the deep which God had founded for them.

9. *Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth.*

Jehovah puts the bit of sand into the mouth of the sea, and it comes no farther than its appointed bounds. Now you must suppose the psalmist is leaving the crowded streets, and the dingy, dusty, smoky haunts of men, and flying, on the wings of his gratitude and praise, away into the quiet of the fertile country.

10-12. *He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches.*

I know of no place that seems to bring out one's joy and praise better than when standing by the side of some rippling brook that tumbles down the fissure among the rocks, and seeing the animals come to drink, and hearing the birds blithely sing among the branches, or hang over and dip into the very stream. Even the reading of this Psalm may be like a cool and refreshing breeze to you at this time, and your soul may in imagination fly away with David, as you also praise and bless your God.

13. *He watereth the hills from his chambers:*

From those watery halls above the firmament he pours down the showers.

13-15. *The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.*

The spirit of praise is flying over the fields ploughed and tilled by man, over the fruitful vineyards red with clusters of grapes, and

over the olive gardens and other places where man's handiwork has made the earth fertile. Now the psalmist mounts still higher, and gets into the woods.

16, 17. *The trees of the LORD are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted; where the birds make their nests: as for the stork, the fir trees are her house.*

Flying along over the tops of the trees, he looks down among them, and he notices the beasts as well as the birds

18. *The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies.*

So that there is not any part of the earth which is not full of God's goodness; even the rocks, which yield nothing to the plough, furnish a refuge for the conies, and the high hills are a home for the wild goats, while the fertile earth beneath makes man's heart glad. As the spirit of praise flies over the tops of the mountains, the sun goes down. The psalmist witnesses that grand sight, an Eastern sunset.

19, 20. *He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night:*

Will he cease from his song now? No, for God does not cease to work.

20, 21. *Wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God.*

So that even night has its mysterious music, and the roaring of the young lions is a tribute to the providence of the good God who cares even for the beasts that perish.

22. *The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens.*

You see, the psalmist does not cease his praise, but finds a theme for music even in the rest of the beasts.

23, 24. *Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening. O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.*

The psalmist has made a long journey, flying along just where he could see everything upon the face of the earth, but he bethinks himself that he has not seen the half of God's works yet, for yonder is the Mediterranean, glistening in the morning sunbeams, so he takes another flight.

25, 26. *So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships:*

That is, above the water; while in it-

26. *There is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein.*

Some mighty fish leaps out of the sea; the psalmist's eye catches a glimpse of it, and he puts even that monster into his hymn of praise.

27. *These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.*

My brethren, what an idea we have here of God thus supplying all the creatures of the earth and the sea! They are all waiting upon him; they can go to no other storehouse but his, no other granary can supply their needs. Surely, we need not be afraid that he will fail us. If he feeds leviathan with his great wants, and the many birds with their little wants, he will not forget his children; he will never withhold any real good from them that walk uprightly.

28. *That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good.*

That is all he has to do, you see, just to open his hand. If that hand were once fast closed, they would all die; but, in order to supply the wants of all the creatures he has made, he has only just to open his hand.

29. *Thou hidest thy face,*

As if he did but put his hand before the brightness of his countenance,-

29, 30. *They are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.*

When God takes away the genial light of the summer's sun, what multitudes of creatures die; and then, when the soft breath of spring blows upon the earth, how soon the multitudes of insects come teeming forth! Christian, here is comfort for you! Has God withheld his Spirit from you for a little while, and have many of your joys and comforts fallen dead? He has only to speak, and he can in a moment renew all your comforts.

31-35. *The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works. He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth: he toucheth the hills, and they smoke. I will sing unto the LORD as*

long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD. Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more.

It seems as if the spirit of praise had bred in the psalmist a spirit of indignation against sin, he could have no patience any longer with those who would not adore so great and so good a God, and therefore he utters this imprecation upon their heads, which is rather a prophecy of what will be their doom: "Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more."

35. *Bless thou the LORD, O my soul. Praise ye the LORD.*

Thus the psalmist, like a good musician, ends with the keynote of his song of praise: "Bless the Lord, O my soul." May each of us say the same!

PSALM 105:26-38

26-28. *He sent Moses his servant; and Aaron whom he had chosen. They shewed his signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham. He sent darkness, and made it dark; and they rebelled not against his word.*

So cowed were they by that awful darkness, that for a time they seemed to repent of their rebellion against the Lord.

29, 30. *He turned their waters into blood, and slew their fish. Their land brought forth frogs in abundance, in the chambers of their kings.*

Though the fish could not live, the frogs could. When good was taken away, evil came. What a strange succession of miracles was this, — the fish slain, but the frogs multiplied!

31-34. *He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies, and lice in all their coasts. He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land. He smote their vines also and their fig trees; and brake the trees of their coasts. He spake, and the locusts came, and caterpillars, and that without number,*

There is great sublimity in this expression. God had only to speak, and whole battalions of devouring locusts and caterpillars seemed to leap out of the earth, or to drop from the clouds: "He spake, and the locusts came, and caterpillars, and that without number."

35-37. *And did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground. He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength. He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes.*

It was a notable miracle that, after all the oppression they had endured, they should be in such a state of health that “there was not one feeble person among their tribes.” When God makes his people march, he puts them into marching trim.

38. *Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them.*

Yet this was the mighty nation whose proud king had defied the Lord. At last, they had had enough of the combat; they were glad that the people of God should retire out of their land, and they themselves bowed low before him. May we be taught humility of heart, so that we can sing the hymn I have chosen! “Sovereign Ruler, Lord of all, Prostrate at thy feet I fall; Hear, oh, hear my earnest cry; Frown not, lest I faint and die!”

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 10:1-20; AND PSALM 105:26-38.

PSALM 106

This Psalm relates the story of God’s mercy to Israel, of the people’s provocation of Jehovah, and of his great patience with them. It commences with an exhortation to praise the Lord.

1. *Praise ye the LORD.*

Or, “Hallelujah.” I cannot help remarking here that this is one of the most sacred words in the whole Bible, and it ought always to be pronounced with the utmost reverence. I sometimes feel my blood chill when I hear of “hallelujah lasses” and “hallelujah bonnets.” If those who use such expressions rightly understood the meaning of the word, they would not thus take the name of the Lord in vain?

1. *O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

As long as you and I are sinners, this will be one of the sweetest notes in our song of thanksgiving unto Jehovah: “His mercy endureth for ever.”

2. *Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can shew forth all his praise?*

Neither the angels nor the perfect spirits who day without night circle his throne rejoicing can show forth all Jehovah's praise.

3. *Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.*

There is great comfort in walking near to God; the way of peace, the way of blessing, is the way of righteousness; but, alas I my brethren, we do not always keep in that way as we should. The psalmist himself felt that he did not, therefore he prayed, —

4. *Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation;*

He felt that he needed God's grace in all its saving power.

5. *That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.*

He longs to get in among the people of God. He wants to share the favor which God bestows upon them, — the free grace which he manifests to them. He wants to be included in their election, to rejoice in their gladness, and to glory in their inheritance.

6, 7. *We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; —*

Very great wonders were wrought there when God's time came to set his people free from their cruel bondage. There was a marvellous display of power on God's part; yet the psalmist had to say, "Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt;"—

7. *They remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.*

They had hardly started out of Egypt before they provoked Jehovah. They had only just caught sight of the rolling waters of the Red sea, when they began to murmur against God and against his servant, Moses.

8. *Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, —*

Oh, is not that a grand word? Well might Jehovah say, "Not for your sakes do I this, O house of Israel." He saved them for his own sake,

8. *That he might make his mighty power to be known.*

Free grace finds in itself, not in us, its own motive, and discovers its own reason for acting on our behalf. God's reason for mercy is found in his mercy.

9-13. *He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness. And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. Then believed they his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel:*

Ah, me! Even the divided sea is soon forgotten; enemies walled up by water speedily pass from remembrance: "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel:" —

14, 15. *But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.*

I do not know of anything more dreadful than that, — to be fattened without, and to be starved within; — to have everything that heart could wish for, and yet not to have the best thing that the heart ought to wish for. May God save us from that appearance of prosperity which is only a veiled desolation!

16. *They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD.*

These two men had done everything for the children of Israel; they had been the instruments in the hand of God of innumerable blessings to them; yet they envied Moses and Aaron.

17, 18. *The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked.*

Jehovah's mercy did not melt the people's hard hearts, so perhaps the fear of his judgment would. God tried both methods with them, as he has done with us, for sometimes he has been very gracious to us, and at other times he has chastened us very sorely. He has tried the kiss and he has tried the blow. Yet what happened in the case of Israel?

19-22. *They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass. They forgot God their Saviour, which had done great things in Egypt; wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea.*

What was to become of such a people, provoking him again and again?

23. *Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.*

How often has our blessed Mediator, who is far greater than Moses, stood before the Lord in the breach! How often has the great Husbandman said, concerning the fruitless tree, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” And then that Divine Dresser of the vineyard has pleaded, “Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it.” And here we are, still spared, and still blessed, through the intercession of God’s chosen Mediator.

24. *Yea, they despised the pleasant land, —*

They said that the Canaan towards which they were traveling was not worth the trouble of getting to it: “They despised the pleasant land,” —

24-28. *They believed not his word: but murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD. Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness: to overthrow their seed also among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands. They joined themselves also unto Baalpeor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead.*

They began to study necromancy and spiritualism, and to join in the abominations of the worship of Baal.

29. *Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them.*

Now notice how something always happened to spare them from the destruction which they deserved.

30, 31. *Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed. And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore.*

Yet still they went on sinning against the Most High.

32, 33. *They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: because they provoked his spirit, so that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips.*

Does it not seem remarkable that Moses, the true servant of God, was not spared from punishment when it was but a word that he spoke unadvisedly, yet still the mercy of God was continued to that

provoking generation? Ah! that is always the way with our jealous God; those whom he loves best will be sure to feel his chastising rod, whatever happens to others. At last, the Israelites reached Canaan, they entered into the land that flowed with milk and honey; did that change their character? No; not in the least.

34-38. *They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: but were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.*

Just think how low they had sunk; God's own people had come down to this, that they actually offered their own children in sacrifice to Moloch.

39-43. *Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions. Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. And he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times did he deliver them; —*

You would not have expected to find such a sentence as that here; yet there it stands. Notwithstanding all that these people did, "many times did he deliver them;" —

43-45. *But they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry: and he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies.*

Was there ever so strange a story as this, — a story of provocation continued almost beyond belief, and yet of mercy which would not be overcome, — of persevering love that would not turn aside?

46-48. *He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives. Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.*

So the Psalm ends upon its key-note, — “Halleljah,” — “Praise ye Jehovah.”

PSALM 106

In this Psalm we have the story of God’s ancient covenant people, and as we read it, we may read our own history in it if we also are his people. It is a looking-glass, in which the beholder may see himself.

1. *Praise ye the LORD.*

The Psalm begins with Hallelujah, and the story of the Church is a succession of Hallelujahs; and the story of every Christian man’s life concerning the wonderful forbearance of God to him is a series of Hallelujahs.

1. *O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

That is the text, and this Psalm is the sermon upon it, — an exhibition of the goodness and ever-enduring mercy of God.

2, 3. *Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can shew forth all his praise? Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.*

These are the really blessed people, and we shall see, in this Psalm, how God’s ancient people so often missed that blessing by their sin, as I doubt not that we also miss much of the sacred, sweet blessedness which would be ours if we walked more closely with God, and were more obedient to him.

4, 5. *Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.*

This is a suitable prayer for each one of us to pray before we go any further. May God hear the vies of his people as we each one seek the fivefold blessing!

6. *We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.*

God has dealt kindly and graciously with us, yet here is an all too true description of what we have done: “We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.”

7. Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt.

Yet they were very plain, easy to understand, for they were the wonders of power that were wrought by God on behalf of his people; but they understood them not.

7. They remembered not the multitude of thy mercies;

They had bad memories as well as bad understandings, and it is so often with us, we remember not the multitude of God's mercies to us.

7. But provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.

That was a bad beginning; they were only just out of Egypt, and they had not yet crossed the Red sea, but they provoked the Lord even there. Oh, how soon after our first joy does our evil nature betray itself!

8. Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.

He saved them, not for their own sakes, but for his name's sake, for the manifestation of his own power and glory. This is how God still deals with his children; not on the ground of their merits, but for the manifestation of his own mercy and grace toward them.

9-12. He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness. And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. Then believed they his words; they sang his praise.

I should think they did believe God's words when they could see his wonderful works, but it is a poor faith that needs prodigies to be wrought each hour or else it fails. No wonder they sang God's praise at the Red sea, but, exultant as the songs of Moses and Miriam were, even better is that praise which rises from a broken and contrite heart which the Lord has delivered out of its trouble.

13-15. They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.

So it always is with us when we begin to let our desires outrun the will of God. He will sometimes let us discover our own folly by granting us our desires. The answer to some prayers would be a dire

calamity. Some pray for riches, and they get them; but they also get leanness in their soul. Some ask for earthly honours and success, and get them, but with them they also get leanness in their soul; and if a man is lean in his soul, it is not much good being fat anywhere else.

16. *They envied Moses also in the camp,*

Envy is a gaunt, lean, spectral thing; and when a soul is lean, it soon gets to be envious of others who are better than itself.

16-20. *And Aaron the saint of the LORD. The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked. They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.*

What a descent it was to come down from worshipping the spiritual God who had wrought such wonders for them, to the adoration of “an ox that eateth grass.” When we put our trust in men, instead of in God, we might have the same sort of ironical description applied to us, “They trusted in a man that must die, and in the son of man that is but dust.” Whenever we forsake the Lord, and put our confidence in anyone else, we are fools indeed.

21-23. *They forgot God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt; wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea. Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.*

You remember the intercession of Moses with the Lord, how he cried, “If thou wilt forgive their sin — ; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.” And, beloved friends, what should you and I have done if it had not been for the Mediator, far greater than Moses, who has stood in the breach very often when we have provoked the Lord, and who has so stood in the breach that he has borne the wrath of God which else must have destroyed us?

24. *Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word:*

They said that the land that flowed with milk and honey was a land that did eat up the inhabitants thereof, and that was full of giants, and they could not drive them out.

25. *But murmured in their hearts, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD.*

Do we ever fall into this sin of murmuring in the family, murmuring in the counting-house, murmuring against men, and murmuring against God, as they murmured in their tents?

26-28. *Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness: to overthrow their seed also among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands. They joined themselves also unto Baalpeor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead.*

They turned aside from the pure worship of the living God to hold communion with departed spirits; they fell into all the horrible abominations of the heathen among whom they dwelt.

29, 30. *Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them. Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed.*

God always has somebody to stand up for him, it is Moses one day, and Phinehas another day. He will not permit his people utterly to quit their faith and to be destroyed.

31-33. *And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore. They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.*

It is not surprising that Moses should have spoken as he did to people who so worried and wearied him with their rebellions and murmurings. Yet you see that God dealt sternly with his servant because of his sin, and he will do the same with those of us who bear the vessels of the Lord. The higher our office, the greater our responsibility. One slip of temper in the meek Moses shuts him out of the Promised Land; so see what sin will do, and see how one who sins in a smaller degree than others may be made a scapegoat for them.

34-36. *They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: but were mingled among the heathen, and learned their work. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.*

God warned them that it would be so, and that they must drive out those Canaanites, and not make a league with them, or else they would be sure to be led astray by them.

37, 38. *Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.*

Yet these were God's people, whom he brought out of Egypt, whom he tutored in the wilderness, whom he fed with manna, and to whom he gave miraculous streams from the rock; these were the only people in the world whom God had chosen as his own, the rest were sitting in darkness, yet see to what degradation they had fallen.

39. *Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.*

They were not true to God; but they plunged into every kind of uncleanness.

40, 41. *Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. And he gave them into the hand of the heathen, and they that hated them ruled over them.*

Read the history of God's ancient people, and see how often this occurred.

42-44. *Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity.*

Nevertheless —Oh, that wonderful “nevertheless” —

44-48. *He regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry: and he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies. He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives. Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.*

And well we may.

PSALM 106

1. *Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

In this Psalm we have the history of God's people turned to practical account. I have heard of some very unwise persons, who have said, "I do not care about the histories of Scripture. I do not profit by them." Tell me, dear friends, what other Bible had David but the history — the first five books? And what more wonderful teaching can there be than is contained in this Psalm, which is the essence of the history, "Praise ye the Lord" —or Hallelujah to Jah? Hallelujah is praise to God.

2-5. Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can show forth all his praise? Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times. Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.

If I may fare as God's people fared, I will be well content, and if God himself will come and bring me salvation, I shall have all that I want. Is that your thought now, dear hearer? Then utter the prayer, and may the Lord answer it while you are yet in your seat.

6. We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.

Three times is the confession of sin here made. It is a good beginning when we can begin with confessing sin. I wish that some people had begun there, when they took up with religion; but they too often jump into it, and I am afraid that they will jump out of it again. That harvest which does not come of ploughing is one which will never fill a barn, and that salvation which does not come from a sense of sin will never come to much.

7. Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt;

They saw them; they were surprised by them; but they could not make them out, could not tell what God was at when he smote the Egyptians. A want of understanding of divine truth is a very fatal want.

7. They remembered not the multitude of thy mercies;

What we do not understand we soon forget.

7. But provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.

They had not been long out of Egypt; they had scarcely eaten the bread that they brought out of their ovens, but they began to doubt God. They provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea.

8. *Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.*

He could not save them for their own sake, but he saved them for his own name's sake.

9. *He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through depths, as through the wilderness.*

The bottom of the sea was made as dry and as easy for their feet as the plains of the wilderness, and God led them through.

10-12. *And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. Then believed they his words; they sang his praise.*

It is almost a sarcasm. They believed when they saw. When the promise was fulfilled, then they believed it. Ah! my dear hearers, are there not some of you of whom the same might be said — I mean some people of God? You believe as far as you can see; and that is not believing at all. Let us trust God, whether or no. Red Sea or no Red Sea, let us believe the promise of God, and make sure that it will be true. Then believed they his words; they sung his praise.

13. *They soon forgot his works:*

They were in a hurry to forget.

13-15. *They waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.*

They had quails to eat. They had the food that they begged for, but their hearts were starved; their souls were famished. Ah! me, what people they were!

16. *They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD.*

They began to pick holes in their character. Good men that lived for them, and were ready to die for them — they began to spit upon them.

17-20. *The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. And a fire was kindled in their company; the*

flame burnt up the wicked. They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.

See! they had been in Egypt. They had seen the Egyptians worship the god Apis in the form of a bull, so that they must needs have a bull too. I daresay that they said, "The bull is an emblem of strength. We do not worship the image; the image is only used to help us to think of the power of God." But God forbids us to worship him under any image of any sort. "Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, nor in the earth beneath. Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them." All images, pictures, crucifixes — the whole (rut) of them are abhorrent and abominable to God. We must have nothing to do with them as helps to worship, for they are not helps. They are destroyers of the worship of God. But, you say to me, "You tell us that it was a bull." Yes, and, in contempt, the man of God here calls it a calf. You cannot be too disrespectful to objects of idolatrous worship. They may be esteemed by others, but do not show any kind of respect to them yourself; but if there be a name that you can give them that is full of sarcasm, let them have it.

21-23. *They forgot God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt; Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea. Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.*

They had found fault with Moses, yet Moses stood forward as intercessor, and through his pleading their lives were preserved. You see, again, what a sinful people they were. Ah! indeed they were! Look in this looking-glass and see yourself.

24, 25. *Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word: But murmured in their tents, and harkened not unto the voice of the LORD.*

This murmuring in your tents is a very obnoxious thing to God. Always grumbling and complaining. "It is an Englishman's privilege," says one. Mind it does not turn out to be an Englishman's ruin, for God cannot endure that we should be always murmuring at his providence.

26-28. *Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness: To overthrow their seed also among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands. They joined themselves also unto Baalpeor, and ate the sacrifice of the dead.*

They tried to practice necromancy — to have communion with spirits; they tried to learn the dark science and the black art; and this also God abhors.

29, 30. *Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them. Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed.*

In his hot zeal he ran the spear through two who were rebelling against God. He did it with all his might, and sometimes it is a kindness to a people to deal severely with them. Sin is not to be treated with white kid gloves. It has to be dealt with sometimes with a heavy hand. Phineas did this.

31, 32. *And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore. They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes:*

Poor Moses who loved them, and lived with them, yet lost his temper.

33. *Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips*

What a people to have to do with! Who would wish to be Moses, and who would wish to be a minister?

34, 35. *They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.*

They did not keep themselves separate. They would go and join this lot and that lot. They mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.

36-39. *And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood. Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.*

“What a dreadful people,” say you. These were God’s chosen people, Israel; the best people in the world at that time; and yet how

could they be much worse? Oh! what a God of mercy God is to deal with such people at all!

40-43. *Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. And he gave them into the hand of the heathen: and they that hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity.*

Listen to this.

44, 45. *Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry: And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies.*

You would have thought that he would have been provoked beyond endurance, but, after all he had smitten, he still had a tender heart towards them.

46-48. *He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives. Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting; and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.*

PSALM 107:1-22

1. *O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

In the heading of this Psalm we are reminded that the psalmist here exhorts the redeemed, in praising God, to observe his manifold providence over travelers, prisoners, sick men, seamen, “and in divers varieties of life;” but, inasmuch as the exhortation is specially addressed to the redeemed of the Lord, I shall endeavor to cast the red ray of redemption over it, and to explain these various circumstances as relating to the spiritual experience of God’s people, and to their deliverance out of divers perils to which their souls are exposed. “O give thanks unto the Lord.” This seems to imply that we are so slow to praise God that we have to be stirred up to this sacred duty. This exhortation looks as if we needed to be entreated to give thanks unto the Lord. Yet this ought not to be an uncongenial or disagreeable task. It ought to be our pleasure to

praise the Lord; we should be eager to do it; and yet it is to be feared that we are often silent when we ought to be giving thanks unto his holy name. He deserves them, “for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.”

2, 3. *Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; and gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.*

Whenever God’s people are redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and gathered unto himself, it is always by his grace and power. They are not only gathered to him, but they are gathered by him; and therefore let them all praise his holy name.

4. *They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.*

This is the experience of all God’s redeemed and gathered ones; they were, at one time, all lost, and wandering to and fro in the wilderness, as God’s ancient people did.

5, 6. *Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.*

This is the point to which a true spiritual experience sooner or later brings all God’s elect ones; they cry unto the Lord in their trouble. The end, the design of their trouble is that they may cry unto him; and when they do so, it is absolutely certain that they shall be delivered out of their distresses.

7-11. *And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness. Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High:*

All God’s people, all his redeemed have been made to feel, in a greater or lesser degree the agony of their spiritual bondage. They have been like captives sitting in darkness, dreading death, realizing that they are utterly unable to deliver themselves. They have been rebellious against the words of God, and have despised his counsel, so that it is absolutely needful that they should be brought to their

right position, and be made to kneel before the Lord in true humility of heart.

12-16. *Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bards in sunder. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.*

Is any child of God thus shut up in the dark? Those of you who have ever been lost in a London fog know what a depression of spirit it brings upon you while you are in the impenetrable darkness, out of which you cannot see any way of escape. All that you can do is to stand still and cry out for help. Well, try what crying to God will do for you in your spiritual depression. Your spirit is cast down into the very deeps; then, out of the depths cry unto the Lord, as Jonah did; rest in him, trust in him, and see whether he will not bring you up into the light of his countenance.

17, 18. *Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death.*

All God's redeemed people have suffered from soul-sickness, and some of them have suffered from it so acutely that they have lost all appetite for spiritual comfort. "Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat;" they cannot bear the sight or the thought of it. A man in this condition says, "Do not bring me any food; I loathe it." The very nourishment that might have restored him he rejects because of the nausea which soul-sickness brings.

19, 20. *Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.*

He healed them with his Word; and there is a specific, in God's Word, for every form of spiritual malady. What we need to know is where the particular remedy for our special form of soul-sickness is to be found; and this the Holy Spirit will teach us if we will but ask him.

21, 22. *Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them*

sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.

PSALM 107:1-32

1. *O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Because we are sinners God's goodness takes the form of mercy. Mercy —this was what we wanted; therefore, instead of mere benevolence towards the good, God's love takes the form of mercy towards the guilty, and this mercy is for ever — it always was, always is, and always shall be.

2. *Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;*

Let the redeemed be the first to sing, and let them sing the sweetest of all. O children of God, you are meant to be leaders in the chorus of God's praise. All nature is a great organ, and if you be what you should be, you are the men whose fingers of gratitude are to touch the keys and bring forth thunders of praise unto God.

3. *And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.*

It is a part of redemption's work to gather out all people — fetch them into a separated condition. The voice of redemption sounds — “come out from among them and be ye separate. Touch not the unclean thing.” And the hand of redemption gathers out God's chosen and brings them into a saved unity where they enjoy fellowship with each other and with God.

Now here he gives a description of the gratitude which is due to God from different persons who have been partakers of his mercy. First, souls are here compared to lost travelers.

4-6. *They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.*

Some of you know what this means. You have lost your way. You know not how to find it. Spiritually you are in a wilderness, and you would, if you could, get to the city of Jerusalem. You would get to the very heart of God, but you cannot. You find no city to dwell in — no peace — no rest. Moreover, your spiritual wants are very

pressing. You are hungry and you are thirsty, but it is a wilderness, and you cannot find a morsel of food. No manna drops for you. Your soul is ready to faint. You feel as if you could not go another step nor search another inch. To lie down and die is all that you can do. But the vultures are in the air; and you are afraid even of despair. You are hard pressed. Notice it is said, "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble." Why did not they do so before? Because men do not begin to pray to God as long as they have any hope beside. But when all hope is gone, then comes the first real living agonizing cry to heaven; and no sooner is that heard than God answers it. "He delivered them out of their distresses."

7-9. And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

Is there a longing soul here tonight? Amidst these thousands, surely there must be some! Well, dear soul, God will satisfy you. He will not merely stay your hunger for a little while, and help you to break your fast, but your longing shall be satisfied. And if you are hungry, he will fill you, and fill you not only with good, but with goodness itself — the very quintessence of everything that is excellent. Next, the psalmist describes prisoners. We have a picture of the spiritual state of man from another point of view.

10-13. Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; because they rebelled against the words of God, and condemned the counsel of the most High: therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.

These were prisoners in a prison where they were forged to work, and where they found no rest. A picture of a dark soul — a soul over which death spread his dragon-wings. You know what it means to be brought into spiritual death — to feel the chill of spiritual death even to your very marrow, paralyzing you, and binding all your hopes in everlasting frost, do you not? Have you been in dread of the wrath to come? Have you set to work to redeem yourselves, and toiled like slaves, but toiled in vain? Has your heart been brought down from your high notions, and your proud desires,

and your boastings, and your loftinesses? Then is fulfilled in you the words of this text — “Therefore he brought down their heart with labour: they fell down, and there was none to help.” “Then,” but not till then, — “then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.” Proud hearts will not pray. When a man can help himself, he will not cry to God. As long as he has any hope left within the compass of his nature, he will not turn to the God who made him. But what a blessed despair that is which drives us to God! It is like the wave that sweeps the mariner up on to the rook where he is safe. May such a wave of despair catch some of us, and hurl us into safety! They cried and he saved them.

14-16. *He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.*

The third picture of our lost estate is given us under the image of a sick man.

17-19. *Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry —*

Even these fools! “Then they cry” —

19-22. *Unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.*

One more picture is given, and that is of a soul at sea, tossed with tempest and not comforted — spiritually shipwrecked.

23-28. *They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry —*

Never till they get to their wit's end do men cry to God. When nothing else is to be done, and all human might has utterly failed, then they cry. Now, you that have ever been in this storm — you know what it means. You recollect how you were sailing smoothly along with fair weather, and suddenly a spiritual cyclone took a hold of you, and twisted your soul round about — threw you sometimes up with presumptuous hopes, and then down again with awful despairs. You could not stand or hold to anything, even the truth you did know you could not believe, and the promises which you could believe you could not apply to yourself. There was no hold-fast for you. You reeled and staggered, and your courage was gone. Your soul was melted because of trouble. There seemed nothing before you but the abyss. Deep called to deep, and Jehovah's waterspouts sent forth a sound. Now, you thought "surely the end is come," and then it was that you began to pray.

28-32. *Unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.*

Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

PSALM 107:1-32

The psalmist exhorteth the redeemed, in praising God, to observe the different forms of his mercy. He views the chosen people as travelers, captives, sick men, and seamen, and in each of these classes he exhorts them to praise the Lord.

1. *O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good:*

He is essentially good. His name God is only a shorter form of good. Yet, if we were to lengthen it, there could be no more goodness found in it than is found in the three letters, "God."

1. *For his mercy endureth for ever.*

That is the form which his goodness takes in relation to us, his sinful creatures; as we deserve nothing, everything that he gives us is a gift of mercy, and what a range his mercy takes! "His mercy endureth for ever."

2. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;

If nobody else will say that God is good, let his redeemed ones say it. If others are silent, let them speak to his praise, if others are doubtful, let them declare positively that the Lord is good, and that his mercy endureth for ever.

3. And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.

We were scattered in various directions by our own folly and sin;-“ Each wandering in a different way, but all the downward road;-and he gathered us unto that blessed Shiloh of whom Jacob said, “Unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”

4. They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way;

Ah, the way of a sinner, convinced of sin, is indeed a solitary way; he has a sorrow which he cannot tell to anybody else, a stranger intermeddleth not with his grief

4. They found no city to dwell in.

There are no cities in the wilderness for people to dwell in. We look for a city that is out of sight at present, “ a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.” Here, in this fleeting world, we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

5, 6. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.

They were a long while before they prayed to the Lord, but it was not a long while before he answered their prayer. When they were brought to that then, that is to say, when they were so hungry, and so thirsty, and so faint that they could do nothing else but cry, then, the moment that they cried unto the Lord, “ he delivered them out of their distresses.”

7. And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.

“He led them . . . that they might go.” The leadings of divine grace do not destroy the activities of the human will. God does not treat us as if we were blocks of wood or stone, but he treats us as reasonable beings.

8, 9. *Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.*

We hardly looked for that verse to follow the preceding one. We might have thought that the psalmist would have written, “for he brings them to a city of rest.” God always exceeds our expectations. He not only brings his wandering people home, but he feeds them bountifully when they are there. He holds high festival within Zion’s gates, and the citizens of the new Jerusalem are fed with the finest of the wheat. Surely souls so blessed must praise Jehovah for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men. Now comes another picture, the picture of the captives:-

10, 11. *Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; because they rebelled against the words of God, and condemned the counsel of the most High:*

They “sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,” for they have lost all energy. They sit down in dumb despair, for at last their sins have found them out. They rejected God, and he has left them to suffer the consequences of their sin: “ being bound in affliction and iron “

12, 13. *Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble,-*

This seems to be always the last thing that people in trouble do; until they hunger, and thirst, and their soul faints, as in the former case, or until they fall down utterly helpless, as in this case, they will not pray. But “then they cry unto Jehovah in their trouble,”-

13-16. *And he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.*

All glory be to the great Liberator’s name! Now comes the picture of sick men, which is also the portrait of ourselves:-

17. *Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.*

Perhaps affliction comes to their bodies, but more especially it attacks their hearts,-they have heart disease, a mortal tremor within, or a terrible fever of fear.

18. *Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat;*

You cannot comfort them, they cannot or will not receive the truth that would sustain them, they have lost all appetite for spiritual food.

18. *And they draw near unto the gates of death.*

They seem to come close to those great iron gates that shut out all hope for ever, they can hear them grind upon their massive hinges; they begin to realize what the wrath of God means.

19. *Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble,*

Fools though they are, they have sense enough to do this.

19. *And he saveth them out of their distresses.*

So that a true prayer from one who is near unto the gates of death is a prevailing prayer. We earnestly urge all to repent long before they come to a dying bed, but if they are on a dying bed, if they are literally near unto the gates of death, here is evidence that, if they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, he will not close his ears or his heart to their prayer.

20. *He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.*

The Word of God has a sort of omnipotent power in it. By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and by the Word of the Lord are sick souls healed. That Word can do anything that God purposes. "Where the word of a king is, there is power;" but where the Word of God is, there is omnipotence.

21, 22. *Oh that man would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.*

Now we come to the seafaring men:-

23, 24. *They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep.*

These words apply not only to seamen literally, but also to others who are called to endure great storms while sailing across the sea of this mortal life,

25, 26. *For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble.*

For even he who has his “sea legs” on finds them of little use to him when such a storm as this is tossing everything in a dreadful hurly burly. “They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths,” and this experience is repeated, perhaps, hundreds of times, day and night, sometimes for weeks together.

27. *They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end.*

But, oh! when souls are caught in a storm of conviction of sin, this is a true description of their spiritual distress,-they are at their wits end, and do not know what to do. Everything about them is shaking, and they themselves are reeling to and fro, sometimes this way and sometimes that;-staggering, scarcely able to believe anything, seeing some things double, and everything out of place.

28. *Then they cry-*

Yes, then, when they are reeling and staggering; that is a queer condition-is it not?-in which to be praying, reeling to and fro, and staggering like a drunken man: “Then they cry.”-

28. *Unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.*

Then God will hear the prayer of a staggering man, and the prayer that has not any sense in it because the man who prays is at his wit’s end. By “sense” I mean not following the consecutiveness of an orderly petition; the prayer itself seeming to reel to and fro. The suppliant is so overpowered by sorrow that he might be thought to be drunken, as she was to whom Eli so harshly spoke bidding her put away her wine from her, whereas she was overcome by sorrow. God hears us when we cannot hear ourselves pray, and when we cannot put the words of our supplication in proper order, God knows what we mean to say, and gives us what we really need.

29. *He maketh the storm a calm,-*

What a change! And what a blessing it is to get into one of God’s calms, for they are far beyond the ordinary calm of nature; then do we enjoy “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.”

29-32. So that the wave thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

PSALM 107:23-32

23,24. They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters ; these see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep.

The Jews were never given to navigation. To “go down to the sea in ships,” seemed a very extraordinary thing to them; they looked upon it as a going down, as it were, into a dreadful abyss. We, who are more accustomed to going to sea than they were, talk of “the high seas;” but they spoke of going “down to the sea.” They never went to sea except on business. King Solomon had no pleasure yacht. There was never one of that ancient race who cared to trust himself upon the sea except as a matter of sheer necessity, and those who did so were looked upon with wonder by their land-loving friends. “They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord;”—that is, his greatest works, both in the sea and on it. They know what storms are, and they see what omnipotence can do, and they come back to tell of the wonders of God upon the mighty deep. This verse may be read spiritually as well as literally. God calls some of his servants, as it were, to go down to the sea in ships. They are tried with poverty, with personal sickness, with temptation, with inward conflicts, with fierce persecutions; and God never calls them to these trials out of mere caprice, there is always a reason for it. They go down to the sea in ships to “do business in great waters.” There is something to be gained from their trials, and something to be learned from them. They “do business in great waters;” and “these see the works of the Lord.” Others hear about them, and believe what they are told concerning them; but these see them. They see what God has done in their case,—how he sustains, how he delivers, how he sanctifies trial, and overrules it for his own glory, and his people’s good: “These see the works of the Lord.” And they also see

the wonders of the economy of grace. They are made to experience the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths, of that love which; passeth knowledge; they see “his wonders in the deep.” You and I need not desire to have trouble, as though we put out to sea for our own pleasure; but, if God calls us to sail upon a sea of troubles, if he sends us there upon his business, we may depend upon it that he means that business to end to our profit and his own glory.

25-27.—*For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end.*

Here we learn something of what sailors see, and of what tried Christians experience. These great storms arise by God’s commandment;—not as many say, nowadays, “by the laws of nature.” The wind, which had been quiet, heard God’s voice, and raiseth itself up, like a wild beast from its lair: “He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind;” and no sooner does the great wind begin to blow than the white crests of the waves are seen, and the white horses fly before the blast which lifteth up the waves on high. Then the ship, however staunch it be, seems to have no greater power of resistance than a frail sea bird; and it is tossed up and down, up and down, from the trough of the sea to the billows’ crown: “They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths;” and their very soul begins to melt. Brave men as they are, it only needs a sufficient amount of storm to make their hearts turn to water and their spirits dissolve into the turbulent element that is all round them: “their soul is melted because of trouble.” Then they cannot keep their standing: “they reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man.” What is worse, they cannot control their brains; they “are at their wit’s end.” What can they do in such a case as that? There is an end to all human wit and wisdom when the great storms are out upon the sea. You who have ever had deep spiritual trials know the analogy of all this. There may come times—there have come times to some of us—when, at the command of God, or by divine permission, there has been a fierce blast of temptation or a fiery trial, and then all that was peaceful round about us before suddenly turns into a whirlpool of tempestuous billows, and we are tossed to and fro at the mercy of the winds and the waves.

Sometimes we ascend in presumption, and then we go down into the very depths of despair. At one moment, we are joyous with hope; and, a moment later, we seem ready to give all hope up, our courage fails us, and our soul dissolves within us, If you never have known this experience, I pray that you never may know it; but some of us have had stormy times when we have seemed to have no foothold, when we have reeled to and fro like drunken men,—when the best faith we have had has been little better than staggering. Still, it is better to stagger on the promise than to stagger at it; and we did still stand though we staggered, and we were at our wit's end. We could not see what to do, and we could not tell what to do, and we could not have done it if we had known what to do; we were brought to such an extremity that we seemed to have neither wit nor wisdom left.

28. *Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.*

This shows that, although they were at their wit's end, they had wit enough or wisdom enough to pray. Their souls were melted, so they let them run out in prayer. It is a good thing to get the soul melted, for then it will flow out like water before the Lord. Note that these sailors cried to God when there was no one else to whom they could cry: "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble." Learn from this sentence that, when your soul is melted because of trouble, you can still pray. When you reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, you can still pray and when you are at your wit's end, you can still pray. Prayer is never out of season; it is a fruit of grace that is acceptable to God in autumn and in winter, in spring and in summer. Long as you live, and even when the worst comes to the worst, cry mightily unto God, for he will surely hear you. Was it not so with us when we were in spiritual trouble, and could do nothing else but cry unto the Lord? It was a poor prayer that we offered, but it was a real prayer that we presented when we cried unto God. Mark how quick God is to hear such prayer as this: "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses." He brought them into them, and therefore he brought them out of them. It was God who took Jacob into Egypt; and, therefore, though it took four hundred years to bring Israel out of Egypt, God brought them out at last. He kills, and he makes alive;

he wounds, and he heals. Rest you in this truth as a matter of absolute certainty.

29. *He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.*

At the first, God made everything out of nothing, so he can easily make a calm out of a storm; and he can make the storm a calm for you whenever he pleases to do so. Your troubled feelings, your tossings to and fro, may soon subside into “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,” which “shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

30. *Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.*

And there is no music that is sweeter to the mariner’s ears than the rattle of the chain as the anchor grips the bottom of the harbor, and the ship rests from all her tossings. The Lord will give you grace, my brother, my sister, to let down your anchor;—or, rather, to throw it up “into that within the vail,” for that is the way that your anchor goes; and then you shall be glad because you will be quiet. I believe that there is often, a greater, fuller, deeper joy in being quiet than there is in making a noise. There are times when it is good to praise the Lord with the high-sounding cymbals and with the harp of a solemn sound; but, in the deepest joy of all, we are still before God, and praise is silent before God in Zion.

31. *Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*

Should they not do so? Those who have survived the storms at sea, or the still greater storms within their own souls, should surely take care to praise the Lord. If we know how to pray, we ought also to know how to praise. Prayer and praise ought to form the two covers of the book of our life, and our life is not well bound unless these are the two covers to it, with a good stiff back of faith to bind the two covers firmly together, and to hold every leaf in its proper place.

32. *Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.*

Let them not only praise the Lord in private, but let them also sound out their song of gratitude to God where the graybeards are gathered together, and let the men of experience, the officers of the

church, the leaders of the Lord's people, help them in the expression of their gratitude.

PSALM 107:33-43

33,34. *He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.*

Hearken unto this, ye who are men of understanding. God can soon take away from any people the privileges which they cease to prize. He sent barrenness upon the earth in the days of our first father, Adam; and he has long cursed with barrenness the very land in which this Psalm was written. He can give us what he pleases, and he can take it all away when he pleases. And, spiritually, God can easily turn a fruitful land into barrenness. The means of grace, the ministry of his Word which was once very rich and fertile to you, may suddenly lose all its savour and all its fruitfulness. Ay, even his own Word, which may be compared to water-springs, may suddenly seem to you to be but as dry ground; and your secret devotions, your reading of godly books, your conversation with gracious men and women, all of which were like wells of water, may seem to be dried up. If you walk contrary to God, he will walk contrary to you. "He turneth a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." When the people of God fall from their steadfastness, when they wander from the paths of holiness, it is easy for God to let them know that the best means are only means, and that the best earthly supplies are barrenness itself apart from him. God grant that it may never be so with any of us! But now see what happens when the Lord turns his hand the other way:—

35. *He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings.*

He can make the sandy desert into a lake of water, he can make that which was barren as the desert of Sahara to become as fruitful as the garden of the Lord. And if you are just now mourning your barrenness, believe in the omnipotence of his grace which can work such wonderful transformations as these for you. "All my fresh springs are in thee," said the psalmist; and so they are with us;

therefore, why should not those fresh springs now flow into our nature so as to make the dry ground into water springs?

36,37. *And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation; and sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase.*

See, brothers and sisters, when God blesses us, then we begin to work for him. When he works, we work. He blesses the barren land with fruitfulness, and then we sow the fields, and plant vineyards. We do not sit still because God is at work; nay, rather, we obey the apostolic injunction, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

38,39. *He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease. Again, they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow.*

God has a great many rods, and we get a great many smarts because of our many sins. If we were but saved from our sins, we should not need all these rods, “oppression affliction, and sorrow,” — tribulation, and anguish, and pain, and distress. I will not tell you the names of all of them, but they are very many, and their strokes are very painful. May God grant that we may be quit of sin, for only so shall we be quit of many of these sorrows.

40. *He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way.*

God makes very little of earth’s biggest men: “He poureth contempt upon princes.” He has wonderful ways of making very poor those who are very rich in themselves. He makes those who were lords of all the fields to be exiles and wanderers in the wilderness, where there is no way. Do not get proud, brethren, or else that may be your lot. He who is so near perfection that he need not pray, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” may before long be so near desperation that he will not have to pray even the publican’s prayer. Let none of us become too great, lest we soon be made very little.

41. *Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock.*

God always has an eye of pity for the poor, and especially for the spiritually poor. While “he poureth contempt upon princes” with one hand, he is lifting the poor from the dunghill with the other.

42. *The righteous shall see it, and rejoice:*

When God’s providence and grace are at work with men, the righteous shall see it, and understand it, and be glad.

42. *And all iniquity shall stop her mouth.*

She is generally very noisy and boastful; but, sometimes, when God’s judgments are abroad, she is obliged to hold her tongue. “All iniquity shall stop her mouth.” O Lord, stop it speedily, for she is making a great noise just now!

43. *Whose is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.*

Those who watch providence will never be without a providence to watch?

PSALM 108.

1-5. *O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory. Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O LORD, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth;*

Here, we begin with praise, — the very praise with which we finished the other Psalm, — praise in a very joyous, confident spirit, for the praise which precedes prayer has more of the “Jubilate” note in it than ordinary praise has. The prayer in Psalm 57:1, which preceded the praise, was earnest, and fervent, and confident, yet it did not reach so high a note as this: —

6-9. *That thy beloved may be delivered: save with thy right hand, and answer me. God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my law-giver; Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; over Philistia will I triumph.*

David is claiming the kingdom which God promised to him by the mouth of Samuel the prophet; — looking first upon the kingdom

itself, and then upon the surrounding territories, and laying hold upon them all as his own because God had given them to him.

10. *Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom?*

In the spirit of a truly courageous leader, he means to fight with that ancient foe of Israel; and wisely appeals to God to lead his army: —

11-13. *Wilt not thou, O God, who hast cast us off? and wilt not thou, O God, go forth with our hosts? Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 57:7-11; AND 108,

PSALM 110

1, 2. *The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.*

You do not need a comment upon this Psalm when you remember how our Lord himself applied it to himself. It is David speaking concerning the Son of David, who is also David's Lord and our King, who at this hour is sitting at the right hand of Jehovah, the Lord of all; waiting until his monarchy shall be extended visibly over all creation.

3. *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.*

Christ, like the rising sun, shall not come alone in his brightness, but, as with the sun we see an innumerable company of sparkling dewdrops, so shall the forces of Christ be as numerous as the drops of the morning dew which spring from the womb of the morning. God's infinite grace shall lead forth willing troops when Christ shall come.

4. *The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*

That is, a priestly king, a kingly priest — priest and king united in one person.

5. *The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.*

Life power shall stand against our coming Lord; when he once comes to the battle, the victory shall be sure.

6, 7. *He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.*

Like a stern warrior that seeks not luxury, like Gideon's men that lapped, he shall drink of the brook as he marches on to the conflict, and because he hath scorn of self-indulgence and human luxury, therefore shall he be exalted King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 110; ROMANS 2:25-29; 3.

PSALM 110

1. *The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.*

Here we see the Christ,-whom we just now saw as risen from the dead, and acknowledged as the Son of God,-seated upon the throne: "Jehovah said unto my Adonai, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

2. *The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.*

No sooner was Christ ascended into heaven than, out of the midst of his Church,-the earthly Zion,-the scepter of his power was stretched forth, and its might was displayed amongst the sons of men. Witness what happened on the day of Pentecost, which was but the beginning of Christ's ruling in the very midst of his enemies, who then became his friends, and yielded their hearts and lives to him; so that Jerusalem, where he had been crucified, became the very center of his kingdom on earth, from which his servants went forth to evangelize the world.

3. *Thy people shall be willing-*

They shall be willingness itself-

3. *In the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.*

That is, as soon as the ascended Christ began his reign in heaven, and the power of his Church begin to be felt on earth, there was a willing people coming forward, in the beauty of holiness, like priests clad in their sacred robes. Such the early Christians truly were; and they were as numerous, and as refreshing, and as bright to the world as the sparkling dew of the morning. Then, indeed, had Christ the dew of his youth most clearly manifested. Multitudes of young hearts yielded to him, and his Church on earth seemed to have had a new birthday when he ascended up on high, and led captivity captive.

4. *The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*

That is, a priest without predecessor or successor,-a priest who was at the same time a king,-a priest of the Most High God, who was greater even than Abraham, the friend of God. Jesus our Lord is not a priest after the order of Aaron, for he came not of that line, but he was “a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

5. *The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.*

When that last great day shall come, Christ shall no longer patiently wait for the overthrow of his enemies; but he shall win the complete victory over them.

6. *He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.*

Thus wilt thou, O Lord, cut down all evil principles, and everything that is opposed to thee!

7. *He shall drink of the brook in the way:*

That is, he shall not be wearied with thirst, as Samson was, but he shall hasten on in his mighty achievements, without pausing to rest, until he has fully accomplished the whole of his great task.

8. *Therefore shall he lift up the head.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 2., AND 110.

PSALM 110:1-7

1. *The LORD said unto my Lord.*

Or Jehovah said unto my Adonai.

1, 2. *Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.*

This is the Messiah, this is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords. Where are his subjects?

3. *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.*

A willing people shall make up the forces of this great King, and upon them the freshness of the morning shall rest.

4. *The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*

King and priest. None other of the house of David save our Lord Jesus Christ could claim the union of these two offices. In Christ we have a King and a priest, as also with Melchisedec of old, a great type of Jesus.

5-7. *The Lord at thy right hand, shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.*

This conqueror shall be refreshed in his journey; therefore, shall he lift up the head.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 110:1-7; HEBREWS 7:1-14.

PSALM 111

1. *Praise ye the LORD.*

Or, "Hallelujah," "Praise be unto Jehovah." "Praise ye the Lord." I invite all Christians to give good heed to this injunction; whether others praise him, or not, "Praise ye the Lord." Do it now: do it always, do it heartily, do it instead of what you sometimes do, namely, doubt him, murmur at him, rebel against him: "Praise ye the Lord." Ye who are beginning the Christian life, praise him for your regeneration. Ye who have long continued in it, praise him for sustaining you. Ye who are the most ripe for heaven, begin now the praises that will never, never end.

1. I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation.

It is always well when a preacher practises what he preaches. David does that here: "Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord." One of the best ways of enforcing an exhortation is to practically obey it: "Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord." But when a man becomes an example to others, he should be very careful to set a good example. Hence, the psalmist not only says that he will praise the Lord, but that he will do it heartily, yea, with his whole heart. Such a God as Jehovah is, is worthy of all the praise we can give him. We ought to praise him with all our thought, with all our skill, with all our love, with all our zeal, with all our heart, with our whole heart. David tells us that he would render this praise both amongst the choice and select company of God's people, "in the assembly of the upright," and also in the larger congregation, where a more mixed multitude would be found. Brethren, praise, is never out of place, and never out of season. If you are with a little company of two or three choice Christian friends, praise the Lord in their midst. Tell them your experience, and bless the name of the Lord for his grace and mercy; but if you should be in a larger assembly, where the characters of some may be doubtful, be not abashed, but still continue to praise the Lord.

2. The work of the LORD are great, —

They are great in number, in size, in purpose, and in effect. Even when God makes a little thing, it is great because of the wisdom displayed in making it. The microscope has taught us the greatness of God in creating tiny creatures of wondrous beauty, yet so small as not to be perceptible to the naked eye: "The works of the Lord are great,"

2. Sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.

If we take pleasure in a man, we also take pleasure in his works, we like to see what he has made; and, in like manner, the saints of God take pleasure in his works. They revel in the beauties of creation; they delight to study his wisdom in providence, but, best of all, they are most charmed with the wonders of divine grace. These works are so marvellous that a mere surface glance at them is not sufficient; you need to search them out, to dig deep in the mines of God's wisdom as seen in his works, to try to find out the secret motive of his everlasting purposes; and, the more you study them,

the more they will grow. Some things impress you at first with greater significance than they do afterwards, but the works of God are so great that, if you look at them throughout your whole lifetime, they will continue to grow greater still.

3. *His work* —

I suppose the psalmist means God's chief work, his grand work of grace: "His work" —

3. *Is honourable and glorious: and his righteousness endureth for ever.*

The work of God is full of grace, and it is full of honour and glory to his blessed name; and every single portion of the work of grace is full of that which resounds to the honour and glory of the Triune Jehovah. I hope, dear friends, that you delight to study the whole plan of saving mercy, from its initiation in the eternal purpose to its culmination in the gathering together of all the people of God. If you do, you will see that all through it "is honourable and glorious: and his righteousness endureth for ever." As it endured Calvary, it may well endure for ever. Though the Lord Jesus Christ purposed so to save his people, he would not do it by sacrificing his righteousness. He fulfilled righteousness to the utmost, by his perfect life, and by his suffering even unto death, and, now, we are quite sure that no further strain will ever be put upon that divine attribute. "His righteousness endureth for ever."

4. *He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered:*

Do not be forgetful of God's wonderful works. They are made on purpose to be remembered; so, treasure them up, for they are worthy of being held in everlasting remembrance.

4. *The LORD is gracious and full of compassion.*

This is what his people always find to be true whenever they read the history of his works. The thought that strikes them is, "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion." If any of you long to be at peace with God, however far you may have wandered from him, he is ready to receive you if you will but return to him, for he "is gracious and full of compassion" — not merely tender-hearted, but full of graciousness. He abounds with thoughts of love towards his people; come, and try him for yourselves.

5. *He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant.*

The needs of all his people are always supplied by him. He finds food both for body and soul, and you may rest assured that every promise of his covenant will be faithfully kept. You may forget it, but he will not: “he will ever be mindful of his covenant,” and mindful of you because of that covenant, mindful of your heavy cares, mindful of your bitter griefs, mindful of your weakness and infirmity, because you are in his covenant,
and he is mindful of it.

6. *He hath shewed his people the power of his works,*

He showed the Israelites what he could do, what force he could throw into what he did, and he has shown to us, Christians, the same thing in another way, by the power of his gracious Spirit, blessing the preaching of his Word to the conversion of sinners, and maintaining the great fight against the dread powers of darkness: “He hath shewed his people the power of his works.”

6. *That he may give them the heritage of the heathen.*

He gave to Israel the land of Canaan, where the heathen dwelt; and he will give to Christ, when he asks for them, the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. Let us pray God to prove the power of his works in the subduing of the nations unto Christ.

7. *The works of his hands are verity and judgment;*

He never acts contrary to truth and righteousness. Even when he puts on his most terrible look, and smites his enemies in his wrath, still, “the works of his hands are verity and judgment;”

7, 8. *All his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness.*

Whatever God commands, determines, purposes, you may rest assured that it will be accomplished; but his purposes are always accomplished, not by caprice, but by “truth and uprightness.” God is a Sovereign, doing as he wills; but he never wills to do anything that is inconsistent with justice, truth, and uprightness.

9. *He sent redemption unto his people:*

He brought them up out of Egypt with a high hand and a stretched out arm, and he has sent redemption to us, first, by price, when he redeemed us from our guilt upon the tree; and then by power, when the Holy Spirit came and broke our bands asunder, and set us free from the dominion of our sins.

9. He hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.

His whole character commands our reverence because it is superlatively holy, and his name is to us a word of awe never to be mentioned flippantly, and never to be quoted without earnest thought and prostration of heart before him. I fear that there are some professors who use the name of God far too freely. They do not recollect that “holy and reverend is his name.” I can hardly think that any man can be “reverend.” There are some who choose to be called by that title; I suppose they mean something less than the word means here: “Holy and reverend is his name,” not mine, certainly.

10. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom:

It is the A B C of true wisdom. He who has learned to fear God has learned the first part of wisdom. According to some, the word “beginning” here means the chief, the head, the front, just as, often, in Scripture, “beginning” signifies that. “The fear of the Lord” is the chief part of “wisdom,” the essence of it.

10. A good understanding have all they that do his commandments:

Practical goodness is the proof of a good understanding. A man may have an orthodox head, and yet not have a good understanding. A man may be able to talk very glibly about the commandments of God, and even to preach about them with considerable power; but it is the doing of them that is the main point.

10. His praise endureth for ever.

PSALM 113

We will read, this evening, two passages in the Word of God; the first will be Psalm **113**.

1. Praise ye the LORD. Praise, O ye servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD.

Three times are you stirred up to this duty of praise. Adore the Sacred Trinity with threefold praise. There is a trinity in you: let spirit, soul, and body praise the Lord. Let the past, the present, and the future make another threefold chord; and for each of these, “Praise ye the Lord. Praise, O ye servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord.”

2, 3. *Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD'S name is to be praised.*

“From the rising of the sun until the going down of the same the Lord’s name is to be praised.” In hours of morning light, when the dew is on the grass, and our soul is full of gladness, and in the hours of the setting sun, when the day is weary, and the night seems coming on, still let the Lord have the praise that is his due, for he is always to be praised. There is never an hour in which it would be unseemly to praise God. For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven; but the praising of God is never out of season. All time and all eternity may be dedicated to this blessed work.

4, 5. *The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high,*

The loftiness, the majesty, the sublimity of God are attributes that are terrible in themselves; yet they minister much joy to those who love the Lord. For, you know, we can never make too much of those whom we love; and if we see them exalted, then is our soul glad. Would you wish to have a little God? Would you wish to have a God who had but little honour, or little power? No; you ascribe to him all conceivable and all inconceivable greatness, and you exult as you think what a high and mighty God he is.

“Who is like unto Jehovah our God,
who dwelleth on high?”

6. *Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!*

It enables us to get some faint idea of the greatness of God when we read that he has to humble himself even to look at the things in heaven, perfect and spotless though they be. Dr. Watts truly sings,

“The lowest step around thy seat
Rises too high for Gabriel’s feet;
In vain the tall archangel tries
To reach thine height with wond’ring eyes.”

All the faculties of all the angels cannot comprehend the Infinite. When the Lord looks down to us, how much he must humble himself! If he humbleth himself to see the things in heaven which

are clear and pure, what humility is required that he may look upon the things on the earth!

7, 8. *He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.*

Have you never noticed that, in all these joyous songs to God, there is almost always one of these notes, that God abases the proud, and exalts the humble? This was the basis of Hannah's song; and it was the pith and marrow of Mary's Magnificat: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." This wonderful turning of things upside down; this withering of the green tree, and making the dry tree to flourish; this killing that which liveth, and quickening that which is dead; this emptying of the full, and filling of the empty; this casting down the mighty from their thrones, and lifting the poor out of the dust; this is always one of the highest reasons for exulting joy. What a truth there is for you and for me tonight, if we feel ourselves to be spiritually so poor that the dunghill is no offense to us, because we feel ourselves to be even more offensive than the filthy things that are cast away by men! What a mercy it is that the Lord "lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people"!

9. *He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the LORD.*

Does your soul feel barren? May the Lord grant unto it an abundant fruitfulness! Looking back upon the past year, perhaps you have had many barren times, or times that you have thought to be barren. If you are a minister of the gospel, I should not wonder if those have been your most fruitful seasons. When you have been most empty, God has been pleased to feed the people through you. O dear brothers and sisters, those very times of spiritual experience which are most humiliating and most painful are often the most soul-enriching to us, and they also bring the greatest glory to God!

Now we will read a New Testament story, in order that we may see how some men did not praise the Lord as they should have done. You will find the narrative in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, at the eleventh verse.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 113, AND LUKE 17:11-19.

PSALM 114

1-9. When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs. Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob; which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters.

I did not interrupt the reading of the Psalm by any exposition. It is a perfect whole, and could not well be divided without spoiling it. We may admire the poetry as well as the inspiration of this Psalm. It begins with rugged abruptness: "When Israel went out of Egypt." It only gives just a hint of the discomfort of the Israelites while in Egypt, arising from the fact that they did not understand the Egyptians "strange language." No doubt they were often beaten by their taskmasters, for not obeying orders, when they really did not understand what must have seemed to them the barbarous speech of their Egyptian oppressors. But God led them up out of the house of bondage, the tribe of Judah leading the van, and all the people following in due order.

How beautifully the psalmist describes the dividing of the Red Sea! He represents the waters as perceiving the presence of God, and fleeing away, not because Israel came to the bank, but because God was in the midst of his people: "The sea saw it, and fled,"-as if abashed at the presence of its Maker, alarmed at the terror of Jehovah's might. So was it with the Jordan; that swiftly-flowing river was "driven back" by a very special miracle. The dividing of the Red Sea was a marvelous act of God's power, but the driving back of that rushing river has some extraordinary points about it peculiar to itself. And all this happened because God was there. The sea flees before him, the river is driven back by him. In like manner, my brethren, if God be in the midst of our church, nothing can withstand its onward march. If the Lord be in any man, that man need not even think or talk of difficulties; for, with God, nothing is impossible.

So mighty was the influence of God's presence that the mountains themselves began to move, and even to skip like rams, and to leap like lambs. There was some fear there, for they trembled in their solid sockets, "at the presence of the God of Jacob." There was joy, too. We speak of "the everlasting hills," yet the psalmist depicts them as moving as easily as the lambs frisk in the meadows in the springtime: "The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs." How grand is the poetic utterance!

"What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" "Thou couldst no longer rush in thine accustomed channel, but must needs return to the source whence thou didst come.

What ailed you, O ye mountains, that ye trembled as if a palsy had seized upon you? 'What ailed you, O ye little hills?'

Now comes the answer, which yet is not given in the form of an answer.

The inspired poet, in order to heighten the grandeur of his language, kept the name of God out of the Psalm until he came to the end, when he thus answered his own riddle: "Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob; which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters;"-another miracle, for God multiplied his marvels. Having brought his people out of Egypt, and led them through the wilderness, and made the hills to move at his majestic presence, now he performs a converting work, changing the rock into a mere, or lake, so plenteous was the effusion of water, and making the flint to gush into a veritable river, which followed the children of Israel through the wilderness, for, as Paul says, "they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, (the margin is, "that went with them,") and that Rock was Christ."

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 114. AND 48.

PSALM 115

1-3. *Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.*

It was very natural that the heathen should say, "Where is their God?" because they had no outward emblem, no visible image, no tangible token; whereas the heathen had their gods many, such as they were, made of wood and stone; so that they asked, "Where is their God?" I think that when that question is suggested, it is a good sign, for it proves the purity of the faith which has cleansed itself from outward symbolism. Many men often have to ask of us, "Where is their God?"

But I fear that the people of Israel were brought into so low a state, at times, that this question was also asked in scorn and derision, "Where is now their God?" "He was with them when they came out of Egypt; he was with them when they captured Canaan; he has been with them in many a terrible battle, turning to flight the armies of the aliens; but where is now their God?" It is a cutting question under such circumstances. It was so with the psalmist when he said, "As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?" "But our God is in the heavens where their gods never were. He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased:" the gods of the heathen have done nothing; they cannot do anything.

4-7. *Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.*

It is a grim piece of sarcasm which the psalmist here aims at the idol gods. I do not know, sometimes, whether this is not all that superstition deserves of us, to be utterly laughed at and put to scorn. The spirit of Elijah is not altogether the most Christlike; and yet even the Christian may well say to the priests of Baal, in derision and contempt, "Cry aloud, for he is a god." What do they deserve who so degrade themselves as to worship things which their own hands have made, things which can be seen with the eye, and touched with the hand? Yet, even in this country, we have

thousands, who call themselves Christians, who prostrate themselves before idols made in different forms and shapes; yea and say to a piece of bread that the baker made, "This is our god." Well says the psalmist: —

8. *They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.*

They are as doltish and as stupid, as blind and as deaf, and as ridiculous as the gods that they make; for no man was ever better than the god he worshipped.

9-11. *O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield.*

There is real help in the living Jah, Jehovah, real protection in him.

12. *The LORD hath been mindful of us: he will bless us;*

There is a new year's motto for you. It will go back through the old year, and forward into the new one: "The Lord hath been mindful of us: he will bless us." See how mindful he has been of us all through the past year in a thousand ways. Long before we have known our wants, he has supplied them. He has delivered us from dangers of which we never knew; and led us into mercies of which we never dreamed.

12, 13. *He will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron.*

He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great. Great blessings for small people, and not small blessings for those whom he maketh great in Israel.

14, 15. *The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children. Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth.*

This is the Creator's blessing, therefore a real one. Many of you have had the new creation wrought in you: you shall live to see new heavens and a new earth.

16. *The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.*

And they seem as if they meant to keep it, too. The sad thing is, that they get the earth into their hearts, and so they miss the blessing which the Lord intended them to receive from his gift of it.

17. *The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence.*

As far as this world is concerned, no note is heard from the grave

18. *But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore.*

Praise the LORD. So let us do tonight. Let us have an extra psalm of praise to the Lord who has brought us safely through another year.

PSALM 115

This is one of the Psalms, which were sung by the Jews at the feast of the Passover. It is highly probable that they were sung by our Lord on that memorable night when he instituted the sacred feast which is to be the perpetual memorial of his death, “until he come.” They have, however, a message for us who are now gathered together here.

1, 2. *Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?*

They talk about what he did when he brought his people up out of Egypt; but they tauntingly ask, “Where is now their God?” Thou art not dead, O God! Nor art thou even waxing weak; wilt thou not let the heathen know that they are resisting thee in vain?

3. *But our God is in the heavens:*

Where they cannot see him. But that is just where he should be—in his own royal pavilion, seated upon his own throne,—out of gunshot of all his enemies,—where he can survey the whole world, where he is dependent upon none, but absolutely supreme over all: “Our God is in the heavens.

3. *He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.*

What a grand sentence that is. After all, his eternal purposes are continually being fulfilled. His decrees can never fail to be accomplished. He is not a thwarted and defeated God,—not one who has to wait upon his creatures to know their pleasure; but “he hath

done whatsoever he hath pleased.” How absolute and unlimited those words are! “Whatsoever he hath pleased.” He hath willed it, and he hath done it. As for the heathen who say, “Where is now their God?” we may ask, in holy derision, “Where are their gods, and what sort of gods are they?” The psalmist gives the answer.

4. *Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands.*

Mere metal,-called precious metal, yet, if made into idols, no better than any other metal. This shows the amount that a man will spend upon making to himself a god that is no god; but what a fool he is to do so! How can a man call that a “god”, which did not make him, but which he himself made?

“Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands.”

5. *They have mouths, but they speak not:*

I want you to notice how the psalmist seems to have an image before him, and he points first to its head, and mocks at its different parts; and then he points to its hands, and its feet, and he utters scathing sarcasm’s about the whole person of the idol god.

5-7. *Eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.*

“They have mouths.” To carry out their idea of God, the makers of idols have given them mouths; but they cannot speak through them, they are dumb. Shall a man believe a dumb thing to be a god? The idols cannot communicate anything to him; it is not possible for them to speak any word of encouragement, or threatening, or promise: “They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they.” Some idols had precious gems placed in their heads, to appear like eyes; but they cannot see through them, for they are blind. Is it not a solecism,-a contradiction, to speak of a blind god?

What a blind man must he be who worships a blind god! “Eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears.” Some Indian idols certainly have ears, for they have elephants’ ears, monstrous lobes; and I think, perhaps, the psalmist was referring to such ears as those. “They have ears,” he says, “but they hear not.” Then what is the use of their ears? You cannot communicate anything to them; so, why do you utter prayers to a thing that cannot hear what you say? Why do you present praises to images that know not what you are saying?

“They have ears, but they hear not.” “Noses have they.” I note the grim sarcasm of this remark of the psalmist; it reminds me of Elijah’s taunting words to the prophets of Baal, “Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.” The ancient Hebrews were not accustomed to treat idolatry with any kind of respect; they poured all sorts of ridicule upon it. Nowadays, we are expected to speak very respectfully concerning all false religions, and some philosophers and divines tell us that there is something good in them all; and they say that modern Papistry, with its gods many, and its rotten rags and cast clouts, which they call relics, is to be treated very delicately. Perhaps someone asks, “Is it not a religion?” Yes, a religion for fools; but not for those who think. “Noses have they, but they smell not.” Their devotees fill the room with the smoke of incense; they burn sweet spices before the idols, but their nostrils are not thereby gratified. “They have hands,” says the psalmist; their makers give them hands, “but they handle not.” They cannot even receive the offerings presented to them. They cannot stretch out their hands to help their votaries. They are without feeling,-so the original tells us; yet they have hands, but they are useless. “Feet have they, but they walk not.” They could not even mount to their shrines by themselves, they must be lifted there, and fastened with nails into their sockets. One of the saddest sights to my mind,-too sad to be ludicrous,-is to see a Popish chapel, as I have often seen it, when the verger is up on the top of the altar, taking down the various images, and dusting the dolls. He, of course, pays them no sort of reverence, but dusts them as your servant does the things in your bedchamber or your drawing room. Yet these are the things that will be worshipped when the bell rings in an hour’s time,-these very things that have been dusted, and treated in this fashion, just like ordinary household ornaments. “Feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.” Their priests pretend that, by a kind of sacred ventriloquism, they make an articulate muttering; but the psalmist very properly says, “Neither speak they through their throat.” They cannot whisper, they cannot even mutter; they cannot make even as much noise as a beast or a bird can; for they are lifeless and useless.

8. *They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.*

That is to say, they are as stupid and doltish as the idols they make. If they can bow down and worship such things as these, surely the worshippers are fitted for the gods, and the gods for the worshippers. Now, brethren, recollect that there is a spiritual idolatry that is very much in vogue nowadays. Certain “thinkers”-as they delight to call themselves, whose religion is known as “modern thought”,-do not accept the one living and true God as he reveals himself in the Old and the New Testaments; but they make a god out of what they are pleased to call their own consciousness. Truly, their idols are reason and thought-the work of men’s brains. Their god does not hear prayer, because it would be absurd, they say, to suppose that prayer can have any effect on Deity. Their god has little or no regard for justice; according to them, you may live as you like, but all will come right at last. They hold out a “larger hope” that the wicked will all be restored to God’s favor; if that should be the case, there would be no justice left upon the face of the earth or in heaven either. All this is false. A god that a man can comprehend is not really a god at all.

A god that I could excogitate from my own brain must, of necessity, be no god. There can only be the one God who is made known to us by divine revelation. God must be infinitely greater than the human mind; he must be beyond our utmost conception,-of whom we can know but little compared with what he really is, and that little he must himself reveal to us. Beware, I pray you, of a god that you make for yourself. Take God as you find him in this Book, and worship him; otherwise, you will find that there may be mental idols as well as idols of silver, and gold, and wood, and stone. “The God of Abraham praise.” “The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob,” the God of the whole earth shall he be called; “the God that led his people out of Egypt, the God of Sinai is the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;” and “this God is our God for ever and ever.” Ours is no new religion; it is the religion of Jehovah worship, and to this we will cling, whoever may oppose.

9-11. *O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield.*

The first of this set of sentences seems to me to be addressed by way of exhortation, but the second is a sort of soliloquy in which the

psalmist, having exhorted others to trust, says, “Well they may trust, for God is both their active and their passive Helper: their help and their shield.” O you who know him, and love him, you who are of the house of Israel, however other men may turn aside to idols, keep yourselves steadfast to Jehovah, and trust in him even when he is mocked and ridiculed! O ye who are his ministers, the house of Aaron, specially devoted to his service, you know him best, and you should trust him most! O all of you, proselytes of the gate, who are not of the seed of Israel, still fear Jehovah, and trust in him, for he is your help and your shield!

12. *The LORD hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron.*

He had been mindful of Israel, and this guaranteed that he would still bless his people. “The times are dark and cloudy,” the psalmist seems to say, “but by his ancient mercies, our faith is established, and our hope encouraged.”

13. *He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great.*

Now little ones, look out for the blessing that is meant for you: “He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great.” Those who have but little faith, little joy, little grace, little growth, yet still he will bless.

14-16. *The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children. Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth. The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD’S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.*

This may in part account for the fact that he is not known, and not honoured among men. He is himself in heaven; and, for a while, he has left men to follow their own devices. Hence it is that they have set up false gods. But, whatever others may do, or not do, let us praise the name of the Lord.

17. *The dead praise not the LORD,*

No song comes up from that dark charnel house, no praise ascends to God from those that are asleep in the grave. The living among them praise him in heaven, but “the dead praise not the Lord.”

17, 18. *Neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD.*

“Praise the Lord,” that is “Hallelujah.” The Psalm could not end with a better note than that; so may all our lives end, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

PSALM 116

I knew a godly woman who, when she was very sick, would always say, “Read me the **116th** Psalm.” It is deservedly a great favourite with many experienced Christians. May the Holy Spirit apply it to our hearts as we read it!

1. I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.

It is a great condescension on God’s part to listen to us. You know what a comfort it is to find a sympathetic listener, who will let you tell out your griefs. It is not wise to tell them to everybody; but there are some who have an ear into which it is both pleasant and profitable to pour the story of our woe. Because God had listened to the voice of his servant’s supplications, therefore David said, “I love the Lord.” Nothing will make us love God better than the assurance that he hears our prayers. We could not love a deaf God; so, when Jehovah does attend to our voice and our supplications, we feel drawn more closely than ever to him.

2. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.

That same blessed experience which is a reason for love is also an argument for continued prayer. “As he has heard me, he shall still hear me; as he has listened to me, he shall listen to me again; — at least, it shall not be for want of my cries that he doth not listen.” That expression, “He hath inclined his ear unto me,” seems to me to mean, “He has stooped down to me to catch my faintest words; he has been favorable to me; he has smiled as he has heard my broken prayers and cries; he has inclined his ear unto me. It was not a mere hearing such as his omniscience might warrant me to expect; but it was such a favorable hearing as only infinite love would have given to me; and, oh! if he is so favorable as to hear, can I be so ungrateful as not to pray?” Here was the case that David had laid before the Lord.

3. The sorrows of death compassed me,—

Just as the dogs surround the poor stag, and shut him in the fatal circle.

3. *And the pains of hell gat hold upon me:—*

They set their teeth into him as the dogs do into the stag.

3. *I found trouble and sorrow.*

He was in a double grief; he had trouble without and sorrow within, it was troubled sorrow and sorrowful trouble, wormwood mingled with gall.

4. *Then called I upon the name of the LORD;—*

That was the very best time to pray. Satan does his utmost to prevent our praying when we are in extremities; but, oh! dear friends, if Jonah prayed in the whale's belly, where can you and I be where we may not and cannot pray? If we sat down upon the very door-step of Hades; yea, if the pit did open her mouth to swallow us up, we might still pray; and the mercy is, that while we are on praying ground we are also on the ground of grace where God can meet with us: "Then called I upon the name of the Lord;"—

4. *O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.*

It was a short prayer, an eager, earnest petition, full of passionate importunity. There was no dictating to God how the deliverance should be wrought: "I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Do it in thine own way, do it in the way that will bring most glory to thee. If thou dost not deliver my body, yet deliver my soul. If my goods must go; if all I have must melt away; yet, O Jehovah, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." This is one of the best prayers in the whole Bible; it is very much like the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

5. *Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;—*

That is a strange combination which the ungodly cannot understand. It is a riddle never to be read except at the cross: "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous." That is what every troubled conscience wants to know,— how God can be just and yet can pardon sin; but we who have believed in Jesus do know that, and it is our joy to say, "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;"—

5. *Yea, our God is merciful.*

I always feel inclined to mispronounce that word, or to divide it into two, and read it, "Our God is mercy full;" for so he is, he is brimming over with mercy.

6. *The LORD preserveth the simple:*

The sincere,— sometimes, the ignorant, those who do not pretend to know; or, the simple, those from whose heart the Lord has driven out all guile, making them to be simple-minded. They are such fools (as the world calls them) as to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is to perform the highest act of wisdom on the part of man. They are such simpletons as to believe the old, old Bible, and to cling to the great atoning sacrifice, and to let the novelties of modern thought blow away like the down of the thistle in the summer breeze. “The Lord preserveth the simple.” How did David know that? Listen.

6. *I was brought low, and he helped me.*

There is no way of knowing a general doctrine so good as that of having a particular experience of it: “I was brought low, brought to be a simpleton, brought so very low that I was obliged to pray a simple prayer; brought so very, very low that I was obliged to have a simple faith in God, for I had nobody else to believe in, and nobody else to trust. ‘I was brought low, and he helped me.’” What a help that is, a help in which God virtually does it all; for our poor weakness, with its best attempts, would rather hinder than help.

7. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

Poor dove! thou art dropping into the water; thy wings can scarcely sustain thee; come back to Noah: “Return unto thy Noah, O my soul!” That is the Old Testament reading of it, and the New Testament rendering is, “Return unto thy Jesus, O my soul, for he is thy true rest! Get back to him, ‘for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.’ In past times, when thou wert dwelling with him in close communion, it was better with thee than it is now that thou hast wandered from him. Return, return, poor prodigal, for there is every inducement to bring thee back. In your Father’s house, there is bread enough and to spare; he never stinted thee. ‘The Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee;’ and he is dealing bountifully with thee even now in giving thee the opportunity to come back, in giving thee the power to pray, and in permitting thee to go to the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat.”

8. *For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.*

Just now, he prayed, "Deliver my soul." He has received the answer to his petition, for he says, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death." He said nothing then about his eyes; but God gives exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. He did not say anything about his feet, but the Lord gave him a blessing for them also: "Thou hast delivered my feet from falling." Oh, for an all-over blessing, a blessing from head to foot,— from the eyes that stream with tears to the feet that are slipping away from under us,— a blessing that begins within by delivering the soul, and then works its way into the very countenance, and makes it resplendent with joy and thankfulness, and gets into the daily life, helping us to march boldly along the slippery way! Glory be to God, he hath given this deliverance to many of us!

9. *I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.*

"I will not care who sees me so long as he sees me; I will court no presence but his presence, 'I will walk before Jehovah.'" It is grand walking, under a constant sense of the Lord's inspection, and a delightful consciousness of the Lord's smile. This is like Enoch's walk, and you know how it ends, for Enoch could not die for the life of him; he walked so near to God that he did not pass into heaven by the ordinary road: he "was not, for God took him." And we, too, though we may die as to these bodies, know that we shall never die as to our souls, for he hath given to us who have believed in Jesus eternal life, and we can never die, or be separated from him.

10. *I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted:*

"I believed." Come, friends; can you all say that? It is a blessed thing for you if you can say that when the sorrows of death compass you, and the pains of the grave lay hold upon you. That is glorious faith which says, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." "I believed, therefore have I spoken." Faith is not a dumb grace; it will make its voice heard.

11. *I said in my haste, All men are liars.*

You see, he had spoken once in the power of the flesh; it was well, therefore, that he should speak now in the power of faith. "I said in my haste, All men are liars." But it was true for all that, for they will fail us if we trust to them instead of to the Lord; yet, in another sense, they are not all liars, so David retracts the hasty word which might have a double meaning, and might imply what he did

not intend, or what he should not mean. See how quickly he turns away from this unpleasant subject; note what comes next.

12. *What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?*

“There,” he seems to say, “put all men away, I have done with them. If they are all liars, let us say no more about them, but let us turn to God.” When you, dear friends, are disappointed with men, do not sit down and worry; you might have known what to expect before you began with them; and now you have found it to be so, turn it to good account. David feels that he has received everything from God, so he says, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?” Well, what can he do? His own poverty comes rushing over his sight again, and the answer to his question is,

13. *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.*

“I ask, ‘What shall I render?’ and I reply, ‘I will take.’” That is what you and I also must say.

The best return for one like me,
So wretched and so poor,
Is from his gifts to draw a plea,
And ask him still for more.

You have given God all you have when you have given him your weakness, your sin, your emptiness; that is all that is truly yours; and then it is that you render to him that which he asks for, that he may put away your sin, that he may fill your emptiness and glorify himself in your weakness.

14. *I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.*

If you have made any vows, mind that you keep them. It is often better not to vow; but when the vow is made, let it be diligently paid.

15. *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*

It is very painful for us to witness, but it is precious to God. We think that they have ended their usefulness when they reach that point, but God estimates their very death to be precious. Tread very softly when you go to the bedside of a departing saint; you may brush against an angel’s wing, for the room is full of them, the place whereon thou standest is holy ground; troops of angelic messengers

are there to do their master's bidding in the last hours of his child, which are about to become his first hours in glory. Besides, the Master himself is there; he is never absent when his children are dying: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

16. *O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid:—*

"Born in thine own house, of one who belonged to thee,— a home-born slave, and glad to glory in that fact. Born in thy house, and bought with thy money, and yielding up myself joyfully to thee: 'I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid:—'

16. *Thou hast loosed my bonds.*

Why, we thought he was going to say, "Thy grace hath, like a fetter, bound my wandering heart to thee." Just so; that is the liberty which he enjoys: "Thou hast loosed my bonds." We are never so free as when free-will has had its death-blow, and we have come under the power of sovereign grace; and now there is another free-will, born of grace, and with its full consent we give ourselves up to God, saying, with David, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; thou hast loosed my bonds."

17. *I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD.*

Now David has grown into a priest, offering sacrifices. He has also grown into a singer, praising the Lord with thanksgiving; and he has grown into a preacher: "And will call upon the name of the Lord." The very man who found the pains of hell laying hold upon him, is now engaged in the holiest exercises.

18, 19. *I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.*

Or, "Hallelujah!" I cannot close this reading without remarking how often my ears are shocked with the blasphemous way in which this thrice-holy word is dragged into the mire,— "Hallelujah fiddles!" "Hallelujah lasses!" and I know not what. "Hallelujah"—praise unto Jehovah,— is one of those awful words which never ought to be pronounced except with the utmost solemnity, although there should be mixed with it the most rapturous joy. Let us take heed lest we be found guilty of taking the name of the Lord, Jehovah, our God, in vain, by using that word flippantly; but let us

solemnly feel in our hearts, and say with our lips, “Hallelujah,— Praise ye the Lord!”

PSALM 116

In this Psalm, David tells us his experience with regard to God and with regard to men.

1. I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.

Answered prayer is a good reason for loving God. David was in his right senses; and he was, by no means, a fool, yet he declared that God had answered his prayer, and, therefore, he loved him. And this is not only David’s experience, but there are thousands of us who can say that God has heard our prayers, and therefore we love him. How can we help doing so?

2. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.

If a beggar in the street were to say to us, “Because you have relieved me once, I will beg of you as long as I live,” we should not be pleased to hear him say that, but God loves to hear us say that to him. He wishes us to resolve that, because we have been successful in prayer once, we will call upon him as long as we live. Now David explains the circumstances which led him to pray: —

3. The sorrows of death compassed me, —

“I seemed to be shut in, — surrounded by a circle of difficulties and terrors: ‘The sorrows of death compassed me,’” —

3. And the pains of hell gat hold upon me:

They seemed to seize him as a lion seizes his prey.

3, 4. I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD,

I beseech thee, deliver my soul. His prayer was a very short one, but very much to the point. Words make not prayer; they often burden it, and prevent it from flying. “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire;” —and David, in a few earnest words, expressed that desire: “O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.”

5. Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.

All who have ever tried him have proved him to be so, — merciful to forgive our sin, — merciful to help us in the time of

trouble, - merciful to strengthen us in the performance of our duty: "Our God is merciful."

6. *The LORD preserveth the simple:*

Those who are of a single mind, — who have no double meanings and concealed motives, — those who know their own ignorance and weakness, and who, therefore, dare not trust in themselves.

6. *I was brought low, and he helped me.*

David could speak for himself, and he did so without the slightest hesitation. Can you, dear friends after making trial of God's love and grace, say of him, "I was brought low, and he helped me"? If you can, then bear this testimony to his praise and glory.

7. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

Man's soul is like the dove that Noah sent out from the ark. It flew over the wide waste of waters, seeking rest, but finding none, so, at last, with weary wing, it made its way back to the ark; and, soul, thou wilt never rest till thou comest back to thy Creator and Redeemer. Thou mayest fly to the pleasures and follies of this world, but they can furnish no real rest for thee; if thou wouldst rest, thou must come back to thy God.

8, 9. *For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eye from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.*

"Let my fellow creatures think what they will of me, I will not care about their judgments, I will only think of God." This is the highest noblest, happiest style of living, — to "walk before the Lord." Why, there are some men who dare not even call their souls their own! They are afraid of their next-door neighbours, or of some great kinsman who sets the fashion for them; but the man who walks before the Lord will think only of the verdict of the Most High, and will care nothing about what men will say.

10, 11. *I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, all men are liars.*

He felt that he could not trust them. He had come into such trouble that men would be deceivers even against their own will, for, even when they would have helped him, he found that they could not. He had looked to them as worthy of his confidence, and had

found them fail him, therefore he said that, so far as reliance upon them was concerned, "All men are liars." Well, what then?

12. *What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?*

"Though men have failed me, the Lord has not. If friends all prove to be false, he still is true." 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?'

13-15. *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*

It matters not where they die, — in the dungeons of the Inquisition, or on the sick-bed of poverty and obscurity, — God is always with them. The death-bed of a saint is one of the places where God often makes his glory to be best seen. From the lips of dying men and women some of us have heard strange sayings, sweeter than any that ever fell from poet's tongue or pen. We have heard words which it was almost unlawful for a man to utter, save only for those who were in the very suburbs of heaven, — almost in glory, — even while they spake with us on earth. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Will yours be a saintly death, dear friend, or will it, on the other hand, be a death of gloom and sorrow? God grant that you may die the death of his people because you have lived the life of his people!

16. *O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.*

How pleased David was to be God's servant! Yet he says, "Thou hast loosed my bonds." To serve God, is to be free; we are never truly free until we bow our willing necks to the yoke of the Most High. Then we break every chain, and snap every fetter. He is the free man whom our God makes free, and all are slaves besides.

17-19. *I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.*

PSALM 116

We have read this Psalm many times, and have often felt it to be a photograph of our own spiritual experience; but we will, on this occasion, read it from one special point of view. Please notice that this Psalm is exceedingly full of the letter I. Cast your eye down the page, and you will be struck with the number of times in which the first person singular appears. Well, then, let us read the Psalm with this view, and each of us for himself or herself say “I” as the psalmist did if the Holy Spirit shall enable us to do so.

1. *I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.*

If this double declaration is true, it turns the reading of the Psalm into a devout spiritual exercise for each one of us who can rightly adopt the psalmist’s language. But can each one of us truthfully say, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee”? If I can honestly say, “I love the Lord,” then I can give the reason for the love that is in me. It is because he has loved me with an everlasting love, and because he has manifested that love, among many other ways, in hearing “my voice and my supplications.”

2. *Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.*

“Whatever others may do or may not do, I will call upon him as long as I live, and I have a good reason for doing so, ‘ Because he hath inclined his ear unto me.’ He has stooped from his throne in heaven to hearken to my feeble accents, he has bowed himself in his majesty to listen to the appeal of my misery. I was brought down very low in my sorrow, but the Lord brought his ear down as low as my lip: ‘ He hath inclined his ear unto me;’ and because he has done that, therefore my heart is inclined unto him, and I will call upon him as long as I live.”

3. *The sorrows of death compassed me,*

“They formed a ring around me, from which I could see no way of escape. I was like a wounded stag that is surrounded by fierce dogs.”

3. *And the pains of hell gat hold upon me:*

“The dogs of hell had fixed their cruel teeth in my throat so that it seemed impossible for me to escape from them.”

3. *I found trouble and sorrow.*

“When I searched for something better, I only found still more trouble and sorrow. I had enough of them without finding any more; but the more I looked for anything else, the more trouble and sorrow I found.” This is a very graphic description of the state of heart in which some of us have been more than once. We have seen no way of escaping from it, and we have been in great distress because we could not discover any way of alleviating our grief.

4. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.

Do you remember, dear friend, when you prayed such a prayer as that,—short, sharp, sincere, pointed, personal, out of the depths of your soul? Then, let your recollection of that prayer have so gracious an influence upon your heart that, in the remembrance of the past mercy, when the Lord heard and answered your supplication, you may find a well of present gratitude.

5. Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.

Listen to that blessed little sentence, those of you who are full of sin, and who are therefore afraid that God will cast you away for ever: “Out God is merciful.”

6. The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me.

There is here, first, a general doctrine; and, then, there is a particular proof and application of it. It is true, in a general sense, that the Lord preserveth the simple-hearted ones who have learned to trust in him; but, in particular, you or I, if saved by his grace, can say, with the psalmist, “I was brought low, and he helped me.” There is a little book of medicine, which Mr. John Wesley brought out, and he put to some of the recipes the word “Proved.” He had evidently tried the medicine, and proved it to be efficacious in his own case. In a similar fashion, we can often put, in the margin of our Bibles, concerning the Word of the Lord, “Proved.” We have tried it, and proved it, and therefore we also can personally say, “The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me.”

7. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee.

Cannot we also, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, speak well of our God tonight? If any of us have been wandering at all from his

presence, and so have lost the conscious sense of his love, let us come back to him at once. We cannot be happy anywhere else. God has spoiled you and me, beloved, for the world; so we must be happy in him, for we can never be satisfied anywhere else. Only in our God can our joy be full. Come back then, my soul, come back to thy Lord: "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." He is thy true Noah; thou canst find no real rest anywhere else; therefore return unto him even as the dove flew back to the ark with weary wing after wandering over the wild waste of waters.

8. *For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.*

"I have had a trinity of deliverances, — my soul saved from eternal ruin, my eyes delivered from the greatest grief of all, and my life saved from sinful stumbling: 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from failing.'" This testimony is far in advance of that given in Psalm 56:13, where David says, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

9. *I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.*

"I will not walk before some great man so as to seek to please him. I will not walk before my fellow-believers so as to be merely looking for their approbation. But 'I will walk before the Lord.'" This is the best way of living, so let it be yours and mine, beloved. Let each of us say, "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living?"

10. *I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted:*

I call your attention again to the repeated use of the letter-word "I." Three times in this one verse we have that little personal pronoun, and I want you each one to take this whole Psalm to yourself so far as it is suited to your case, to make a soliloquy of it while we are reading it: "I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted."

11, 12. *I said in my haste, All men are liars. What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?*

I expect that we have all of us said, in our haste, some things that we had better not have said. They may have been true; yet, for

all that, it was a pity that we uttered them. Yet I am glad that the psalmist, although he said, "All men are liars," did not dwell upon that unpleasant truth, but speedily turned from unreliable man to his ever-reliable God. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" If all men are liars, if all earthly comforts fail us, if all human dependences disappoint us, our God will not do so. Let us leave the broken cisterns without even grumbling at them, or having bitter feelings concerning them; and let us turn to God, and let this be the question put by each one of us, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" I suggest, dear friends, that we do each of us personally put this question to ourselves, "What shall I render unto the Lord? What can I do for Jesus? What can I give to God? What is there, at this particular time, that I can devise for the glory of God in order to manifest my love to him?" Peradventure, in this house tonight, there may be the conception —perhaps, the birth — of some high and noble enterprise for God. If this question shall be pressed home upon some ardent spirit here, there may be the first thoughts, in this house of prayer, of some far-reaching ministry which shall be a means of blessing to many lands through all the ages that are yet to come. God grant that it may be so! What shall I, a young man just beginning life, render unto the Lord? What shall I, a man in the full strength of his manhood, render unto the Lord? What shall I — a man far advanced in years, mature and ripe for heaven, and soon to be taken there, — render unto the Lord? Whoever I am, let me make haste to answer the question, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?"

13, 14. *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.*

There never was a better time than the present, and there never was better place than this, for some holy resolve concerning consecrated service for the Master.

15. *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*

They are themselves at all times so precious to the Lord that everything about them is very dear in his esteem, and they are never more precious than in their deaths. We constantly have some of the very choicest of the Lord's saints going home to their Father; and

when the Lord takes any of them home to himself, it becomes those of us who are left to try to do all the more for our God. Let some of us be baptized for the dead, let us press forward to fill the gaps in the ranks of the armies of God, and do all that lies in our power to win the victory for his righteous cause.

16. *O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.*

Still read this Psalm very personally, — you especially who have had godly mothers. Say, “I am a born slave, — born of one who was thy slave, for I delight to use even such a hard name as that. I am God’s servant, born of one of God’s servants: ‘the son of thine handmaid.’” I like to remember that it was so in my own case, and I can truthfully say to the Lord, “I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid.” “Thou hast loosed my bonds,” by making me to feel the bonds of thy grace. There is no liberty like complete subjection to God. The greatest freedom of thought is to think only God’s thoughts; and the highest freedom of living is to live according to the rule of holiness in the ways of the Most High.

17-19. *I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, In the courts of the LORD’S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.*

And we do and will praise him at this time, and for ever and ever.

PSALM 116

1. *I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.*

Every answered prayer should make us love the Lord, and especially those prayers that come up from our heart when it is overwhelmed within us. When we pray in deep trouble, and God sends us help and deliverance, it is impossible for us not to love him. Cannot each believer here say, with great gratitude, “I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications”?

2. *Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.*

“This begging business pays so well that I will never give it up as long as I live. The Lord has heard me, so he shall hear me again

and again. He is so good and so generous a God, and such bounties are continually being distributed at his door, that I will never go to anybody else, but will continue to knock at God's door as long as I live." The psalmist goes on to tell us what was the special occasion which brought out this expression of his gratitude.

3, 4. *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.*

His petition was short, earnest, plain, and personal. It was a sharp arrow shot from the bow of prayer, and it reached its mark in the heart of God. Are any of you just now in very sore distress? Then let each one imitate the example of the psalmist, and pray, "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." Have you been delivered as the psalmist was? Then, make a note of it, be sure to jot it down in your pocket-book, so that, when you get into such a trouble again, you may turn to the record of God's delivering mercy, and say, "The God who delivered me before has not changed, so I will apply to him again, for I am sure that he will again deliver me."

5, 6. *Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me.*

Poor simpletons, who cannot help themselves, but who are, nevertheless, free from deceit and craft, and take God's Word as they find it,-sincere simple souls, who trust in the Lord, he will take care of them, but he will leave those who think they are wise enough to do so, to take care of themselves.

7, 8. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.*

If we have enjoyed this trinity of deliverances, let us praise the Three One God for ever and ever. Praise him, O my soul, if thou art saved! Praise God, O mine eyes! Be filled with the happy tears of gratitude since he has delivered you from the bitter, briny tears of grief. Praise him, O ye feet that he has kept from falling, and run in the way of his commandments with great joy!

9. *I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.*

"That shall be my way of walking,-not before me, that I may gain their praise, but I will consider the Lord, and the Lord alone;

and so long as I please him, I shall not mind whether I please anybody else or not.

10, 11. *I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, All men are liars.*

It is always better not to speak in haste. It is very seldom that we say much that is worth hearing when we talk too fast. "I said in my haste, All men are liars."

12. *What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?*

That is better, for it is better to praise the Lord than to find fault with men, even if the fault found be really there. It is better for each one of us to be rendering our homage to God than picking holes in the coats of others, so let each one of us ask, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?"

13. *I will take-*

The psalmist asks, "What shall I render?" and he answers, "I will take." That is a strange way of rendering, is it not? Yes, brethren, but that is the way for us to show our gratitude to the Lord for all his benefits toward us. John Newton was right when he wrote, —

"The best return for one like me,
So wretched and so poor,
Is from his gifts to draw a plea,
And ask him still for more."

"I will take" —

13, 14. *The cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.*

And I can be spokesman for you, brethren and sisters in Christ, and say that the Lord is good, and that we have proved him to be good to us under peculiarly trying circumstances. He does not fail to help his people, neither does he turn his back upon them in their hour of need. We have tried all other dependences, and have been bitterly disappointed; but the Rock of Israel's salvation standeth fast for ever, glory be to the name of Jehovah of hosts! Let us pay our vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people.

15. *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*

It is an event for which he makes all necessary arrangements. He does not allow it to happen accidentally, or according to the will of man. As good old John Ryland says,

“Not a single shaft can hit Till the God of love thinks fit.”

16. *O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.*

The palmist said that he was a home-born slave, because his mother was a servant of God, and he was born, as it were, a servant of his mother's Lord. How delightful it is to be a Christian, and the Son of a Christian! Let us rejoice and be glad if that is our happy lot. It is more honour to have had a mother who feared the Lord than a mother who was princess or an empress, but who had not the grace of God in her heart.

17-19. *I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.*

PSALM 116

We have read this Psalm many times, let us read it now, not regarding it so much as the language of the psalmist uttered thousands of years ago, as our own language at this moment.

1. *I love the LORD,*

Let us go as far as that if we can; let us each one say, “I love the Lord.”

1. *Because —*

There is a reason for this love. People say that love is blind, but love to God uses her eyes, and can justify herself: “I love the Lord, because” —

1. *He hath heard my voice and my supplications.*

Can you go as far as that? Do you recollect answers to prayer, when you cried to God with your voice, or when your voice failed you, but supplication rose to God from your heart? Surely there is not a man, whose prayers have been answered, who does not love God. He must love the Lord when he recollects what poor prayers his were, what great blessings came in answer to them, and how speedily and how often God has heard his prayers, and granted his requests.

2. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.

That is a vow which we may well make, and hope for grace to keep it. It means that, as we have succeeded so well in begging at God's door, we will keep on begging of him as long as we live. I suppose the psalmist meant that, because Jehovah had heard him, therefore he would never call upon any false god; but, as long as he lived, he would resort to the one living and true God. I hope that you and I can say the same. We have tried the fountain of living waters, why should we go to broken cisterns that can hold no water? Prayer to God has always succeeded, why should we not continue it? All you who have plied the trade of mendicants at the mercy-seat must have been so enriched by it in your souls that you are determined to stand there as long as you live." Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." This is sound reasoning, for even the emotions of believers, when they are most fervent, are based upon solid reasons. We can defend ourselves even when we grow warmest in love to God and most earnest in prayer. Now the psalmist tells one of his many experiences in prayer: —

3, 4. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD;

Dark days are good days for praying; when your eyes cannot see, you pray all the better; when there is no earthly prop to lean upon you are all the more ready to lean upon God alone. The psalmist was like a poor worm in a ring of fire: "the sorrows of death compassed me." The sheriff's officer seemed to hold him in his grip: "the pains of hell got hold upon me." As for his inner experience, he found nothing there but "trouble and sorrow." When the town of Mansoul was besieged, every way of escape was closed except the way upwards, and it was so with the psalmist, and therefore he made use of that way. "Then called I upon the name of the Lord." His prayer was short, earnest, and full of meaning: —

4. O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.

He did not have to search for a form of prayer, his words were such as came naturally to his mind; and that is the best sort of prayer which arises out of the heart's sincere desire.

5. *Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.*

The psalmist was delivered by an act of grace, yet it was an act of righteousness, for God is not unrighteous to break his own promise, and he has promised to help his people. Grace and righteousness both guarantee answers to believing prayers, and mercy comes in to make assurance doubly sure: “Yea, our God is merciful.”

6. *The LORD preserveth the simple:*

Straightforward men, those who cannot play a double part, those simpletons whom others take in and laugh at because they are honest, true, genuine, — the Lord preserveth such people.

6. *I was brought low, and he helped me.*

Oh, these blessed personal pronouns, are you laying hold of them as I read them? Are you speaking them out of your own soul?

7. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

Come home to him, for you have no other friend like him in earth or heaven; come back to him, my soul, and rest where you have often rested before.

8. *For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.*

An eternity of mercies from the Eternal himself.

9. *I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.*

The best style of living is walking before God, so living in his sight as to be indifferent to the opinions and judgments of our fellow men and only caring to know that God is looking upon us with approval. This is the way to live; and if we have tried it, we have found it to be so pleasant that we are resolved to continue in it.

10, 11. *I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, All men are liars.*

They have all failed me; some of them could but would not help me, so they were as liars to me; others would but could not, and as I have trusted them, they were as liars to me; but thou, my God, art no liar, thou art the truth itself! I ask those of you who have had a very long and varied experience to look back, and tell me whether you can recollect even once when your God has broken his promise. You have sometimes been afraid that he would forget it, but has he ever done so? If you speak as you have found him, you must praise

and adore the faithful, immutable, all-sufficient Jehovah, who has made your strength to be as your days even to this very hour.

12. *What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?*

That question contains the essence of true religion. This should be the one object of our lives if we have been redeemed by Christ, and are his servants. Whatever we have done for God, we should endeavor to do much more, and to do it much better.

13. *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.*

This is a curious way of rendering anything, yet you know that John Newton's hymn says, —

“The best return for one like me
So wretched and so poor,
Is from his gifts to draw a plea,
And ask him still for more.”

14-16. *I will say my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.*

It is a great blessing if we are able to say, as David did, that we are born into God's house. Some of us had gracious mothers who brought us to the Lord in earnest prayer long ere we knew anything. I can say to the Lord, “I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid;” and I have no greater wish than that all my descendants may be the Lord's.

17-18. *I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD, I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people,*

Do it, beloved, let your hearts now pour themselves out in silence, and afterwards in grateful song before the Lord. Praise him, magnify him, bless his name, “in the presence of all his people.” It is inspiring to be with your brethren and sisters in Christ. Perhaps the devotion which burns low when there is only one brand on the hearth will burn all the better and brighter when we add many blazing brands to it.

19. *In the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.*

PSALM 116:1-6

1. *I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.*

You cannot help loving God if he has heard your prayers. Have you tried him? If you have, you can join with David and thousands of others in confessing that he is a prayer-hearing God, and therefore you love him. I find the verse might be read, “I love the Lord, because he hears.” He is always hearing. I am always speaking to him, and he is always hearing me, and therefore I love him. Can you imagine a better reason for love?

2. *Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.*

“He hath inclined his ear” — stooped down, as it were, as you do to a sick person to catch his faintest word. “He hath inclined his ear.” He has heard my prayer, when I could hardly hear it myself. When it was such a broken prayer, such a feeble prayer, that I was afraid I had not prayed, yet he heard me. He inclined his ear, and “therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.” That is, I will never leave off praying, and I will never leave off praising. This is the best gratitude we can show to God. Now, if a beggar were to say to us, “If you will help me today, I will beg of you as long as ever I live,” we should not be very thankful to him; but when we say this to God, he is glad, for he wants us to be thus continually calling upon him.

3, 4. *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.*

He felt as if he had been hunted. As in hunting, they sometimes surround the stag with dogs as with a cordon, so he says, “the sorrows of death compassed me. There was no getting away. I was in a circle of sorrow.” Worse than that, his pains of conscience and heart were so great that he says, “The pains of hell gat hold upon me” — got the grip of him, as though he were arrested by them — as though those dogs had come so close as to seize and grasp him. “Then,” says he, “I called.” At the worst extremity he prayed. There is no time too bad to pray in. When it is all over with you, still pray. Often the end of yourself is the beginning of your God. He means to get you away from every other confidence, that you may fling

yourself upon him. “Then called I upon the name of the Lord.” And what was the prayer? A very short one: “O Lord, I beseech thee deliver my soul.” God does not measure prayers by the yard. It is not by the length but by the weight. If there is life, earnestness, heart in your prayer, it is all the better for being short. Read the Bible through, and you will scarcely find a long prayer. Prayers that come from the soul are often like arrows shot from the bow — quick, short, sharp; and God hears such prayers as these — “O Lord, I beseech thee deliver my soul.”

5. *Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;*

Wonderful combination — gracious and yet righteous. And if you want to know how this can be, look at Calvary, where Jesus dies that we may live. “Oh! the sweet wonders of that cross, where God the Saviour loved and died” — where there was the justice of God to the full, and the mercy of God without bound. “Gracious is the Lord and righteous.”

5, 6. *Yea, our God is merciful. The LORD preserveth the simple:*

Those that have such a deal of wit may take care of themselves, but “the Lord preserveth the simple,” the straightforward, the plain-minded — those who believe his word without raising questions. “The Lord preserveth the simple.”

6. *I was brought low and he helped me.*

Oh! many of you can say this, I trust, and if you cannot I hope you will before long — “I was brought low, and he helped me.”

PSALM 116:1-11

It begins well.

1. *I love the Lord,*

Can you say that? “Yea, Lord, thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love thee.” “I love the Lord.” Love is said to be blind, but not love to God. Love to God can see, and it can give a reason for its own existence, and a good substantial reason too. “I love the Lord.”

1. *Because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. A good reason for love will be found in the closet where prayer is answered. If you have ever been in trouble, and that Divine friend has listened to your feeble cries, you do love him, and you cannot help loving.*

You wonder why others do not love him too.

2. *Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.*

“Because.” He harps on that string. It is so sweet a note that he touches it again: “Because he hath inclined his ear unto me”: stooped out of heaven. He has laid his ear down to my lips. He has caught my wandering utterances. He hath inclined his ear. My sin had pushed his ear away, but he has brought his head back again, and inclined his ear unto me. “Therefore.” You see this was given as a reason, but the Psalmist is so full that what was a reason for love now becomes a reason for something else. The flowers in the garden of believers bloom double. Here is a second flower on this stalk. I love him because he hath inclined his ear unto me.

“Therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.” I speed so well in prayer that I will keep on in that blessed business. God heard me once. He shall hear me again.

“Long as we live should Christians pray,
For only while we pray we live.”

And as long as we live we shall find out the best way of living — to live from hand to mouth — from God’s hand to our mouth — by continual prayer. Now the Psalmist tells about this wonderful instance in which God heard his cry.

3. *The sorrows of death compassed me,*

They were all round me. They made a circle. I could not find a break. They compassed me. Sorrows, deadly sorrows, the very sorrows of death.

3. *And the pains of hell gat hold upon me:*

They came inside the circle and they gripped me. I was like one that did lie under the lion. He seemed to bite and tear me. “The pains of hell gat hold upon me.” Did you ever know that? I did. Oh! I can never forget, for the scars are in my mind to this day when the pains of hell gat hold upon me. They say that there is no hell. He will never say that who has ever felt the pains of a guilty conscience — the pangs of unforgiven sin to a soul that is made alive by the Spirit of God. “The pains of hell gat hold upon me.”

3. *I found trouble and sorrow.*

An unexpected find. They were hidden away — these double enemies — hidden away beneath my pleasures, beneath my sins, beneath my self-righteousness. “I found trouble and sorrow.”

4. *Then called I upon the name of the LORD;*

The most canonical hour for prayer is the time of our greatest distress. When you can do nothing else but pray, then is the very best time to pray. When you seem shut up to prayer, what a blessed shutting up it is! “Then called I upon the name of the Lord.” And what was his prayer? Very short: very full: a sort of soldier’s prayer.

4. *O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.*

There, dear hearer, if you want to begin to pray to God, there is a good beginning for you. “Oh! Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.”

5. *Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;*

A curious mixture. You will never understand it until you stand at the foot of the cross.

5. *Yea, our God is merciful.*

That is the practical outcome of the holy conjunction of grace and righteousness in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. “Our God is merciful.” Sometimes when people cannot read well, they spell the words, and one, I remember, spelt God in this way — “Yea, our God is merciful.” That will do — full of mercy — merciful.

6. *The LORD preserveth the simple:*

You clever men take heed of this. “The Lord preserveth the simple” — the plain, hearty, honest, sincere, sometimes ridiculed for their want of cunning. God takes care of them.

6. *I was brought low, and he helped me.*

What a sweet thing it is when you have studied a general doctrine to be able to give yourself as a particular instance of it. “The Lord preserveth the simple.” That is a grand truth. “But I was brought low, and he helped me.” That is an emphatic proof. That is the enjoyable illustration of the grand truth. Can you say that, dear friends? Can you put that in your diary? “I was brought low, and he helped me.”

7. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

Come back. He is a good God. Why wander? Return unto thy first husband, for it was better with thee than now. He has been bountiful. My soul lives on his bounty again.

8. *For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.*

As I read these words, they seem as if they were written for me. Do they seem, dear hearer, as if they were written for you? Have you undergone this trinity of salvation — your soul from death, your eyes from tears, your feet from falling? If so, then make this resolve tonight.

9. *I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.*

That is to say, as he has dealt so well with me, I will always deal well with him. I will not care to look to men — to their hope, to their help, to their judgment, to their censure, but I will set the Lord always before me. He shall be everything to me. Beloved, it is one of the best days work a man ever does, when he turns clean away from everything but God. Oh! when you have given up all reliance upon the creature, and throw yourself upon the bare arm of the Creator, now you have got at it, man; now you have come to real life. All the rest is mere play-acting, but this is reality, for God alone is, And all else is but a dream.

10, 11. *I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, All men are liars.*

And uncommonly near the truth he came, even though he was in a hurry in saying it, for if you trust in any men, they must be liars to you. They will fail you either from want of faithfulness, or else from want of power. There are pinches where the kindest hand cannot succor. There are times of sorrow when she who is the partner of your bosom cannot find you alleviation. Then you will have to come to God, and God alone, and you will never find him fail you. The brooks of the earth are dry in summer, and frozen in winter. All my fresh springs are in thee, my God, and there neither frost nor drought can come. Happy man who has got right away from everything to his God.

PSALM 116:10-19

The whole Psalm is one of joyous thanksgiving because of God's mercy to the singer. He had been in deep waters of trial and

affliction, but had not been suffered to sink. He had known fierce assaults of sin that threatened tearful eyes and falling, stumbling stops, but God had upheld and strengthened. As he recalls all this, he longs to make some return by way of praise, and witness to others. Hence he now inquires.

10, 11. *I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, All men are liars.*

And uncommonly near the truth he came, even though he was in a hurry in saying it, for if you trust in any men they must be liars to you. They will fail you, either from want of faithfulness, or else from want of power. There are pinches where the kindest hand cannot succor. There are times of sorrow when she who is the partner of your bosom cannot find you alleviation. Then you will have to come to God, and God alone, and you will never find him fail you. The brooks of the earth are dry in summer, and frozen in winter. All my fresh springs are in thee, my God, and there neither frost nor drought can come. Happy man who has got right away from everything to his God.

12. *What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits towards me?*

Here we see gratitude is springing up in this man's breast. He lives upon God, and he loves God, and now the question comes, "What shall I do for God?" Service is not first. We make a mistake when we begin with that. No: we begin as he did, with "I love the Lord." Tell what the Lord has done for you, and then go on to, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits toward me?"

13-15. *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*

We do well to notice those deaths, for God notices them. They are among his precious things. And if God thinks so much of dying saints, depend upon it he will not forget the living ones. He will help us. He will help us to the end.

16. *O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid; thou hast loosed my bonds.*

What a sweet thing to be the servant of God. Well does David say it twice over. Well does he delight to look upon himself as a

slave that was born in his Master's house. "My mother," says he, "was one of thy servants. I am the son of thy handmaid." Oh! It is a blessed thing to be able to be God's every way — to feel in looking back, "I am not only his by redemption and by the new birth, but I seem as if I was bound to be his by a long ancestry of men and women, whom his sovereign grace called to himself." Grace does not run in the blood, but it is a great mercy when it runs side by side with it; and when the handmaiden of the Lord is mother of a man who is a child of God as well as her child. "Thou hast loosed my bonds." You are never quite free, you have never got your bonds all loosed — till you can doubly feel the bonds of God. Read that: "I am thy servant. I am thy servant." That is two blows. "Thou hast loosed my bonds." There is no freedom except in perfect subjection to the will of God. When every thought is brought into captivity to the mind of God, then every thought is free. You have heard much of the freedom of the will. There is no freedom of the will till grace has bound the will in fetters of divine affection. Then is it free, and not till then. "I am thy servant — thy servant; thou hast loosed my bonds."

17. *I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD.*

He has been doing it. What a man has done he will do. Oh! it is a blessed thing that the children of God at last catch a habit of devotion. Just as the sinner continues in his sin, so may I venture to say, "Shall the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" If so, then he that has once heartily learnt to praise his God may begin to forget to do so. Use is second nature, and the holy use to which God has put us by his grace shall be our nature for ever.

18, 19. *I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, In the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.*

I see that David liked company. He would have been happy here, though we meet under conditions not wholly pleasant. He would have been glad to be in the midst of a smiling company of grateful saints, who could all say, "That is true, David. What you have written of yourself, you might have written of each one of us, and we can each one say, 'I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.'"

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 116:10-19; SONG OF SOLOMON 2:1-7.

PSALM 118

May the Good Spirit, who taught the psalmist to indite these words help us to feel their inward meaning!

1. *O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever.*

Now, do that, dear friends. Before we read another verse let us do that. In your hearts think of the goodness and mercy of God to you-to each one as an individual, and give him thanks now: no murmuring, no coldness of heart. Cast out everything, and give God thanks at this moment. It is the least we can do. It is to our own benefit to be grateful. How can we be holy if we are deficient in that simple matter? “ Oh give thanks unto Jehovah, for he is good, because his mercy endureth for ever.”

2. *Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth for ever.*

And if there be an elect out of the elect, who live still nearer to God and are doubly consecrated to his service-

3. *Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth for ever.*

But let not the praise be confined to these joyous ones. Let the whole church take it up.

4. *Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy endureth for ever.*

You have tried it: you have proved it. The mercy of God has followed you in all your devious paths. It will follow you even to the end. “His mercy endureth for ever.”

5. *I called upon the LORD in distress:*

“I” nothing like coming to particulars and personalities. “ I.”

5, 6. *The LORD answered me, and set me in a large place. The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?*

“What is man? He is but as the dust before God, and, when God is with us and takes care of us, what can man, that is as a moth, do to God’s preserved ones?”

7-9. *The LORD taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.*

Now he goes on to detail his experience of trouble and of deliverance.

10. *All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them.*

David was a warrior. His business was to fight; and he was attacked on every side by all sorts of people. He was shut in, and the Lord was with him; and he broke his way through.

11, 12. *They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns:*

Thorns crackle and blaze, and then it is all over with them. So it shall be with the adversaries of the believer. “They are quenched as the fire of thorns, for in the name of the Lord will I destroy them.”

12, 13. *For in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall:*

“Thou “: the same great and leading name.

13,14. *But the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.*

What a poet this man is. Thanksgiving is the tone of a true poet. When a man’s heart gets warm, and he begins to adore his God for his boundless mercy, the strain cannot grovel. Gratitude lends its wings better than the fabled Pegasus, and up the mind rises in a majesty of glory. “Jehovah is my strength and song, and he has become my salvation.”

15, 16. *The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacle of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly.*

He drops into triplets. This is no accident. We meet with these triplets often in the Old Testament. Why three? Why not four? Ah, you know, who can sing, “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end.”

17, 18. *I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The LORD hath chastened me sore:*

You notice David’s rendering of the 13th verse. To the enemy he says, “Thou hast thrust sore at me, that I might fall.” When he thinks it over he says, “The chastening hand of God is in this, even

in my enemy's wicked and malicious attacks. And so he reads it over again, "The Lord hath chastened me sore, but he hath not given me over unto death." The Roman magistrates had a bundle of rods with an axe tied up in the middle. The children felt the rod, but not the axe. "Thou hast chastened me sore, but thou hast not given me over unto death."

18-21. *But he hath not given me over unto death. Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD: this gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter. I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.*

Another grand verse. Answers to prayer are the notes of our music. If God has heard thee pray, take care that he hear thee praise. Mercies for which we are not thankful will curdle into curses. Take care that thou praise God when he fills thee with his good things, ay, and praise him if he does not.

Bless a taking God as well as a giving God. Is he not equally God whatever he does? Now David sings of himself, but the Spirit of God inspired him to sing of the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of David.

22, 23. *The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.*

The Jewish rulers would not have Christ. They cast him aside as a stone which would not fit their wall, especially because he was a corner stone. They wanted to stand as a lone solitary wall. They did not want to have the corner turned even for the Samaritan-much less for the poor Gentile. But you and I must bless God that, whilst Christ is laid upon the wall of the Jew as a corner stone, he turns a corner for us poor Gentiles that we may be built into the same temple of God. He has become the head stone of the corner.

24. *This is the day which the LORD hath made;*

This Sabbath day-this gospel day-"the day that Jehovah hath made."

24. *We will rejoice and be glad in it.*

Now, heavy hearts, try and rise to that. This is not the day of doom: this is not the day of curses. It is the day of mercy and of

love. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Hosanna. Let us cry Hosanna.

25, 26. *Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD:*

And again Hosannah.

26, 27. *We have blessed you out of the house of the LORD. God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light:*

Blessed be his name. We were in the dark before, but he has brought light to our spirit. The light of knowledge, the light of joy, the light of delight, he has brought to us.

27. *Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.*

Do that, beloved. Give yourself up to Christ again. Bind yourselves again.

“Tis done; the great transaction’s done.

I am my Lord’s, and he is mine.

High heaven that heard the solemn vow

That vow renewed this day shall hear.”

Present it to your God. “Bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords unto the horns of the altar.”

28, 29. *Thou art my God, and I will praise them: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

PSALM 118

1. *O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever.*

Here is a standing reason for thanksgiving. Although we may not always be healthy, nor always prosperous yet God is always good, and, therefore, there is always a sufficient argument for giving thanks unto Jehovah. That he is a good God essentially, that he cannot be otherwise than good, should be a fountain out of which the richest praises should perpetually flow.

2-3. *Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth for ever.*

These were specially set apart for God’s service, and, therefore, where much is given, much is expected. The house of Aaron,

therefore, must have a special note of thanksgiving, and though we who preach the gospel claim no sort of priesthood, yet if any ought to lead the strain of thankfulness, it should be those who minister for God continually.

4. *Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy endureth for ever.*

Let them all say it: let them all say it now: let every one of us say it for himself, "His mercy endureth for every."

5. *I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place.*

I think many of us could make just such a record as that and not once but many times in our lives, we could say, "I called upon the Lord in distress." We have had many trials, but we have a mercy-seat always to fly to, and a God always ready to hear the cries of his distressed ones.

6. *The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?*

The past always gives us assurance for the future, for we are dealing with the same unchangeable God, and, therefore, we may expect to have the same dealings from him.

7, 8. *The LORD taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.*

There is one text which I have never seen put up anywhere. You have illuminated texts in your houses and schoolrooms, and so on, but I think I have never seen this, "Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm" or this other one, "Cease, ye, from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?" and I am sure there is no teaching of Scripture more necessary than that, whether it refers to great men or to little men, whether it refers to men of eminence, or to those of your own family circle. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence, in man."

9. *It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.*

It is nobler, it is more agreeable to sound reason, it will lead to better results. God better deserves our confidence than the princes of the earth do — even the best of them.

10. *All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them.*

This may apply to David, but it applied better to Christ, around whom Jews and Gentiles came, but he won the victory over them.

11, 12. *They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees, they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.*

The thorn makes a good blaze and crackle, and sputter, but it is soon out altogether. “For in the name of the Lord will I destroy them.” In this way we may meet our spiritual foes, temptations, trials, the world, sin, death, hell, the name of Jehovah shall be our strength. “In hoc signo vincit,” said one of old — “By this sign thou conquerest,” and so by this sign we also overcome through the blood of the Lamb.

13. *Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the Lord helped me.*

This will rebut all the attacks of our fiercest foes — “But the Lord helped me.”

14, 15. *The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly.*

Where God’s people dwell, there is the voice of joy. Their family prayer sanctifies the house with its joyous notes. Even then there is trouble and sorrow in the house, yet resignation makes joy and rejoicing there still; and if rejoicing for a moment should go, yet salvation never does. “This day is salvation come to thine house.” If thou be now a converted man, it will never go away again. It is an abiding being: it is in the tabernacles of the righteous.

16, 17. *The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.*

Some have thought this psalm was composed by Hezekiah after his sickness, and after the destruction of Senacherib’s host. It may be so. It has been used by many besides Hezekiah, who have not forgotten that these are the words of Wickliffe, used when monks came round his dying bed with prayers, Paternosters, and crucifixes, and urged him to repent, and he said, “I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord.” And so, indeed, he did.

18. *The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.*

Many of his best children can say this, for “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” “The Lord hath chastened me sore, but he hath not given me over unto death.” You that have recovered from sickness, here is a song for you. You who above all were not given over to your sins and to the just punishment of them, here is music for you, “He hath not given me over to the second death, which he might have done.”

19, 20. *Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD: This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter.*

I suppose he who uttered these words has passed through the beautiful gates of the temple.

21. *I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.*

Future, past, present — all full of blessing.

22-24. *The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD’S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*

Though this is applicable to the Sabbath, yet it is also applicable to any day, and to every day which God especially makes glorious by delivering many.

25-27. *Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD. God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.*

It is the king returning from victory and recovered from sickness. He brings his sacrifice with thanksgiving, as every child of God should, and there it is ready bound to the altar horns.

28, 29. *Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

PSALM 119:1-16

The first eight verses of this Psalm, in the Hebrew, begin with the letter A, and the second eight begin with the letter B. The whole Psalm is the good man's alphabet; the Holy Spirit condescended to use these expedients to help the memory of the readers of Holy Scripture. We should be thankful for this. I have sometimes heard preachers blamed for dividing their discourses in such a way as to help the memory of their hearers. The preacher may well bear that blame without any regret, since the Spirit of God here condescends to alliteration, and to alphabetical arrangement, in order to help the memories of readers. Thus the Psalm begins

1. *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.*

If there are any people in the world who are blessed, surely it must be those who are in God's way, and who take care to keep their garments unspotted from the world. Oh, if one can feel, at the end of every day, "I am undefiled in God's way, and I have walked in his law," how sweet it is in such a case to fall asleep, not self-righteous and boastful, but yet thankful to have been kept from the iniquity that abounds in the world! Truly, "blessed are the undefiled in the way." Perhaps some of you cannot claim this particular blessing; then, remember that there is another Psalm (the thirty-second) which begins, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," and that blessing is of the same force and of the same sweetness as this one.

2, 3. *Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.*

And if we walk in God's ways, he will never require us to do anything which is inequitable or unrighteous. No, that life which is made up of walking in God's ways, will be full of equity, and free from iniquity.

4. *Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.*

We are to be as industrious in holiness as grasping men are in business. "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently," watchfully, carefully, industriously, with all our might.

5. *O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!*

The psalmist is driven to prayer. His admiration of the godly man makes him aspire to be like him, and then he feels that he cannot attain to that height without divine help; so he cries, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!"

6. *Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.*

That is a wide expression, "respect unto all thy commandments." There are many men who are willing to keep a part of God's commandments; but they must pick and choose for themselves which these shall be. Such are arrant traitors; there lurks in their heart a distinct rebellion against the Lord, for they do really presume to be the judge of God, by taking exception to this or that command in his law. In their great condescension, they are willing to be obedient in certain points, but not in all. Such men have need to be ashamed; but the psalmist could say, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

7. *I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.*

"I will not praise myself; if I am enabled to be holy, that holiness is thy work, and I will praise thee for it."

8. *I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.*

Whenever you make a resolve, accompany it with a prayer. Let this be your declaration, "I will keep thy statutes;" but pray, "O forsake me not utterly," for, otherwise, your resolution will come to nought. Now begins the second octave of the Psalm

9. *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*

The psalmist has spoken about the holy way; now he would speak about young men running in it. One of the most intense desires of every godly man is that there may be a succession of godly men. Oh, that our young men might be good men, so that, when the old men pass away, the generation following them may be as good as their fathers, nay more, that they may be far better! "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" Within him are strong passions, around him are fierce temptations; wherewithal shall he cleanse his way? There are plenty who would defile him; the youth is compassed about with the temptations of gaiety and the allurements of folly:

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” Here is the answer

9. *By taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

There is no keeping a clean way if you walk with your eyes shut; you must pick your path in such a foul road as this: “By taking heed thereto according to thy word.” Yes, the greatest heed we can take will not keep us out of the mire unless God’s Word is a continual lamp unto our feet and a constant light unto our path. Oh, that every young man here might cleanse his way by taking heed thereto according to God’s Word!

10. *With my whole heart have I sought thee:*

Can you each one say that, “With my whole heart have I sought thee”?

10. *O let me not wander from thy commandments.*

“For, though I have sought thee with my whole heart, yet my heart may in the future go astray. Do not permit it, Lord; do not permit it.” It is a very sorrowful thought to me, that there are many, who once sat in these seats, and resolved to maintain a holy life, who, nevertheless, are, at this moment, in the seat of the scornful, some perhaps in prison, and many of them where they ought not to be. They determined to be right; but, destitute of divine grace, they have gone astray; therefore, let each of us pray, “O let me not wander from thy commandments.” You know what John Bradford used to say when he saw a man taken out to be hanged, “There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God.” And when you see others wander, you may say the same about yourself, and then breathe the prayer, “O let me not wander from thy commandments.”

11. *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

An old preacher, in a sermon on this text, divided it thus: “The best thing: ‘thy word.’ In the best place: ‘have I hid in my heart.’ For the best of purposes: ‘that I might not sin against thee.’” He thus gave in a few words the very gist of the text.

12. *Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.*

There is a mixture, you see, of prayer and praise. That is the best devotion, which contains a happy combination of these two things, prayer and praise.

13. *With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.*

I must take leave to claim a special property in this text, and there are some among us here, following that same holy craft of preaching the divine Word, who can, each one, lay his hand upon his heart, and say to God, "With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth." This is a happy occupation. If you cannot spend all your lives in it, because of other duties, yet, at least in your own family, and as often as you have opportunities, use your lips in God's service.

14. *I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.*

Not only as much as in riches, but as in all riches. David had gathered together a vast sum of money for the building of the house of the Lord; but whatever joy he had in those accumulations (and I daresay he had great gladness when he thought of the purpose to which all would be put) yet, nevertheless, he says, "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches."

15. *I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.*

Blessed meditation! The lack of meditation is one of the faults of the days in which we live, we are so very busy that we have not time to study God's Word; but the psalmist said, "I will meditate in thy precepts:" that is the secret strength; "and have respect unto thy ways:" that is the public result.

If we meditated more, we should live better. God help us so to do!

16. *I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.*

So may each one of us resolve. Amen.

PSALM 119:1-20

It is not easy to see the special subjects that are spoken of by David in each of the short portions of eight verses, yet I do not doubt that if each portion were very carefully examined, we should see that there is some thread running through. We have not here simply a number of pious sentences about the excellency of God's Word, but we have choice gems set, each of them in a golden ring of spiritual intent and purpose. I think the first eight verses, all of which begin with that letter Aleph, or A, set forth the excellence of abiding in holiness, and walking continually in the way of the Lord. Not so much the restoring and comforting power of the word, as the

blessedness of that word in leading us to conduct ourselves in consistency of character at all times.

1. *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.*

There is another blessing which comes before this. "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." And we can never know the blessing of this 119th Psalm unless we have felt in our own souls that first blessing — the blessedness of forgiven sin. But when, through the forgiveness of sin, we are put upon gospel ground, and are saved, then, not according to the law, but according to the gospel does this blessing come upon us. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way." The men who have kept their garments unspotted from the world — who from the time of their conversion even until now have been under the influence, of the divine Spirit, and so have been enabled to walk in holiness without once defiling their garments with any great and public sin — who walk in the law of the Lord, not occasionally, but always — whose daily walk is in conformity with the divine mind — these are blessed.

2. *Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.*

For he that has most of God, yet needs to seek more. We keep the testimonies — those we know, for we are taught of the Lord according to the promise, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." Yet do we still seek more. With our whole heart are we pressing on still to something higher and better. Even the undefiled in the way are so, comparatively: they are not absolutely undefiled, so as to be absolutely perfect in the sight of God. Hence they feel their imperfection, and they press after something better. They seek him with the whole heart.

3, 4. *They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.*

So that if we do so, we are unprofitable servants. We have done no more than was our duty to do. When his divine grace has renewed us, and has enabled us to walk in all sobriety, and truthfulness, and holiness, even then we have nothing to boast of. "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently."

5. *O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes !*

“Oh! that I may never defile my garments!” And he who has not defiled his garments still prays the same prayer that he may be kept still and directed still. “Oh! that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!”

6. *Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.*

It gives a man boldness. Integrity of heart before God breeds sacred courage. He has nothing to be ashamed of, and he is not ashamed when he has respect unto all God’s commandments.

7. *I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.*

Not “I will praise myself.” Not “I will take credit to myself for my clean walking;” but “When thou hast taught me, and I learn thy ways, then all the praise shall be rendered unto thee.” This is the fruit of evangelical obedience. Legal obedience, even could it be rendered, would be sure to claim the servant’s wage, and take to itself the praise; but the obedience of a child of God leads to the laying of honour at Jehovah’s feet.

8. *I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.*

Strong resolution, but a deep consciousness of weakness and unworthiness. “I will,” but oh’.. how can I do it?

“Oh! for this no strength have I

My strength is at thy feet to lie.

Oh! forsake me not utterly.”

Now, in the next eight verses it seems to me that the subject is some what different. We have seen the excellence of an undefiled way. Now we have before us one who wants to prove the power of the Word to keep him in that undefiled way; and so he begins with this question.

9. *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*

His passions are strong: his experience little. His tempers are many: his friends cannot always be at his side. “Wherewithal shall he cleanse his way?” It is very apt to become miry. The answer is:

— -

9. *By taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

The word will keep him in the cleanly path — will warn him of all the mire into which he would have fallen; and if he take heed to his steps, he shall not trip.

10. *With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.*

There is the young man's fear; and it may be the old man's fear, too. "I have sought thee sincerely and earnestly, but do not permit my weaker passions to get the mastery over me — do not suffer me in some unguarded hour to be carried captive by my lusts. Oh! let me not wander from thy commandments. It were better to die than to wander from thy way." The true convert dreads sin. He loathes the very thought of the most pleasurable folly. "Oh! let me not wander from thy commandments."

11. *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

There is the dread, you see — the dread of sinning — the dread of defiling his way; so he says that he has adopted this divine remedy. A good division of this text, if anyone would preach from it, is the best thing, "Thy word;" in the best place — "have I hid in my heart"; for the best of purposes — "that I might not sin against thee."

12. *Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.*

As if he said, "Teach me thy statutes that I may be blessed, too. Thou art a happy God. Teach me thy way that I may be happy, too. Blessed are the undefiled. Teach me to be so, that as thou art blessed, so I may be."

13, 14. *With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.*

A man's walking will be right when his delight is of this kind, for where the heart goes, the life will go. To some people religion is a task. It will never have much power over them. But when it becomes a delight, then will their walk be affected by it. A well-known and renowned infidel of the last generation, traveling in Wales, said to a little girl whom he saw reading her Bible, "Well, my dear," he said, "I see you are getting through your task." "Task sir?" she said, "What do you mean? I am reading the Bible." He said, "I thought your mother had set you a chapter to read." "Oh! no, sir. If my mother wanted to punish me, she would not make me read the Bible. It is the most delightful book in all the world, and it is a great joy to me when I can get a little time alone to read my Bible."

It touched his heart. As he confessed afterwards, he was delighted to find something like genuine religion. And where you find delight in religion, there it is genuine. True, genuine religion is like some of the German waters. They come up all fresh and sparkling. I like to see the sparkling in it — a little sparking religion — a little flash of joy and of delight. But very much that we get now-a-days is flat, stale, dull, unprofitable. They keep it corked, but badly corked usually, and when we see it there is nothing in it that we should desire it. It is a poor article. God give us delight in himself, for that is tame religion. “I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches.”

15. *I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.*

An excellent way of keeping the life clean is to keep the thoughts clean. Our boys are brought to prison by reading the abominable trash that is poured forth for juveniles; and many and many a crime has been the result of the fiction of the present day. It is often not only light reading, but filthy reading, too. If we would read God’s Word more, and meditate in it better, our hearts would be kept sweet and so would our lives be.

16. *I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.*

God grant that we never may.

17. *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.*

Does it want much grace, then, to keep a child of God alive — even to keep him alive? Yes, it does. Little grace will be of no use to us. We must have great grace, for our needs are great. Sometimes our troubles are great: at other times our temptations are great. We are always in great necessity; and thou, Lord, must have a large exchequer, and thou must give it liberally to us, or else we, poor, penniless beggars, must utterly die of want. Merely to live, then, needs the bounty of God. “Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live and keep thy Word” — for there is no living in truth, except as we keep the Word of God. Those who live in the neglect of God’s Word are not living at all, but they are dead while they live. God deliver us from such life.

18. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

They are there, but I cannot see them unless thou open my eyes. It is not that thy Word is dark, but that my eyes are dim. Yea, by nature they are blinded altogether. Oh! thou, who art the great Physician of the blind, open thou my eyes.

19. *I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.*

Do you see the drift of that? He says, "I am a stranger here. Then, Lord, if thou do not become, and continue to be, my acquaintance, I am altogether alone." It is true of the Christian that he cannot find anything here that can satisfy his soul. He must, therefore, have the Lord, or else he is in a very sorry case. Oh! beloved, the more you find yourselves strangers in this world, the more are you becoming like your God. The Psalmist says elsewhere, "For I am a stranger with thee," not "to thee," but "with thee, like thee," for God is a stranger in this world. Men do not recognize him or delight themselves in him. "So, since, Lord, I have no other friend, and can find no other satisfying portion, hide not thy commandments from me. On the contrary, let me see the more of thee, because I have nothing else."

20. *My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.*

We cannot always say that, for we sometimes wish that our hearts would break. Sometimes we sing: —

"My heart rejoice or ache: Resolve this doubt for me;
And if it be not broken, break And heal it if it be."

PSALM 119:9-32

9. *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" A vital and solemn question. His way is full of temptations, and he himself has strong passions. How shall he make his way clean, and keep it so? "By taking heed thereto according to thy word." Without heed he will soon be in the mire, but carefully walking with God's word as his rule, by the blessing of God's grace it will keep him out of sin.

10. *With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandment.*

There might be thought in this confession to be some commendation of himself, and therefore he salts it with this prayer: "I have sought thee, Lord, sincerely, but still, notwithstanding that, I am very apt to stray away, and I shall sadly wander unless thou keep me. O let me not wander from thy commandments."

11. *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

The best thing put into the best place for the best of all purposes. There is no antidote against sin like the possession of the Word of God in the soul.

12. *Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.*

Thou art blessed, make me blessed. Thou art the happy God, instruct me in the way of happiness.

13. *With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.*

I am a learner, but I have tried to be a teacher too. I have not kept the Word of God to myself as though it were only a personal treasure for me, but what I have heard in the secret-chamber of fellowship, that have I spoken on the housetops. Have you published abroad what you know? Then you are the person to learn more. When men drop their money into a money box, they have to break it to get it out again, and if they have not need of it they will not do so. God doth not care to drop his treasure into a heart that never useth it and imparteth it. Let your lips speak what your heart learns.

14. *I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.*

If all sorts of riches were put together, I have found them all, and more than them all, in thy testimonies. I am rich in all respects when I have thee.

15. *I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy way.*

Meditation treads the wine press and gets the juice out of the grapes. A man may read too much if he reads without meditation. "I will meditate." It is the harvesting by reaping of what we have sown by reading.

16. *I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.*

I will take a deep pleasure in them, and I will find an intense joy in every pondering of them. "I will not forget thy word." I will never let it go out of the precincts of my memory: I will recall again and

again. I will always have a text of thy precious Book ready to my tongue.

17. *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.*

Give me much of thy comfort, royally of thyself: deal bountifully with me: I have great necessities, am a mass of wants, therefore, “ Deal bountifully with me that I may live.” And I have great tendencies to wander. Great risks and perils. Give me abundance of grace that I may keep thy word.

18. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

The wonders are there: cause me to behold them. A man may have a fair landscape before him, rich in all beauties of form and colour, but if his eyes be closed, what is he better for it?

19. *I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.*

“I am a stranger in the earth.” I do not belong now to it: I am born and bound for heaven: I am a pilgrim here: men do not understand me, neither have I any settled business here. “I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.” Oh, remember that I am thy alien,thy banished one: send me love-messages from the old home and loved country.

20. *My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.*

Broken souls are many: but not on this account! Oh, how few are in danger of breaking, through such a longing as this ! Would God there were many more that did sigh and cry after the Word of God; for longings such as these are sure to lead to an earnest search, and the earnest search will increase knowledge and increase grace.

21. *Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.*

A proud man is surely a sinful man. He may think himself a righteous man, but he cannot be so. He has gone far astray from the very essence of God’s law, which is that he should walk humbly with his God.

22. *Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.*

A man that does that is pretty sure to be reproached and to be contemned by man; for they think that one who follows God faithfully “is very old-fashioned, he has not much spirit, he has not drunk in the philosophy of the age, he is a fossilized Christian,” and so on. Well, we can bear all such reproach: still are we truly glad when we escape it.

23. *Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.*

And a great man’s word goes a long way with some people. They think a prince a great authority. “But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.” He did not burst out in angry reply, he did not give fierce railing for railing, but he sat himself down as quietly as he could, the more abundantly to meditate in God’s statutes. What calmness there is here, and what wisdom! for if princes should speak against us, and the great ones of the earth should rail, what matters it? If they drive us away from our faith, it would matter, but if they drive us to our Bibles, it is a benefit.

24, 25. *Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors. My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.*

Here he prays for quickening. He felt the spiritual death that was so natural to him, the heaviness of his heart, the tendency to sink, the attractions of the world.

26. *I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.*

Open confession is good for the soul, and I have made this confession: thou hast heard me: now “teach me thy statutes.”

27. *Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.*

Lord ground me and found me in thy knowledge: give me to know fully, firmly, what I do know. I would not be as a man that eats, but thinks not, whence the bread came, but I would wish to understand the way of thy precepts: “so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.”

28. *My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.*

Will not this prayer suit some that are in this house this morning who are very dull and depressed? Oh, if your soul sinks, still pray and say: “Strengthen thou me.” You want strength, dear friends. If

you had more strength, your trouble would not crush you; your soul would not melt if you had more strength and confidence.

29, 30. *Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously. I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.*

As a captain lays out his chart so as to keep his course correctly and safely, so I try to sail by it. I have chosen thy law, and precept, and command as my course, and I would fain keep to them.

31. *I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O LORD, put me not to shame.*

I am glued to them: there is no separating me, no tearing me apart, from them. “O Lord, put me not to shame.”

32. *I will run the way of thy commandment, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

I will go quicker and faster, I will have more energy, more flaming zeal, in thy service — “When thou shalt enlarge my heart.” O Lord, it is very narrow and very contracted, I cannot think great thoughts, nor do great things, nor believe great promises, unless thou shalt enlarge my heart. Lord, give me a larger heart, stronger to obey, tenderer to love, for thy name’s sake!

PSALM 119:17-28

17. *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.*

O Lord, I am thy servant; yet, I pray thee, do not pay me wages according to my deserts, but according to the greatness of thy mercy, “deal bountifully with thy servant.” Little mercy will not be enough for such great sins and such great needs as mine. Deal very generously with thy poor servant who is so full of necessities, “that I may live;” for, if thou wilt only let me live, it will be of thy bounty, since I deserve not even that boon. Only to have my life still spared, shall be regarded by me as a great favor from thee. I want not to live to please myself, for that would not be living at all, but “that I may live, and keep thy word.” A holy life is the only true life, the only life that is really worth having; and he that hath it hath been dealt bountifully with by his God. I commend this verse to each servant of the Lord as a prayer that may be continually presented to him.

18. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

This is one of the first parts of God's bountiful dealings with us. There is no mercy that is so great as mercy to one's own person, to one's own eyes, for instance, which are such essential parts of ourselves. Lord, when thou art dealing bountifully with me, I do not ask for riches, but I do ask that my eyes may be opened. I do not ask thee to give me more than thou hast given in thy Word, but I do ask for opened eyes with which I may perceive what thou hast put there, else the beauties of thy Word may be useless to me by reason of my blindness. This blessed Book teems with marvels; it is a world of wonders. It records many miracles, but every page of it is itself a miracle, and a mass of miracles; yet we must have them revealed to us, or we shall not discover them. Revelation itself must be revealed to every man individually by the Spirit of God, or else he will never see it.

19. *I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me,*

Humane men deal kindly with exiles; God has commanded us to be generous to strangers, and he will certainly be so himself. Lord, because of thy love, I find myself like an exile among the sons of men; but be not thou thyself strange to me. What should I do, in this world, without thee, and without thy Word? "Hide not thy commandments from me."

20, 21. *My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times. Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.*

God cannot bear the proud; it is very seldom that they can bear one another; and if proud men loathe pride as they see it in others, you may rest assured that the good and great God will not endure it. How sternly he rebuked it in the angels that kept not their first estate. How he rebuked it in Pharaoh! All through history, it may be seen how God has been continually abasing the proud, and giving grace to the humble.

22. *Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.*

He had lived honestly and uprightly, and yet men slandered him. Was there ever a man upon earth, who was good and true, who was not slandered? God himself was slandered in paradise by the old serpent, and the Lord Jesus was constantly being slandered by

wicked men, so can any of us hope to escape the envenomed tongue of the slanderer? Yet it is very painful, and we may well pray to be delivered from it, especially if we can add, with the psalmist, “for I have kept thy testimonies.”

23. *Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.*

Sometimes, men can bear what the commonalty say; but to have the great ones of the earth speaking against them, is thought by some to be very hard. The psalmist says, “Princes also did sit and speak against me.” What did he do under such circumstances? Did he rise up in anger, and answer them? Or did he sit down, and consider how he could defend himself against them? Far from it: “Thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.” He seems to say, “I did not think it was worth my while to leave the Scriptures, even for a moment, so as to speak to them; but I went on studying thy Word, and left them to say what they pleased.” We shall be wise if we do likewise.

24. *Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.*

While these princes were taking counsel against the psalmist, he also went and took Counsel’s advice against them; but that Counsel’s advice was the advice of the Word of God. He stuck to the Scriptures. Little as he had of them, yet that little he greatly prized. The Pentateuch furnished him with five inspired Counselors to whom he resorted in his time of need. Let us imitate his example, especially as we have the complete Canon of revelation to advise and counsel us.

25-28. *My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word. I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works. My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.*

The Word of the Lord is available for quickening, teaching, and strengthening. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” May that gracious Spirit, who inspired it, ever teach us its inner meaning!

PSALM 119:21-32

21. *Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.*

Wherever there is pride in the heart, there is sure to be error in the life. A proud man is wrong, to begin with, and as long as he continues proud, he must be wrong. It is not possible for him to be right. God has rebuked him, and God has cursed him. How wise it would be of him to be humble. Remember we shall have either to be humble or to be humbled; and it is much better to be humble than to have to come under the humbling dispensations of God's hand.

22. *Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.*

O Lord, do not suffer men to believe lies and slanders against me, or if they do let my conscience sustain my courage by the consciousness that I have kept thy testimonies.

23. *Princes also did sit and speak against me:*

Had they nothing else to do, but talk against God's servants? No; they sat down to do it with deliberation. "Princes also did sit and speak against me."

23. *But thy servant did.*

"Go to law with them?" No not so here. "But thy servant got in the face and defended himself?" No, no. Look, you will not read those words. But "Thy servant was broken-hearted about it to have the great men of the earth speaking against him?" No, it is not so either. "But thy servant did."

23. *Meditate in thy statutes,*

Is not that a very blessed and admirable way of enduring slander — simply to take your Bible and read a little more than usual? You will cure it so.

24. *Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.*

Because I love them and delight in them. I submit my life to their guidance.

I go to thy Book to ask what I shall do. I consult it as the oracle of God. I take my doubts, and difficulties, and dilemmas there, and I find that they are all met. "Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors."

25. *My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.*

Ah! there is a note of sadness here. The Psalmist complains of himself. He found himself very sorrowful, and he could not get out of the sorrow; or he found himself very full of business cares, and he could not get rid of them. "My soul cleaveth to the dust" — as though it was stuck to the dust, and the dust to it, and could not rise. Then how sweet the prayer, "Quicken thou me." "Didst thou not first make me of dust, and wilt thou not at the last quicken my mortal body out of the dust? Then, now, my Lord quicken thou me according to thy Word." See, here is an evil complained of. He finds himself cleaving to the dust. Here is a remedy sought, "Quicken thou me." And here is an argument pleaded with God — "according to thy Word." There is a promise for it. Lord, fulfill thy word.

26. *I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.*

A confession had been made: "I have declared my ways." That confession had been accepted: "Thou heardest me." Then a petition is offered: "Teach me thy statutes." "Thou seest that I confess how wrong I was. Now give me grace that I may not go wrong again." May that be our spirit always.

27, 28. *Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works. My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.*

"I am poured out like water," says the Saviour. "My heart is like wax. It is melted in the midst of my bowels." It is the greatness of pain, the greatness of fear, the greatness of sorrow, till he seems to melt away in the fire like wax. "For heaviness," says he, "my soul melts. Then strengthen thou me." Oh! it is so sweet to turn to God when your soul is burdened — to look to him, and say — not "deliver me." Observe that, the child of God is not so anxious to get rid of trouble, as he is to know how to behave worthily under it. "Strengthen thou me, according to thy Word." How he harps on that "according to thy Word." The child of God does not expect God to do otherwise than he has promised to do, and he is quite content if the Lord will act according to his Word, for well does our poet put it: —

"What more can he say than to you he hath said, —
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?"

In this book, dear brother, whatever your trouble, there is a promise to meet it. If you lose a key and you send for the

whitesmith, as a general rule, somewhere in that bunch of keys he has a key that will fit your lock. And so here is a bunch of keys, and there is a key here that will exactly fit the lock of your trouble whatever it may be, for God foresaw the circumstances of all his people, and prepared a promise for every circumstance.

29. *Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.*

“Take away the evil: give me the good.” “The way of lying.” Oh! it is a dreadful thing to get into that. There are some that have a way of doing it — some that do it jocosely, some that do it by implication. Some think it shrewd to deceive. “Remove from me the way of lying.” If truth should be banished from all the world besides, it ought to find a shelter in the breasts of Christians. The Christian man is forbidden to take an oath, because there should never be any necessity for it. His word — his, “Yea, yea” — his “Nay, nay” should always, be sufficient. Thank God it is, where the grace of God is.

30, 31. *I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.*

I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O LORD, put me not to shame. Here is, first, choice: “I have chosen the way of truth.” Here is his practically carrying it out: “Thy judgments have I laid before me.” Here is his perseverance in it: “I have stuck unto thy testimonies.” And then there is his prayer about it: “O Lord, put me not to shame.” And it is a prayer which is sure to be answered. “Truth may be blamed, but it cannot be shamed.” Truth is God’s daughter, and he will take care of her. If you have chosen the way of truth, it is a way in which, though some may censure and slander, your righteousness shall come forth, in due time, as the noonday.

32. *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

“When I get liberty of heart, then will I take as my choice, thy ways.” The Christian is never so much at liberty as when he is under law to Christ. He knows the difference between licence and liberty. He has a liberty to do so he wills, because he wills to do as God wills him to do; and herein lies the only freedom which we desire.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 90 AND 119:21-32.

PSALM 119:25-32

25. *My soul cleaveth unto the dust:*

“It sticks to it as though it were glued to it; my soul cannot be lifted up, at least by myself, out of its sadness, and its earthiness.” The psalmist was not one who could boast of perfection. He had to lament that the earth, which was in him by nature, made even his soul cleave to mother earth. He did not like it; he was not content that it should be so, and therefore he breathed this prayer: —

25. *Quicken thou me according to thy word.*

“Lord, there is nothing but life that can bring me up out of the dust, for death lurks in the dust, and the duel tends to death. Put life into me, Lord, thy life, the divine life. Thou hast promised to do this, therefore, do it, Lord, ‘according to thy word.’” That is a prayer which is always sure to succeed, for it is based upon the promise of God. Hath the Lord promised anything? Then he will surely perform it; and you cannot use a better argument in prayer than to say to him, “Do as thou hast said;” or, as the psalmist puts it, “Quicken thou me according to thy Lord.”

26. *I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me:*

“I have made a full confession to thee, my God. I have owned my fault wherein I was wrong, and I have thanked thee for thy grace given to me in anything wherein I was right.”

26. *Teach me thy statutes.*

“O Lord, let me not have such a sorry tale to tell again. If my copy of thy handwriting has been badly written, set it for me afresh, I pray thee: ‘Teach me thy statutes.’”

27. *Make me to understand the way of thy precepts:*

“Let me know, O Lord, what the way of thy precept is; get me into that way; and then, oh help me to keep in it all my life!”

27. *So shall I talk of thy wondrous works.*

A man never talks rightly of God’s works till he knows God’s ways, and it is idle to talk of them if there is no doing at the back of the talking; so the psalmist prays, “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.” To preach, and not practice, is very bad preaching; but first to understand the way of the Lord, then to run in it, and then to speak of it, this is well.

28. *My soul melteth for heaviness:*

The Hebrew word is “droppeth.” The psalmist’s soul was like water dripping from the eaves of a house in time of rain. There are two sorts of sorrow, — the sorrow that rushes like a mighty torrent, and the sorrow, which is perhaps the worse of the two, which goes drip, drip, drip, drip, drip, drip, — like the constant dripping which wears away stones, — and which makes even the boldest heart to feel the attrition: “My soul melteth, dissolveth, droppeth, drippeth for heaviness:” —

28. *Strengthen thou me* —

The psalmist does not ask to have the trouble removed; but he prays, “Help me to bear it.” Whenever there is a thing that is hard, the right way to get through it is to get something that is still harder. If God will give us an adequate supply of his grace, hard times will not wear us away. So the psalmist prays, “Strengthen thou me” —

28. *According unto thy word.*

See how he clings to that expression, “according unto thy word.” He knows the power of that argument, and therefore he uses it again and again.

29. *Remove from me the way of lying:*

“Do not let me fall into any untrue habits. Do not let me profess to have had an experience which I have never felt, or talk about holy things of which I know nothing experimentally. Keep me from everything that has any trace of falsehood in it.”

29. *And grant me thy law graciously.*

“For thy law is truth, and when thy grace brings thy law home to my heart, all that is false will be banished from me.”

30. *I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.*

“I have laid them before me as a man puts his model in front of him that he may work to it.” It is well for us to have God’s way and God’s judgments always before our eyes, that we may be duly impressed and rightly guided by them.

31. *I have stuck unto thy testimonies:*

Just now, the psalmist said that his soul stuck to the earth; yet, at the same time, he was sticking to God’s testimonies, for every good man is two men. There is a new-birth-man who sticks to God’s testimonies, and there is that old carnal nature in us which cleaves to the dust.

31, 32. *O Lord, put me not to shame. I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

That is, “When thou shalt give me liberty of heart, then I will run in the way of thy commandments. When the impediments are removed, — when the sin, which doth so easily entangle me, is taken away, then will I run with delight in the way of thy commandments.

PSALM 119:25-32

25. *My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.*

“I feel heavy, unhappy, dull: ‘My soul cleaveth unto the dust.’ Or I feel worldly, lethargic, lifeless: ‘My soul cleaveth unto the dust.’ There is nothing but the power of new life that can separate me from that dust: ‘Quicken thou me according to thy word.’” Divine life is the great cure for most spiritual evils. When a man has vigorous life in his constitution, he throws off many diseases; and when the soul is full of spiritual life, it masters a great number of evils. “My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.” That is good pleading, — “according to thy promise, for thou hast promised to quicken me. It is the nature of thy Word to be quick and quickening; therefore, Lord, ‘quicken thou me according to thy word.’”

26. *if have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.*

“I have confessed my wrong; now, O Lord, teach me what is right! I have owned my sin; now, O Lord, lead me in the paths of holiness! ‘Teach me thy statutes.’”

27. *Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.*

He who fully understands the way of God’s precepts must talk of his wondrous works. There is a power about that truth in the heart to unloose the most stammering tongue. We are bound to speak of that which God teaches to us: “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.”

28. *My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.*

Are any of you, dear friends, in that condition? Do your hearts melt within you? It is a sore trouble, as I know full well. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity;" but when his very soul melts for heaviness, what is he to do then? Why, even then he may pray; nay, then he must pray; and this may be the burden of his prayer, "Strengthen thou me according unto thy word." Notice, beloved, how the psalmist keeps harping upon that string,-" according unto thy word." If your prayer is according to God's Word, you may expect a comfortable answer sooner or later. We know that God will not act contrary to his Word. He who is not a man of his word is despised; and if there could be one who was not a God of his Word, what would be said of him? But, my tried friend, he will make his Word true to you to the very letter; therefore still cry to him, "Strengthen thou me according unto thy word."

29. *Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.*

"Lord, let me not be pestered by liars, and let me never fall into any measure of falsehood myself." There is a way of thinking better of yourself than you deserve, which is a form of lying. There is a method of supposing that you have experienced what you never have experienced, and that you have attained to what you never have attained to; that also is a way of falsehood. May God remove it from us, and may we have the law of the Lord written on our hearts! "Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously."

30. *I have chosen the way of truth:*

"I want to be true, I want to know the truth, I want to feel the truth, I want to practice the truth: 'I have chosen the way of truth.'"

30. *Thy judgments have I laid before me.*

"Like a map, so that I might follow the way of truth as I see it drawn out in letters of light in thy Word." The man who spreads out God's Word before him, like a map of the road, is not likely to make a mistake in his journeying.

31. *I have stuck unto thy testimonies : —*

I like that word "stuck." "I have stuck unto thy testimonies." "I could not be drawn or dragged away from them. They told me of some fine new ideas and modern grand discoveries; but 'I have stuck unto thy testimonies.' They came before me with something

very artistic and scientific; but ‘I have stuck unto thy testimonies:’

31. *O LORD, put me not to shame.*

You may rest assured that he never will. If a man clings to God, God will cleave to him. If we are not ashamed of God, he will never put us to shame; but we shall go from strength to strength glorying in his truth and grace.

32. *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

There is an enlargement of the heart that is very dangerous, but this kind of enlargement of the heart is the most healthy thing that can happen to a man. A great heart, you see, is a running heart. A little heart goes slowly, but an enlarged heart runs in the way of God’s commandments. Oh, for a heart full of love to God; and then to have that heart made larger, so as to hold more of God’s love! Lord, enlarge my heart in that sense! Let me feel at home and at liberty with thee; let the last link of my bondage be snapped. Amen.

PSALM 119:25-40

By the help of God’s Holy Spirit, this psalm may serve for the purposes of self-examination, for we may ask ourselves as we read, “Do I feel in that way? Are my prayers like those of this good man? Is my experience like his: “We may often ask ourselves, “Am I as watchful, and as careful, and as fond of God’s Word as he was?” Such questions will do us good.

25. *My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.*

He does not like to feel the cleaving of his soul to the dust. There are some that feel it, but they seem content to continue in that condition; but no sooner does David feel it than he cries “Quicken thou me.” A sense of sin is of small value, unless it leads us to desire to escape out of it. “Quicken thou me.” I lie as dead as if it were dust to dust. My soul seems cleaving to it, as if it had come to its end, and meant to rest there; but, Lord, give me life. Thy Word promises me life. Thou hast ways laid down in thy Word for giving life. “Quicken thou me, according to thy Word.”

26. *I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.*

I have told thee all about myself. Now tell me about thyself. “Teach me thy statutes.”

27. *Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.*

It is a bad thing to talk of what we do not understand and he who shall preach what he has never experienced is very likely to do so. Yet beloved, there is no understanding Gods precepts except he shall teach them to us. We are void of understanding. He must enlighten. He must instruct. “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts.” Some are very anxious to understand the doctrines, and some to understand the prophecies. All well and good, but “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts”, give me practical godliness, help me to live to thy praise, “so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.” I will not talk till thou hast taught me. But when thou hast taught me, then my subject shall be thy wondrous works. The wonderous work of making me to understand thee shall be something to speak about, and all the wondrous works of nature, and providence, and grace shall be the subject of my continual conversation.

28. *My soul melteth for heaviness:*

For the best of men sometimes suffer the sharpest sorrows. Hearts of stone are not likely to be so sensitive as hearts of flesh. “My soul melted for heaviness.”

28. *Strengthen thou me according unto thy word.*

He wants strength, but he does not want to obtain it in any way, but the way of God’s appointment. “According unto thy Word.” Somewhat like our hymn, which says: —

“He that suffered in my stead,
Shall my physician be
I will not be comforted
Till Jesus comforts me.”

“Strengthen thou me,” but let it be “according to thy Word.”

29. *Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.*

Let me not lie. Let me not be tempted to lie. Let me not be pestered with the falsehoods of others. Remove the way of lying far from me, and oh! by thy grace, give me to know the law. That is a remarkable combination of words. “Grant me thy law graciously.”

Has law anything to do with grace? Yes, such a law as he speaks of — the law in the heart — the law in the hand of Christ — the law written in the life of the believer — not the law of merit and of salvation by works, but “grant me thy law graciously.”

30. *I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.*

As a seaman spreads out the chart before him, that he may follow the right channel, and not miss his track — as a traveler spreads out his map that he may keep to the right way, “I have chosen the way of truth. Thy judgments have I laid before me.”

31. *I have stuck unto thy testimonies:*

As if I were glued to them — sealed to them. They said I was very old-fashioned. They said I did not keep pace with the times. They said I was not a man of thought. I did not care about that. “I have stuck unto thy testimonies.”

31. *O LORD, put me not to shame.*

And he never will. If we stick to him, we may be quite sure that we shall come forth out of every difficulty and every opposition triumphantly. “Put me not to shame.” And although he thus spoke, yet you perceive the activity of his soul.

32. *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

Give my heart freedom. Knock off my fetters. Take away my heaviness. Remove from me my ignorance. Give my soul room, and she will run, but it will be in the ways of thy commandments.

33. *Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.*

Here is the art of finally persevering. Here is the way of continuing to the end, and the same shall be saved. We must begin with a teachable spirit. He that is not willing to learn has not begun right. We ought to disciple all nations, but he that will not learn is not yet disciplined. “Teach me.” But the teaching we must have must come from God. “Teach me, O Lord. I am not content to have the Word second-hand. Be thou my schoolmaster. Teach me, O Lord. I shall never learn unless thou teach me. Thou who didst make me, thou who didst give me a new heart, thou must write that law upon my heart, or it will never be written there. Teach me, O Lord. Teach me the way of thy statutes. Teach me practical godliness. So teach it

to me that I shall learn it, and put it into practice and if I be taught of thee, then I shall keep it unto the end; not else.”

34. *Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.*

A want of understanding is a very great lack. There is little wonder that men turn aside from an outward religion which has never taken possession of their thoughts and minds. If they only subscribe to the creed which they have never studied — if they only carry out a life — the mere shell of a life — the inward principles of which they do not know, they will soon turn aside. “Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law.”

35. *Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.*

“Not only teach me the way, but make me to go in it. Take hold of me as a mother does of her little child, and teach me how to walk, and help me in the walking.” Make me to go. It is a feeble word — a most expressive prayer. “Make me to go for therein do I delight.” When a man delights in God’s way, he will be sure to be made to go in it.

36. *Incline my heart unto thy testimonies,
Bend it that way — incline it.*

36. *And not to covetousness.*

For, naturally, my heart would go after the world, and cleave to its riches and its treasures, and begin to covet, but, Lord, bend it the other way. If you do not love God’s testimonies, the tendency will be to become a lover of the world. “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.”

37. *Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;*

Or “make mine eyes to pass from beholding vanity.” I am a runner in the race. Do not let me stop to look at anything, but may my eyes pass by vanity. Let me not be like her in the fable who paused to gather the golden apples in the race, and so lost it and was deceived. If the world’s golden apples are thrown in my way, make my eyes to pass from beholding vanity.

37. *And quicken thou me in thy way.*

More life towards thee will deaden me to the world. The more I follow after God, the less shall I care to follow after the world.

38. *Stablish thy word unto thy servant,*

Make it fast, firm, sure.

38. *Who is devoted to thy fear.*

I am established in thee. Establish the Word to me. Thou has bound me fast to thy altar. Oh! give me the fast blessings and sure mercies of David.

39. *Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.*

I fear lest I bring a reproach upon thee, and then upon myself. Oh! suffer me not to do so. I am not afraid of the reproach of the world. I count the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. But, oh! let them never have to charge me with sin, and let me not fall into such pecuniary difficulties or other troubles, that men will be able to make a charge against me out of them. Help me to provide things honest in the sight of all men. "Take away my reproach, which I fear, for thy judgments are good."

40. *Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.*

PSALM 119:33-40

We have here some of the jottings from David's pocket-book, the notes of his experience as recorded in his diary. The whole Psalm is a great casket full of golden rings. They all fit one into the other; but each ring is also perfect in itself.

33. *Teach me, o Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.*

We forget what others teach us, but we never forget what God truly teaches us. He who has been graciously taught will finally persevere.

34. *Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.*

This is the great point as to thorough godliness,—to observe God's law with our whole heart. In these days, there is much slurring in religious matters; but they who love God aright love him with their whole heart, and they are careful even in what others call "little things." Live unto God with the utmost heartiness, exactness, and precision, every moment. "The Lord thy God is a jealous God;" therefore, serve thou him with great jealousy and sincerity of spirit.

35. *Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.*

And when a man delights to do that which is right, God will help him to do it. The psalmist seems to speak like a little child who has not found the use of his limbs yet. He says, "Make me to go; take hold of me, as a nurse does of her charge, and enable me to take my first trembling, tottering footsteps. Make me to go, for I delight to go. Lord, help me to carry out my soul's desire."

36. *Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.*

"Make me covetous for holiness; let that passion which, in other men, goes after gold and silver, in me run after obedience and fellowship with thee, my God. Incline my heart in another way than nature would incline it; nature puts it on the left hand, and makes me covetous; my God, put thou my heart on my right side, that I may seek only after thee and after holiness."

37. *Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.*

The psalmist commends all his nature to the care of his God. Just now, he prayed about his feet; then, about his heart; now, about his eyes. We need the sanctifying grace of God in every faculty of our spiritual manhood, lest we go astray one way when we are watching against sin in another direction. It matters little at which gate a city is captured; if it be taken at all, it is taken. Oh, for grace to watch every portal of the town of Mansoul, lest we be overcome at any point!

38. *Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.*

"Lord, make thy Word to stand fast to me, for I do love thee, I am in thy fear. Thy fear has become part of myself." If you notice, the words "is devoted" are put in by the translators. The verse should read, "Who to thy fear," as if his whole self had run into the mould and shape of a God-fearing man. He asks God therefore to establish his Word unto him, and so he did; what David asked, David's God gave.

39. *Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.*

"Lord, never let me sin, so as to bring a reproach upon thy holy name! Keep me from doing anything that would grieve thee, and cause thine enemies to blaspheme."

40. *Behold, I have longed after thy precepts:*

That is a sure sign of a true child of God. Hypocrites may long after the promises, but only the true-born child of God longs after the precepts. If your chief desire is to be holy, that is a desire which comes of the Spirit of God. A bad man may desire to go to heaven; a desperately wicked man may wish to die the death of the righteous; but he who intensely longs to live a godly, righteous life is indeed the subject of divine grace. I am sure that there are some of us here who can say that we have made no bargains with God, nor put in any conditions whatever; if he will but help us to live holy lives, he may do what he wills with us. Our one desire is this: "Behold, I have longed after thy precept."

40. *Quicken me in thy righteousness.*

Let that be the prayer of every one of us. Amen.

PSALM 119:33-40

33. *Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; —*

The psalmist is constantly talking about "the way." We have that expression in the 27th verse, then in the 29th, the 30th, and the 32nd; and now again we have it here: "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes;" —

33, 34. *And I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.*

That is not true or right understanding which permits us to go into sin; those who are really wise in heart hate evil and love righteousness.

35. *Make me to go in the path —*

Or, say —

35. *Of thy commandment; for therein do I delight.*

"Make me to go." Not only show me the way, but make me to go, like a nurse does with a child when she puts her hands under its arms, and strengthens its tottering footsteps. This is a very beautiful expression: "Make me to go." Lord, we are very weak; we are like little children; make us to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do we delight.

36. *Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.*

The heart must love something; it will either love that which is good, or that which is evil. "O Lord," the psalmist seems to pray, "incline my heart in the right direction. Make it lean towards that which is good; cause me to count thy grace better than all the riches of the world."

37. *Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;*

"Do not let me even look at it, for one may look at an ugly thing until the sense of its deformity gradually disappears, and it becomes attractive. Lord, never let me so fix my eyes upon sin that, at last, I come to reckon it a desirable thing."

37. *And quicken thou me in thy way.*

A man who travels quickly has not time to stop and look at the things in the road. Lord, let me go so fast to heaven that, when the devil hangs his baubles in his shop-window, I may not have time even to stop and look at them: 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.'

38. *Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.*

That is, "Make thy word to me real and true. Put away my natural skepticism, my proneness to question, my tendency to doubt." "Stablish thy word." "Make me to know how firm, how true, how real it is, for I would love it more and more. I do believe it, for I am devoted to thy fear, but I long to be still further established in the faith."

39. *Turn away my reproach which I fear:*

Are any of you fearing reproach? If so, you may well fear it, for you deserve it; yet, even then, you may ask the Lord to turn it away from you.

39, 40. *For thy judgments are good. Behold, I have longed after thy precepts:*

Some people, whom I know, long after the promises, and others long after the doctrines. I hope that they will all get an equal longing for the precepts, for true believers love the precepts as much as they love the promises or the doctrines: "Behold, I have longed after thy precepts."

40. *Quicken me in thy righteousness.*

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 32. AND PSALM 119:33-40.

PSALM 119:64-72

64-67. *The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes. Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray: —*

Prosperity had been to the psalmist like the gap in the hedge through which the sheep wander from the shepherd; but affliction had been to him like the prickly bushes that often stop the sheep from wandering still further, so he says, “Before I was afflicted I went astray:” —

67. *But now have I kept thy word.*

What a benefit, then, affliction had been to him; and what a blessing it often is to us! So, instead of dreading it, as we usually do, we ought to welcome it, and be on the look-out for the blessing which is to come to us through it. Many a child of God has joined with Dr. Watts in singing, —

“Father, I bless thy gentle hand;
How kind was thy chastising rod;
That forced my conscience to a stand,
And brought my wandering soul to God!
“Foolish and vain, I went astray
Ere I had felt thy scourges, Lord;
I left my guide, and lost my way;
But now I love and keep thy Word.”

68. *Thou art good, and doest good;*

What a delightful description this is of God and his works! Who is good? Our Lord Jesus supplies the answer, “There is none good but one, that is, God.” And his works are like himself: “Thou art good, and doest good.”

68. *Teach me thy statutes.*

In the 25th Psalm, David wrote, “Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he teach sinners in the way;” and here, because the Lord is good, and does good, the psalmist prays, “Teach me thy statutes.” He will teach us that which is good because he is himself good. What a blessing it is for us to have such a Teacher! How wonderful it is that God should be so condescending as to take us into his school!

69. *The proud have forged a lie against me:*

They have kept on hammering away until they have finished the falsehood; they have “forged” it, as one forges a deadly weapon in the fire.

69. *But I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.*

“It is no use for me to trouble about them. When they have forged one lie, they will probably forge another, and there is practically no end to that black business. It is no use for me to try to answer them; I will turn to a far more profitable occupation: ‘I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.’”

70. *Their heart is as fat as grease;*

Insensible, lifeless; — they have no conscience, no feeling; they are so proud of their prosperity that they are afflicted with fatty degeneration of the heart.

70. *But I delight in thy law.*

What a blessing it is for us to find our fatness there, — to delight in the marrow and fatness of God’s law!

71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

The psalmist, was so impressed with the benefits which he had derived from his afflictions, that he returned to the subject: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.” There is much teaching power about God’s rod. He always keeps one in his school, and it is greatly needed for such dull scholars as we are. Many a child of God can repeat the psalmist’s testimony: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.” “Thou hast whipped a little knowledge into me, and not much has come in any other way.”

72. *The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.*

David had a great deal of gold and silver, far more than any of us have; but yet he thought very little of it in comparison with God’s law. Many people despise gold and silver because they have not got any. The fox said the grapes were sour because they were beyond his reach. But here is a case, in which a man had as much gold and silver as he could ever want; yet he says that the law of God’s mouth was better than all of it, and he was wise in saying so. For gold and silver can be stolen; riches often take to themselves wings, and fly away; even great wealth may soon be spent and gone; but

God's law never leaves those who love it, nor lets them lose it. When all our spending money is gone, then is the commandment of God our treasure still. Happy is everyone who can say, with David, "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver."

PSALM 119:73-88

In this Psalm we have, as it were, notes from David's pocket book.

73. Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.

This is a very instructive prayer; the psalmist does as good as say, "Lord, thou hast made me once- make me over again. Thou hast made my body; mould my spirit, form my character, give me understanding." If God should make us, and then leave us without understanding, what imperfect creations we should be! A man devoid of understanding is only a blood and bone creation; and therefore the psalmist does well to pray, "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding." But what sort of an understanding is desired? That I may learn to discuss and dispute? No: "that I may learn thy commandments;" for holiness is the best of wisdom, and the surest proof of a right understanding is obedience to God's commandments.

74. They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.

A hopeful godly man is a continual source of joy to other people. When a man can inspire hope in his fellows, and he cannot do that unless he is full of hope himself, he lights a fire of comfort. Bring such a man into a storm, and he helps you to be brave. "They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word."

75. I knew, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

We are glad to listen to a man who can tell us that, an old man, a tried man, who can say that God has been faithful in afflicting him, a man who, after having borne the brunt of tribulation, can yet bless God for it. Such testimonies as these are full of joy and gladness to the young folk; they can encounter trial with a joyous heart when

they hear what their fathers tell of the goodness of God to them in their troubles.

76. *Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.*

“Lord,” he seems to say, “I have been a comfort to others; be thou a comfort to me. Thou hast made others glad to see me; make me glad with the recollection of all my experience of thy mercy: ‘Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort.’” If you have lost your own comfort, dear friends, see where you are to look for it, to the merciful kindness of God. Those are two beautiful words, are they not? “Merciful”—take that to pieces, and it is mercy-full. Is not God full of mercy? Take the next word to pieces—“kindness.” That means, “kinned-ness”—that kind of feeling that we have to our own kin when they are very dear to us. “Lord, let thy mercy-full kinned-ness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.”

77. *Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live:*

“I am so broken down, my bones are so full of pain, that if thou dost handle me roughly, I shall die: ‘Let thy tender mercies come unto me.’ I am like a poor flower whose stalk is almost broken through, ready to droop and die; let thy tender mercies bind me up, that I may live.”

77. *For thy law is my delight.*

God will not let a man die who delights in his law. You are the sort of man who shall live. If you love the law of God, the Word of God, the will of God, the way of God, he will not let you die. There are none too many of your sort in the world, so the Lord will keep you alive so long as you can serve him here.

78. *Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.*

That is a delightful turning of the subject: “They dealt perversely with me, without a cause;” but David does not say, “I will envy the proud,” or, “I will be spiteful to them,” “I will fret myself because of them.” No; he seems to say, “They may do what they will; but I will meditate in thy precepts.” When anyone has treated you contemptuously, or dealt perversely with you without a cause, instead of resenting it, get to your Bible, meditate in God’s precepts. It is the noblest and at the same time the most successful way of

fighting against contempt, so to despise the despising of men as to rejoice in your thoughts of God and his truth.

79. *Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.*

“Lord, make me such a man that they who fear thee may seek my acquaintance. Of thy great mercy grant that, if any of them have turned away from me through hearing slanderous reports about me, they may be inclined now to come back to me, for I love them, and I would not willingly offend them. ‘Let those that fear thee turn unto me.’”

80. *Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.*

When the heart is right with God, there will be no need to be ashamed. Though you may make some mistakes and blunders, because you are human, yet, if you are sincere, shame shall not overtake you. What a blessing it is to have a sound heart! But when the heart is spiritually unsound, the profession is always in danger. The other day, a friend of ours was taken from us almost in an instant through heart disease; and when Judas sells his Master, or when Demas turns aside to the silver mines of earth, it is the result of heart disease. There are many who go about in the Christian Church with a ruddy face, and apparently with great strength of religion; but on a sudden they prove apostates. Yes, that is the effect of heart disease. Therefore, pray very earnestly with the psalmist, “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.”

81. *My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.*

What! faint and hoping, too? Yes, a Christian man is a wonder and a contradiction to many, and most of all to himself. He cannot understand himself; he faints, and yet he hopes. Two apparently opposite emotions may be at the same time in the Christian bosom. Every man is two men, if he is a man in Christ Jesus; I sometimes think that there is a triplet of characters in every man of God, so that he has three different experiences at the same time. Certainly he can have two, for here we have them: “My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.”

82. *Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?*

“I look for it till my eyes ache; I strain my eyes to see thy word, watching for it till my vision grows dull in waiting: ‘Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying.’” Oh, then, his eyes could speak! Yes, eyes

can say a great many things; and blessed are the eyes that have learned to say this: "When wilt thou comfort me?" It is a good way of praying, sometimes, to say nothing at all, but to sit still and look up. The eyes can say what lips and tongue cannot, so learn well the language of the eyes, and talk to God with them, even as he talks to you with his eyes. "I will guide thee," says he, "with mine eye." Be you, therefore, able to speak to God with your eyes, as David was when he wrote, "Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?"

83. *For I am become like a bottle in the smoke;*

An old dried-up skin bottle, that is hung in the smoke of the tent over the fire, till it is wrinkled and cracked, and almost good for nothing.

83. *Yet do I not forget thy statutes.*

"Beauty is gone, strength is gone, comeliness is gone; but not my memory of thy word, O Lord." What a mercy it is that, when the worst comes to the worst with us, still the best remains: "I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes."

84. *How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?*

"Lord, I have but a short life; let me not have a long affliction." Does he mean, "Lord, I have lived too long in this miserable state; I wish my days were shortened"? We must not murmur at the length of our days, but we may plead that persecution may come to an end. We may even go so far as to say with David, "How many are the days of thy servant? When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?"

85. *The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.*

It is not often that proud men take to digging; but here, you see, these children of the pit learn to dig pits for God's people; and they have not given over the practice yet. Pits were dug in olden times to catch wild beasts; but now, often, the wicked dig pits to try to catch good men, seeking if they can to make a fault where there is none, or to lead us into a line of conduct which they shall be able to represent unfavorably: "The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law."

86. *All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.*

What a prayer that is! Store it up for use, dear friend, carry it home with you. That is the kind of prayer to be prayed on the roadside, in a railway carriage, ay, even in an accident: "Help thou me." "Help thou me," is a wonderful prayer, it seems to turn on a swivel whichever way you wish; you may use it to ask for anything you need in every time of emergency: "Help thou me."

87. *They had almost consumed me upon earth;*

"They had almost eaten me up; they had almost burned my life out. Blessed be God, they could not consume me anywhere except upon earth! My immortal part would escape the burning of their coals of juniper. They had almost consumed me, but almost is not altogether." When God delivers his people from the lion and the bear, the jaws of the wild beasts may be almost closed, yet they shall be opened wide enough for us to escape: "They had almost consumed me upon earth."

87. *But I forsook not thy precepts.*

You cleave to the right, and God will not turn away from you, nor will he let you turn away from his precepts.

88. *Quicken me after thy lovingkindness;*

That is a blessed prayer for us to offer. If any of you feel dull and drowsy, if any of you are heavy and slow in your movements, cry, to the Lord, "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness."

88. *So shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.*

Spiritual life is the root of holiness: "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth." May God bless this reading to our instruction! Amen.

PSALM 119:81-88

81. *My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.*

The psalmist was so full of longings, hungerings, thirstings, for God's salvation that he had come even to faintness through the strength of his desire. Yet, in his faintness, he was not too far gone to hope; and we also have good ground for hoping and believing that God, who gave us his Word, will stand to it, for he is both able and willing to fulfill all that he has promised.

82. *Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?*

He looked out for a message from God as the watchers of the night looked for the breaking of the morning. His eyes ached to behold the comforts of his God. Oh, blessed state of strong desire! I pray God that we may all experience it

83. *For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.*

When an empty skin bottle was hung up in one of the smoky dwellings of the East, it became withered, cracked, useless; and the psalmist says, “‘I am become like a bottle in the smoke,’ — I seem to be good for nothing, withered, dried up; — ‘yet do I not forget thy statutes.’” A good memory is one of the best of things for us to possess; but a good memory for that which is good is better still.

84. *How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?*

“I am not going to live here for ever, Lord; let me not have to wait to be vindicated until I am in my grave. O my God, hasten the day of my deliverance!”

85, 86. *The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law. All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.*

God’s Word is all true; the longer we test and try it, the more shall we find it to be worthy of our fullest confidence. Those who doubt its truth have never really proved its power. Those who mistrust it, in any degree, are as yet like inexperienced mariners who are constantly doubting and fearing what is going to happen; but those who have long done business on the great waters of the ocean of divine inspiration, and who have seen the wonders of the Lord there, will tell you that, though heaven and earth shall pass away, God’s Word shall endure for ever. We have seen a thousand things in the course of our earthly pilgrimage, but there is one thing that we have never seen, and that we never shall see, namely, God proving unfaithful to his promise, and deserting his people in their time of need. What a short yet comprehensive prayer the psalmist prayed when he uttered those three words, “‘Help thou me!’” “‘Help thou me,’ — that I may never be frightened by those who wrongfully persecute me; — that I may never do anything to deserve their persecution; — that I may be able to behave myself wisely while they are plotting against me.” If you are in business, write this

prayer on your shops, your offices, and your ledgers; if you are sick, have this petition hanging before your eyes, that you may be constantly reminded to cry to the Lord, "Help thou me."

87. *They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.*

Therefore his enemies could not consume him. As long as the believer holds fast to God's precepts, he is indigestible even to the old dragon himself; and no adversary shall ever be able to devour him as long as the Word of God is in his heart.

88. *Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.*

Give me more true spiritual life, inspirit me, revive me, 'quicken me.' At this very moment, good Lord, if I am cold, and half frozen, and almost dead, yet since I am like the trees, whose life is in them even when they have lost their leaves, give me a new spring-time: "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness." We all need this quickening if we are to hold on and hold out to the end; and, blessed be the name of the Lord, — "New supplies each hour we meet while pressing on to God."

PSALM 119:81-96

81. *My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.*

The ship rocks, but the anchor holds; the singer is ready to faint, but he is not ready to despair. He knows where his restoring will come.

82. *Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?*

What a mercy it is to have our eyes on God's word, full as it is of blessing to be waiting till the blessing comes out of it! Mine eyes watch thy word, that is so full of the rain of comfort; and I say to myself, "When will it descend and refresh me? When will the clouds let fall their silver drops upon my thirsty soul?"

83. *For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.*

I feel dried up, besmeared and besmirched as with soot, my very beauty is gone from me, and my usefulness too. I am not fit to hold anything, but I have become like a skin bottle that is parched up; yet for all that I have a memory of thy word: the smoke and the heat

have not dried out of me the flavour of that good old “wine on the lees well refined” that once filled my heart.

84. *How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?*

“How many are the days of thy servant;” or rather, how few they are be; not long in coming to me, lest I die whilst thou art still on the road.

85. *The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.*

They might make pits for lions and tigers, but not for sheep. These pits were not after God’s law. There are still cruel enemies who would, if they could, entrap the people of God; shall not this make us feel what a great mercy it is we have one to be our guardian and defender who knows where the pitfalls are?

86. *All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully;*

There is a fine prayer for us every day in the week: “Help thou me.” Lord, I am helpless if thou do not help me. Thou art the helper of Israel: he that keepeth Israel will not slumber nor sleep. “Help thou me.”

87. *They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.*

“They had almost consumed me upon earth.” They seemed as if they would swallow me up entirely, “but I forsook not thy precepts,” and therefore they could not consume me; I was invulnerable and invincible because I stuck to rectitude and kept to thy precepts.

88, 89. *Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth. For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.*

There is not a new divine word, or a new gospel, or a new law; but it is a settled gospel, a settled law, a settled revelation, “settled in heaven,” stereotyped, fixed, made permanent. If perfect, then unalterable, if alterable, then would it be imperfect.

90. *Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.*

“Thy faithfulness is unto all generations.” Thou who wast true to Abraham wilt be true to David; thou who wast true to David wilt be true to me. Thou art ever faithful to thine own nature and Godhead. “Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.” It would rot out of

its place, it would rush into space like a truant planet if thou didst not hold it where it is. Thou, therefore, wilt hold thy gospel where it is, and thy servants where they are.

91. *They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.*

The fixed laws of the universe have their analogy in the fixed rules of revelation. Are not all material things thy servants, and they are kept; thou wilt therefore keep us.

92, 93. *Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction. I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.*

We may well keep to that which is our life. If God's precepts breed life in us and then quicken us, and so renew that life, let us stand to them, be obedient to them, and that at all times.

94. *I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts.*

"I am thine, save me." Oh, what a sweet assertion. "I am thine," — thy creature, thy redeemed one, thy chosen, thine espoused. "I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts."

95. *The wicked have waited for me to destroy me:*

Let them wait.

95. *But I will consider thy testimonies.*

I will not consider them, they are not worth it, they would only distract or distress me. I will keep my thoughts fixed upon thy word, and so shall I be at peace and escape from their malice.

96. *I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.*

Yes: all perfection in the creature! In very deed it is an attribute of the Creator, and whether it be true or false, whether men have the excellence they boast of, or have it not, there must be an end to it all, either as to its extent or its duration; but thy commandment has no limit, it covers everything; and it has no termination; it endures for ever. "Thy commandment is exceeding broad."

PSALM 119:89-104

89. *For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.*

It is not a changeable or vanishing thing: "Thy word is settled," settled for ever, settled "for ever in heaven." As God changes not, so

the Word which he has spoken to his servants changes not. If the foundations of the faith could be removed, what would the righteous do? What would any of us do? But, with an eternally fixed Word of God, we have something solid to build upon, a foundation on which we may confidently rest our everlasting hopes.

90. *Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: —*

God, who kept his promise to Abraham, keeps it also to us though we are far down the ages, and he will keep it to our children and our children's children as long as the world endures, and then for ever and ever. We need not be afraid to leave the generations to come in his hands. "Thy faithfulness is unto all generations:" —

90, 91. *Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.*

This material world whose laws appear to be so fixed, abides only because God has established it; but a day will come in which he will roll these things up like an outworn vesture, and he that sitteth upon the throne shall make all things new. But, at present, we have, in the fixity of the laws of nature, a type of the fixity of the promises and purposes of God.

92. *Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.*

Notice the love of God's servant to God's Word: "Unless thy law had been my delights." The word is in the plural, for the psalmist not only took a delight in it, but all his delights were there. It was the sea of happiness wherein he bathed his entire soul. "Unless it had been so," says he, "I should then have perished in mine affliction." One of the best preservatives for the heart in times of trouble is an intense delight in the Word of God. Oh, to get away from this noisy world, from the turmoil of life, and its endless discussions and controversies, and to sit down, and quietly listen to what that Word has to say to us! This is the best way to recuperate drooping and fainting spirits.

93. *I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.*

Nothing makes a man remember the Word so well as the fact that it has quickened him. If you owe your spiritual life and the support of it to the Word of God, you will not forget that Word. If

you feel that, every time you come into contact with it, it inspires you with fresh life, you will be anxious to be often diligently reading it.

94. *I am thine,* —

That is a grand thing for anyone to be able to say, what a heaven of bliss lies slumbering in these three words, “I am thine,” —

94. *Save me;* —

That is a good argument: “‘I am thine’ by redemption, so do not lose me. ‘I am thine’ by a new creation, so let not the enemy steal me away from thee. I am thy servant, so exercise a master’s rights over me, and protect me from all my foes. ‘I am thine, save me;’” —

94. *For I have sought thy precepts.*

Notice how the psalmist here twice singles out the precepts rather than the promises; even hypocrites may love the promises, but only sincere believers love the precepts. The true servant of God loves the burdens which his Lord and Master lays upon him, and he only wishes that he had more strength to bear still more of them.

95. *The wicked have waited for me to destroy me:* —

“They have lain in ambush, they have waited to catch me tripping, to ruin my character if possible, so what shall I do, — Counterplot them? No. Watch them night and day? No. ‘The wicked have waited for me to destroy me:’” —

95. *But I will consider thy testimonies.*

There is something that seems to me calmly defiant about the psalmist’s resolve. He does not say, “The wicked are waiting to destroy me, but I will fight them.” No, but he says, “I shall read my Bible, and I shall follow its directions. I shall act in obedience to my God, and in that way I shall baffle them.” To be obedient to God is the surest way to be victorious over wicked men. Keep thou God’s Word, and God will guard thy head in the day of danger.

96. *I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment* —

“Ah, there I find perfection: ‘Thy commandment’” —

96. *Is exceeding broad.*

It is so broad that there is no limit to it. One of the early fathers used to say, “I delight in the infinity of Scripture,” and well he might, for there is no limit to it. Even one single text might suffice for a man’s meditation for a whole year; if it did not, it would be

because of the scantiness of the man's meditative power, and not because of the exhaustion of the meaning of the verse.

97. *O how love I thy law!*

The psalmist breaks out into a transport of delight. He does not say how much he loved God's law, for the simple reason that he could not tell us that; but he says, "O how love I thy law!"

97. *It is my meditation all the day.*

That is the best proof of the psalmist's love of God's law, for love shows itself by its constant familiarity with its chosen object. "It is my meditation all the day." Every day, wherever I may be, I turn my daily experience into instructive meditation upon thy Word." One of the best commentaries on God's written Book is God's Book of Providence when it is explained to us by his Holy Spirit.

98. *Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.*

David knew how well God's Word had instructed him, and first he declared that he was wiser than his enemies; and, next, that he was wiser than his former instructors: —

99. *I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.*

The man who rightly meditates upon this wondrous Book is, after all, the truly wise man. His wisdom is that of the heart, received by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and it has a power of understanding in it that will make him wiser than those who are merely book-learned or man-taught.

100. *I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.*

First his enemies, then his teachers, and now his elders, the ancients, —he could excel them all; and he gave the reason for it: "Because I keep thy precepts." Take this Book away, and give the man all the human learning that he could ever acquire, and how little he would know, after all! But let him study the Book, and even in the absence of other books, (though that need not be the case with him, such a man will still be wise, — wise for eternity.

101. *I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.*

The Bible is a very sanctifying Book. If we keep its precepts, it holds us back from many things into which we might otherwise have run. "I have refrained my feet from every evil way." Notice the universality of the obedience of a true saint. He does not say, "I will avoid all sin except a certain one for which I have a great liking." Oh, no: "I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word."

102. *I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.*

Those who are taught of God are always well taught; they never unlearn what they have learned at the feet of Jesus. Those who backslide and apostatize were never truly taught of the Spirit of God.

103. *How sweet are thy words unto my taste!*

Have you a spiritual taste, dear hearer? It is one thing to hear the Word it is another thing to taste it. Hearing the Word is often blessed, but tasting it is a more inward and spiritual thing; it is the enjoyment of the truth in the innermost parts of our being. Oh, that we were all as fond of the Word as were the old mystics who chewed the cud of meditation till they were fattened upon the Word of the Lord, and their souls grew strong in the divine love! I am sure of this, — the more you know of God's Word, the more you will love it. It is ignorance that misses the sweetness of it.

103. *Yea, sweeter than honey to my month!*

There is an indescribable sweetness in it. It is sweet to my heart, and when I utter it, how sweet it is to my mouth! I heard one observe, the other day, that he noted a great difference between the preachers of his youth and many of those of the present day. He said, "The old men used to enjoy the Word so much while they were preaching it; they preached it with their eyes beaming with delight in it. You could see that, if there was no savour in it for other people, there was a divine savour about it for the preachers themselves." This is the mark of the man who is taught of God, — that the Word is sweet to his mouth when he preaches it to others as well as sweet to his taste when he meditates upon it himself.

104. *Through thy precepts I get understanding: —*

The practical parts of God's Word not only appeal to our understanding but they give us understanding. That is a marvellous

thing, but it is true. Sometimes, when you are arguing with a man who is dull of comprehension, you are apt to say, “Well, I can give you arguments, but I cannot give you an understanding with which to appreciate them;” but this Word can give us understanding: “Through thy precepts I get understanding.” —

104. *Therefore I hate every false way.*

The best test of a true spiritual understanding is an intense and vigorous hatred of every thing that is false. The lover of truth is a follower of the truth, he is not a man of craft and guile. He keeps to the straight line and in the long run it shall be proved that he is the man who is indeed taught of God.

PSALM 119:89-112

89. *For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.*

Other things come, and go, and change, moons wax and wane, tides ebb and flow, everything earthly is changeable; but “Thy word is settled —settled in heaven,” with the eternal settlements. No truth of it can fail, no promise of it can be broken. What a joy this is to our hearts tonight! There is something sure, after all: “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.”

90. *Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.*

That is, God has spoken to nature, and that word has established the earth, and made it to stand securely.

91. *They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.*

It was God’s word that made the sun, and the moon, and the stars; and it is God’s word that bids creation still exist. And that is the almighty word upon which you and I are resting, if we are truly trusting in the living God.

“His very word of grace is strong As that which built the skies;
The voice that rolls the stars along Speaks all the promises.”

92. *Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.*

Let us remember how God’s word has kept some of us alive when we had nothing else to live upon. Hope would have quite failed, and we should have been driven to despair, if it had not been for the precious, priceless word of God.

93. *I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.*

Nothing sharpens the memory like having been quickened. If we have been at death's door, and the word of God has brought us renewed life, we shall never forget it.

94-96. *I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts. The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies. I have seen an end of all perfection:*

No matter who it is that boasts of being perfect, "I have seen an end of all perfection."

96. *But thy commandment —*
There lies the perfection —

96. *Is exceeding broad.*

Covering the whole life, covering the thoughts, the intents, the desires of the inner and secret nature.

97, 98. *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.*

If we have God's law always with us, we shall be wiser than the most crafty of our enemies; for, after all, there is nothing that puzzles and baffles cunning men like simple honesty. Do that which is right, and you will cut through the nets in which men would entangle you. They cannot trip you up if your feet are settled in God's ways.

99, 100. *I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.*

There is more wisdom in obeying God than in all the ethics of heathen philosophers. It matters not whence they take their precepts and maxims, there is no wisdom like yielding one's heart to God.

101-104. *I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.*

The man who cannot hate does not love; but he who loves that which is right, is by no means indifferent to the wrong and to the false; he hates it, and the more intensely he loves God, and loves

right, the more intensely does he hate every false way. Especially does he hate it in himself. Oh, to be delivered altogether from every trace of falsehood!

105. *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

It shows me the way; it cheers me in the way; it reveals to me the difficulties of the way.

106, 107. *I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments. I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.*

Are any of you afflicted tonight? I commend this prayer to your use. One would have expected that David would have prayed, "I am afflicted very much: comfort me, O Lord." Or, "Relieve me, O Lord." Instead of praying so, he cries, "Quicken me, O Lord," and he did well. Let us imitate him, for if we get more spiritual light and life, we shall, by that means, get more comfort, and the trouble from which we are suffering will soon cease to vex our spirit.

108-112. *Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments. My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law. The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end.*

Oh, that every one of us might be able to make this declaration of the psalmist our own! God grant it, for Christ's sake! Amen.

PSALM 119:105-115

105. *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

We are walkers through the city of this world, and we are often called to go out into its darkness; let us never venture there without the light-giving word, lest we slip with our feet. Each man should use the word of God personally, practically, and habitually, that he may see his way and see what lies in it. When darkness settles down upon all around me, the word of the Lord, like a flaming torch, reveals my way. We should not know the way, or how to walk in it, if Scripture, like a blazing flambeau, did not reveal it. It is a lamp by night, a light by day, and a delight at all times. David guided his

own steps by it, and also saw the difficulties of his road by its beams.

106. *I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.*

Under the influence of the clear light of knowledge he had firmly made up his mind, and solemnly declared his resolve in the sight of God. Perhaps mistrusting his own fickle mind, he had pledged himself in sacred form to abide faithful to the determinations of his God. Whatever path might open before him, he was sworn to follow that only upon which the lamp of the word was shining.

107. *I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.*

According to the last verse he had been sworn in a soldier of the Lord, and in this next verse he is called to suffer hardness in that capacity. Our service of the Lord does not screen us from trial, but rather secures it for us. The Psalmist was a consecrated man, and yet a chastened man. Quickening is the best remedy for tribulation, the soul is raised above the thought of present distress, and is filled with that holy joy which attends all vigorous spiritual life, and so the affliction grows light.

108. *Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments.*

He offers prayer, praise, confession, and testimony — these, presented with his voice in the presence of an audience, were the tribute of his mouth unto Jehovah. He trembles lest these should be so ill uttered so to displease the Lord, and therefore he implores acceptance. When we render unto the Lord our best, we become all the more concerned to do better. If, indeed, the Lord shall accept us, we then desire to be further instructed, that we may be still more acceptable.

109. *My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law.*

He lived in the midst of danger. He had to be always fighting for existence — hiding in caves, or contending in battles. This is a very uncomfortable and trying state of affairs, and men are apt to think any expedient justifiable by which they can end such a condition, but David did not turn aside to find safety in sin. They say that all things are fair in love and war; but the holy man thought not so:

while he carried his life in his hand, he also carried the law in his heart.

110. *The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts.*

Spiritual life is the scene of constant danger. The believer lives with his life in his hand, and meanwhile all seem plotting to take it from him, by cunning if they cannot by violence. We shall not find it an easy thing to live the life of the faithful. Wicked spirits and wicked men will leave no stone unturned for our destruction. He was not snared, for he kept his eyes open, and kept near his God.

111. *Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.*

He chose them so his lot, his portion, his estate; and what is more, he laid hold upon them and made them so, — taking them into possession and enjoyment. David's choice is our choice. If we might have our desire, we would desire to keep the commands of God perfectly. To know the doctrine, to enjoy the promise, to practice the command, — be this a kingdom large enough for me.

112. *I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end.*

He was not half inclined to virtue, but heartily inclined to it. His whole heart was bent on practical, persevering godliness. He was resolved to keep the statutes of the Lord with all his heart, throughout all his time, without erring or ending. He made it his end to keep the law unto the end, and that without end.

113. *I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.*

The opposite of the fixed and infallible law of God is the wavering, changing opinion of men. David had an utter contempt and abhorrence for this, all his reverence and regard went to the sure word of testimony. In proportion to his love to the law was his hate of man's inventions. The thoughts of men are vanity; but the thoughts of God are verity.

114. *Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.*

To his God he ran for shelter from vain thoughts, there he hid himself away from their tormenting intrusions, and in solemn silence of the soul he found God to be his hiding-place. When called into the world, if he could not be alone with God as his hiding-place,

he could have the Lord with him as his shield, and by this means he could ward off the attacks of wicked suggestions.

115. *Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.*

If we fly to God from vain thoughts, much more shall we avoid vain men. Evildoers make evil counselors. Those who say unto God, "Depart from us," ought to hear the immediate echo of their words from the mouths of God's children, "Depart from us. We cannot eat bread with traitors."

PSALM 119:105-120

We will read tonight two of the stanzas which make up the 119th Psalm, beginning at the 105th verse.

105. *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

God's Word is full of brilliance; it is always giving out its blessed light. It casts a light upon all our daily life. It is a light for the house, and a light for the way, and happy is the man who never walks abroad without this lantern to light up his pathway. There are many pitfalls on the road, and many places where the traveler's garments may soon be besmeared, so he has great need of this light to guide him.

106. *I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.*

I scarcely remember ever hearing of a man swearing, and then approving of it, but this kind of swearing is right enough: "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." We are to determine, with the most vehement resolution, that, God helping us, we will keep his righteous judgments; for, if we have only a weak resolution, we usually fall short even of our own determination. What shall we do then if that determination is itself weak? Some of us have lifted our hands to heaven, and pledged ourselves to the living God that we will be his faithful people.

"High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear."

107. *I am afflicted very much:-*

Here is a good man, a better man than most of us, a man who is determined to do right, yet he gets into trouble because he is

determined to do right. God's wheat will be threshed, his gold will be put into the furnace. If you were worth nothing to him, God might not take the trouble to afflict you; but when you are resolved to do right, you may expect that resolution to be tried and tested; and if it is worth anything, it will stand the trial. "I am afflicted very much:"-what will be the next words, "Lord, deliver me"? No, no." Lord, bring me out of the furnace"? Nothing of the sort." I am afflicted very much:"-

107. *Quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.*

"Give me more spiritual life; give me more spiritual strength; that is what I most need." Oftentimes, that prayer is answered by the affliction itself. We are afflicted very much, and by that very affliction the Lord quickens our graces, strengthens our souls, drives away many of our wandering thoughts, and brings us nearer to himself.

108. *Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD,-*

My prayers, my praises, my testimonies, my ministries, accept them all, O Lord,"-

108. *And teach me thy judgment.*

He who teaches others needs teaching himself. He who hopes that what he says will be accepted by those who hear it opens his ear to hear what God says to him. There will be no acceptance of what thou sayest to others unless thou dost accept what God says to thee.

109. *My soul is continually in my hand:*

David's life was often in jeopardy. Saul hunted him as a partridge upon the mountains. He was sometimes very sick, and ready to die. Perhaps also, at times, he was in such great sorrow that he felt as if his soul was a thing that he held in his hand. We do not know exactly where our soul is, but we usually think of it as being somewhere in the very center of our being. David says that he had his soul in his hand, where he might at any time lose it; but what else does he say?

109. *Yet do I not forget thy law.*

"If I have even to die for it, I am willing to die for it. If I have to lay down my life because I will do right, I will do right even while I lay down my life."

110. *The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts.*

“If I had done so, I should have been caught in their snare, but as I kept straight on in the way of thy precepts, it little mattered how many snares they laid for me.”

111. *Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever:-*

Some take their own thoughts for their heritage, but it is a poor portion for anyone to have. Some take other men’s philosophies for their heritage, but such a heritage as that is soon gone. But some of us can say, with regard to the eternal and immutable truth of God, that we have got such a grip of it that we cannot give it up. There may come a thousand other changes; but, by God’s grace, there will be no change in this matter: “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever:”-

111. *For they are the rejoicing of my heart.*

Well may a man love that which rightly makes him glad. Shall we ever forsake that which is the source of our greatest comfort? If some men had greater gladness in the gospel, they would be more true to it. If they had ever eaten the sweet, and enjoyed the fat things full of marrow, they would never go away from the old old gospel which has made their hearts so glad.

112, 113. *I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end. I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.*

Notice that the word “vain” is not in the original, the psalmist wrote, “I hate thoughts,” yet the word for thoughts includes the idea of mere thoughts. So, if any teaching in the world is the result of human thought alone, you may not rely upon it for a moment, for the Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity,” and they never will be anything better than that. The thoughts even of the most profound and the best instructed of men will not bear the weight and pressure of an immortal soul’s eternal interests. Revelation is the one reliable thing that we can rest upon. What God has spoken is all true, but as for what men have thought, I have been so often disappointed and deceived that I can say, with the psalmist, “I hate mere thoughts: but thy law do I love.” In the law of the Lord there are verities, certainties, immutabilities, here may we abide, and rest securely.

114. *Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.*

For thou wilt be sure to do as thou hast said. Thy promises are not like men's, they cannot be broken, and when I get one of thy promises, O my God, I hide behind it, I am protected by it, and I am comforted through it.

115. *Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.*

Holy men often find that, in order to be holy, they have to be solitary. It sometimes happens that the force of evil companionship is too much for the gracious heart to bear, and the Christian man has to say to the ungodly, "Depart from me." Now, if even godly David had to say to evil-doers "Depart from me," you need not wonder that the Lord Jesus Christ will one day say to all impenitent men, "Depart from me, ye evil-doers." If we keep the commandments of our God, we shall often have to walk in a separate path from the ungodly; and even if we do not keep ourselves to ourselves, we shall keep ourselves to our God.

116. *Uphold me-*

I thought we should soon come to that petition. We have been reading about David's resolutions, and we might have thought that he was too bold in speaking so positively, but now he shows us the modesty of his mind: "Uphold me"-

116. *According unto thy word, that I may live:*

The Lord upholds us as a nurse holds up a little child, and teaches him to walk. "Uphold me," O Lord, for I cannot stand by myself. My good resolutions will soon evaporate unless thou dost sustain me. There is a gracious promise which just answers this petition, "I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

116. *And let me not be ashamed of my hope.*

O my God, never let me have to say that I have hoped in thee in vain! I know I never shall, but I trust to thee not to disappoint me. "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth me "

117. *Hold thou, me up,-*

One is fond of that short, simple prayer, first it is, "Uphold me," and then, "Hold me up;" either way it is equally good: "Hold thou me up,"-

117. *And I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.*

When God holds us up, there is no fear of our falling down; we have respect unto his statutes when he has respect unto us.

118, 119. *Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood. Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross:-*

Perhaps some of you have seen the great heaps of slag lying outside the furnace, that is a picture of the ungodly: "Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross:"-

119. *Therefore I love thy testimonies.*

What! does love to the truth, and to the God of truth spring out of this putting away of the wicked? Yes, even the stern justice of God makes his people love him, and love his truth. I am of the same mind as the children of Israel were when Pharaoh and his army were swallowed up in the Red Sea, and the emancipated slaves sang unto the Lord who had triumphed so gloriously. Some cannot do that because their sympathy is so entirely with the wicked, but the destruction of all that is evil creates a flow of joy in the heart of the true believer. Still, it is a fearsome joy, full of holy awe and trembling.

120. *My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.*

Well may we also tremble when we see how terrible God is out of his holy places. There is a fear which is akin to love. As there is a fear which perfect love casts out, so is there another fear which love dandles on her knee, and such is the fear which David felt. May we too ever have that holy awe of God in our hearts! Amen.

PSALM 119:113-120

The proper way in which to read these verses is to peruse them in the spirit of prayer, turning every verse into a personal supplication to God. I do trust that many of us may be so in the Spirit today, that these words may suit us.

113. *I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.*

The moralist is quite content to look after his actions, but the Christian is never happy until his thoughts are sanctified. The true believer hates vain thoughts, because they lead to vain words and to

vain actions; because vain thoughts nailed his Saviour to the tree; because vain thoughts spoil his devotion, mar his communion with God, and, like the birds which came down upon Abraham's sacrifice, would destroy all his offering. "I hate vain thoughts." The converse of this is, "But thy law do I love." There is nothing vain there; nothing in thy law to distract me; nothing to give me unhallowed thoughts. But, there is a cure for vain thoughts. When you have been assailed of vain thoughts, let your mind be lovingly stored with texts of Scripture, with passages of God's Word. The Psalmist, whilst writing these words, is evidently under a sense of danger, so he said: —

114. *Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.*

Here is a hiding-place to escape to from danger, and a shield to protect whilst in danger. A hiding-place is not enough, because that cannot be moved, but the shield can be carried everywhere. It is buckled, on the warrior's arm; and into every conflict he can take it. So, at even-time, when I tell my troubles to my God, he is my hiding-place; But all the day long, while I myself abide in, the heat of the conflict, he is my shield. See where the Christian's hope is, dear friends! It is not in his own integrity, or faithfulness, or sincerity; but "I hope in thy word."

"The gospel bears my spirit up;
A faithful and unchanging God
Lays the foundation for my hope
In oaths, and promises, and blood."

115. *Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.*

By which David did not mean that he would not speak with ungodly men. Monkish seclusion would be no advantage to a Christian. We are to be in the world, though not of it, as a ship is in the sea, but the sea is not in the ship, or else soon would she go to the bottom. We are to take care of the world; to hold such society with them as may come from necessity, but as to any nearer communion, "Depart from me, ye evildoers; your company I cannot bear; your example pollutes the air: ye do me damage; ye vex my ears, ye dishonour my God; depart from me, ye evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God." You see, it seems as if this was not possible as long as there was an infinite association with the

ungodly. I know nothing that is so likely to destroy the purity of a Christian's life as any intimate association, with ungodly people. You cannot run with the hare and hold with the hounds, too. It is impossible for you to join with the world, and yet be true followers of Christ.

116. *Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope.*

You see, he feels his weakness, and he cries to his God.

117. *Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.*

The brightest archangel owes all his glory to God, and the perpetuity of that glory depends upon the constant gift of the gracious One. How wise, then, is it of men, conscious of their weakness, to hang constantly upon their God. As the vessel hangs upon the nail, and if the nail can move, the vessel must fall, so must we hang upon God. If he be not faithful, and true, and potent, then must we perish; but, thank God. concerning this we have no doubt.

118-119. *Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their. deceit is falsehood. Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies.*

You see, the Psalmist's mind is entirely occupied with this spirit of perseverance. He seems to tremble, and to be filled with awe lest he should by any means prove an apostate, and be unworthy to enter into the kingdom. He looks with solemn mind upon God as casting all the wicked of the earth down under his feet, just as men cast out the refuse: as the slag of the furnace is sometimes thrown down to make the footpath: so, he says, "Thou puttest away the wicked of the earth like dross; thou hast trodden them down." Filled with a heavy trembling lest this should be his lot — lest, after he had thought he had known and experienced the happiness of communion with God, he should be found to be reprobate silver and be given over to destruction. Does such a fear as this come upon you, my brethren? If it does not, there is room for you to fear, for even our holy Apostle had this as his anxiety, "Lest, after having preached to others I myself should be a castaway." It is not as to whether God will be faithful to me, but whether I am really his, whether my conversion has been genuine, and my union to Christ vital. These are questions which breed a holy anxiety, which is one of the very best

means of keeping a Christian in the path of right, and so of guaranteeing the perseverance which God has promised.

120. *My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.*

PSALM 119:113-128

1-3. *I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.*

Presumptuous thoughts, erroneous thoughts, wicked thoughts, foolish thoughts,-all three David hated. A good man ought to be a good hater, as well as a good lover. What should he hate? He should hate sin thoughts. What should he love? He should love the law of the Lord. If we do not hate sin in the very egg, we shall not be likely to hate it in its fuller development. The very thought of sin must be detestable to us; and if we do not think of evil, we shall not speak evil, nor do evil. We ought to begin with David at the beginning, and say, "I hate vain thoughts;" yet negative religion is not sufficient, so we should go on to the positive form: "'Thy law do I love;' and I love it so much that I wish I could always keep it, and never transgress it, and never forget it."

114. *Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.*

"Thou art my protection against every kind of danger." David had been accustomed to hide in the caves of the mountains, but now he says that he hid himself in his God. When he did not hide, but stood out bravely against the serried ranks of his foes, then God was his shield to cover him in the day of battle.

115. *Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.*

If, by your evil example, you would take me off from serving my God, I will make you take yourselves off so that I may neither see nor follow your ill example: "Depart from me, ye evil-doers: for I will keep the commandments of my God." David puts his foot down firmly, and says, "I will keep the commandments of my God." It is a grand thing to be able to speak of "my God." Another man's God would be of little use to me, but when he is my own God, my God in covenant relationship, then I may well say, "I will keep the commandments of my God."

116. *Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live:*

“Lord, I cannot even live unless thou dost uphold me according to thy promise.” The Christian man is so dependent upon God that he owes his life and the continuance of it to upholding grace.

116. *And let me not be ashamed of my hope.*

“If thy promise could fail me, then I should have cause to be ashamed of my hope. Therefore, O Lord, let me never at any time have the shadow of a doubt concerning the truthfulness of thy promises, lest I should begin to be ashamed of my hope!”

117-118. *Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually. Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood.*

“They are like salt that has lost its savour, which is neither fit for the land nor yet for the dunghill, but men cast it out, and tread it under their feet; and this is what thou doest with ungodly men, especially with those ‘that err from thy statutes.’ Then treadest them beneath thy feet, ‘for their deceit is falsehood.’ They try to make it look like truth, but it is falsehood all the while.” How much of deceit there is in this world which men gloss and varnish so that the thing looks right enough though all the while it is deception and a sham! May God keep us from all the trickeries and falsehoods and errors of the age!

119. *Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross:*

“As the dross is thrown away when the useful metal has been extracted from it, so, O Lord, when thou hast taken all thy saints out of the world thou will put the wicked of the earth away like dross.”

119. *Therefore I love thy testimonies.*

What? Does David love God’s testimonies because they are thus severe? Yes, for it is the mark of a true believer that he does not kick against the severities of his God. Worldlings can rejoice in the god of this age, who is said to be nothing but effeminate benevolence, but the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob is the God of justice, who will by no means spare iniquity; and for that very reason a true believer says, with David, “I love thy testimonies.”

120. *My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.*

This is the man who truly loves God, and this is the kind of fear that perfect love does not cast out. Though we love God supremely,

we become for that very reason God-fearing men, and dread to do anything that would cause him anger or sorrow.

121. *I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.*

When a man is conscious of doing right, he has a good ground of appeal to God. If, when it was in your power, you did not oppress others, you may plead with God that he will not let others oppress you. If it has been your habit to act with judgment and justice towards others, you may expect that God will defend you against all your oppressors.

122, 123. *Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me. Mine eyes fail for thy salvation,-*

“I have looked for it so long, I have longed for it so eagerly, that my eyes seem to grow inflamed with watching, a film seems to come over them so that I cannot see out of them: ‘Mine eyes fail for thy salvation.’”

123. *And for the word of thy righteousness.*

“I look for no salvation except in the way revealed in thy Word, and I do not wish thee to do an unrighteous thing even to save me from my oppressors.”

124. *Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy,-*

He dare not ask to be dealt with by God on any other ground than that of mercy. Though he is innocent of that which the ungodly laid to his charge, he is not innocent before God, and therefore he pleads for mercy. He owns that God is his Lord and Master, and that he is God’s servant, and as a man should deal mercifully with his servant he pleads that God will so deal with him: “Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy,” —

124. *And teach me thy statutes.*

He had kept God’s statutes so far as the eyes of men could see; but, before God, he takes a humbler position, and begs to be taught what he is to do, asks to be instructed, like a child, in the statutes of his God.

125. *I am thy servant;-*

This is the third time in four verses that David mentions this relationship; he seems proud of being God’s servant. Though he were but as a menial, yet would he glory in it: “I am thy servant;” —

125. *Give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.*

“Lord, do not merely teach me, but give me understanding.” That is what our teachers cannot do. They may put the truth before us so plainly that we ought to understand it, but they cannot give us understanding.

126. *It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law.*

And surely this is an age in which this prayer is very suitable. On all hands we see God’s law ridiculed, or denied, or travestied, or else hidden under tradition or under the dicta of so-called scientific men, or in some way or other “made void.” Oh, that God’s right hand of grace might be stretched out to do some miracle of mercy in the land at this very time!

127. *Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.*

“Therefore” — because the wicked tasted God’s law, and made it void, David loved it all the more. It is a live fish that swims against the stream, it is a live man of God who can say, “They have made void thy law, Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yes, above fine gold.”

128. *Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right;-*

“Ungodly men think they are wrong; that is an additional proof to me that they are right.” When a certain old philosopher had been praised by a bad man, he asked, “What have I done amiss that he should speak well of me?” And there are some men’s mouths out of which the praise of Christ or the praise of the Scriptures would be to God’s dishonour. They tell me that So-and-so spoke blasphemously against Christ; but why should he not do so? It is natural for him to be a blasphemer. When serpents hiss, do they not act according to their nature? I do not read that Christ stopped men’s mouths when they blasphemed him, but I do know that when the demons bore witness to him, he silenced them, for he liked not to be praised by diabolical mouths. Let ungodly men say what they may, we know the value of their speeches, and we are not troubled by them.

128. *And I hate every false way.*

Again David mentions his hatred of all falseness. Some men are such “chips in the porridge” that they neither love nor hate; but the

believer is a man who has both loves and aversions. He loves the truth, and therefore he hates every false way.

PSALM 119:119-126

119-121. *Thou putteth away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies. My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments. I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.*

Eastern kings cannot often say as much as this, but David had been a just king. This was for his comfort when he himself came under unjust treatment. "I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors." It is of the same tenor as another prayer: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." God often deals with men as they deal with others: "With the forward, he will show himself forward"; "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." May our conduct be such that, though we plead no merit, yet we may dare to mention it in prayer.

122. *Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.*

As nearly as I remember, this is the only verse which does not mention the law or the Word of God. Here you have a "surety," and that is something even better. If the law fails us, the surety stands us in good stead. How I like to think of God the surety of his people! When there is a trial against them, and the oppressor is heavy upon them, they can come to God to be a surety for them in the great action of life. "Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me." My Master is surety for his servants; his servant is sure enough.

123. *Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.*

I have looked until I have looked my eyes out: I am weary with waiting, with watching, with weeping: "Mine eyes fail for thy salvation." Some do not even look for him. Here is a man who looked until his very eyes gave out.

124. *Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.*

He is a just man; he can plead that he has done justly; but he does not ask to be dealt with according to justice: "Deal with thy

servant according unto thy mercy” — as far as any one of us can get. If you have been greatly sanctified, have walked very near to God, I would not advise you still to go beyond this prayer: “Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy.” Singular is the next sentence: “And teach me thy statutes.” It is a great mercy to be taught the ways of God, to understand his way, to understand the practical part of it, the statutes. To be made holy is a high honour, a great privilege. When you are seeking great favors of God, ask for great holiness.

125. *I am thy servant;*

He called himself “servant” many times before; and in this wonderful passage this is the third time. He is delighted to be the “servant of God.” He says little about being a king; he says a great deal about being a servant: “I am thy servant.”

125. *Give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.*

You know, generally a teacher finds the teaching; the pupil has to find understanding. But here is a prayer: “Give me understanding.” The last verse he asked to be taught; here he asks to have an understanding given to him. What a God we have to deal with! And when we are taught of the Lord, how effectually we are taught: he not only gives the facts, but gives the understanding with which to get at their meaning.

126. *It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law.*

When men begin to exercise a destructive criticism upon the Word of God, it is time for God to work. When God’s law is held in small esteem, when men go their own way, call vice by the name of pleasure, “It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law.”

PSALM 119:129-144

129. *Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.*

Every true believer admires God’s Word; and, more than that, it amazes him: “Thy testimonies are wonderful.” View them from any point you may select, they are wonderful, wonderful in themselves, wonderful in their operation, wonderful in the way in which they endure all kinds of testing, and yet remain the same: “Thy

testimonies are wonderful.” This wonder, however, in the true believer leads to godly practice, to holy living: “Therefore doth my soul keep them.” Our soul must be like a golden gasket in which we store the priceless jewels of the Word of the Lord. You cannot rightly keep God’s Word anywhere but in your soul; to keep it merely in the memory, or in the intellect, is of no avail.

130. *The entrance of thy words giveth light;*

The very first principles, the elements of God’s Word, are full of light and no sooner does it come into the heart than there is light directly. How much more light does it give when it penetrates into the secret chambers of our being, and we begin to understand its deeper mysteries!

130. *It giveth understanding unto the simple.*

God’s Word gives understanding to those who feel that they have very little mental ability: “the simple.” They are only plain people, who must have the truth put very simply before them, or else they cannot comprehend it; but as soon as ever God’s Word enters their heart, even such people get understanding. It is not the Word outside the heart that gives the blessing; it is the entrance of the Word that gives true life to the soul.

131. *I opened my mouth, and panted:*

That was an admirable way of praying; no words were used by the psalmist, but his soul expressed itself by panting: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.”

131. *For I longed for thy commandments.*

The very best kind of prayer is that inarticulate panting, in which there is a longing, a sighing, that cannot be expressed in words.

132,133. *Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Order my step, in thy word:*

“Lord, I have found the way into thy Word, that is the road I intend to travel; now I pray thee to guide my every step.” They say that “Order is heaven’s first law,” and certainly a Christian should lead an orderly life. He should be a Methodist, he should have a method in all that he does; and he should pray for God to order his steps according to his Word.”

133. *And let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*

A hypocrite says to himself, "I do not swear, I do not steal, and I do not lie, yet I allow other sins to have dominion over me;" but a true man of God will not have any master but the Lord Jesus Christ. He will not put his neck under the foot of even the most attractive sin: "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." That is the psalmist's prayer; here is the apostle's answer to it: "Sin shall not have dominion over you"

134. *Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.*

He does not mean that he will not keep God's precepts if he is not delivered from man's oppression; but there are persons in such circumstances, — Christian wives with wicked husbands, godly servants with ungodly masters, believers who are greatly oppressed by evil men, —and they desire to be delivered from the oppression of man that they may be the better able to keep God's commandments.

135. *Make thy face to shine upon thy servant;*

What a blessed prayer that is! Let each one here pray it tonight: "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." The Lord is our sun; he is the very sun of heaven; they need no sun there because they see his face.

135. *And teach me thy statutes.*

The Lord's servant ought to know the law of his Lord's house. How can he be an obedient servant if he does not know his Master's will? So the psalmist prays, "Lord, I will take it as a favor if thou wilt teach me thy statutes, that I may not only know, but also do them!"

136. *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.*

Some think that the psalmist meant that his eyes wept because they, that is, his eyes did not keep God's law. You know how easily sin comes in through the eyes, and goes out through the eyes, too. Well may those eyes weep in sorrow that have lusted towards sin. But I think the psalmist alludes here to the ungodly. The sins of sinners are the sorrows of saints. "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law." Perhaps David referred to his own children, or he may have meant his soldiers, those rough, rugged warriors who were led by Joab. He met with many in his

own country who turned aside from God, and he wept over them. It is a blessed sign of grace when you can weep over other men's sins. Do not say, "So-and-so has gone wrong," and treat the matter with indifference. If you can do so, you may question whether you have grace in your own heart, for a true Christian ought to be tender and compassionate at the thought of the sinful things around him. There are some who can look upon the error and false doctrine which abound everywhere, and say, "Oh! let it alone, do not trouble yourself about that; but he who walks with God is not of their mind, it is a constant grief and agony of spirit to him that men keep not God's law.

137. *Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments.*

It is always well to set God in contrast with wicked men. If others are unjust, he is not. If they forsake the truth, he does not.

138. *Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.*

True to the letter, true always, true to the core.

139. *Thy zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.*

Yes, God's faithful servants become the more zealous when others grow cold. When they see that God's words are forgotten by others, they remember them all the more, and they grow exceedingly zealous for the law of the Lord.

140. *Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.*

It is pure in the sense of being unadulterated, and it is pure in the sense of being holy. There is nothing in the Scripture that would lead us to sin, nor excuse it. It is a wonderful condemner of sin: "Thy word is very pure." Notice the psalmist's use of the word "very." In the one hundred and thirty-eighth verse, he says, "Thy testimonies are very faithful;" and now, in the one hundred and fortieth, "Thy word is very pure." "Therefore thy servant loveth it." When purity draws out our love, it proves that our heart itself loves that which is pure; and the heart that loveth purity is a pure heart.

141. *I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts.*

He was poor but pious, little but loving, despised but devoted. It was the man who had but one talent who went and digged in the earth, and hid his Lord's money. David was not of that kind; he was small, but he knew he was not too small to sin; he was despised, but

he did not on that account think that he might turn aside from the right path.

142. *Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,*

God's Word does not change, it is everlasting; and the righteousness which it reveals and which it proclaims to us is everlasting.

142. *And thy law is the truth.*

God's Word is not only true, but it is "the truth." The truth is God's law, and God's law is the truth.

143. *Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me:*

Just now he said that he was despised, and now he says he is unhappy. Trouble without, and anguish within, seemed to grip him as in a vice.

143. *Yet thy commandments are my delights.*

A man of the world cannot understand how a Christian can be in trouble and yet be full of delight; but it is true. We can be cast down, but not destroyed; we can be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; we can be poor, yet make many rich. Here you have another holy paradox: "Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights," not only his delight, but his delights; as if he had a whole host of them, a great company of joys, and a chorus of holy mirth.

144. *The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding,*

That is a great prayer, not only, "give me to understand," but "give me understanding." It is one thing to tell a man the truth, but quite another thing to make him understand it; and if you make him understand that particular truth, he may not understand another, but David asks for understanding with which he might be able to comprehend all the truth of God: "Give me understanding," —

144. *And I shall live.*

God grant that this prayer may be offered by each one of us, and heard by the Lord, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PSALM 119:129-144

129. *Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.*

It is very wonderful that God should speak to us at all, and still more marvellous that he should write to us such a book as this Bible is. The Book itself is full of wonders, and one of those wonders is that it reveals him whose name is “Wonderful.” Observe that the psalmist, having said to the Lord, “Thy testimonies are wonderful,” does not add, “Therefore do I sit down and wonder at them.” No, his appreciation was practical, let ours be the same: “Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.”

130. *The entrance of thy words giveth light;*

Those who are most ignorant, and have least confidence in their own abilities, will nevertheless become very wise if they study God’s Word.

130-131. *It giveth understanding unto the simple. I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.*

What a wonderful verse that is! The psalmist cannot describe his longing for God’s commandments except by going to the brute creation for a suitable metaphor. He had probably seen the hunted stag stand still, and pant to get its breath, all the while longing for the waterbrooks. So he says, “I opened my mouth, and panted.” “I could not put my prayer into words, so I panted. My heart, my breath, my lungs, my very soul panted, for I longed for thy commandments.”

132. *Look thou upon me, —*

That is all the psalmist wants, and all that we want, too. If a look from us to God will save us, what must a look from God to us do for us? “Look thou upon me,” —

132-134. *And be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.*

Some of you, perhaps, may hardly be able to do as you would if you were perfectly free to act, for you are to a certain extent under the government and power of ungodly persons. Well, here is a prayer for you to present to the Lord: “Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.”

135. *Make thy face to shine upon thy servant;*

That is the best sunshine for us; let us but have the light of God’s countenance, and nothing can put us out of countenance. If

the Lord will smile, men may frown as much as they please. So we pray with the psalmist, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant."

135-136. *And teach me thy statutes. Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.*

The psalmist felt for others as well as for himself. It was not enough for him to be holy; he would have others to be the same. Sin in other men brought sorrow to his heart: "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law."

137. *Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments.*

After having wept over the sin of men, the psalmist turns with sweet calmness of spirit to the goodness of God.

138. *Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.*

"Very faithful." You who have tried and proved God's promises must have found them so; not only faithful, but very faithful, faithful to the letter, faithful to the moment. God seems rather to exceed his promise than ever to fall short of it.

139-140. *My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words. Thy word is very pure: —*

Just now the psalmist said, "Thy testimonies are very faithful. Now he says, "Thy word is very pure." There is no adulteration in this blessed Book; it is pure truth. You cannot add to it or take from it without making it imperfect: "Thy word is very pure:" —

140. *Therefore thy servant loveth it.*

It is only a pure heart that loves the pure Word of the Lord; so, if you love the Word of God because of its purity, it is an argument that your heart has been renewed by grace.

141. *I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts.*

In verse 139, the psalmist complained that his enemies had forgotten God's words, and he does not complain of the fault in others, and then fall into it himself; but he says, "Yet do not I forget thy precepts." There are some people who seem to think that it does not much matter what they do. If they were persons of influence, they think that they would be very careful of their example. "But," says one, "I am only a feeble woman, — a poor mother with a few children." "Oh!" exclaims another, "I am only a child as yet, I cannot influence others." "Oh!" cries a third, "I am simply an ordinary working man, nobody notices me." Listen to what the

psalmist says, "I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts." "I do not make all excuse out of my littleness, that I may be careless in my living." Take that message home, dear friends, and learn its lesson, for it applies to many of you.

142. *Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, —*

What a wonderful sentence! Just now, the psalmist said, "Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteousness." (See the marginal reading of verse 138.) Now he advances another step, and says, "Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness."

142. *And thy law is the truth.*

That is what I believe this Book of God is, — "the truth." I know of nothing infallible but the Bible. Every man must have a fixed point somewhere; some believe in an infallible pope, and some in an infallible church, but I believe in an infallible Book, expounded by the infallible Spirit who is ready to guide us into all truth: "Thy law is the truth."

143. *Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delight.*

What a curious mixture this verse describes! Here is a man full of trouble and anguish, and yet full of delight at the same time. Little do they understand human nature, and especially gracious human nature, who cannot comprehend this paradox. There are many seeming contradictions in the Christian life, and this is one of them: "Trouble and anguish have taken hold of me:" — as dogs lay hold of their prey, — "yet thy commandments are my delights." The apostle Paul pictured another such a case as this when he wrote, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed," and he also described the Christian paradox, "As unknown, and yet well known, as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." May we all understand these paradoxes in our own experiences!

144. *The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.*

Now let us read what the Lord Jesus said to those who professed to reverence the Scripture, but who really made it void by their traditions.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 119:129-144; AND MATTHEW 15:1-13.

PSALM 119:137-152

137. *Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments.*

It is well to be able to say this when you are being tried, when the hand of God lies heavy upon you; it is hard to kick against the pricks, but it is very sweet to submit, and to say, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments."

138. *Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.*

"Righteous" for the present, "faithful" for the future. There is no mistake about God's Word, it will never fail, we may trust it implicitly, and we shall never be disappointed.

139. *My zeal hath consumed me,*

The psalmist had such zeal for God's Word that he seemed like a sacrifice consumed with the fire upon the Lord's altar.

139. *Because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.*

First, they despised them, then, they neglected them, at last, they got as far as even to forget them. Forgetfulness of God's Word is a very dreadful stage of disease in the heart.

140. *Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.*

To love God's Word for its purity, is an index of a pure heart. Some love it for its poetry, some love it for its doctrine, some love it for its mercy; but he is an advanced man in the kingdom of grace who loves it for its purity.

141. *I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts.*

Others may, but I am not following their example. It is well when a Christian man is a contrast to other men. When they call him a mere nobody, he adopts their words, and says, "Yes, I am nothing, 'I am small and despised,' yet I do not forget the Lord's precepts."

142. *Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.*

Pilate asked, "What is truth?" Here is the best possible answer: "Thy law is the truth." Not only does it contain the truth, but it is the truth. The Word of God is not only true, that is its quality; but it is the truth, that is its essence. It is the cream of all truths. "Thy law is the truth."

143. *Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights.*

"Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me:" like two fierce dogs they had fixed their teeth in him; yet even then he could say, "yet thy commandments are my delights." What a riddle is the man who knows God! He has great trouble and is full of anguish, yet he is delighted; how can these things be? The child of God knows what it is to be troubled on every side, and yet not to be troubled within.

144. *The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.*

As if he could not live without it, he did not call it true living except as he understood and enjoyed the precepts of his God.

145. *I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes.*

Here we have both a prayer and a resolve; but the resolution grew out of the prayer, and was connected with it. The psalmist prays to God to help him to keep his statutes. Are any of you hard put to it just now by strong temptation? I commend this verse to you: "Hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes." Cry unto God, "Do help me, O Lord; let not strong temptation drag me away from thee! I do long to be holy, my whole heart's desire is to keep Thy ways; O help me, I pray thee!" This verse begins with "I cried," and the next verse begins in the same way: —

146. *I cried unto thee;*

It is good when you can cry. The living child cries, and it is the man of God whose prayer is a cry of almost inarticulate utterance and grief: "I cried," "I cried." What did he cry?

146. *Save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.*

David had no notion of salvation without obedience; so he prays, "Save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies." Is that the salvation you desire, —salvation from sin? If so, you shall have it. God, the Holy One, delights to bestow holiness; and he will speedily hear and answer such a prayer as that.

147. *I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried:*

The psalmist was still crying, crying early in the morning; before the sun was up, he was up, and crying unto God.

147. *I hoped in thy word.*

It is well when hope goes with prayer, when you begin to see daylight even before the sun is up. "I hoped in thy Word." Not in any enthusiastic impression of his own, but in God's Word itself, the psalmist placed all his confidence.

148. *Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.*

As he was up before the sun, so he was praying before they set the guards for the night-watch; and when they were changing guards, and he heard the cry of the hour from the watchman, he was still crying to God; and at the same time he was meditating: "that I might meditate in thy Word." Ah, that is the way to cry! Meditation is very much neglected nowadays; we read, perhaps, too much, we meditate, for certain, too little; and meditation is to reading like digestion after eating. The cows in the pasture eat the grass, and then they lie down, and chew the cud, and get all the good they can out of what they have eaten. Reading snips off the grass, but meditation chews the cud. Therefore, "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest." In this matter we often fail; we shall be wise to imitate David, who devoted the early morning to prayer, and the night watches to meditation.

149. *Hear my voice —*

So the psalmist used to pray aloud. It is a very great help in prayer if you can do the same. If we pray aloud to be heard of men, it is a sin; but if we pray aloud that we may hear ourselves, so that our devotion may be excited, we shall often find it very profitable, and if people hear us by accident, so much the better; they are not hearing anything that will do them hurt, they are hearing that which may do them good.

149. *According unto thy lovingkindness:*

That is, do not hear it to judge it, to censure it, to criticize it, but hear it as a father hears his child, loving to hear its little voice speaking in broken accents.

149. *O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.*

Just now, the psalmist prayed, "Hear me, O Lord!" In the 146th verse, he cried, "Save me;" now his prayer is, "O Lord, quicken me!" When God puts more life into us, then we have more strength to bear our burdens, and having more spiritual life, we have more power to resist temptation. Quickening is an essential mercy, containing within itself a multitude of blessings: "Quicken me according to thy judgment."

150. *They draw nigh that follow of after mischief:*

He could hear the sound of their feet behind him; they were running after him, and he could detect the pit-pat of their malicious footsteps.

150-151. *They are far from thy law. Thou art near, O LORD;*

What a comfort that is! They are trying to get near, but thou art near. I can hear the tread of their feet behind me, but I can see thy face close to me. How comforted is the psalmist in the time of trouble! His adversaries may be as keen of scent as bloodhounds, but God is with him, therefore he fears them not.

151-152. *And all thy commandments are truth, Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.*

So that this Psalm was written by David when he was an old man. He had known the Lord's commandments when he was young, and now, in his declining days, he can say, "I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever." O young men, if you want to be happy old men, begin by knowing God's Word! If you have known that God has founded his Word of old, you know that which will comfort you when you grow old. In fact, you have found a perpetual spring within your heart, if from your youth up you have known in the fullest sense the Word of the Lord. Some are changing their creed every day in the week, as the weather changes, but blessed is that man who has so learned Christ to begin with that he keeps in the old way all his life. He is the man who can truly grow. Transplant a tree six times a year, and you will not get any fruit from it; but blessed are they that are planted in the courts of the Lord, for they shall flourish there, and shall still bring forth fruit in old age.

PSALM 119:145-168

145. *I cried with my whole heart; hear me. O LORD: I will keep thy statutes.*

It is sweet to look back upon our prayers, if those prayers were uttered with our whole heart, for it is no small work of divine grace to enable us to throw the whole heart into prayer; and when we get that we may be quite sure that our prayer will succeed. The God who gives us grace to pray with the whole heart will be sure to reply to the prayer. After prayer David uttered a resolution, "I will keep thy statutes." He was resolved upon this with his whole heart, and though a resolution is not enough, for many make resolves and break them, yet no man is likely to keep God's word who does not resolve to do so. Therefore is it needful, first, to cry in prayer, and then to resolve with the whole heart to walk according to God's will.

146. *I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.*

He has got on this string, you see, and he touches it again. First he said, "I cried with my whole heart." Now again he says, "I cried unto thee." When you are in trouble, if you can remember that you were much in prayer before you entered into the experience which led into the trouble, you can plead with God that you did not rush into it carelessly and prayerlessly; and you have a good argument to urge with him why he should help you in your time of need.

147, 148. *I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.*

It was not now and then that David was in a devotional frame of mind. He continued so. He began early, but he continued late. The prayer of the dawn was followed by the watch of the midnight.

149. *Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.*

He was accustomed to put these two things together, all through this judgment — as much as if he felt that he could appeal both to the tenderness and to the justice of God for help in his time of need; for with a God who has entered into the bonds of the covenant with us, and pledged himself by promise and, by oath, we may plead both his loving-kindness and his judgment.

150, 151. *They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law. Thou art near, O LORD: And all thy commandments are truth.*

How beautiful this! The enemies are coming near, but thou art nearer They approach me, but I abide with thee, and thou abidest with me, I am safe.

152. *Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.*

Oh! believer, what comfort there is in this for you! If you have known it all your years, it has been a blessed thing to know that God changes not—that as he spake, or ever the earth was, so will that word abide when this world shall cease to be.

153. *Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forgot thy law.*

Lord, thy grace has helped me to remember thee. I pray thee, therefore, remember my affliction. Look at it with thy eyes of wisdom, and deliver me.

154-155. *Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word. Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.*

Salvation is near to any man who seeks it, but the ungodly, as they will not have God's Word, so shall they not have God's saving grace They are far from it.

156. *Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy judgments.*

Here again, you see, he puts judgment and mercy together—the justice and the tenderness of God, and he leans on both. It is a mark of an instructed Christian when he is able to derive comfort, not merely from the love of God, but also from the holiness and the justice of God, seeing that these are on his side, through Jesus Christ's atoning blood.

157-158. *Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.*

O child of God, whenever you look upon the transgressors, your heart should bleed that they should transgress so good a law—that they should grieve so gracious a God—that they should bring upon

themselves so terrible a penalty. “I beheld the transgressors and was grieved.”

159, 160. *Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.*

And here is the very sweetness of the gospel — that it is not a thing of today, which will lose its efficiency tomorrow. It endureth for ever. You that have got it have chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from you. All the blessings of the covenant are everlasting blessings. They are “the sure mercies of David”; and he that getteth them getteth an inheritance which he shall not lose.

161. *Princes have persecuted me without a cause; but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.*

Not in awe of their word, but in awe of thy word. The fear of God is the best cure for the fear of men. No man who is devout is cowardly. If thou fearest God with all thy heart, thou wilt defy all the devils in hell, and fear none.

162-165. *I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil. I hate and abhor lying; but thy law do I love. Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments. Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.*

Whatever happens, they shall suffer no ill from it. “There shall no evil befall such, neither shall any plague come nigh their dwelling,” for they “dwell under the shadow of the Almighty.”

166. *LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.*

Now, cannot some of you feeble people say that? You that cannot talk of full assurance, and are half afraid that you are none of the Lord’s people at all, yet you can say, “Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments;” and, if so, you have done that which proves you to be his.

167, 168. *My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly. I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.*

No man will ever take comfort in this, if he is not a renewed man, for to know that all our ways are before God is ground for great distress if we are ungodly — if we are walking contrary to his

mind; but if we are, indeed, his children, we love to feel that we are always living under his eye — that there is nothing about us unknown, to him — no secret sorrow which he does not read — no invisible burden which he does not see.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 51., PSALM 119:145-168.

PSALM 119:145-168

145. *I cried with my whole heart: hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes.*

In the time of trouble there is no resort like that of prayer, but it must be intense and earnest. “I cried with my whole heart.” And sometimes it should be accompanied with a resolve to profit by the affliction. “I will keep thy statutes.” As the child under the rod prays to be spared because he hopes in future to be obedient, so does the Psalmist here say, “Hear me, O Lord; I will keep thy statutes.” This ought to be the effect of every affliction, to make us more careful in our obedience. It is not always so, but so it ought always to be.

146. *I cried unto thee: save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.*

As if he felt that the force of gratitude would constrain him to obedience. He did not merely promise it, but he prophesied it as a matter of certainty that he should keep the Lord’s testimony.

147. *I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.*

Early prayers seem seasonable. Before we have gone into the world, should we not first go to our God? Prayer ought to be the key of the morning to open it, as well as the key of the night to close it. And notice what should always be associated with prayer, namely, hope. “I hoped in thy word.” There is no prayer like a hopeful prayer, in which a man hopes, believes, expects, that God will send him a blessing.

148. *Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.*

Before the watchman can cry the hour of night, mine eyes are upon the Word of God, and I am studying that. Oh! it is well when we prove our love to the Word of God by our meditation upon it, our constant, searching into it.

149. *Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness:*

Not according to my earnestness, much less according to my merit, but “Hear my voice, according to thy loving-kindness.” Oh! what a large measure this, for who can tell how boundless is the loving-kindness of God? Such be the answer to my prayer, O my Lord.

149. *O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.*

As thou dost try me, quicken me. Just as thou art I have need of it give me more spiritual life.

150. *They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law.*

Dogs are at my heels. I have heard them long ago pursuing me, but now they are getting nearer to me than ever.

151. *Thou art near, O LORD;*

Is not that a blessed sentence, that, when the adversaries are near, the Friend of friends is near too? What if he be like a hunted stag, and the dogs are at his heels, yet the omnipotent Lord, the Interposer, can come between and save his darling from the power of the dogs.

151, 159. *And all thy commandments are truth. Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.*

It is an old story with me that thy love is without beginning, thy covenant from all eternity, thy grace immutable, not fickle, changeable as if it were founded yesterday upon the sand, but “Thou hast founded them for ever.”

153-155. *Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law. Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word. Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.*

If they sought that salvation, they would cease to be wicked; they would find salvation; but while they follow out their wicked ways they get further and further away from anything like salvation.

156-158. *Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy judgments. Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.*

It is enough to make any man grieve that the Word of God, which is so right, so just, so good, should be despised. What

madness is this which is in the hearts of men, that they despise the best of the best?

159. *Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness.*

It is a fair argument; as a friend may say to another, “Consider how I love you;” as a child might say to his angry father when he is about to chasten him, “My father, I love you, although I have transgressed; look at my heart, and see how I love you, notwithstanding all the mistakes of my character, and even the faults that I have committed.

160, 161. *Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever. Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.*

“Princes have persecuted me without a cause; but my heart standeth in awe of” — them? No, but “of thy Word.”

162-166. *I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil. I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love. Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments, Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them. LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.*

Present duty, future expectation. It is no use our hoping for great things unless we ourselves cultivate good things. God will make tomorrow bright: let us make today holy.

167, 168. *My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.*

I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.

PSALM 119:153-174

153. *Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law.*

As much as if he said, “Lord, I do not forget thee; do not forget me.” Thy grace has kept my memory; let thy grace keep me altogether.

154-6. *Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word. Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy*

statutes. great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy judgments.

Oh! how the saints want quickening. They know they do. They feel that they get dull, and they cannot endure it. They are not happy unless they possess vivid grace and true light.

157-8 *Many are my persecutors and mine enemies: yet do I not decline from thy testimonies. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.*

The very sight of them gave me sorrow. Even though they tried to be mirthful, I was not amused by them, and beheld them and was grieved, “Because they kept not thy word.”

159. *Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness.*

My heart is right, I do love thee; but I feel dull and heavy. Lord, come and quicken me, not according to my love to thee, but according to thy lovingkindness, come and quicken me. “Thy word is true from the beginning” — from the first page of the book of Genesis to the very last — true about everything, true from the first moment it began with me. Every promise has been kept. There has not been a falsehood all the way through.

160. *Thy word is true from the beginning: and everyone of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.*

“Princes have persecuted me without a cause.” David was a prince and a man expects to be fairly dealt with by his peers; but it was not so in this case.

161. *Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.*

When we are in awe of God’s word, we shall not be in awe of princes. The fear of God is the best cure for the fear of men.

162. *I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.*

He had more joy in reading the Scriptures than in winning a great battle, or in being surprised at the finding of a great treasure.

163. *I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.*

Now the Orientals did not hate lying; they generally tried to be proficient at it. The only fault about lying with them is to be found out. Then they think they must have been very unskillful. David, therefore, was far ahead of his time — far ahead of his fellow-countrymen.

164. *Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.*

He could not have enough of praise; he did it often, he did it perfectly — seven times a day — and if he praised God seven times a day because of his righteous judgments how much more ought we to do it because of his abounding grace! Ah! there is a special cause for thanks.

165-166. *Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them. LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments,*

Two good things to put together — hope in God's mercy, and obedience to God's will.

167-174. *My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly. I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee. Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to thy word. Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word. My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes. My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness. Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts. I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight.*

Cannot we say that, dear friends, this morning? I hope we can — with all our failings and wandering, yet the law of God is our delight, and if we could have our wish, we would never again go beyond its restraints, nor fall short of its demands.

PSALM 120:1-3

1. *In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me.*

Slander occasions distress of the most grievous kind. Those who have felt the edge of a cruel tongue know assuredly that it is sharper than the sword. Calumny rouses our indignation by a sense of injustice, and yet we find ourselves helpless to fight with the evil, or to act in our own defense. We could ward off the strokes of a cutlass, but we have no shield against a liar's tongue. Silence to man and prayer to God are the best cures for the evil of slander. It is of little use to appeal to our fellows on the matter of slander, for the more we stir in it the more it spreads, it is of no avail to appeal to the honour of the slanderer, for they have none, and the most piteous

demands for justice will only increase their malignity and encourage them to fresh insult. However, when cries to man would be our weakness, cries to God will be our strength. The ear of our God is not deaf, nor even heavy. He listens attentively, he catches the first accent of supplication; he makes each of his children confess, — “he heard me.”

2. Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.

Lips are soft; but when they are “lying lips” they suck away the life of character and are as murderous as razors. Lips should never be red with the blood of honest men’s reputes, nor salved with malicious falsehoods. The faculty of speech becomes a curse when it is degraded into a mean weapon for smiting men behind their backs. Those who fawn and flatter, too, and all the while have enmity in their hearts, are horrible beings; they are the seed of the devil, and he worketh in them after his own deceptive nature. Better to meet wild beasts and serpents than deceivers: these are a kind of monster whose birth is from beneath, and whose end lies far below.

3. What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?

The Psalmist seems lost to suggest a fitting punishment. It is the worst of offences — this detraction, calumny, and slander. Judgment sharp and crushing would be measured out to it if men were visited for their transgressions. But what punishment could be heavy enough? What will God do with lying tongues? He has uttered his most terrible threats against them, and he will terribly execute them in due time.

PSALM 121

1. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

No help comes from anywhere else but from the eternal hills. Let us lift up our eyes, therefore, hopefully expecting help from the hills; it is on the road, it “cometh.” The psalmist with the eye of faith could see it coming, so he watched its approach.

2. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.

He would sooner unmake them than desert his people. He that made heaven and earth could certainly find shelter for us either in

heaven or in earth. He cannot, he will not leave us, he will make room for us in heaven when there is no room for us here. What a blessed thing it is to look right away from the creature to the Creator! The creature may fail you; but the Creator is an ever-springing well of all-sufficient grace.

3. *He will not suffer thy foot to be moved:*

He will not endure it, he will not suffer it. Many would like to trip thee up; but he will not allow it, he loves thee too well.

3. *He that keepeth thee will not slumber.*

Thou mayest slumber, for thou art frail, but he is a Watchman to whose eyes sleep never comes. You are always safe. Alexander went to sleep, he said, because Parmenio watched; and you may take the sleep of the beloved because Jehovah watches over you.

4. *Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*

Behold it, that is, mark it; put a nota bene at the side of it, take cognizance of this as a great and sure truth. Jacob went to sleep with a stone for his pillow, but he that kept him did not sleep; he came to him in the night-watches, and revealed to him his covenant.

5. *The Lord is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.*

Oh, what a keeper we have! Can you not trust him? Will you not be at peace in your mind if it be indeed true that Jehovah keeps you, and is your guard in the hour of danger?

6. *The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.*

Then, when canst thou get hurt? If thou art protected both day and night, these make up all the time. God does not make a new sun for his people, the sun would smite us as well as others, but he takes the sting out of the sun's excessive brightness: and we have the same sickly moon as others have, with the same influences over us, but God takes care that the moonbeams do not harm his people. Neither the sun of prosperity nor the night of adversity, neither the light of truth nor even the dimness of mystery, shall injure one of the chosen seed.

7. *The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.*

That is the soul of our preservation; if the life, the soul, be kept, then are we kept altogether.

8. *The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in —*

Thine early days of youth, when thou art going out into life; and thy coming in, when the older days creep over thee, and thou art coming in to God and heaven; thy going out into business, and thy coming in to private devotion.

8. *From this time forth, and even for evermore.*

Let us, therefore, feel restful at this time, and even for evermore, having the Lord for our Keeper and Preserver.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 121 AND 122.

PSALM 121:1-7

1. *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.*

It is wise to look to the strong for strength. Dwellers in valleys are subject to many disorders for which there is no cure but a sojourn in the uplands, and it is well when they shake off their lethargy and resolve upon a climb. The holy man who here sings a choice sonnet looked away from the slanderers by whom he was tormented to the Lord who saw all from his high places, and was ready to pour down succor for his injured servant. Help comes to saints only from above, they look elsewhere in vain: let us lift up our eyes with hope, expectancy, desire, and confidence. Satan will endeavor to keep our eyes upon our sorrows that we may be disquieted and discouraged, be it ours firmly to resolve that we will look out and look up, for there is good cheer for the eyes, and they that lift up their eyes to the eternal hills shall soon have their hearts lifted up also. The purposes of God; the divine attributes. The immutable promises, the covenant, ordered in all things and sure. The providence, predestination, and proved faithfulness of the Lord — these are the things to which we must lift up our eyes, for from these our help must come.

2. *My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.*

What we need is help, — help powerful, efficient, constant: we need a very present help in trouble. What a mercy that we have it in our God. Our hope is in Jehovah, for our help comes from him. Help is on the road and will not fail to reach us in due time, for he who sends it to us was never known to be too late. Jehovah who created all things is equal to every emergency; heaven and earth are at the disposal of him who made them, therefore let us be very joyful in

our infinite helper. He will sooner destroy heaven and earth than permit his people to be destroyed, and the perpetual hills themselves shall bow rather than he shall fail whose ways are everlasting. We are bound to look beyond heaven and earth to him who made them both: it is vain to trust the creatures: it is wise to trust the Creator.

3. *He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.*

Though the paths of life are dangerous and difficult, yet we shall stand fast, for Jehovah will not permit our feet to slide, and if he will not suffer it we shall not suffer it. If our foot will be thus kept we may be sure that our head and heart will be preserved also. In the original the words express a wish or prayer, — “May he not suffer thy foot to be moved.” Promised preservation should be the subject of perpetual prayer; and we may pray believingly; for those who have God for their keeper shall be safe from all the perils of the way. Among the hills and ravines of Palestine the literal keeping of the feet is a great mercy, but in the slippery ways of a tried and afflicted life, the boon of upholding is of priceless value for a single false step might cause us a fall fraught with awful danger. We should not stand a moment if our keeper were to sleep, we need him by day and by night, not a single step can be safely taken except under his guardian eye. God is the convoy and bodyguard of his saints. No fatigue or exhaustion can cast our God into sleep; his watchful eyes are never closed.

4. *Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*

The consoling truth must be repeated: it is too rich to be dismissed in a single line. It were well if we always imitated the sweet singer, and would dwell a little upon a choice doctrine, sucking the honey from it. What a glorious title is in the Hebrew — “The keeper of Israel,” and how delightful to think that no form of unconsciousness ever steals over him, neither the deep slumber nor the lighter sleep. This is a subject of wonder, a theme for attentive consideration, therefore the word “Behold” is set up as a waymark. Israel fell asleep, but his God was awake. Jacob had neither walls, nor curtains, nor bodyguard around him, but the Lord was in that place though Jacob knew it not, and therefore the defenseless man was safe as in a castle. He keeps us as a rich man keeps his treasure, as a captain keeps a city with a garrison, as a royal guard keeps his monarch’s head. If the former verse is in strict accuracy a prayer,

this is the answer to it, it affirms the matter thus, “Lo he shall not slumber nor sleep — the Keeper of Israel.” Happy are the pilgrims to whom this psalm is a safe conduct; they may journey all the way to the celestial city without fear.

5. *The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.*

Here the preserving One who had been spoken of by pronouns in the two previous verses, is distinctly named — Jehovah is thy keeper. What a mint of meaning lies here: the sentence is a mass of bullion, and when coined and stamped with the king’s name it will bear all our expenses between our birthplace on earth and our rest in heaven. Here is a glorious person — “Jehovah,” assuming a gracious office and fulfilling it in person, — Jehovah is thy “keeper,” in behalf of a favoured individual — my, and a firm assurance of revelation that it is even so at this hour — Jehovah is thy keeper. A shade gives protection from burning heat and glaring light. We cannot bear too much blessing; even divine goodness, which is a right-hand dispensation must be toned down and shaded to suit our infirmity, and this the Lord will do for us. When a blazing sun pours down its burning beams upon our heads the Lord Jehovah himself will interpose to shade us and that in the most honourable manner, acting as our right-hand attendant, and placing us in comfort and safety.

6. *The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.*

None but the Lord could shelter us from these tremendous forces. There are dangers of the light and of the dark, but in both and from both we shall be preserved — literally from excessive heat and from baneful chills; mystically from any injurious effects which might follow from doctrine bright or dim; spiritually from the evils of prosperity and adversity; eternally from the strain of overpowering glory and from the pressure of terrible events, such as judgment and the burning of the world. Day and night make up all time: thus the ever-present protection never ceases.

7. *The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.*

It is a great pity that our admirable translation did not keep to the word “keep” all through the psalm, for all along it is one. God not only keeps his own in all evil times but from all evil influences and

operations, yea, from evils themselves. This is a far-reaching word of covering: it includes everything and excludes nothing: the wings of Jehovah amply guard his own from evils great and small, temporary and eternal. Soul-keeping is the soul of keeping. If the soul be kept all is kept. The preservation of the greater includes that of the less so far as it is essential to the main design: the kernel shall be preserved, and in order thereto the shell shall be preserved also. Our soul is kept from the dominion of sin, the infection of error, the crush of despondency, the puffing up of pride; kept from the world, the flesh, and the devil; kept for holier and greater things; kept in the love of God; kept unto the eternal kingdom and glory. What can harm a soul that is kept of the Lord?

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 5:1-19, AND PSALM 121:1-7.

PSALM 122

We will read two portions of Scripture relating to public worship; the first will be Psalm 122, one of David's "Songs of degrees." (See Luke 18:1-14 for second portion.)

1. *I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.*

"I was glad for my own sake, for I hungered and thirsted to go into the house of the Lord; I was glad for the sake of those who offered to go with me, for I delight to see in others a longing desire to profit by the means of grace; I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'"

2, 3. *Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together:*

So is every true church of God when it is in a healthy state. There are no divisions, no schisms: "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together." It is not a long straggling street, a dislocated village; but all the houses are rightly and regularly placed, and surrounded with strong munitions of defense against the adversary. May this church ever be blessed with such unity that it shall be as a city that is compact together!

4. *Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD.*

We should go up to the house of God, then, for two purposes, first, "unto the testimony of Israel;" that is, to hear what God

testifies to us, and also publicly to testify our confidence in him; and, next, we should go up “to give thanks unto the name of the Lord.” Especially should we do this when we have been restored from beds of languishing sickness and pain, or when we come up from the house of mourning. But what is there in God’s house that should tempt us to go there?

5. *For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.*

The preaching of the gospel is like the setting up of a throne of judgment, “for the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two- edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart;” and long before the last great judgment day arrives, and the final assize begins, the ministry of the gospel is God’s judgment seat, at which ungodly men may learn what they are in the sight of the Judge of all, what their present state of condemnation is, and what it will be finally unless they repent.

6. *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:*

Ask that she may be free from persecution without, and from anything like disturbance within: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”

6. *They shall prosper that love thee.*

Neglect of the means of grace is the death of all soul-prosperity; but an earnest love to the house of God, and all who belong to God, will bring us true spiritual prosperity.

7-9. *Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good.*

Now let us read a short passage out of the Gospel according to Luke.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 122 and LUKE 18:1-14.

PSALM 122

1. *I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.*

I was glad for their sake, glad to think they were so willing to go. I was glad also for my own sake, for I was glad to go, too.

2. *Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.*

Happy men who were citizens of such a city! Happy worshippers coming together to the place whose very name signifies the vision of peace, the metropolis of God, type of the New Jerusalem which is from above!

3. *Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together:*

Not a conglomeration of huts, but builded as a city with substantial structures; and not a straggling city, like some we read of, that have been called “cities of magnificent distances,” but it was “compact together.” Happy is the church that is at peace; blessed are the people who are joined together by a gracious brotherly love.

4. *Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD.*

The Church is the point of meeting: “Whither the tribes go up.” The Church is the place of “testimony,” and saints go to hear testimony, and they go to bear it. I wish there was more of this bearing testimony among Christian people, and that they looked upon it as a sacred duty to tell to others what God has told to them. “To give thanks unto the name of the Lord” — that is another part of true worship, — praise, joyful thanksgiving, should be one of the saints’ continual avocations; let us not forget it at this time. Some are here who have been sick; let them give thanks unto the name of the Lord. Some are here who are still weak, yet able to come up with God’s people; let us give thanks unto the name of the Lord. We have all some special mercy, some choice favor, for which to praise his name; then let us all give thanks unto the name of the Lord.

6. *For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.*

If any of the people had been wronged by the petty magistrates, they went up to Jerusalem, and made their appeal to the king. Here may we bring our suit before God, and order our case before him, for he is true and just, and nothing shall go amiss that is left with him.

6. *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:*

Pray for it now, breathe a silent prayer to God.

6. *They shall prosper that love thee.*

God loves those who love his Church, and love his cause, and he rewards them with prosperity, as much of earthly prosperity as they can bear, and prosperity to their souls beyond measure.

7. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palace.

The psalmist bade us pray, and now he himself prays. He who bids others do a thing should be prepared to set the example.

8. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now pray, Peace be within Thee.

Let us say it, for the sake of beloved ones in heaven, and dear ones on earth who are on the way thither, "Peace be within thee."

9. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good.

Not only pray for it, but work for it, give for it, live for it: "I will seek thy good!" God bless to us these two Psalms and put us all in a right state of heart tonight! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 121 AND 122.

PSALM 123

We shall read, this evening, three short Psalms, the 123rd, 124th, and 125th. May the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writers of them, strengthen our faith while we read these songs of joyous confidence!

1. Unto thee lift I up mine eyes,

Instead of looking downward in despair, or looking to the right hand or to the left to human confidence, or looking within in pride, "Unto thee lift I up mine eyes," —

1. O thou that dwellest in the heavens.

It is always delightful to the Christian to remember what the title of his God is: "Our Father, which art in heaven." It is the place of prospect from which God looketh down, and seeth all men, and understandeth all their ways; and it is also the place of his power and his glory. Lord, I look up to thee, thou dwellest in glory, therefore all power is in thy hands, and thou knowest how to use that power on the behalf of thy people!

2. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.

The servant looks to his master's hand for direction and for support. If he has a work to do that is too heavy for him, he looks to his master to send him help, and he also looks to his master's hand for his reward when his work is done. So, dear friends, are we day by day walking as in our Master's light?

3. *Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt.*

The best thing that the best of men can ask for, is God's mercy; and that mercy is so great even to the heavens, that, under the weariness of trials and troubles, it is a sufficient help for them. When we are not only in contempt, but even filled with contempt, and, as the text puts it, "exceedingly filled with contempt," so that we have lost our good name amongst men, still may we turn to our God, and seek his mercy.

4. *Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.*

This was the lot of God's people in David's day; it is the same with believers now, and I suppose that, so long as the earth standeth, the saints of the Lord will have to cry unto him concerning their adversaries. Let them remember always to use the same remedy that the godly ones of old used; and not plead in earthly courts of law, but take the case to the great Court of King's Bench in heaven, let not any of the Lord's children ever be concerned about defending their own characters, but let them always go at once to him whose bare arm is quite sufficient to right all wrongs, and to deliver the oppressed.

This exposition consisted of readings from Psalm 123, 124, And 125.

PSALM 123

1. *Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.*

Our eyes are far too apt to look below, or to look within, or to look around, but it is wisdom on our part to look up. There is always something blessed to see upward, especially when we look up to him who dwells in the highest heavens, — our Father, our Saviour, our Comforter. There is little down here that is worth looking at, but there is everything for our comfort when we look up.

2. *Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress;*

so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.

This is what we are looking for, — the mercy of the Lord our God. It comes from his great heart, through his almighty hand. A wave of his hand is sufficient to drive away all our troubles. When he opens his hand he supplies the needs of every living thing, so mighty and so bountiful is he. Let us, therefore, keep our eyes upon our Lord's hands "until that he have mercy upon us."

3. *Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us:*

The longing soul does not wait in utter silence without expressing its desires. I have heard of some who have said that their will was so fully conformed to God's will that they had left off praying to him, but surely that was a satanic delusion, for the will of Christ was perfectly conformed to that of his Father, yet for that very reason he abounded in prayer. We must be in an evil case if we leave off praying. The psalmist says that he and those who were like-minded with him waited until the Lord had mercy upon them, and then he began a sort of litany, "Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us." He uses the same words twice as if to express the greatness of his need, the clearness of his perception of what he needed, the earnestness of his desire, and his expectation that his need would be supplied. In this verse and the previous one, we have the petition, "Have mercy upon us," presented no less than three times, for mercy is the greatest need of the best man who ever lived.

3. *For we are exceedingly filed with contempt.*

That is a sharp cutting thing, most trying to the soul that has to endure it; and many have been greatly depressed in spirit by the contempt that has been poured upon them. But, Lord, thy mercy is a cure for man's want of mercy; thy thoughtfulness of us will take off the edge from man's contempt of us.

4. *Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.*

It does not seem to be a desirable thing to be at ease, for it was such people who were the scorers of the psalmist and his godly companions. Job also said, "He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease." In the stagnant air of a life of ease, all kinds of mischiefs breed, and

especially that fever of pride which leads ungodly men to have contempt for God's people.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 123., 124., AND 125.

PSALM 124

1. *If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say;*

There is a break here, the sentence is not finished, so finish it for yourselves. If the Lord had not been on your side, what then? You would have been condemned on account of sin. If the Lord had not been on your side as the Redeemer, you would have been left to perish through the natural depravity of your own heart. If he who is "mighty to save" had not been your Helper, just think, Christians, you who are today filled with joy, whose feet are treading Mount Tabor, think what you would have been if the Lord had not been on your side, and then praise and magnify that grace to which you owe so much.

2, 3. *If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us: then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:*

The word "quick" here means "living." Before we were dead, they would have swallowed us up, for the anger of men against God's people is always exceedingly great. They called the Master of the house "Beelzebub", so they are not likely to be very warmly affected towards his disciples. Suppose that we had been given up to the devices of wicked men, where should we have been? My brethren, a man may live so circumspectly that, outwardly, he may be without fault; yet he may wake up, come morning, and find his character blasted, and it may remain so for years, for the tongue of slander is full of all manner of villainy; and, often, the more pure the alabaster of a man's character may be, the more black are the filthy spots which the world makes upon it. Be not too much cast down, O ye children of the living God, when ye are dishonoured among men, for so was it with the Lord God himself, who was slandered in the garden of Eden! Expect not, therefore, that you will escape the serpent's venom.

4, 5. *Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul.*

Here, in this life, we may have troubles, not only from our own evil hearts, but also from Satan and from the world. Truly, if it had not been for the Lord, the proud waters had gone right over our souls. It is a wonder that we are alive, brethren; we can sing with Watts, —

“Our life contains a thousand strings,
And dies if one be gone
Strange that a harp of thousand strings
Should keep in tune so long!”

But it is a ten thousand times greater miracle that we are spiritually alive when there are so many in this world seeking to destroy us. This is a marvel of marvels; and the whole world itself contains no greater wonders than are to be found in that one little world of Mansoul.

6. *Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.*

We were almost in their teeth, like David’s lamb; but David’s Son plucked us out of the jaws of the lion, and out of the paws of the bear. Now the psalmist uses another figure. First he spoke of the proud waters, then of the wild beasts, and now he mentions the fowlers.

7, 8. *Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.*

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. What a blessed conclusion is it to our experience when we can sing of what the Lord has done, and so are encouraged by the all of what he will yet do! Let us write this text upon our banners, and lift them up in the face of every adversary, “Our help is in the name of the Lord.” As John Wesley said, “The best of all is, God is with us,” that is the best of all to the Christian, so good an “all” that he is blessed with that even if he hath nothing besides.

This exposition consisted of readings from Psalm 123, 124, And 125.

PSALM 124

1-3. *If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say; if it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us: then they had swallowed us up quick, —*

That is, alive, —

3. *When their wrath was kindled against us:*

If it had not been God who had engaged to take care of his people, they would all have perished, but that God must be Jehovah. I wish that our translators had not been carried away by the superstition of the Jews, and that they had used the word “Jehovah” where it is employed in the original. This verse and the previous one would have read, “If it had not been Jehovah who was on our side, when men rose up against us: then they had swallowed us up alive,” as some beasts, and birds, and fishes swallow their prey and as some men would do with us if they could, that is, swallow us up alive, making a short and speedy end of us, not waiting to tear us in pieces, but swallowing us whole and alive.

4, 5. *Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul.*

The figure is varied. We are first likened to the lamb that is liable to be swallowed by the lion, and next we are compared to one who is in danger of being carried away by a devouring flood, which shows no pity to any, but sweeps everything before it down to destruction.

6. *Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.*

Neither to Satan and his legions, nor to wicked men, has God delivered us. We are not to be their prey, for God claims us as his own.

7. *Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.*

What a joyous song that is for the escaped soul to sing! Whenever a Christian man has fallen into difficulties through not walking uprightly when he has gone astray from the right path, and has been caught in the fowler’s net, and is in such trouble that he does not know what to do, —when God comes, and cuts the net, perhaps with the sharp knife of affliction, and the imprisoned soul again finds freedom from worldly associations, and happy liberty in the service of God, I do not know a sweeter song than this that he and others of God’s rescued birds can sing as they mount up into the clear light of God’s countenance, “Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.”

8. *Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*

This is a good lesson for us to learn from the past experience of the Lord's people. God and God alone did deliver his servants in the past and herein is our confidence for the present and the future; — our help is in the name — the revealed and manifested character — of Jehovah, the Creator of heaven and earth.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 123., 124., AND 125.

PSALM 125

1. *They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.*

Various conquerors have destroyed the buildings upon Mount Zion, but the mountain itself is still there. None have ever dug it up, and cast it into the Mediterranean Sea. It stands fast, and will stand there as long as the world endures; and "they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion," they shall abide as firmly as that sacred mountain does. Nothing can move them, or remove them; they are in the hands of Christ, and none can pluck them thence. "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all," says Christ, "and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Oh, what a solidity does faith give to a man!

2. *As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.*

This verse shows the believer's safety, as the former one showed his stability. As the mountains stood to guard the sacred city, so does God stand round about his people as a wall of fire. Before any can hurt the believer, they must first break through the ramparts of the Godhead. It is not merely said that horses of fire and chariots of fire are round about his people, though that is true; but that the Lord himself is round about them, and that not occasionally, but "henceforth even for ever." I believe in the eternal safety of the saints, and I would base it upon these two verses alone if there were no other Scriptures to that effect. If they never are to be moved any more than Mount Zion, and if God is round about them for ever, then they must live, and they must stand. There is no "if" or "but" put in here, — "provided that they behave themselves," and so on. No; but, trusting in God, they never shall be moved, and God will be

round about them as their sure defense. I fancy I hear someone say, "If it be so, why am I tried and troubled?" Ah, my brother, it was never contemplated that you should be free from trouble! There is a rod in the covenant; and if you never feel it, you may suspect that you are not in the covenant.

3. *For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.*

You will feel that rod, but it shall not rest upon you. The days of persecution shall be shortened for the elect's sake; and though, perhaps, the devil may be more furious with you than ever, having great wrath because he knows that his time is short; yet God will put an end to your suffering, your persecution, your oppression, for he knows your frame, and he is aware that, perhaps, if the temptation were pushed too far, you might yield. Therefore will he make way of escape for you; he means to try and test you, but not too much, he will abate the fierceness of man's wrath, and deliver you.

4. *Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.*

True believers are good; especially are they good at heart, for grace has made them so, and God therefore will do them good. He will bless them more and more; he will sanctify them, and prepare them for the ineffable goodness that is at his right hand for ever and ever.

5. *As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.*

There are there always have been — in the Church of God some who have been the Church's dishonour. They have crooked ways of their own, and, in due time, under stress of persecution, or through temptation, they "turn aside unto their crooked ways." They leave the path of trustfulness and holiness, as Judas did, as Demas did, as many beside have done. What will God do with them? He will "lead them forth;" he will show them up; he will bring them into the light; and in what company will he lead them forth? Why, "with the workers of iniquity," for if they were not such in outward action, they were really so in thought and heart. And where will he lead them? He will lead them forth to execution; they shall go among the malefactors, they shall be led forth to die. But will this hurt the

Lord's people? No; when the chaff is separated from the wheat, the wheat shall be all the purer. "Peace shall be upon Israel." All the Lord's chosen, pleading, princely people — his Israel — shall have peace upon them. May we all be found amongst them, for Christ's sake! Amen.

PSALM 125

1. *They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.*

I noticed, in one of the reports of the survey of Palestine, that it is said that, albeit every building upon Mount Zion has been demolished, and not one stone has been left upon another, yet the scarps of the hill are altogether immovable, and remain the same as ever. Mount Zion itself cannot be removed, but abideth for ever, and the child of God, by faith in Jesus, cannot be moved by fear, nor removed by sin, but abideth for ever. We abide in Christ, and Christ abides in us — and this makes us like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. If any of you are tossed to and fro, or are changeable, so that you do not know your own minds, may the Lord deliver you from such a state as that! It is faith that makes us steadfast.

2. *As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.*

Here is security as well as stability. The mountains stand like sentinels around the central hill of Zion, so the city is well guarded, and God protects his own people against adversaries of every kind, and he will continue to do so "from henceforth even for ever."

3. *For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; —*

God does not completely screen his people from trial. They sometimes feel the rod of the wicked in the form of slander, oppression, opposition, and persecution, but they shall not always feel it: "The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous;"

3. *Lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.*

If too heavily oppressed, they might do wrong in order to escape from oppression, and God will not have that. He will not let his people be tried above what they are able to bear. He knows that the

tendency of poverty and suffering might be to provoke them to sin, therefore he will not let the rod of the wicked rest upon them, lest they put forth their hands unto iniquity.

4. *Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.*

God is always good to his own people. This prayer is also a prophecy that it shall be well with those that fear the Lord.

“In time, and to eternal days
‘Tis with the righteous well.”

5. *As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways,*

There are still such people, who profess to be all right, yet they are not; for, after apparently going a little way in the straight road, they turn aside unto their crooked ways. Well, what shall happen to them?

5. *The LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity:*

They chose the same way, so they shall share the same end. What a sad end for those, who once stood side by side with the saints, to be led out to execution side by side with the workers of iniquity!

5. *But peace shall be upon Israel.*

In the 1st and 2nd verses of the Psalm, they are said to be like Salem; in this last verse, they are said to have Salem, that is, peace: “Peace shall be upon Israel.”

PSALM 125

1. *They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.*

What comfort there is in this verse to all who trust in the Lord! We never expect to see anyone tear up mount Zion by the roots. The Romans have been there, and ploughed mount Zion as a field, but they could not remove it, it is there still, and the natural features are the same as they were in the days of Abraham and David. Mount Zion “cannot be removed but abideth for ever.” Men have swept away much that was built on it, but mount Zion is there still, nor shall any human power ever be able to remove it; and, glory be to God, neither men nor devils shall ever be able to remove us if we trust in the Lord, for we “shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.”

2. *As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.*

At Jerusalem, there is first the deep valley round the hill, and then afterwards a range of encircling mountains, but the munitions of stupendous rock are nothing compared with those eternal ramparts which protect the people of God.

3. *For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands into iniquity.*

“The rod of the wicked” may fall upon the lot of the righteous, but it shall not “rest” there. The godly may be oppressed for a season, but that season shall not be too long for them to endure. God will not allow his servants to be tried above what they are able to bear, lest their faith should fail, and, in order to escape from their oppressors, they should “put forth their hands unto iniquity.”

4. *Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.*

The psalmist prays to Jehovah to do good to those whom he has made good, for there are none who are naturally good; and there is a special goodness which he bestows upon those whom he has made good by the effectual working of his good Spirit. When they no longer lean this way or that way, but stand upright in their integrity, then shall they know this special goodness of the Lord.

5. *As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, —*

Ways of policy, of falsehood, of self-seeking, of presumptuous sin, of backsliding, —

5. *The LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: —*

If they will work iniquity, they shall go with those that work iniquity. Each one shall go to his own company; if we have loved the people of God on earth, and have walked in God’s ways here, we may confidently expect to be gathered with his elect above; but if we have turned aside to crooked ways, what can we expect but that, where the workers of iniquity go, there we too shall go? “As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, Jehovah shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity:” —

5. *But peace shall be upon Israel.*

What a blessed benediction that is, — peace! It is the one thing that we want above everything else. We are sometimes glad to know more; but we often tire even of knowing, and would rather sit down

as children who are satisfied with what they have been told by others who do know. We wish to be very useful in the world, — and, blessed be God, we can never rest unless we are useful; but there are times of weariness when the best blessing for us, the blessing which shall most help to fit us for future service, is perfect peace, that peace of which our Saviour said to his disciples, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.” Are all of you who are trusting in Christ in the enjoyment of that peace at this moment? If not, you are not living up to your privileges as believers.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 123., 124., AND 125.

PSALM 125

1-3. They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever. For the rod of the wicked shall not test upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.

By “the rod” is here meant “the scepter.” The wicked shall not permanently rule over the righteous; they may have a temporary dominion and sovereignty; but, in due season, their rod shall be broken, and their power shall be scattered to the winds.

4, 5. Do good O Lord, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.

May we have faith to lay hold upon that last blood promise, and so enjoy the peace of God which passeth all understanding! Amen!

This exposition consisted of readings from Psalm 123, 124, And 125.

PSALM 126

This is one of the “Songs of Degrees.” They are supposed to have been sung as the pilgrim caravan was going up to the temple at Jerusalem. Every time they halted and pitched their tents, they sang a Psalm. If carefully read, it will be found that these Psalms exhibit a real advance in experience.

For instance, the keynote of the 125th is stability, while that of the 126th is joy, and especially joyful hope. Each one appears to advance a stage higher than the one that precedes it.

1. *When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.*

“It seemed too good to be true. We were in a delirium of joy: ‘We were like them that dream.’ Our slumber had been profound; we thought that God had altogether forgotten us; but when we found that he was coming to our rescue, ‘we were like them that dream.’”

2. *Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing:*

“We wanted to express our joy, so laughter came, which is a natural, unartificial mode of expressing delight. Our mouth was filled with laughter. We not only laughed, but we laughed again and again, even as Abraham laughed when a son was promised to him, and as Sarah laughed when Isaac was born.”

2. *Then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them.*

It is a fine time when even the heathen begin to see the joy of believers. They could not help hearing and seeing it, and with astonishment they said, “Jehovah hath done great things for them,” to which the godly replied that it was so. They were not at all ashamed to own it. They had not any of that unhallowed modesty which is afraid to speak to the glory of God, but they said:

3. *The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.*

I heard a brother, at a prayer-meeting some time ago, say, “Whereof we desire to be glad.” That is not what these people said; and if the Lord has done great things for you, you are glad, not only do you desire to be glad, but you are so. It is always a pity to try to improve on Holy Scripture, for it does not need to be improved upon. When the Lord does great things for his people, they are as glad as they can be, and they cannot help saying so.

4. *Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south.*

The river-beds, when the Southern torrents have been dried up, seem to be nothing but a gathering of stones and dust. Then comes a copious rain, bringing a sudden flush of water, and the captivity of the stream is gone. That is the meaning of the prayer: “Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south.”

5, 6. *They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*

Notice that word “doubtless.” If you have any doubt about it in your own case, may the Lord drive all your doubts away! When God says “doubtless”, we must not be doubtful: “He shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

PSALM 126

1. *When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.*

We could hardly believe it; we began to talk incoherently, as men do in their sleep. We were so carried away with joyful rapture that we did not know where we were: “we were like them that dream.”

2. *Then was our mouth filled with laughter, —*

We became Issacs, for he was the child of laughter. We laughed as Abraham did, for very joy of faith. Sometimes, laughter may become the holiest possible expression. It may be one of the meanest utterances of our nature, but it may also be one of the loftiest. These people not only laughed, but their mouth was filled with laughter; they could not laugh loudly enough, there was no expression of articulate speech that sufficed them at all: “Then was our mouth filled with laughter,” —

2. *And our tongue with singing:*

When they did find their tongue, they could not speak, they must sing. They could not have anything so slow as a mere declaration, they must have a Psalm: “Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing.”

2. *Then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them.*

The heathen could not help seeing that it was the Lord who had delivered Israel. No other people except the Jews ever came back from captivity. The Babylonish tyrant never restored any others to their land, but he did restore these people; and the very heathen said, “It is their God, Jehovah, that hath done it.” And what did God’s own people say?

3. *The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.*

See the difference between the outsider and the insider. The outsider says, "The Lord hath done great things for them." Ah! but they who belong to God say, "The Lord hath done great things for us." Oh, the privilege of being able to say "for us!" Dear hearts, can you join with all the saints, and say, "The Lord hath done great things for us"? This is what happened to God's people before, but now they have fallen into another trouble, so hear how they pray.

4. *Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south.*

"Thou didst it once; do it again. Thou madest us to live; make us to live again. We sang then, O Lord; enable us to sing again, 'Turn again our captivity.' As the dry river-beds are suddenly made to be filled with water at the melting of the snow, so come, and fill our hearts, 'as the streams in the south.'"

5. *They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*

Take that for certain; lay it down as a Scripture proverb. When God sends us a wet time, and we have to sow in the moist foggy atmosphere, never mind; there are brighter days yet to come. We shall reap amid the sunbeams, and carry home our sheaves with joy.

6. *He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*

"He shall doubtless come again with rejoicing." Now, ye disconsolate workers, ye who have only a handful of seed, ye shall come back with an armful of sheaves. You shall come back rejoicing though you go forth now sorrowing, for the Lord has said it; wherefore be of good courage.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 126. AND 127.

PSALM 127

1-3. *Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.*

It is vain for you, to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows for so he giveth his beloved sleep. Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

The psalmist had been speaking about house-building, and there is the building up of the house in the sense of a family being built up by children. Some people think children an encumbrance, but they are "a heritage of the Lord," and they are to be looked upon with gladness. One said, "I have twelve sons," and his friend answered,

“That is exactly Jacob’s number.” “Yes,” said the first speaker, “and I have Jacob’s God to enable me to sustain them.” There is a comfort in that thought; may God grant that none may be troubled by those whom God sends to us for a heritage!

4. *As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.*

In the case of an arrow, you know it all depends which way you shoot it. Mind, therefore, that you direct your children aright; give them a good start, a true aim from the very first, God helping you, and then they shall fly from you like the arrows of a mighty archer.

5. *Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them:*

That is, when they are like arrows; — not when they are gnarled and knotty, like crooked sticks. When they are unwilling to be tutored and trained, then they become a trial and a trouble; but happy is the man who has a quiver full of arrows; the more the merrier of such children as the psalmist here speaks of.

5. *They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.*

When there was any suit at law, these sons of his would be there to plead for him; if there was any fighting to be done, they also would be to the front. It was a dangerous thing to attack a man who had a house full of strong, loyal, loving sons. They would be his defense, they would speak, and speak with very considerable emphasis, too, with his enemies in the gate.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 126. AND 127.

PSALM 129

Three Songs of degrees.

1, 2. *Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me.*

The trials of some of God’s people begin very early. When first we put on the armor of God, the adversary is usually very bitter against us. Some of our old friends and acquaintances cannot bear to see the change in us, and they bitterly oppose us, so that God’s children may have to say, “From our youth they have afflicted us.” But you must not think that the beginning of sorrows will be the end of them. Oh, no! “Many a time have they afflicted me.” God’s

children are often called to pass under the rod, and the rod is frequently held in the hands of the children of men. Your Saviour carried the cross, and he expects you to carry it, too. He does not tell you to take it up now and then, but to take it up always, and to follow him with a constant will, cheerfully bearing it for his dear name's sake. "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet"-Is not that sweetly put?-"yet they have not prevailed against me." You recollect how Joseph's brothers envied him, and at last sold him into Egypt; yet from the dungeon he rose to the throne, and he could say. "Yet they have not prevailed against me." If thou art of the seed royal, one of the chosen people of God, they shall not prevail against thee. Even proud Haman, with all his plotting, was not able to overcome poor Mordecai; and the Lord thy God will preserve thee from the fury of all thy adversaries, and bring good to thee out of all the evil they try to do unto thee.

3. *The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.*

Like one that has been cruelly scourged until each cut of the lash seemed to make a furrow through the quivering flesh: "The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows." How truly could our blessed Lord utter these words when he was delivered up to wicked men to be scourged!

4. *The LORD is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.*

"The Lord is righteous." There is our hope and comfort. He takes away from them the scourge, and cuts up the cords of which it is made; and those cords with which they would bind the righteous he cuts into pieces, so that they can do nothing against them: "He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked."

5. *Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion.*

So it seems that the one aimed at, and made to suffer, is the Church of God, "Zion." She has often been scourged and afflicted. Her experience is like that of her covenant Head, and her triumph will be like his triumph.

6-8. *Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up: wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom. Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the LORD be upon you: we bless you in the name of the LORD.*

So the adversaries of the Church of God may grow as fast as grass on the roof of a house, but they will perish just as fast, and there will be nothing left of them. They threaten, they bully, they rage, they rave; but it is only for a little while.

Now we will read the “De profundis” Psalm.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 129., 130., AND 131.

PSALM 130

1. *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.*

“Sinking, sinking, sinking, — drowning, dying, — hope all but gone, almost everything gone, — yet I have cried unto thee; — with much fear, and little hope, ‘Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord.’”

2, 3. *Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*

Judged by ourselves, on the ground of absolute justice, none of us can hope to stand before his judgment seat without being condemned. I trust that we all know and feel that this is true.

4, 5. *But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.*

Never yet has, any poor soul perished that could use such language as this. It may be a long while before you get the full comfort of all the Lord’s promises; but you are sure to have it sooner or later, if you can but hope “in his Word.” Well did good John Newton sing, —

“Rejoice, believer, in the Lord,
Who makes your cause his own.
The hope that’s, built upon his Word
Can ne’er be overthrown.”

6-8. *My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all her iniquities.*

Children of God, plead that precious, promise: “He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities;” and never rest till you are fully freed

from the bondage of sin; for God will work a perfect work in you, and then he will take you home to be with himself for evermore.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 32 and 130.

PSALM 130

1. *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.*

The most eminent of God's saints have been in the depths; wherefore, then, should I murmur if I have to endure trials? What am I that I should be exempt from warfare? How can I expect to win the crown without first carrying the cross? David saw the depths, and so must you and I. But David learned to cry to God out of the depths. Learn hence that there is no place so deep but prayer can reach from the bottom of it up to God's ear, and then God's long arm can reach to the bottom and bring us up. out of the depth. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." Do not say, "Out of the depths have I talked to my neighbours, and sought consolation from my friends."

"Were half the breath thus vainly spent, To heaven in
supplication sent,

Your cheerful song would often be Hear what the Lord hath
done for me."

2. *Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.*

Now a main part of prayer must be occupied by confession, and the Psalmist proceeds therefore: —

3. *If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*

That is to say, apart from Christ, if God exercises his justice to its utmost severity, the best of men must fall, for the best of man, being men at the best, are sinners even at their best estate.

4. *But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*

If there were no mercy, there would be no love in any human heart, and there would be an end to religion if there were an end to forgiveness. Here let us observe that the best of men dare not stand before an absolute God, that the holiest of God's saints need to be accepted on the footing of a Mediator and to receive forgiveness of sins.

5. *I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.*

There is a waiting of expectancy; we believe that he is about to give us the mercy, and hold out the hand for it. There is a waiting of resignation; we know not what God may do, nor when he may appear, but we wait. Aaron held his peace. Tis a great virtue to wait for God when we know not What he does, but to wait his own explanations, and be content to go without explanations if he does not choose to give them.

6. *My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.*

And many a mariner has watched, for the morning with an awful anxiety, for he could not know where his vessel was until the day should break. Many a weary patient, tossed upon the bed of pain, has waited for the morning, saying, "Would God it were morning, for then, perhaps, I might find ease." And you know that sometimes the watchers upon the castle-top, who have to be guarding the ramparts against the adversary by night, watch for the morning. So does David's soul watch. Lord, if I may not have thee, permit me to watch for thee. Oh! there is some happiness even in waiting for an absent God. I recollect that Rutherford says, "I do not see how I can be unhappy, for if Christ will not love me, if he will but permit me to love him, and I feel I cannot help doing that, the loving of him will be heaven enough for me." Waiting for God is sweet, inexpressibly delightful.

"To those who call, how kind thou art, how good to those who
seek;

But what to those who find? Ah! this, nor tongue nor pen can
show,

The love of Jesus, what it is, none but his loved ones know."

Happy are they who, having waited patiently, at last behold their God.

7, 8. *Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

He shall do this in a double and perfect way; he shall redeem us from the effect of all our iniquities through the atoning sacrifice, and from the power of all iniquity by his sanctifying Spirit. They are without fault before the throne of God. I will purge their blood that I

have not cleansed, saith the Lord that dwelleth in Zion. May my soul have a part and lot in this precious promise!

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 130; 1 JOHN 1:4-7.

PSALM 130

1. *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.*

God's people have to go into the depths, and God's people pray in the depths, and often they pray best in the depths. The rarest pearls lie deepest in the sea; and the most precious prayers come out of the depths of affliction: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." Cannot many of you say the same? Looking back upon your past afflictions and trials, yet you can feel that you did pray in them. He that can pray in the depths will soon sing in the heights. If thou canst pray, thou canst not be drowned by all the seas that roll over thee. God who brought thee into them will bring thee out of them if thou canst pray.

2. *Lord,*

Or, "Adonai," Sovereign Lord,-

2. *Hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.*

"Do hear me, Lord!" What is the use of prayer if God does not hear it? It is said to be a profitable spiritual exercise. So it is, because we believe that God hears it; but apart from that, it would be an idle waste of words. "Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."

3. *If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*

Not one of us, surely. If God were now to deal with us according to our sins, who among us could stand in his presence?

4, 5. *But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.*

See, this is all in the first person. Dear friend, can you use it in the first person? Can you say, "I wait for Jehovah"? Blessed are they that are content to wait his will, but yet with holy eagerness are prepared to do that will or to suffer it, as he pleases. "My soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope." All my hope is there. If it were not for his promises I should have no confidence, but one word of God is better than all the things that can be seen. It is better to trust in

God's declaration than in man's oath. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

6. *My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.*

Those on the sick bed, who long for their weary waiting to be over, those afflicted ones who cry in the night of pain, "Would God it were morning!" Those, too, that stand as sentinels the night before the battle, or after the fight, watch and long to see the morning light. There are many such weary waiters, and my soul is one of them, waiting for the Lord "more than they that watch for the morning."

7. *Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.*

Enough to buy us back from all our slavery, and to buy back our inheritance as well. Our Redeemer is the redeemer of the inheritance that has been mortgaged, and now is burdened by the enormous debt of sin: "with him is plenteous redemption."

8. *And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

That is our worst slavery, our in-equities, our want of equity, our having acted unfairly to God and unfairly to man. He will redeem us from all that evil; yea, he has redeemed us by price, and he will redeem us by power.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 129., 130., AND 131.

PSALM 130

I will first read the Psalm through, and afterwards say a few words by way of exposition.

1-8. *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the LORD for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

You notice that this is one of the Songs of Degrees; that is, Psalms ascending by steps, and it begins at the very bottom: "Out of the depths." But it gradually climbs up to the heights: "He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." May your experience and mine, beloved, be like a ladder, —upward, always upward, step by step, ever rising, and getting nearer to our God!

The Psalm begins very low: "Out of the depths." The psalmist is in the depths of sorrow and conscious sin, the depths of weakness, the depths of doubt and fear; yet, though he is in those depths, he does not leave off praying: "Out of the depths have I cried." Some of the best prayers that were ever prayed have been offered in the depths. There are some men who never prayed at all until they came into the depths of sorrow, and those sorrows pressed their prayers out of them. The psalmist's prayer was a cry. That is a child's prayer; it cries to its mother or its father: "Out of the depths have I cried." But it was not like a child's cries sometimes are, —cries to itself, or cries to nobody: "Out of the depths have I cried unto THEE, O Jehovah." That is the right kind of prayer which is directed to God as an arrow is aimed at the target.

In looking back over his past experience, the psalmist tells the Lord that he has prayed. Sometimes, it is a good thing to pray over your prayers. "I have prayed, Lord; now I present one more petition, 'I pray thee to remember that I have prayed. I pray thee to hear me. Lord, hear my voice.'" What is the good of prayer if God does not hear it? Sometimes we ask God to answer our supplication. That is right, but, at the same time, remember that it may be a greater blessing for God to hear our prayers than to answer them; for if he were to make it an absolute rule that he would grant all our requests, it might be a curse rather than a blessing. At any rate, I should feel it a very dreadful responsibility to have cast upon me; for then, after all, I should have to depend upon my own prayers, and therefore have to order my own way. But when I read that God will hear my prayer, that is much better, for he can do as he likes about answering it; and if I pray an improper prayer, what is better for me than for God to hear it, and then to set it on one side? And, often, mine are such poor feeble prayers that it is much better for me that he should hear them, and then do for me exceeding abundantly above what I have asked or thought. I used to think that we ought to say that he is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God; but I do

not say that now. It is enough that he hears, enough that you have presented your petition, and that God has heard it. "Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." That is, "Lord, consider my prayer; have respect unto it.

Answer it according to thy wise consideration of it; 'let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.'" Our prayers must usually be supplications; that is the word for a beggar's pleading when he supplicates and asks for favors. That is what we do when we plead with God; and even if we do not speak, yet there is a voice in our supplications. In the sixth Psalm, David speaks of the voice of his weeping; and there is often a voice in that sorrow which cannot find a voice. God hears the grief that cannot itself speak to him: "Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."

And now, having put up his petition, notice his confession: "If thou, Jehovah, shouldest mark iniquities, O Adonai, who shall stand?" So it should run. If God were to sit like a judge taking notes of the evidence, and putting down against his people all their errors, who would be able to stand in that court? We should all be condemned. Then, does not God mark iniquities? Yes, he does in one sense, but not in another; and, through his infinite love and mercy, he does not deal with us after our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities. "If he did," David seems to say, "I could not stand." But he says more, "Who shall stand?" Whatever pretensions to perfection any persons may make, they are false. There is no man who can stand in God's sight when he comes to mark our iniquities; and if we are taught of God's Spirit, we shall know it to be so. In fact, the more holy a man becomes, the more conscious he is of unholiness.

"But" — and what a blessed "but" this is! — one of the most blessed "buts" in the Word of God: "But there is forgiveness with thee;" or, "There is a propitiation with thee." There is a readiness to deal with men, not according to their just deserts, but according to free grace and the infinite mercy of God. "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Is not that a very strange expression? One would have thought that it would have said, "There is judgment with thee, that thou mayest be feared." But no, brethren, if there were judgment with God, and no forgiveness, then men would grow despairing, and they would be hardened and rebellious; or else all would be swept away in God's wrath, and there would be

nobody left to fear him. It is mercy that softens the heart, it is the forgiveness of God that leads men to love him and to fear him. The true fear of God — the holy filial fear — never rises out of judgment, but springs out of forgiving love. I hope, beloved, you feel that, because you are forgiven, you fear to offend God; because of so much love, you fear to grieve the blessed Spirit of God.

“I wait for Jehovah, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for Adonai,” — the King, the Sovereign Lord, — “more than they that watch for the morning, they that watch for the morning.” Our translators put in the words, “I say more than,” — I suppose, to make the sense more clear; but, by doing so, they spoiled the beautiful poetic simplicity of the original. “Let Israel hope in the Lord.” Until this verse, the psalmist has been talking about himself; now he speaks about all the people of God. True religion is expansive; as your own heart gets warmed, you begin to call others in to share your felicity. “Let Israel hope in the Lord.” Did not their father Jacob do so? When all night he wrestled at the brook Jabbok, he hoped in the Lord, and so he gained his name Israel, and went away triumphant because he hoped in Jehovah.

“For with Jehovah there is mercy.” Believe that, O seeking sinner! “With Jehovah there is mercy.” Believe this, O backslider! “With Jehovah there is mercy.” Believe this, downcast child of God; “and with him is plenteous redemption.” There is enough for you, and there is enough for all who come to him. There is not a slave of sin whom God cannot redeem, for “with him is plenteous redemption.”

“And he shall redeem.” There is the comfort of it; he not only has the redemption, but he will make use of it. “He shall redeem Israel” — the whole of his Israel, all his people — “He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” Oh, come to him, then, with all your iniquities, and pray to be redeemed from them; and as surely as Jehovah lives, he will fulfill this promise, and redeem you from all your iniquities.

PSALM 131

1. *LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.*

I commend this verse to some who profess to be Christians, but who are always puzzling their poor brains with intricate questions, who want to solve the mystery of where free will and predestination can meet, how man can be responsible, and yet God's predestination can be fulfilled, and I know not what beside. These are great waters the waves whereof are too big for our little barques. We have quite enough to do, my brother, to attend to the plain things of God's Word, and to strive after holiness and the salvation of our fellow men, without addicting ourselves to tying knots and trying to untie them. It is an unprofitable business; it gendereth to pride rather than to anything else, and well did David say, "My heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me."

2. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.

That is a very blessed thing to be able to do, to quiet yourself when, like a weaned child, you are crying under the afflicting hand of God, when you feel a proud spirit murmuring, or when you want to pierce the darkness that veils divine truth, and want to understand what cannot be understood, and you worry because you are not omniscient. Oh, it is a blessed thing, then, to say to yourself, "Be quiet, child! Be quiet! "What art thou but a child, after all, at thy best? What dost thou know? What canst thou know? Art thou not satisfied to hear thy Father say, "What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter"? Dost thou not know that here we know but in part, and see but in part? By-and-by, we shall know even as we are known, but not yet. "I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother:"-as a child who sucks his finger, and goes to sleep sobbing "my soul is even as a weaned child." David did not say, "My soul is even as a weaning child," fretting, worrying, wanting to have its own will. There is no happiness in that state; but when it is not the weaning, but the weaned,-not the present participle, but the past,-then we get into comfort: "My soul is even as a weaned child," who has given up his old comfort, that which he thought was as necessary to him as his life. He finds that, after all, he can live without it, and grow without it, and come to a better manhood without it than with it: "My soul is even as a weaned child."

3. Let Israel hope in the LORD-

You will never be weaned from him if you are his; but if you are weaned from the world, so as to have all your hope in the Lord, thrice happy are you. Now, too, you will grow; now you will come to the fullness of the stature of a man in Christ Jesus, which you could never have done if you had not been weaned. I remember that when Sarah weaned Isaac there was a great feast at the weaning, and I believe that God's children often have a great feast at their weaning from the world. All the while they are but babes, and suck their comforts from the world, they get but little real joy; but when, by divine grace, they outgrow that state of things, then is there a great feast made for them.

3. *From henceforth and for ever.*

That is real comfort that you may always enjoy, hoping in the Lord from henceforth and for ever. In life and in death here is a blessed confidence that will never fail you. God grant that we may enjoy it now and evermore! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 129., 130., AND 131.

PSALM 132

This Psalm is a prayer and pleading of the covenant, such a prayer as might have been offered by Solomon at the opening of the Temple, or by any of the descendants of David, either in their times of joy or in their seasons of affliction. It divides itself into three parts. In the first seven verses, mention is made of David's zeal for the ark and for the house of the Lord. Then, in three more verses, there follows the prayer at the moving of the ark; and then the last verses mention the covenant which God made with his servant David, which is pleaded by David's descendants in after years. The Psalm begins thus:-

1. *LORD, (or, Jehovah,) remember David, and all his afflictions;*

We cannot come before God in our own name; so what a mercy it is that we have a good name to plead! You and I do not approach the Lord in the name of any saint or holy man; we plead the name of "great David's greater Son," and with the utmost emphasis can we say, "Lord, remember Jesus, and all his afflictions, — his griefs and sorrows on our behalf." This was a most proper prayer, however, as it stands, from those who belonged to David's race; they pleaded the name of him with whom God had entered into covenant on the

behalf of all his seed: “Lord, remember David, and all his trouble, — his trouble which he took about thy house, and about thine ark.”

2. *How he swore unto the LORD, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob;*

Jacob was the great maker of vows; and you will remember also that Jacob, on his dying bed, made mention of “the mighty God of Jacob.” David in this Psalm imitated his forefathers; he made a solemn vow to the Lord that he would build a house for God, even as Jacob did when he said, “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house.”

3-5. *Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.*

He used strong words to signify that his house should be no house to him, and that he would not regard his bed as a place of rest until he had discovered where God would dwell. It means that he would give himself wholly up to this project; it should be his life-work to find a suitable place for the worship of the Most High. I wish that this same zeal would take firm hold of all Christians. How many there are who dwell in their ceiled houses while the house of God lies waste! They can provide abundantly for themselves; but for God’s cause, for God’s gospel, for a place wherein the poor may meet for the preaching of the Word, they do not seem to care. May the Lord give us to feel something of this self-denial and devotion to God that moved the heart of David!

6, 7. *Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood, We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool.*

This is what David did, and you see what trouble he took in the matter; but you know that he was not permitted to build a house for God. Yet he had the same reward as if he had done so, for God built up his house, and established his dynasty for many generations. God often takes the will for the deed with his servants; and when they wish to do a good work, and there is some reason why they may not

carry out their plans, the Lord looks upon them, and gives them the same reward as if they had accomplished their design. After all, dear friends, David's wish to build a house for God, although it was very right and proper in itself, yet, in the sight of God, was but a small matter. He took little account of Solomon's Temple, though it was "exceeding magnificent" You remember how Stephen said, just as a sort of passing remark of no great importance, "Solomon built him an house. Howbeit, the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." And it is a very curious fact in history that, from the very day in which the great Temple was dedicated, spiritual religion began to decline in the land. God's worship was never more pure than when it was rendered in a tent in a humble way, but, as soon as the great gilded Temple was erected, and priestly pomp began to display itself, it seemed as if men began to depart from the spiritual worship of Jehovah. How often it is that, the more gorgeous the ceremonial, the less hearty and the less spiritual the worship becomes! Our great and glorious God, who fills heaven and earth, takes small account of noble architecture and earthly pomp and splendor, or of the sweetness of tousel, or the fumes of incense. He is far above all that is merely sensual; but he delights to dwell where there are broken hearts that he can bind up, and where genuine believers worship him in spirit and in truth.

8-10. *Arise, O LORD, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy. For thy servant David's sake turn not away the face of thine anointed.*

Turn back for a minute to the eighth verse: "Arise, O Jehovah, into thy rest." This exclamation was very similar to the language which Moses used whenever the ark set forward: "Rise up, Jehovah, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee." And when it rested, he said, "Return, O Jehovah, unto the many thousands of Israel." So David did well to use similar words, when the ark was at length brought to its resting-place. He calls it the ark of God's strength, for such it really was. It had done great wonders. It was when the ark was borne by the priests into the midst of Jordan that the river was divided so that the people could pass over dryshod. Even when the ark was taken captive, it brought disaster to the Philistines; and when the men of Bethshemesh irreverently looked into it, great numbers of them were slain. It was

truly the ark of God's strength, — the great type of the power of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the ninth verse we read, "Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness." That is the best robe that he can wear who serves God; and you know that all of us who believe in Jesus have been made kings and priests unto God.

Righteousness, therefore, should be the garment which we wear from head to foot. "And let thy saints shout for joy." God's holy ones should be happy ones. No man has so much right to be happy as he that is holy. We serve the happy God, we may well be happy ourselves; and we are not to keep our happiness hidden within our own hearts: "Let thy saints shout for joy." Let them exult, let them triumph, let them express their delight. The tenth verse is a prayer for the king, and for the whole line of kings; and the psalmist pleads with the Lord to continue to look upon them for the sake of David with whom he had made his covenant. Now the Psalm finishes with the covenant made with David.

11. *The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it, Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.*

That was literally fulfilled in a long line of kings, but it is more gloriously fulfilled in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. David the prophet-king is dead; but he, seeing before that God would raise up Christ, laid hold upon this precious promise, "Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne." Our Lord Jesus Christ is the King of the Jews, but he is also King of kings and Lord of lords; and as God has set him on the throne, neither devils nor men can ever pull him from it.

12. *If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.*

And so it would have been; the kingdom of Israel would never have been broken up, either by internal rebellion or external attack, if it had not been that the kings flagrantly turned aside from God. He bore with them very long, but they waxed worse and worse, and at last God's covenant had to be kept, through their default, by a deed of vengeance against them. Yet today, in spirit, this covenant stands fast, for the Lord Jesus has kept it on his people's behalf, and now he shall sit upon the throne of David for evermore, blessed be his holy name!

13. *For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation.*

Here are some of the sweetest words that ever were written; there are fathomless depths of sweetness in them, for here we have the truth concerning the election of the Church of God: “The Lord hath chosen Zion.” Some men cannot endure to hear the doctrine of election — I suppose they like to choose their own wives; but they are not willing that Christ should select his bride, the Church. Everybody is to have a free will except God. But let them know that God still exercises a sovereign choice among the sons of men. Jesus said to his disciples, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” Blessed be his name, the truth still stands. “The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation.” We delight to dwell with those whom we love; and God so loves his Church that he desires ever to dwell in it, and he does dwell in it by his Spirit; and a day shall come when the perfected Church, the new Jerusalem, shall come down out of heaven from God, having the glory of the Lord, and the Lamb shall be the light thereof. You know how the last chapters of the Book of Revelation describe the glorified Church, and God dwelling in the midst of it. “The Lord hath chosen Zion:” that is the first thing, — election. “He hath desired it for his habitation: that is the next thing, — the indwelling of the Spirit of God in the Church, and this is one of the greatest marvels of which we have ever heard.

14. *This is my rest for ever:*

Is it not wonderful that God, Jehovah, should say of his people, “This is my rest for ever”? Now, if he rests, I am sure that we may. It is very remarkable that, when God was making the world, he never rested till he had fitted it up for his child, and everything was ready for Adam. God never stopped his work till there was everything that Adam could desire; and when it was all complete, then he rested the seventh day. So, when he has done everything for his Church, when his work for her is all completed, then Christ rests, but not till then. He says, by the mouth of Isaiah, “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth;” but that being once accomplished, he says, “This is my rest for ever.” God does not rest

in the work of his hands as a Creator, he rests in the work of Christ as the Redeemer.

14. *Here will I dwell; for I have desired it.*

God dwells in his Church, and will dwell in it. He has desired to do so, and his desire will certainly be realized; who can cause him to be disappointed?

15. *I will abundantly bless her provision:*

By which I understand that there will be provision, that there will be abundant provision, and that there will be abundant blessing on that provision. God grant that we may always find it so! Let us plead this precious “I will.” “I will abundantly bless her provision?”

15. *I will satisfy her poor with bread.*

Poor, and yet satisfied; satisfied with bread! Ay, but what kind of bread? The Bread that came down from heaven, the Bread of God, which is Christ Jesus, whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed. “I will satisfy her poor with bread.” The Lord does not say anything about her rich. No, but we read in another place, “The rich he hath sent empty away.” I wish ever to remain among the poor of the Lord’s flock; not to put my name down among those perfect people who are so rich in grace that they are obliged to tell everybody about it. No, I would be poor in spirit, — emptied more and more, lying lowly and humbly at my Lord’s feet. I am the more ready to do this because I perceive that the Lord has prepared all his goodness for the poor in spirit: “I will satisfy her poor with bread.”

16. *I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.*

The prayer in the 8th verse was, “Arise, O Lord, into thy rest.” In the 14th verse, we read the answer, “This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell.” Then in the 9th verse was the petition, “Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness.” Now the Lord gives the response, “I will also clothe her priests with salvation.” Righteousness is only a part of salvation; but oh, what glorious raiment it is when a man once wears the silken dress of salvation! Talk of “cloth of gold” — there is nothing among royal array that can be compared to the vestments of the saints. I go in for vestments when they are those of which the Lord says, “I will also clothe her priests with salvation.” They shall be covered over with it, from head to foot, so that there

shall be nothing of his people to be seen but his own salvation. Notice the prayer in the 9th verse, "Let thy saints shout for joy." And the answer is here, "Her saints shall shout aloud for joy." God always gives more than we ask. Silver prayers get golden answers. "Open thy mouth wide," says he, "and I will fill it." Ay, and then open it again, and he will fill it yet again, for he "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

17. *There will I make the horn of David to bud:*

As a stag's horn grows, putting out fresh buds and branches, so shall the power of David be increased and enlarged. We see that promise fulfilled spiritually in the growing Kingdom of Christ.

17. *I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed.*

His name shall never go out like an extinguished lamp. If it be blown out once, as it were, in the death of Solomon or any other, king, yet from that lamp shall another be lighted. The Lord says, "I have ordained a lamp," and Christ will always be a source of brightness in the world; he will ever be "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel." As the holy lamp in the sanctuary was never to go out, so has God ordained that Christ shall ever shine to the joy and delight of his people.

18. *His enemies will I clothe with shame:*

In this Psalm two sets of clothing are mentioned; and you can have which you like. Here is one, "I will clothe her priests with salvation;" and there is the other, "His enemies will I clothe with shame? Shame is a terrible thing, many a man has thrown away his life to try to escape from the shame of a guilty conscience; but the ungodly will be for ever clothed with shame, and they will be eternally condemned. "His enemies," that is the description of the ungodly. It is of small account what your outward character appears to be; if you are an enemy of Christ, these are the garments in which you will die, and these are the garments in which you will continue to suffer for ever: "His enemies will I clothe with shame."

18. *But upon himself shall his crown flourish.*

Upon Christ the laurel wreath, or rather, the crown of glory, shall never wither. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law."

PSALM 132

A Song of Degrees.

1. *LORD, remember David, and all his afflictions.*

God had entered into an everlasting covenant with David, “ordered in all things and sure,” and in this Psalm either David himself or some of his people or descendants pleaded that covenant in time of affliction and trial: “Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions.” The Lord would not forget either David or his people, yet it pleased him for them to come before him in prayer, and to remind him of the covenant that he had made with his servant. Using this prayer in a gospel sense, we bow before the Lord, and cry, “Lord, remember Jesus, the Son of David, and all his afflictions; remember all that he endured as his people’s Substitute, and have pity upon us, for his sake, as we plead that eternal covenant which thou hast made with him on our behalf.” That ancient covenant was made With David and the far more ancient covenant of grace was made with great David’s greater Son,” our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

2-5. How he swore unto the LORD, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.

David remembered that he had built himself a palace, but he wished even more ardently to build a palace for his God, a house for the celebration of his worship: “an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.” But where can a worthy house be built for God? Where can there be made a fit dwelling place for the Most High? He filleth all things, yet all things cannot contain him. There is but one dwelling place of God, it is in Christ Jesus, for “in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” Oh! how we ought to thank God that he has provided himself a fitting dwelling place in the person of his dear Son, in whom all believers also are builded together for a habitation of God through the spirit. As for the ark of the covenant, it had long ago in David’s day dwelt in obscurity.

6. *Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood.*

God is willing to dwell in the woods. Many a time he does so. In many a cottage far removed from the haunts of men, God is found; and to many a backwoodsman God is as near as he is to those who worship him in temple or cathedral. "We found it in the fields of the wood."

7. We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool.

This Psalm is called "A Song of degrees." Notice the steps here described. We heard of it, we found it, we will go into it, we will worship in it. It is a good thing when, in our prayers and praises, we ascend step by step, -not on the stepping-stones of our dead selves, which is a piece of rubbish, -but by the living stepping-stones upon which the ever-living Spirit helps us to rise tier above tier, his own almighty hand helping us continually to rise higher and higher.

8. Arise, O LORD into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength.

Let us pray that the Lord may constantly find rest in the midst of his people. He finds rest in them because they are one with his well-beloved Son. Come, Lord, at this moment, and take thy rest in the midst of this assembly, and make us all rest in thee.

9. And let thy priests be clothed with righteousness;

This is the best robe for all God's holy ones, who are priests and kings unto him; this is better than snow white linen or robes bedecked with crimson and gold.

9. And let thy saints shout for joy.

The worship of God should be very gladsome and even demonstrative. We may shout. Sometimes the overflowings of joy demand more than ordinary expression, therefore we pray, "Let thy holy ones shout for joy."

10. For thy servant David's sake turn not away the face of thine anointed.

Much more may we ask this for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. O God, remember thy Son, our Lord and our King, and for his sake look in love and pity upon us today !

11, 12. The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David, he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.

Long did the house of David reign over Israel; but they proved unfaithful, and therefore the scepter passed out of their hands, but it

is still in the hand of another Son of David. In a spiritual sense Jesus Christ has a throne and a dominion that shall know no end.

“ Jesus shall reign wherever the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.”

13. *For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation.*

The literal Zion was the Lord’s habitation for a time, but the spiritual Zion will be his dwelling place throughout eternity.

14. *This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.*

God rests in his people; the whole company of the redeemed shall be his abiding place for ever.

15. *I will abundantly bless her provision: will satisfy her poor with bread.*

God sends the needful provision for his people, and sends his blessing with it. We are so poor that we have not even spiritual bread for our souls to eat unless he gives it to us; but here is his gracious promise, “ I will satisfy her poor with bread.” This he will do both literally and spiritually.

16. *I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints, shall shout aloud for joy.*

In the 9th verse we had a silver prayer, but here, in this 16th verse, we have a golden answer. The prayer of the psalmist was, “ Let thy saints shout for joy;” the Lord’s answer is, “Her saints shall shout aloud for joy.” God always gives good measure, pressed down, and running over. Often, we have not because we ask not, or because we ask amiss. His command to each one of us is, “ Open thy mouth wide,” and his promise is, “ I will fill it.” If you ask great things of him, he will give you yet greater things for he is “ able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

17. *There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed.*

Oh, that today the horn of David might again bud! May every believer in Jesus feel the life of God reviving within him, and in many a case where there is no spiritual life at all may life divine begin today ! Pray for it, beloved; and then look for it, and you shall surely see it.

18. *His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish.*

We have no King but Jesus and his crown is always flourishing. It wears well upon a blessed head. Let us crown him once again this day with our gladsome praise and thanksgiving.

PSALM 135

1. Praise ye the LORD.

Or, “Hallelujah.” “Hallelujah” is the key-note of it. So this is one of the Hallelujah Psalms, for so it begins; and if you look at the end, you will see that so it closes. There is “Hallelujah” again. The whole Psalm is shut in at the beginning and at the end with this which is both our duty and our delight: “Praise ye the Lord.”

1. Praise ye the name of the LORD;

The character, the work, all that is revealed of God, is a subject for praise: and especially that wonderful and incommunicable name Jehovah, — never mention it without praise: “Praise ye the name of the Lord.”

1. Praise him, O ye servants of the LORD.

Make it a part of your service. Praise him because you are his servants. Praise him because he accepts your service. You ought to be first in sounding his praises, therefore, “Praise him, O ye servants of the Lord.”

2. Ye that stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God, —

You are permitted to dwell near to him. You have a standing and an abode, an office and a work, in the courts of the Lord’s house; therefore take care that you begin the strain. Should not the King’s courtiers praise him? Praise him, then, “ye that stand in the courts of the house of our God,” —

3. Praise the LORD; for the LORD is good:

There is one excellent reason for praising him, and you can never praise him too much. He is so good that you can never extol him to an exaggeration.

3. Sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant.

That is, singing God’s praises is pleasant; it is a pleasant duty, and the Lord’s name is pleasant, or lovely. The very thought of God

brings the sweetest emotions to every renewed heart; there is no pleasure in the world that exceeds that of devotion. As we sing praises unto the Lord, we shake off the cares of the world, we rise above its smoke and mists, and we get there the clearer atmosphere of communion with him.

4. For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure.

There is something for you who are the Lord's chosen to sing about.

“In songs of sublime adoration and praise,
Ye pilgrims to Zion who press,
Break forth, and extol the great Ancient of days,
His rich and distinguishing grace.”

5. For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.

“I know it,” says the writer of the Psalm; “I know it by experience; I know it by observation; I am sure of it. There is no god like unto our God. He is a great Creator, a great Preserver, a great Redeemer, a great Friend, a great Helper. ‘I know that Jehovah is great, and that our Adonai is above all gods.’”

6. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.

The heathen divided out the universe into provinces, and they had Jupiter to rule heaven and earth, and Neptune for the sea, and even today many sing, but, oh! how inaccurately, “Britannia rules the waves.” It is Jehovah, and no one else, that rules the waves, and the people on either land or sea. He is Lord everywhere, and whatever he pleases to do is done. He is no lackey to wait upon the free will of his creatures: “Whatsoever Jehovah pleased, that did he.”

7. He causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth;

That is a very wonderful work; what millions of tons of water are every day turned into vapor, and caused to ascend from different regions of the earth to fall again afterwards in cheerful, refreshing rain! What should we do if this process were suspended? It is the very life-blood of the world.

7. He maketh lightnings for the rain;

It is said that the Bible was written to teach us religion, not science. That is very true, but the Bible never makes a mistake in its science; and I would rather agree with the old writers, who held that the Bible contained all science, than I would go with those who blasphemously pretend to correct the Holy Ghost, and to set him right upon geology, and I know not what besides. In the long run, it shall be proved that the old Book beats all the scientists; and when they have made some wonderful discovery, it will turn out that it was all recorded here long before. "He maketh lightnings for the rain." There is an intimate connection between electricity and the formation of rain; and in the East this is very clear, for we are constantly reading in books of travel of heavy downpours of rain almost always accompanied by thunderstorms.

7. Re bringeth the wind out of his treasures.

The wind never comes puffing around us according to some freak of its own; but "He bringeth the wind out of his treasures; "counting, and spending it as men do their money, not suffering more wind to blow than is needed for the high purposes of his wise government. Let praise for this be given to the God of nature who is ruling over all, and ever doing as he wills. The psalmist goes on to show that the God of nature is also the God of his people: —

8. Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast.

It was God's own hand that did it. The firstborn of man and beast could not have died by accident all over the land of Egypt at the same hour of the night; but Jehovah thus punished the guilty nation. Had they not oppressed his firstborn? Had they not cruelly trampled on his people, and refused to hearken to his Word? And when the time came for this last and heaviest blow, the Lord did but act in justice to them, and in mercy to his people.

9. Who sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants.

"Tokens and wonders;" — not only prodigies which astounded the people, but "tokens" which taught them, for the plagues were directed against their deities, and large books might be written to show how every plague exposed the impotence of some one or other of the false gods which the Egyptians worshipped. Pharaoh and his servants were all involved in the sin, so they were all included in the

punishment. How much better was it to be a servant of Jehovah than to be a servant of Pharaoh!

10. *Who smote great nations, and slew mighty kings;*

Two of them are mentioned, perhaps because they were two of the most powerful kings who blocked the road of Israel.

11-13. *Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan: and gave their land for an heritage, an heritage unto Israel his people. Thy name, O LORD, endureth for ever;—*

He is the same Jehovah now as ever he was. Multitudes of people, nowadays, have made unto themselves new gods; they have imagined a new character for Jehovah altogether, and the God of the Old Testament is ignored and slandered; but not by his chosen people, they still cling to him.

The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is not the God of the dead, but of the living; and that is true spiritually as well as naturally. Those who are spiritually dead refuse to own him, and set up gods that they have imagined; but those who are quickened by his grace delight in him, and glorify his name. Let this, beloved, be our joyful song, “Thy name, O Lord, endureth for ever; —

13, 14. *And thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations. For the LORD will judge his people, and he will repent himself concerning his servants.*

For they have their dark times, and are often in trouble through their sin. Then the Lord sends chastisement upon them, but when it has answered his purpose, he gladly enough withdraws it. How different are the idols of the heathen from our God!

15. *The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands.*

They can do no works, for they are themselves the result of the work of men. Their handiwork can be nothing, for they are the work of men’s hands.

16-18. *They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths. They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trusteth in them.*

The original conveys the idea that those who make such gods grow to be like them, they are continually getting to be more and

more like them. They become dumb, blind, deaf, dead, as they worship such idols as these.

19, 20. *Bless the LORD, O house of Israel: bless the LORD, O house of Aaron: bless the LORD, O house of Levi: ye that fear the LORD, bless the LORD.*

All of you, whether you be of the house of Aaron or of the tribe of Levi, to whatever house or tribe you belong, bless the Lord; and if you are Gentiles, even though Abraham acknowledge you not, yet, “ye that fear the Lord, bless the Lord.”

21. *Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, which dwelleth at Jerusalem.*

Our inmost hearts would bless him. We cannot make him more blessed than he is; we cannot add to his glory; but, oh! we do wish that everything we can do, everything that can be done to his honour, may be done.

21. *Praise ye the LORD.*

That is, once again, “Hallelujah.” Oh, for the spirit of divine grace to set us praising God from the heart, and to keep us at that holy exercise all our days!

PSALM 136

When the chorus was taken up by the whole of the people, accompanied by a blast of trumpets, this must have been a magnificent hymn of praise.

1. *O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

The Psalm begins with the august name, the incommunicable title of the one living and true God, Jah, Jehovah. For this name the Jews had a high respect, which degenerated into superstition, for they would not write it in their Bibles, and put another word instead, in which our translators have imitated them, not to the improvement of the version. Surely, if it is “Jehovah” in the original, we should have it “Jehovah” here. The name is a very wonderful one, “Je-ho-vah.” No man knows exactly how it should be pronounced; it is said to consist of a succession of breathings, therefore is it written, “Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord,” whose name is a breathing, and in whom dwells the life of all who breathe. Let us take care that we never trifle with the name of God. I think that the common use of the word “Hallelujah,” or, “Praise ye the Lord,” is

simply profane. Surely, this is not a word to be dragged in the mire; it should be pronounced with solemn awe and sacred joy.

2. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever.

If there be any other god, if there can be imagined to be any, our God is, infinitely above them all. The gods of the heathen are idols, but our God made the heavens. If there be any reverence due to magistrates, of whom we read in Psalm 82, "I have said, Ye are gods," yet are they nothing at all compared with Jehovah, "the God of gods."

3. O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Whatever there be of authority, or lordship, or kingship of any kind, in the world, it is all in subjection to him who is "the Lord of lords." I think I hear the trumpets sounding it out, and all the people joining in chorus, "O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever." It is ever the same strain, the enduring mercy of God, that bore the strain of Israel's sin, and Israel's need, and Israel's wandering.

4. To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Nobody does wonders that can be compared with Jehovah's wonders. Nobody helps him in the doing of his wonders; he asks no aid from any of his creatures.

5. To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Every time you lift up your eyes to that one great arch which spans all mankind, praise the name of the great Builder who made that one enormous span, unbuttressed and unpropped. What a work it was! And it was made by mercy as well as by wisdom. If we go into the scientific account of the atmosphere, of the firmament, and of the stellar heavens, we see that the hand of mercy was at the back of wisdom in the making of it all: "for his mercy endureth for ever."

6. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever.

We ought to praise him for the making of every country, especially, I think, we who dwell on these favored islands, because he has placed our lot in an island.

“He bade the waters round thee flow;
Not bars of brass could guard thee so.”

We might have been beneath the tyrant’s foot, if it had not been for “the silver streak” that gives us liberty. The whole earth, wherever men dwell, will afford some peculiar reason for their praise to Jehovah.

7-9. To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever: the sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever: the moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Why three verses about one thing? Because we are not wont to dwell upon God’s goodness as we should. We are therefore bidden, first, to remember light in general, and then the sun, the moon, the stars, each one in particular; and each time we do so, we may say, “His mercy endureth for ever.” We are not left in the daytime without the sun; and, when the day is over, the darkness of the night is cheered either by the moon or by the stars, which show us that, not only day unto day, but night unto night, he thinks upon us, “for his mercy endureth for ever.” Praise him, praise him, whether it be high noon or midnight, when the day is renewed or when the curtains of your rest are drawn, still praise him, “for his mercy endureth for ever.”

10. To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever:

It is not a common mercy of which we have to sing, but a peculiar theme for thanksgiving, he “smote Egypt in their firstborn.”

11. And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever:

Sing of his goodness to his chosen, even though it involved a terrible stroke upon his proud adversary. There are some who cannot praise God’s left hand, but we can; not only the right hand that helps his people out, but the left hand that smites the Egyptians. We praise him still with unabated joy in him. What he doeth, must be right; and in his vengeance there is justice, and justice is mercy to mankind.

12. With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever.

In all God’s acts there is some peculiarity which commands especial attention. “He” brought out Israel,” praise him for that. He

did it “with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm,” therefore again praise him. The ring is precious, but the brilliance in the ring is that to which in this verse you are bidden to look, namely, Jehovah’s strong hand, and stretched out arm.

13, 14. *To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever: and made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever:*

And when you, too, come to the Red Sea on your way to the heavenly Canaan, when your path is blocked, God will divide it for you; and as he gently leads you through the very deeps, he will have you sing, “His mercy endureth for ever.” No floods can drown his love, nor divide you from it.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Jehovah will split seas in two to make a passage for his people, “for his mercy endureth for ever.”

15. *But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

This is the deep bass of the hymn, he “overthrew Pharaoh.” “The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.” We cannot give up that verse; we cannot refuse to sing the song of Moses; we must praise and bless God for all that he did at the Red Sea, even though terrible were his deeds of righteousness, when the chivalry of Egypt sank to the bottom of the sea like a stone.

16. *To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever,*

Here is another point where you can join with Israel. This world is a wilderness to you; but the Lord leads you through it. By his fiery-cloudy pillar, he conducts you all your journey through. By his manna, gently dropping from heaven, he feeds you still; and he will guide you till he brings you over “Jordan’s stormy banks” — “To Canaan’s fair and happy land.”

17-20. *To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: and slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever: and Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever:*

Here you have the repetitions of God. I have sometimes said that I like the tunes which allow us to repeat the line of a hymn; and, certainly, one likes a Psalm which turns over some great mercy of

God, and makes us see the various facets of the wonderful jewel. The psalmist does not merely say that Jehovah smote great kings; but these kings were famous in battle, which rendered their greatness or power the more formidable; but whether men be great, or whether they be valorous, or both, they cannot prevent God's mercy to his people. He will push a way for them against the horns of their adversaries, and they shall be victorious. As if to show the depth of his gratitude, the psalmist gives the names of these kings, and of the countries over which they ruled; and he dwells with emphasis upon these points of the mercy of God to his people, in that he slew famous kings, Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og the king of Bashan.

21, 22. *And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever: even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

He gave them those countries which were beyond the land of promise, because these foes tried to stop their way. He did not limit Palestine; but, on the contrary, he stretched the ordained bounds of it, and enclosed the land of the Amorites and Bashan within the territory he gave to his people. Now comes a soft sweet verse; I think I hear the harps leading the singing: —

23. *Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever:*

Can you not sing this tonight? Some of you, who were very poor, very sad, despairing, abhorred of men, slandered, persecuted, very low, perhaps some here, who once were in the slums of this city, now can sing, "Who remembered us in our low estate." Spiritually, our estate was low enough; it had ebbed out, till we had no comfort nor hope left; but the Lord remembered us. That is a blessed prayer, "Lord, remember me." That prayer has been answered for many here; aye, even before we prayed it. He remembered us in our low estate, "for his mercy endureth for ever." Dear heart, are you in a very low estate tonight? Do you feel as if you were at death's dark door, and at hell's dread brink, by reason of the greatness and blackness of your sin? "His mercy endureth for ever." Catch at that rope. Drowning men clutch at straws; but this is no straw. Do cling to it; it will bear your weight. It has been a means of salvation to myriads before you. Trust God's mercy in Christ, and

you are saved, “for his mercy endureth for ever.” “Who remembered us” — what next?

24. *And hath redeemed us --*

This song is climbing up; it begins to ascend the heavenly ladder; it has already reached redemption.

24, 25. *From our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

God is the great Feeder of the world. What a commissariat is that of the universe! One cannot think of the wants of the five millions in London without shuddering lest, some day, there should not be food enough for them; but there always is. I will not trace it to the mere fact that trade and commerce supply us. No, there is an over-ruling power at the back of it all, depend upon it. All the world seems eager to supply our markets, and to make the loaf for the labourer; but it is God who has planned it all. Let us praise him “who giveth food to all flesh.” As for spiritual meat, he will give us that; I trust we shall all have a portion of meat in due season tonight. If any shall be hungry at the end of the service, it shall be surely from want of willingness to be fed rather than lack of suitability in the Word of God to sustain the spirit, and bless the soul.

26. *O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

PSALM 136

This is indeed one of the chief songs of praise which we find even in the Scriptures, and it is not surprising that such a poet as John Milton should have written that version of it that we often sing, — “Let us with a gladsome mind, Praise the Lord, for he is kind: For his mercies shall endure, Ever faithful, ever sure.”

1-3. *O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Here, you see, we have three titles of God, first as Jehovah, secondly as the Elohim, thirdly as the Adonai or Lord. By whatever name God is known, he is worthy of our highest praise. Whether it be the name referring to his self-existence, or the name relating to

his covenant engagements, or the name applying specially to his rule and governorship, in any and every capacity, let us praise him.

Notice that each of these three verses begins "O give thanks." We are to praise the Lord for his greatness, and to give him thanks for his goodness. Our praise shall consist largely of the element of gratitude as we think of all that he has done for us. Although I lay no stress upon the fact of these verses being three, and upon the names of God being three, yet it is very remarkable that, throughout the Old Testament, even when there is no distinct allusion to the doctrine of the Trinity, yet still the threefold praise is constantly being repeated, as if this sublime truth lay latent, but yet was not unknown to those godly ones who dived deep into the mystery of the triune unity of God. Let us, who have this truth so clearly revealed to us, give thanks unto the Triune Jehovah with all the powers of our threefold nature, body, soul, and appetite.

4, 5. To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.

The making of the heavens is a great marvel of wisdom; and inasmuch as that wondrous work sprang from the unaided wisdom of God, it is a subject for which we should unceasingly praise him. When men invent some notable piece of machinery, they are generally long in bringing it to perfection, and they usually borrow various ideas from those who have preceded them; but it was not so with God. By his own perfect wisdom, he struck out the arch of heaven, and made all that it covers.

6. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Once in the history of the globe, the earth and the waters were mingled together; but, at God's bidding, the earth rose to its assigned position, and the deeps received the sea, and they have kept their places ever since, except when God caused the flood to cover the whole earth.

7-9. To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever. ' the sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever: the moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.

What should we have been without light? Could any poor unhappy creatures ever have lived in a dark world? Let us praise

God for the light; let us bless him for the sun, — that great mercy, but let us not forget the lesser mercies, — the moon and the stars which he also made. It is well, when we are praising God, to dwell upon all his bounties; for, sometimes, mercies which appear small from one point of view become all the greater from another point of view. Stars seem little to us, but what vast orbs they really are! Let us praise the great Creator for every kind of light that he has made, and let us especially praise him for all spiritual light, and even for his ministers, who are stars in his right hand. They are but little twinkling lights compared with the great Sun of righteousness; but, still, “he made the stars also.” Therefore, let him have due praise for it, “for his mercy endureth for ever.” So far, we have been reminded of the wonders wrought by the great Creator. Now we are called upon to give thanks to the Lord for his deliverance of his ancient, people out of Egypt.

10-14. *To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever: And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever: With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever: And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever:*

It was a great miracle by which the Red Sea was divided. I suppose it was somewhere about eight or nine miles in breadth at the place where the Israelites crossed it; yet the sea rolled back, and stood in a heap on either side, and left a clear passage for the people through the very heart of the sea. God’s mercy made a way for his people through the sea, and a path for them through the mighty waters; but it was no less a mercy to make them go through the sea. They had not been accustomed to any kind of traveling, and certainly not to such traveling as that, through the heart of the sea; but the Lord inspired them with confidence, so that they went down into the very depths without fear, and came up again on the other side. But God’s mercy is always consistent with his justice, so there was very different treatment for the Egyptians.

15, 16. *But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which led his people through the wilderness- for his mercy endureth for ever.*

In this Psalm, you have three leadings. There is, in verse 11, leading out: "Brought out Israel" In verse 16, there is leading through: "led his people through the wilderness;" and in the 21st verse, we shall find that there is leading into: "and gave their land for an heritage." So God leads us out from the region of sin, he leads us through the wilderness of this life's trial, and he leads us into the rest which remaineth for his people. "To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy Endureth for ever." You are today, dear friends, experiencing that kind of leading. Long ago, some of you were led out of the realm of sin, now you are passing through this great and terrible wilderness wherein there would be thirst and hunger were it not for the heavenly water and manna, and we might fear the fiery serpents were it not for him who was lifted up upon the cross as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. Yet the Lord will safely lead you through the wilderness, and give you the land of promise.

17. To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:

His mercy and his vengeance are quite compatible; the one has not done away with the other.

18-20. And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever: and Og the king of Bashan for his mercy endureth for ever.'

Here are four verses where we think that one might have sufficed. Ah, brethren, we often use only one verse when we ought to use four! Scripture sets us a better example; it frequently repeats its references to some one thing because, in that one thing, there are included many mercies. It would be well if the diligence in describing details which we use with regard to our troubles could be exercised upon descriptions of our mercies; for, then, we should imitate the psalmist's style, and say, "O give thanks to him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: and slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever: and Og the king of Bashan."

21, 22. And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever: even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever. Here we have the same thought put into two

verses, to show us how to dwell, with lengthened notes and repeated Hallelujahs, upon the goodness and mercy of God.

Notice how many of these verses begin with “And,” as if every mercy had been linked to another which went before it, and would be linked to another which would come after it. I like to see these “Ands.” They remind us that there is more to follow. After all that we have received from God, there is yet more to come; God has not come to the end of his mercies.

23, 24. *Who remembered us in our low estate, for his mercy endureth for ever: and hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Redemption, — what a grand note that is! What voice can ever reach its fullness and its loftiness! Let us praise the name of the Lord as we remember the price and the power with which he “hath redeemed us from our enemies.”

25. *Who giveth food to all flesh:*

There is food for you, then, poor hungry one; there is food for you, child of God. He, “who giveth food to all flesh,” can certainly give food to all spirits.

25, 26. *For his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

PSALM 136

1-3. *O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords for his mercy endureth. for ever.*

In this Psalm we have the same refrain repeated twenty- six times. The words, “for his mercy endureth for ever,” were probably intended to be taken up as a chorus by all the people in and round about the temple at their solemn festivals. But, though there is repetition here, there is no tautology, for the saints of God are so fond of God’s praise that they can never have too much of it. I am sure that, if you have ever tasted the faithful mercy of God in covenant with his people, you will never hear this sentence once too often. “For his mercy endureth for ever” will be a sound that shall be most welcome to your ears. You will observe that, first of all, the praise is to the Lord’s person: “O give thanks unto Jehovah... the

God of gods.... the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever.”
Next, the praise turns upon his works

4-9. *To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: For His mercy endureth for ever. To him that made great lights for his mercy endureth for ever: the sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever: the moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

In the works of creation, and in the dispensations of providence, we have abundant proofs of the perpetuity of God’s lovingkindness. No sooner have we experienced the blessings of the day than the mercies of the night follow quickly upon their heels. If we look up to the heavens, we have instances of God’s mercy there, in kindling the stars, and lighting the sun and moon; and if we look upon the waters, and the land that standeth above them, we still see God’s lovingkindness. That man is intensely blind who can see nothing of love and kindness in creation. You have but to open your eyes anywhere to see that the whole earth is full of the mercy of God. Still, the loudest song belongs to God’s dealings with his Church; and, therefore, in the tenth verse, we come to God’s deliverance of his peculiar people, his chosen Israel, in which we also have our share, for in Abraham’s seed all the nations of the earth are blessed this day.

10-15. *To him that smote Egypt in their first born: for his mercy endureth for ever: and brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever: with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth far ever: and made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever: but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

And you and I have experienced deliverance’s of a like kind. Our troubles have been overcome; our sins have been forgiven; we have been preserved by God’s goodness, and guided by his wisdom. Let us, therefore, sing of that covenant faithfulness, and of that immutable truth, which have never left us.

16-18. *To him which led his people through the wilderness for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: and slew famous kings for his mercy endureth for ever:*

We are far too slow to recall the special mercies of God. We have here a bright example given us, not only to remember God's goodness in the lump, but in detail. We are, as it were, to take his mercies to pieces, that we may see fresh grounds for thanksgiving in every separate section.

19-23. *Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever: and Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever: and gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever: even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Here is a song for us: "Who remembered us in our low estate." We were brought low by sin, by conviction, by ignorance, by our own powerlessness; but, low as we were, "He remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever."

"He sent his Son with power to save
From guilt, and darkness, and the grave
Wonders of grace to God belong,
Repeat his mercies in your song."

24-26. *And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of heaven for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Thus the Psalm finishes upon its keynote: "for his mercy endureth for ever." May that be the keynote both of our daily song and of our eternal hymn of praise unto the Lord! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 55, AND PSALM 136

PSALM 136

Let us make this occasion a time of praise and thanksgiving: let our hearts dance at the name of our God: let our lips give expression thereto, in joyful music.

1. *O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

That is the beginning of our praise, the essential goodness of God from which all the streams of mercy flow. Oh, deep abyss of infinite love.

2, 3. *O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

His greatness, which is beyond that of all potentates on earth or principalities in heaven, — this also is to be our joyous theme of song. His greatness and his goodness together make us magnify his name.

4. *To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Nothing is absolutely wonderful except God, and all other things are dwarfed and diminished in wondrousness as compared with him. The Seven Wonders of the World are trifles compared with the seven-million wonders of God.

5. *To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

They boasted of the Colossus that strode across the sea, but what shall we say to the heavens that span not only the earth but all the universe? And in those heavens there is mercy to be seen as well as wisdom, the adaptation of the physical world to the circumstances of man, so that there is a relation between the weight of every dewdrop and the structure of the human body.

6-9. *To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him that made great light: for his mercy endureth for ever. The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever. The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

See how these ancient godly ones loved to dwell upon a thing. When the note was “light” they did not just sing it through and have done with it, but there were choruses and repeats in their music; but the music of today is “rattle through it as fast as ever you can, and have done quickly, with it.” Our forefathers liked to linger a bit on these sweet praises of God. So did the Hebrews.” “Great lights!” Aye, but there must be the sun and the moon and the stars. They could never have enough of it: they rolled these sweet morsels under their tongue and then out upon their lips as they praised God.

10. *To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever:*

Yet it was an awful judgment, and it needs a reverent, lowly, saintly spirit to sing over even the judgments of God. Had certain theologians of the present time been present at the Red Sea they would have cried in sentimental sympathy over the Egyptians, but instead of that Miriam took a timbrel and said, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously." The fates of sinful men are of small moment as compared with the glory of God. Jehovah filleth all things, and when the heart is fully taken up with the glory of God, it learns to sing even this stern refrain: "To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever."

11-15. *And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever: with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever: and made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever: but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

See how they prolonged the strain: and what blessed exercise this is, to take mercies to pieces and examine all the details, and have a fresh verse for each particular of God's goodness to us. Glory be unto his blessed name for ever and ever.

16. *To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Therefore he will lead you through the wilderness, and bring you through great droughts, and your manna shall drop from heaven, and your waters flow from the rock. Sing then to his name, ye that are in the wilderness.

17. *To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:*

That is a terrible and tragic matter, that smiting of kings. Yes, but these singers did not groan over it. There are no less than four notes over this.

18-23. *And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever: Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever: and Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever: and gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever: even an*

heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever:

The note descends a little from the martial strain of trumpet, from smitten kings and the drowned chivalry of Egypt; but though it sinks, how it sweetens! What a soft, clear sound there is about it.

24-26. *And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

Glorious redemption! That is ever the choicest note of all. Ring that silver bell again.

This is the Christian's true promised land of great spiritual blessings. May we have faith enough to enter into the full possession of it. It is a very wonderful chapter.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 136., AND EPHESIANS 1

PSALM 137

1, 2. *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.*

Babylon was full of canals and rivers; the captive Israelites sought out lonely places where they might be away from their oppressors, and might in the company of their countrymen pour out the sad stream of their griefs and sorrows. "The rivers of Babylon" seemed congenial to them, and they mingled their tears with the flowing waters. They "sat down" as if they felt they were to be there a long while, and were not soon to go back to their own land; and they "wept" — not simply because of their banishment and their woes, but also because of the mournful condition of their beloved Zion, which had been ravaged by the Chaldeans, ploughed as a field, and given over to desolation. Some of these poor captives had been singers in the courts of the Lord's house which had been burnt with fire, and others had brought their "harps" with them into their captivity; but they could not find any music in their hearts, and therefore they fetched no melodious notes out of their harp-strings. They did not break their harps, however, for they might want them someday, so they hung them up on the weeping willows which abounded by the water-courses. Then came one of the sharpest trials

they had ever had, — a piece of bitter cruelty on the part of their oppressors, who had no compassion upon the poor prisoners whom they had taken from their own land.

3. *For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*

As no cups except those that were taken out of God's holy house would do for Belshazzar when he wanted to make himself drunk, so no music would suit these heathen captors of Israel but the songs of God's house: "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." These poor people were crestfallen and utterly broken down, yet their enemies cried, "Make mirthful music for us, sing us one of your sacred songs." They only wanted to laugh at it, or, at the very best, to listen to it simply as a piece of music that they might criticize, so they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." But the captives could not and would not sing for any such purpose. Zion's songs were not meant to be sung for mere amusement, nor were her chants intended to be made the theme of mockery and ridicule by the ungodly.

4, 5. *How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.*

"No," they said, "if we were to make mirth for the Babylonians, we should be doing serious damage to Zion, we should be traitors to Jerusalem;" so the harpers said, "Sooner than we will play a tune to make mirth for you, let our right hands become paralyzed."

6. *If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth;-*

They said it each one for himself; they would sooner be dumb than sing these sacred songs for the amusement of the ungodly revelers who had gathered round about them. Instead of a song, they offered a prayer which must have sounded terribly in the ears of those who mocked them; it was a fierce prayer, — a prayer made under a very different dispensation from that under which we live, — a prayer by a patriot who had seen his wife murdered, and his children dashed to pieces, and he prays thus: —

6, 7. *If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.*

These Edomites, who ought to have been like brothers to the Jews, were their most ferocious enemies, and they stirred up the Chaldeans to be more terribly cruel than they otherwise would have been.

8, 9. *O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed: happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.*

For these people had gone all over the world, wherever they could, murdering and mutilating. Tens of thousands of little children had they brutally killed, multitudes of women had they ravished, a vast number of cities had they destroyed. They were the scourges of all nations; and, therefore, moved to righteous indignation, the Jews felt that anybody who should overthrow that city of Babylon, and put to death its inhabitants, would be doing good service to the rest of mankind. And, mark you, all this came to pass in due time. When Cyrus turned aside the waters of the river which had been Babylon's great protection, and left the river-bed quite dry, he marched his troops right into the center of the city; and when the Babylonians, to defend themselves and a part of the city, were driven to great straits, we are told by historians that they themselves destroyed their own wives and children, calling them useless mouths, that they might be able to defend themselves a little longer from the sword of Cyrus, so that, literally, it came to pass that the man who had destroyed his own children thought himself happy to be rid of them that he might maintain the fight. How dreadful is God when he deals with nations that have been cruel and ferocious! Go ye to Babylon this day, and see what ruinous heaps he hath made, what desolation he hath wrought in that land.

PSALM 138

1. *I will praise thee with my whole heart; before the gods will I sing praise unto thee.*

We cannot be too much occupied in the praises of God. He rightly deserves all the thanksgivings we can bring to him. It is the great engagement of heaven; let us begin the music here. If we would be heavenly-minded on earth, we must be filled with the praises of God. Notice how David resolves that in praising God, it shall be done heartily. "I will praise thee with my whole heart." If

there is ever a thing that ought to be done enthusiastically, it is the praising of God. I cannot bear to hear God's praises chirped out elegantly by polite people, as if they were ashamed of what they were doing, or to see a mass of pipes and bellows left by itself to blow the praises of God by machinery, instead of men and women praising him with their heart. Oh! how acceptable it must be to God to hear the heart speak. As for the tongue and voice, however sweet their sound, there is little in it. It is the heart. Soul-music is the soul of music. "I will praise thee with my whole heart." See how bold the psalmist is about this. "Before the gods," he says, "will I do it. Before the angels, before the kings and great ones that think themselves little gods. I will speak to the honour of Jehovah's name awe, and in the idol temples, where their worshippers will be greatly wroth about it. I will praise thee with my whole heart. Before the gods will I present praise unto thee."

2. I will worship toward thy holy temple,

That was God's way of worship. In the old times there was the shrine of God. There was the one altar which would render praise acceptable. David takes care to render praise to God in God's way: and that is a great principle in worship — to avoid will-worship, and to endeavor to present sacrifices such as God prescribes. "I will worship toward the holy temple." What blessed reasons are here given for praising. "I will praise thee for thy loving-kindness." Is not that the grandest word in any language — loving-kindness? It is a compound of perfect sweets to make up yet more perfect sweetness — kindness and love mixed together. A marvellous blend? Loving-kindness gave the promise, but truth takes care to see it fulfilled. "So will I praise thy name."

2. And praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word

That is, "thy word of promise — thy gospel which thou hast applied with power to my soul. Thou hast made it to seem lustrous beyond anything else I have ever seen of thee, O my God; therefore, will I magnify thee, because thou hast magnified thy word."

2, 3. Above all thy name. In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.

Ah! this is what ties a man to praise. Answered prayer is sure to lead us to adoring gratitude. Notice that he says that God answered

him, not by taking away his trouble, but by strengthening him with strength in his soul. You see it does not matter whether he takes away the load, or strengthens the back to bear it. And that is often the method by which he answers his servants' cries. Not strength of body, perhaps he would have liked that, but strength of soul. And oh! when the soul is strong bodily weakness is but a very small drawback. Nay, the weakness of the body may sometimes tend to illustrate the more the greatness of the power of God. Let us read that verse again, for some of us can set our seal to it. "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul."

4, 5. *All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O LORD, when they hear the words of thy mouth. Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the LORD: for great is the glory of the LORD.*

David was a king, and kings would learn from him. You and I are not kings, but we may exercise a very beneficial influence in our own circle of acquaintances if we make bold to praise God when others can hear us. Let us speak well of his name. Wherever we go, let us have a good word for our Master. When others want to know what sort of God we serve, may they gather it from our holy joy and exultant confidence at all times.

6. *Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.*

A glance of them is quite enough for him. He has no wish to know any more about them: he so hates them. Nothing can separate God from a soul so much as pride. It is that which causes the rejection of the gospel. Men will not have the humbling gospel — the sinners' gospel. They are too fine, too good, too lofty, and so they do not want God, neither does his soul desire them. "For the proud he knoweth afar off."

7. *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me:*

He was a king but he had his trouble. A throne is not a place wherein we can shelter ourselves from trial. "Though I walk in the midst of trouble" — like a man that is to rush through a fire — "yet I shall be safe," saith he "for thou wilt revive me — give me new life. When it seems as if my life would be destroyed, thou wilt quicken me again."

7, 8. Thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.

Note the confident spirit that runs through all this. There is a childlike trust in God, and there is a gladsome praise of God for what has been already received at his hands. Oh! for more of this spirit — the spirit that makes music to the Lord for the past, and trusteth him for the present and the future. Some more blessed words of comfort from: —

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 138.; ISAIAH 55:1-11; ROMANS 8:28-39.

PSALM 138

1. I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee.

“Gods or no gods, whatever they may be, ‘I will praise thee with my whole heart,’ I will not be ashamed to declare my confidence in Jehovah, whoever may listen to me.”

2. I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

Now was his time to speak. The gods of the heathen had their worshippers; then, should Jehovah be deserted by his loyal subjects? “No,” says David, “I will worship thee, and I will praise thee, whoever may oppose me.”

3. In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.

What worshipper of idols could ever say that of his god? “Ears have they,” but they bear not the cries of their worshippers. “Hands have they,” but they cannot deliver those who cry to them. “Feet have they,” but they cannot come to the help of their votaries. But David declares that God had heard him in the day of his trouble, and strengthened him with strength in his soul.

4. All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord, when they hear the words of thy mouth.

He felt that he had had such good things to say concerning God, such blessed words of God to make known, that even the kings of

the earth, when they began to listen to him, would become attentive, and would even become converts, and begin to praise Jehovah with him.

5. *Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord: for great is the glory of the Lord.*

Think of that,— kings singing in the ways of the Lord, crowned princes becoming choristers in God’s service. Someone has said that there are few in heaven who wore crowns on earth; and I am afraid it is true that, of all who are crowned on earth, few ever get to that land where all are kings and priests unto God. To have a crown on earth, and a crown above, is a rare thing; but David says that these kings “shall sing in the ways of Jehovah: for great is the glory of Jehovah;” and they shall be overpowered by that glory,— melted, subdued, wooed, won, converted by its power.

6, 7. *Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: —*

He was a king, yet he expected trouble; and do you complain when it comes to your cottage, after it had been to David’s palace? “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me:

7. *Thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me.*

He expected first to be revived, and afterwards to be protected. He believed that God would stretch out his hand, as men do when they make a supreme effort, and put forth all their force: “Thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies.” David also expected ultimate preservation: “‘Thy right hand shall save me.’ Thou wilt do it; dexterously, readily, gladly, wilt thou do it: ‘Thy right hand shall save me.’”

8. *The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me:*

“All that has to do with me — my business, my family, my work, my temporal and my eternal interests,— ‘that which concerneth me,’ and that which troubles me, moves my heart with the deepest concern, Jehovah will perfect.”

8. *Thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.*

And he will not do it; he will carry on unto completion the work which he has begun, blessed be his holy name!

PSALM 138:1-6

A Psalm of David.

1. *I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee.*

Before the heathen gods, however highly exalted — I will sing thy praises so in their very teeth; and the magistrates and princes and kings who think themselves gods on earth — I will not fear them or be silenced by them.

2. *I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.*

For thou wert far more glorious in revelation than in creation — thy promise did greatly transcend every other display of thyself above all we have ever known or conceived of thee. Thou hast magnified thyself by thy covenant of grace, and thy works of grace toward thy people. For this worship and praise are for ever due!

3. *In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.*

That is a thing to make a man King — when in the day of trouble God comes to him, hears his prayer and works his deliverance, when none else can help. God's rescues demand our grateful songs: his deliverances our new anthems of exultant praise.

4. *All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O LORD, when they hear the words of thy mouth.*

When thy gospel is preached, and they know it, they shall count it their honour to honour thee. It is ignorance of its glory and grace that makes silence possible: but to hear it as God's word of caring love is to be compelled to extol.

5. *Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord: for great is the glory of the LORD.*

David was a king, and he danced before the ark, and he anticipated the time when other kings should not be ashamed of exuberant rejoicing in the King of kings. Oh, that it were come! May the Lord hasten it in his own time, and the choral hosts of heaven be swelled by the presence of the crowned monarchs of earth!

6. *Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly:*

That is a sweet text. One who was a scoffer met a humble child of God one morning, and he said to him, “Tell me, is your God a great God or a little God,” and the poor man said, “Sir, he is both, for, though he is so great that the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, yet he makes himself so little that he condescends to dwell in my poor heart.” Ah, it was sweetly said. He who fills the heavens, nay all things, will be our abiding guest and friend if we will but welcome him.

6. *But the proud he knoweth afar off.*

He has enough of them. He does not want them to come near to him. When they are miles away he knows all about them. They make a fair show, but he sees that it is all a fable and pretence. He knows them — afar off!

PSALM 139

1. *O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.*

God does not need to “search” us, for that implies a want of knowledge, a knowledge obtained by search. But the meaning of the text is, that God knows us as well as if he had examined us through and through, just as an excise officer searches a house to find contraband goods. “O Lord, thou has searched me, and known me.”

2. *Thou knowest my downsitting, and mine uprising,*

“Such common-place things as these, my sitting down at home, my rising up to go to my business, thou, O Lord, dost observe and know even such minor matters as these.”

2. *Thou understandest my thought afar off.*

“Before the thought has entered my mind, thou knowest what it will be. When I run far away from thee in my own apprehension, thou art still so near to me that thou canst hear my mind think, and thou knowest the meaning of my thought when I try to think crookedly.”

3. *Thou compassest my path and my lying down,*

“Thou surroundest me when I go out, or when I rest at home; when I labour, or when I sleep. Thou dost set a ring-fence round about my every action and my non-action, too.”

3. *And art acquainted with all my ways.*

“Thou knowest all that I do, as one that is most intimate and familiar with me. Thou, great God, ‘ art acquainted with all my ways.”

4. *For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*

“Not only the words of my tongue, but the words in my tongue, are known to thee, O Lord.” As we sang just now,

“My thoughts, before they are my own,
Are to my God distinctly known;
He knows the words I mean to speak,
Ere from my opening lips they break.”

5. *Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.*

“I am taken as in an ambush: I am held captive; I cannot get away. ‘Thou hast beset me behind and before — more than that, thou hast arrested me, ‘laid thine hand upon me.”

6. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.*

“Thou hast it, but I cannot reach it. Thou hast it, but ‘I cannot attain unto it.”

7. 8. *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:*

For so it runs in the Hebrew. The translators put in the word “art”, as you can see by the italics. “If I ascend up into heaven, thou there,” that is all the psalmist says.

8. *If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou.*

Again it is more emphatic without the words supplied by the translators. “Thou, O God, art in the depths as well as in the heights, Thou art everything in every place, all in all art thou.”

9. 10. *If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me,*

“I cannot go anywhere except thou dost enable me to go.”

10. 11. *And thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.*

“There is no escaping that way, for the night shall be transformed into light; and I shall be as clearly perceived in the darkness as in the daylight.”

12. *Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee;*

It hides from eyes which are but mortal; but thou art pure spirit, and thou discernest not through the impinging of light upon the retina of the eye.”

12. *But the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

Now the psalmist goes back to the very foundation and origin of his being.

13. *For thou hast possessed my reins:*

“Thou art within the secret portions of my bodily frame.”

13. 14. *Thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made:*

Hence Galen, the oldest and the best-known of the ancient surgeons, was wont to say that an undevout anatomist must be mad, as another said that an undevout astronomer was mad, for there is such a marvellous display of skill and wisdom, delicacy and force, in the making of a man, that we may each one say, “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

14-16. *Marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.*

Still he dwells upon his birth, and all that went before it, and he did well to speak of those marvels. We are too apt to forget God’s goodness to us in our infant days; but we should remember that we come not into this world without a Creator, and in that Creator we find a Friend, the best we have ever had, the best we ever can have. Oh, for grace never to wish to stray away from him in whom we live, and move, and have our being!

17. *How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!*

How often God has thought of each one of us! Remember that, if you were the only man in all the world, he would not think more of you than he does now that you are only one of myriads of myriads. The infinite mind of God is not divided by the multiplicity of the objects brought before it, but his whole mind goes forth to

contemplate each individual. What deep thoughts, what bright thoughts, what faithful thoughts, God has had concerning us! ‘How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!’”

18. *If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.*

“Whether I sleep or wake, thou art with me; but, better still, I am with thee. Ere I fell asleep, I put my soul into thy hands; and when I awoke, I found it there.”

19. *Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God:*

It cannot be that God, who sees everything, will for ever endure the wickedness of men. It cannot be that he will suffer all crime and villainy and blasphemy to escape with impunity: “Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God.”

19. *Depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.*

“I do not want to be with you, or to have you with me, in the day when God metes out vengeance upon the ungodly.”

20. 22. *For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.*

We are bound to love our own enemies, but we are not bound to love God’s enemies. We are to wish them, as enemies, a complete overthrow; but to wish them, as men, a gracious conversion, that they may obtain God’s pardon, and become his friends, and followers, and servants.

23. *Search me, O God, —*

Is it not wonderful that what the psalmist started with as a doctrine, now becomes a prayer? Before, he said, “O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.” Now he cries, “Search me, O God,”

23. *And know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:*

Every attribute of God works for the good of those who trust him; if you are a believer, you may ask for his infinite power to protect you, and his infinite knowledge to search you.

24. *And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

May God first make that our prayer, and then graciously hear it, for his great name's sake! Amen.

PSALM 139

May the all-seeing God, of whom this Psalm speaks, look down upon us and bless us richly while we read it!

1. *O LORD thou hast searched me, and known me.*

“Known me perfectly, far better than I know myself. Thou hast made an inquisition, and investigated every secret thing concerning me: ‘Thou hast searched me, and known me.’”

2. *Thou knowest my downsitteing and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.*

“Before I think it, while as yet it is not actually my thought, while it is still unformed, and far away, thou understandest it. Thou not only knowest what it is, but thou understandest it; — the motive from which it springs, the state of mind out of which it arises, and whereunto it tendeth: ‘Thou understandest my thought afar off’”

3. *Thou compassest my path —*

“Thou art all round me,— behind, before, above, beneath, “Awake, asleep, at home, abroad, I am surrounded still with God.”

3. *And my lying down,—*

“When wearied by my journey I lie down to rest, thou dost still bless my lying down.”

3. *And art acquainted with all my ways.*

“I cannot tell thee anything which thou dost not know; nor can I hide anything from thee. Whatsoever I have done, or am doing, or shall do, ‘Thou art acquainted with all my ways.’”

4. *For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*

He knows the words I mean to speak,
Ere from my opening lips they break.

God sees the word that is lying quietly on the tongue as well as the word which has been uttered by the tongue. “Thou knowest it altogether.” God’s knowledge is not partial or imperfect. He never misjudges any, for he is acquainted with every part of every man.

5. *Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.*

“Thou hast come so near me that thou dost touch me. Thou not only knowest my thoughts and my words, but thou dost come into contact with me. Thou dost know me as I know a thing when I feel it with my hand: ‘Thou hast laid thine hand upon me.’”

6, 7. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit?*

Not that David desired to go away from God, but he wished to show the impossibility of escaping from the eye of God: “Whither shall I go from thy spirit?”

7. *Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*

“Thou art everywhere, and thy far-seeing eye will behold me in every place; vain is it, therefore, for me to think that I can ever flee from thy presence.” Is it not a very striking thought that every sin is committed in the presence of God? He must be a very bold rebel who would insult his monarch to his face; men are generally on their best behavior when they stand upon the palace floor; yet the whole earth is but the habitation of the great King eternal, immortal, invisible, and every time we sin, we sin in his very presence, and with his eye resting upon us.

8-10. *If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.*

Well did Dr. Watts write,—

If mounted on a morning ray,
I fly beyond the western sea,
Thy swifter hand would first arrive,
And there arrest thy fugitive.

There is no hope of escaping from God by any speed to which we may attain, for if we could fly with the rapidity of light, yet would Jehovah be beforehand with us; his hand would lead us, and his right hand would hold us.

11. *If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.*

It shall be light to the eyes of God, for he depends not upon the light in order that he may see. Light is a most welcome aid to our poor optics; but God sees just as well in the darkness: “Even the night shall be light about me.”

12. *Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

This is a very commonplace truth, and yet how seldom do men realize it! They still fancy that, when the night comes on, and they are not perceived by mortal eyes, they may do what they will; but there is no curtain in the night that can hide a deed of guilt from the eye of the omniscient Jehovah: "The darkness and the light are both alike to thee."

Almighty God, thy piercing eye
Strikes through the shades of night;
And our most secret actions lies
All open to thy sight.

13. *For thou hast possessed my reins: —*

"The innermost parts of my being,— thou hast possessed them as thine own. Thou knowest as much about them as a man knows of the rooms in his own house: "Thou hast possessed my reins:""

13, 14. *Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; —*

That is a very sweet thing for the psalmist to say. Just when he felt stricken with awe by reason of this august attribute of the omniscience of Jehovah, he looks up to his God, and says, "I will praise thee;"

14. *For I am fearfully and wonderfully made:*

Anyone who understands anatomy will tell you that man is strangely formed. So fearfully are we made that our life stands in constant jeopardy; it looks as if every breath might be our last, and every pulse might speedily end our life. You cannot examine a blood vessel — especially some of the very small ones — through a microscope, without being utterly astonished. Any medical man will tell you that there are many times in an hour,—perhaps even in a minute,— in which a very simple thing would put our life in imminent peril of destruction; truly, we are "fearfully and wonderfully made."

Our life contains a thousand springs,
And dies if one be gone.
Strange, that a harp of thousand strings
Should creep in tune so long.

Every man is a world of wonders; he need not go abroad for miracles, for he is himself a marvellous and miraculous combination.

14. *Marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.*

How there can be a compound of spirit and matter,— how the earth on which we tread should enter into our composition, and yet we should be akin to angels, how there can be something about us that links us with the dust, yet much about us that joins us to God himself,— these are extraordinary things which we do not understand. Where is the point in which the spirit touches materialism? How is it that the will can move the hand or the finger? How does spirit act on matter? Those are questions much more easily asked than answered.

15. *My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought —*

Embroidered, as it were, with a needle. So extraordinary is the body of man, that it may be compared to the needlework of God: “curiously wrought”

15, 16. *In the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members mere written,—*

Just as an architect sketches his plan for a building, and specifies so much of this and that, so the psalmist represents God as writing down in a book all the members of our body.

16. *Which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.*

God mapped out what he intended that we should be, even when as yet we were not in existence, and from our earliest days he cared for us. If we look back upon our infancy, that considerable period of life in which we were utterly helpless, and could do nothing whatever for ourselves, it ought to check our unbelief, because, if God took charge of us then, and found means for our protection and our upgrowing when we were but little babes, if we should live to a second infancy, we may fairly trust that God will take care of us again; and if we should ever, through sickness, be reduced to such a helpless state that we can do nothing for ourselves, yet he that cared for us before we saw the light, and when we saw it with feeble trembling eyes, will take care of us still.

17-19. *How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee. Surely Thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: —*

It must be so; God cannot let sinners continue to live, and provoke him to his face. He must, one day, take down the sword of justice, unsheathe it, and smite the foes of righteousness: “Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God:”

19. *Depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.*

“Get you gone, lest, when he comes to smite you, I should have to see you die.”

20-22. *For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.*

We are to love our own enemies, but we are not to love God’s enemies. We are to forgive our personal enemies, but we cannot forgive God’s enemies. That man loves not truth who does not hate a lie; and he loves not the right who has no anger against wrong. We are living in an age in which we are practically told that truth and error are the same, that the devil’s lie and the Divine Revelation may lie down together. If we will not endorse this falsehood, men call us bigoted or dogmatic. Bless the Lord, we mean to be a great deal more dogmatic than we have been, and to stick even closer to the truth of God than we have hitherto done, if that be possible.

23, 24. *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

That is a blessed prayer; may God hear it in the case of each one of us, for his dear Son’s sake! Amen.

PSALM 139

In this Psalm, David praises God by specially dwelling upon the one attribute of omniscience. If we really wish to praise God, we must think of him as he is, and it is the best praise that we can render to God to describe him as he is; and any one of his many attributes is so full of glory that, if we give due honour to it, we shall have much to say upon it.

1. *O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.*

It is true that God knows everything, but that is not what David says here. He makes a personal application of the universal truth: "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me." He does not talk about God's knowledge of other men, but he speaks to God concerning himself: "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me ;" — "thou hast searched me as if thou wert looking for contraband goods. Thou hast ransacked me, thou hast gone down into my very heart, and hast spread out every secret part of my being: 'Thou hast searched me, and known me.'"

"Lord, thou hast search'd and seen me through,
Thine eye commands with piercing view
My rising and my resting hours,
My heart and flesh, with all their powers."

2. *Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.*

"What I do, and what I do not do; my downsitting for rest, and my uprising for action ; — thou knowest me altogether, my most trivial deeds, and my most important movements. My thoughts are so well known to thee that, even before I think them, thou knowest what they will be. Thou needest not to come near to me in order to know me; so strong is thine eye that if thou only lookest at me from a vast distance as a man looks at a star in the midnight airy, ' thou understandest my thought afar off.' What I think, and why I think it, whether it be sorrowful or hopeful, thou understandest my thought. Sometimes, I cannot understand it myself, but thou always understandest it."

3. *Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.*

"Thou hast put a ring round me both in my stayings and my goings. I go to sleep, but thou dost not sleep. I cannot think of thee while I slumber, but thou dost think of me, and thou ' art acquainted with all my ways.'"

"Great God, thy penetrating eye
Pervades my inmost powers;
With awe profound my wondering soul
Falls prostrate, and adores.
To be encompass'd round with God,
The holy and the just;

Arm'd with omnipotence to save,
Or crush me into dust !
Oh, how tremendous is the thought !
Deep may it be impress'd !
And may the Spirit firmly grave,
This truth within my breast !”

4. *For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*

“Thou not only knowest what it is, but thou knowest all about it; — even the word which I have not yet spoken, the word that is in my tongue, as well as the word that is on my tongue. Those seeds of speech, that have as yet not grown into words, thou knowest them altogether.”

5. *Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.*

“Like men lying in ambush, ‘thou hast beset me behind and before.’ All that I have ever done, and all that I shall ever do, thou knowest it all. I am like one under arrest, upon whom the officer lays his hand so that he may have no opportunity of escaping. I am in thy grip; thou hast taken such a firm hold upon me that I cannot get away from thee. In another sense, I am like a child enfolded in his mother’s arms, for thou hast ‘laid thine hand upon me.’”

6. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me! it is too high, I cannot attain unto it.*

“I cannot climb up to thy glorious throne; the very lowest step of it is far higher than my feet can reach: ‘I cannot attain unto it.’”

7. *Whither shall I go from thy spirit! or whither shall I flee from thy presence ?*

“I do not want to do so, but it would be quite impossible for me to flee from thy presence even if I wished to do so. Neither by steady marching, nor by rapid flight, can I get away from thee.”

8. *If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:*

The Hebrew is, “Thou there;” as if there was nothing else there but God.

8. *If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.*

This seemed even more wonderful to the psalmist than that God was in heaven; so he put in a “behold “ — “ Behold, thou.”

9. *If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; —*

“If I fly on the wings of light, which travels with inconceivable rapidity,” —

10. *Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.*

“I cannot go there except by thy leading, and I shall not be there except by thine uplifting. There is no way by which I can keep away from God even if I try to do so. If, instead of living in the light, I seek to hide myself in the darkness, what then ?”

11. *If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.*

“The very night shall change its nature, and turn from darkness into light.”

12. *Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

See, my dear brethren, how we dwell continually under the inspection of God. You have seen bees in a glass hive, and watched all their movements, or you have put an insect under a powerful microscope, and examined every part of it. Even so doth the omniscient God watch and examine you; nothing is done by you that he does not observe. The poet speaks of the fierce light that beats about the throne of man, but you dwell in that far fiercer light which beats about the throne of God.

13. *For thou hast possessed my reins:*

“Those secret organs of my body which I cannot see, and whose working I can only imperfectly comprehend.”

13. *Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.*

“Even before I came on the stage of action, thou wast exercising wondrous care over me.”

14. *I will praise thee; —*

That is a good resolution for each one of us, as well as the psalmist, to make. As God sees me, let me praise him; it will be pleasing to him to hear me praising him: “I will praise thee; “ —

14. *For I am fearfully and wonderfully made : —*

Nobody can rightly study the anatomy of the human body, and see the beautiful arrangement of the various veins, and nerves, and

sinews, and muscles, and bones, without saying with the psalmist, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made: “ —

14. *Marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.*

To study God’s marvelous works, you need not go abroad; for they can be plainly seen in your own body. This earthly house of your tabernacle, in which you dwell so long as you are in this world, is a masterpiece of divine wisdom and skill.

15. *My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.*

God made us in his secret workshop by a marvelous method of divine power.

16. *Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.*

God’s wonderful foreknowledge enabled him to know us even before we knew ourselves, or anyone else knew us; and in the very making of us, the creation of our body and mind and spirit, God was beforehand with us.

17. *How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God ! how great is the sum of them !*

“I love to remember that thou, my God, art thinking of me. I am not distressed or alarmed by that recollection; I do not say, ‘ How terrible are thy thoughts unto me, O God! ‘but, How precious’ — how consoling, how full of promises of blessing to me,’ — are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!”

18. *If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.*

“Thou dost lull me to sleep, and thou dost awake me in the morning; and when I open my eyes, thou art still there.” Happy believer, who is always with God! Why should not you and I, dear friends, always be consciously in the presence of God? We are never right unless we are in that condition; and if we ever begin to forget God, we are in a wrong state of heart. If we can live, from day to day, without realizing that God is near us, we are falling into a sad and dangerous condition.

19. *Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God:*

It cannot be that God has seen all their wickedness, and read their evil thoughts, and yet will spare them. When men offend in the very presence of the judge, it is easy work for him to try them.

19. *Depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.*

“Ye men of blood, ye men stained with the blood of your fellows, get away from me, for I do not want to be harboring criminals. God sees my company as well as myself, so depart from me?”

20. *For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain.*

David could not bear even the thought that men should insult such a God ; — a want of reverence to the All-seeing One was altogether unbearable to him; so he bade those who were guilty of such wickedness to take themselves away from him.

21, 22. *Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.*

We are to love our own enemies, but we are not to love God’s enemies, nor willingly to mix with them. How can Christian men associate with the lewd and irreverent without becoming partakers of their evil deeds? Let us take note of what David says, and realize that we cannot be the friends of God if we are the friends of God’s enemies. Now the psalmist comes back to his key-note. He began the Psalm with the declaration, “O Lord, thou hast searched me;” and now he prays, —

23. *Search me, O God, and know my heart:*

“Thou hast searched me, O God; but I pray thee to do it again, and to keep on doing it; never take thy great search-light away from me.”

23. *Try me, and know my thoughts:*

“I cannot hide them from thee, and would not if I could.”

24. *And see if there be any wicked way in me,*

“Lord, look for the dross, to consume it; look for the spots, to wash them away.”

24. *And lead me in the way everlasting.*

“Amen,” — our hearts say, “Amen, — so let it be.”

PSALM 139

This is a Psalm we can never read too often. It will be to us one of the greatest safeguards against sin if we have its teaching constantly before our mind's eye, and the teaching of this Psalm is simply this, "Thou God seest me."

1. *O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.*

Thou hast looked into my most secret parse. The most intricate labyrinths of my spirit are all observed of thee. Thou hast not searched, and yet been unable to discover the secret of my nature but thou hast searched me and known me. Thy search has been an efficient one, thou hast read the secrets of my soul,

2. *Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off.*

It is a common enough thing to sit down and to rise up and I myself oftentimes scarce know why I do the one or the other, but thou knowest and understandest all. "Thou understandest my thought afar off." My heart forms a thought that never comes to a word or an act, but thou not only dost perceive it, but thou dost translate it; thou understandest my thought.

3. *Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.*

I am surrounded by thee as by a ring of observers.

4. *For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*

Not only the words on my tongue, but those that slumber in my tongue, the unspoken words, thou knowest them perfectly and altogether.

5. *Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.*

Thy presence amounts to actual contact. Thou dost not only see, but touch, like the physician, who does not merely look at the wound, but by-and-bye comes to probe it. So dost thou probe my wounds, and see the depths of my sins.

6, 7. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*

It seems as if the first impulse was to fly away from a God whose attributes were so lofty. 'Twas but a transient impression, yet David words it so.

8, 10. *If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold, me.*

How swift he supposes his flight to be, as swift as the light, for he borrows the wings of the morning, and yet the hand of God was controlling his destiny even then. As Watts rhymes it —

“If mounted on the morning ray,
I fly beyond the western sea,
Thy swifter hand should first arrive,
And there arrest thy fugitive.”

11, 12. *If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

For, mystery of mysteries, and more wondrous still, thou not only dost observe, but thou always hast observed, and thou hast not only observed my well-formed being and my visible life but before I had a being thou didst observe what I should be, and when I was yet in embryo thine all-observing eye watched me.

13-16. *For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect, and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.*

In so vivid a manner doth our holy poet sing of the omniscience of God with regard to our creation. Before we had breath he formed and fashioned us.

17. *How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!*

How many thoughts has God towards us! We cannot count them, and how kind are those thoughts — we cannot estimate them — how precious, how great!

18. *If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.*

I suppose I had finished the tale, had counted up all thy thoughts to me, and then fell asleep. I should then but begin to count again, for thou continuest to thrust out mercies from thy hand. My God, my numeration shall never overtake thee, much less my gratitude, and the service that is thy due!

19. *Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.*

“Surely” — here is a solemn inference from the omniscience of God — “surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God.” Thou hast seen their wickedness. They have committed their wickedness in thy presence. Thou wilt need no witnesses, no jury, thou art all in one. Art thou not the Judge of all the earth, and shalt thou not do right? “Surely thou wilt destroy the wicked, O God.” Then I desire not to have those in my company who are condemned criminals, and are soon to be executed. “Depart from me, therefore, ye bloody men.” See how this sets David upon purging his company and keeping himself clean in his associations, since God, who sees all, and will surely punish, would hold it to be evil on the part of his servant to be found associating with rebellious men.

20-22. *For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.*

We are bound to love our own enemies, but not God’s enemies, since they are haters of all that is good and all that is true, and the essentially good One himself. We love them as our fellow-beings, but we hate them as haters of God.

23, 24. *Search me, O God. and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

PSALM 139:1-18

1. *O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.*

“Thou hast explored me, as men dig in mines, and make subterranean excavations. Thou hast searched into my secret parts, and known me.”

2. *Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,*

“My simplest acts, those which I scarcely premeditated.”

2. *Thou understandest my thought afar off.*

“Before I think it, when I think it, and when I forget it, thou dost understand my every thought.”

3. *Thou compassest my path and my lying down,*

Making a ring around me, so that I am entirely under thine observation. My roving and my resting are both known to thee.”

3. *And art acquainted with all my ways.*

“My habits, and the exceptions from my habits, are all known to thee.”

4. *For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*

“When it is in my tongue, and not spoken, like a seed sown, hidden away, not yet sprouted, thou, O Jehovah, knowest it altogether!”

5. *Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.*

“I am like a prisoner, with guards before me and behind me, and the officer’s hand upon my shoulder all the while. Thou hast arrested me, O Lord; I can never get away from thee.”

6. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain up to it.*

“I believe it, but I cannot understand it; even my imagination cannot picture it to me.”

7. *Wither shall I go from thy spirit?*

“If I want to do so, if I desire to avoid thee, where can I go to escape from thine omnipresent Spirit?”

7, 8. *Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:*

The true glory of that bright world.

8. *If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.*

“The terror of that place of woe, in the land of death-shadow and darkness, thou art living, whoever else is dead. If I make my abode in Hades, in Hell, thou art there.”

9, 10. *If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me,*

“If the breath of the morning breeze should bear me far away across the pathless sea, thou art there before me; if I ride upon a flash of light, thou art swifter than the sunbeam: even there shall thy hand lead me.” The lone missionary in the furthest parts of the earth is led by God. When, he knows not his way, God leads him; and when he has no companion to cheer him Gods hand upholds him. What a comfort to any of you who have to journey far away from your kindred! You cannot be alone, for God is there; be of good comfort, and go as bravely as if you walked the crowded streets of this great city.

10-12. *And thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

It is impossible to conceive that God should need the light in order to see. He can see as well in the midnight shades as in the blaze of noon. Let no man think that he may sin in secret, because he is not seen of the eye of man; God’s eye is on him in the dark as much as in the light.

13, 14. *For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.*

He was no agnostic, he never dreamed of being a know-nothing.

15-17. *My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!*

How sweet to be thought of by God! How charming and how cheering to be the perpetual object of the Lord’s thoughts! The psalmist does not tell us how precious are God’s thoughts; but he

sets a note of admiration to them: "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" He does not try to calculate the total of their value; but he says, "How great is the sum of them!"

18. *If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.*

"Thou hast thought of me when I was asleep, and when I wake, I think of thee." Happy living, happy dying, to feel that, if we never wake again on earth, we shall wake up with God! How precious it is to think that when good and useful men fall asleep, when they awake, they are for ever with the Lord! Our turn will come soon, my brothers and sisters. May it be our portion to die in harness, and to be taken away while yet we have the light of God's sustenance resting upon our work!

PSALM 140

To the Chief Musician, a Psalm of David. Very likely this Psalm was written by David while he was being hunted about by Saul, and while all manner of falsehoods were being spoken against him. He therefore comforts himself in his God. He writes this Psalm, and he means to have it sung, and sung well; so he dedicates it "to the chief Musician." There are some parts of our life which are so crowded with urgent necessity, and so full of divine mercy that we feel that, if we ever get through them, we will make a song about our deliverance, and dedicate that song unto God through "the chief Musician."

1. *Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man;*

He is wicked at heart, and violent in his temper. Whenever we meet with such an adversary, we have good reason to cry to God: "Deliver me: preserve me." Yet, if we must have enemies, we prefer that they should be bad men; we do not wish to have a child of God against us; if we must have an antagonist, we would much rather that he should be one who is "evil" and "violent."

2. *Which imagine mischief's in their heart; continually are they gathered together for war.*

It goes hard with a peace-loving man — a man of quiet spirit, — when he is beset by those whose very heart is set on mischief, and

who cannot meet one another without conspiring to prepare for some fresh form of battle.

3. *They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.*

Before a serpent strikes any object, its tongue is in quick motion. If you ever see a cobra when he is angry, you will notice that his tongue darts to and fro, as if impatient to sting; and the psalmist here, writing of the tongue of the ungodly, remarks how quickly it moves. They seem to have sharpened it — to have prepared it — for all manner of mischief. “Adders’ poison” — the poison of the deadliest known serpent in the East — “is under their lips.” Perhaps you think that this is a very dreadful description of some remarkably bad man; so it is, but remember that, when Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, wishes to describe us all, both Jews and Gentiles, he quotes this very passage, and says, “The poison of asps is under their lips.”

There is poison in our mouths still unless grace has taken it away. We, too, shall soon be speaking evil, and talking slanderously, if the grace of God does not keep our tongues and our lips.

4, 5. *Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have planned to overthrow my goings. The proud have hid a snare for me,-*

“They have put it where I cannot see it; I do not know where it is, nor what it is; but know that they want to lead me into such sin that they can afterwards turn round upon me, and accuse me for it: ‘The proud have hid a snare for me,’” —

5. *And cords; they have spread a net by the wayside;-*

“Close to where I am walking, so that, if I go even an inch out of the way, I shall be caught in it. They seem to be tempting me in my usual course of life: ‘They have spread a net by the wayside;’” —

5. *They have set gins for me. Selah.*

As men try to ensnare poor birds in all kinds of traps, so the ungodly sometimes seek the destruction of the righteous by setting many snares for them.

6. *I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God:*

Ah! that was the right thing to do, — to leave the ungodly and their traps, and go straight away to God: “I said unto the Lord, Thou art my God.”

6, 7. *Hear the voice of my supplications, O Lord. O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.*

“When the darts flew thick and fast, and when the battleaxe came down with a mighty crash, ‘Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.’” This Psalm reminds me of that passage in the song of Deborah and Barak: “O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.” What wonders we also have been enabled to do by the upholding and preserving grace of God!

8. *Grant not, O LORD, the desires of the wicked: further not his wicked device; lest they exalt themselves. Selah.*

If it seemed that God’s providence was helping them against the righteous, they would be too proud to be borne with; they would lift up their heads on high, and say, “See how God is with us, how he permits us to have our way.”

9. *As for the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them.*

This may be read as a prophecy in the future tense: “The mischief of their own lips shall cover them.”

10. *Let burning coals fall upon them :-*

Or, “Burning coals shall fall upon them.”

10. *Let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again.*

The Psalmist doubtless had before his mind’s eye the picture of Sodom, where burning coals fell on the guilty cities, and where men stumbled into the fire, and when they tried to escape, fell into the deep slime pits, and perished. And, truly, it is but just that, if men lie, and slander, and try to tempt the righteous to their destruction, they should fall into the pits that they have themselves digged.

11. *Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth:*

Neither shall he be; the man who is glib of tongue, and who uses that facility of speech for the destruction of the characters of godly men, shall never be established.

11. *Evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him.*

His own dogs shall eat him; he was a huntsman against the righteous, and, behold, the evil of his own mouth shall turn upon him to devour him: "Evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him."

12. *I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.*

We may always leave such matters with the Lord. God is the poor man's Executor, and the proud man's Executioner. He will take care of the oppressed, and such as are down-trodden.

13. *Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence.*

Now let us read the next Psalm, which is to much the same effect.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 140 and 141.

PSALM 141

1. *LORD, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee.*

You see how a child of God prays when he is in trouble. David says, "I cry unto thee," and then the second time, "I cry unto thee." And he cried for God as well as to him: "Make haste unto me." The very best thing you can do, when you cannot help yourself, is to cry unto God, for he will help you.

2. *Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.*

David was probably far away from the tabernacle, and he could not join in presenting the morning or the evening sacrifice there; but he prayed God to let his prayer be such a sacrifice: "Let it be sweet as the perfume of the smoking spices of the morning; let it be as acceptable as the burning lamb of eventide.

3. *Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.*

Our mouth is a door, and it needs a watchman, and there is no watchman who can keep it except God himself: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

4. *Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties.*

That last petition is a very proper one; we are neither to think the thoughts of the wicked, nor to practice their ways, nor to enjoy their

pleasures: "Let me not eat of their dainties." There are certain amusements which are fraught with sin: "Let me not eat of their dainties." There are some erroneous doctrines, which are very pleasant to the taste of those who believe them: "Let me not eat of their dainties." There are some sins that seem to have a peculiarly sweet flavor, and so are very attractive to men: "Let me not eat of their dainties."

5. *Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness :-*

You see, dear friends, David cries out against slander, he cannot bear that wicked men should lie against his character; but he says, "I do not want to be let alone where I am in the wrong; I do not wish to be flattered: ' Let the righteous smite me.' He is the man who ought to do it. When I have done wrong, it is his duty to correct me; and I wish him to do it: ' Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness.'"

5. *And let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head:*

Some people cannot bear to be spoken to about a fault; they feel as if the reprover had broken their head directly, and they are as savage as a bear with a sore head. But the child of God is not so; he looks upon the rebuke of a good man as being like healing, sweet-smelling oil, and he prizes it. Depend upon it, the man who will tell you your faults is your best friend. It may not be a pleasant thing for him to do it, and he knows that he is running the risk of losing your friendship; but he is a true and sincere friend, therefore thank him for his reproof, and learn how you may improve by what he tells you.

5. *For yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.*

I will try to repay the righteous for their rebukes by praying for them when they are in trouble. I will say to my God, "These good men tried to keep me right, and they smote me when I did wrong; now, Lord, they are in trouble, I pray thee to help them, and bring them out of it."

6. *When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words; for they are sweet.*

Wicked men often will not hear the gospel; but when they get into trouble, then they will. When their judges are overthrown in stony places, then they begin to be willing to hear what good men

have to say. A bitter world makes a sweet Word; and when providence frowns upon us, it often happens that we love the gospel all the more, and smile upon its messengers, for their words are sweet.

7. Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, —

“We are like men ready to be put into their graves; or the cause that we advocate seems so totally dead that we seem to be like dry bones that are flung out of a grave.”

7. As when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth.

“We feel as if we were like chips out of a tree that has been cut down.”

8. But mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord: in thee is my trust;

“I may be cut to pieces, I may be chopped up, I may seem to be made into a bundle of firewood; but, Lord, my eyes are unto thee: ‘O God the Lord: in thee is my trust.’”

8. Leave not my soul destitute.

“If I have thee, I am still rich. Even if I lie at the grave's mouth, I may still live; but if thou be gone from me, then am I destitute indeed.”

9, 10. Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, whilst that I withal escape.

Amen! So let it be!

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 140 and 141.

PSALM 142

1. I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication.

Silent prayers are often true prayers, but there are times when, in extremity of suffering, it is very helpful to give expression to the soul's agony. I know some friends who can never pray to their own comfort except they can hear their own voices, and I believe that it is a good thing for the most of us to retire to some private place where we cannot be heard by men and where we can therefore freely use our voices in prayer. Very often the use of the voice helps to keep the thoughts from wandering, and also gives intensity to the desires. You notice that David particularly mentions here that he cried unto the Lord with his voice. No doubt many of his prayers

ascended to God from his heart without the medium of his voice; but here, the cry with his voice went with the desires of his heart.

2. *I poured out my complaint before him; —*

That is a beautiful expression, “I poured out my complaint,” — just as you turn a pitcher upside down, and let all the contents run out: “I poured out my complaint.” We are generally ready enough to do that, only that, usually, we go to some friend, or to some enemy, and pour out our complaint into his ear. But what is the good of doing that? David took a far wiser course: “I poured out my complaint before him.”

2. *I shewed before him my trouble.*

Uncovered it, and set it all out in order before him. God could see it, yet David knew that it was his place and his privilege to spread it all out before him.

3. *When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.*

Many of the Lord’s saints know the meaning of that sentence: “My spirit was overwhelmed within me.” They are like a vessel that has sunk in the sea, and is completely covered by the waves. David was in such a plight as that, he did not know his own whereabouts, but here was the mercy, “Then thou knewest my path.” It is much better that God should know our path than that we should know it ourselves, for we may know it, and be driven to despair by our knowledge; but God’s knowledge of it moves him to uphold us in it, or to deliver us out of it.

3, 4. *In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me:*

“They were afraid to link themselves with me, lest, when I went down like a drowning man, they should be dragged down with me.”

4. *Refuge failed me;*

“I could not run away; there was no place where I could find shelter.”

4. *No man cared for my soul.*

“They were all hard, cold, ungrateful, treacherous.”

5. *I cried unto thee, O LORD:*

What a mercy that David was driven to do that! If there had been any earthly refuge, he would have fled to it. If there had been some

human being at his right hand to help him, probably he would have trusted to him. If any man had cared for his soul, peradventure he would have trusted in that person, but now that every earthly door was shut, he was obliged to turn to his God.

5. *I said, Thou art my refuge —*

“I can flee to thee.”

5. *And my portion in the land of the living.*

With both hands he lays hold of God, and cries, “Thou art my refuge and my portion,” — two glorious “mys.” Well did Luther say that the very pith of the gospel lies in the little words, and it is the same with the Psalms.

6, 7. *Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, —*

This is a suitable prayer for those who have troubled consciences, for those who are shut up in Doubting Castle, and cannot get out without divine assistance. “Bring my soul out of prison,” —

7. *That I may praise thy name:*

As soon as you are set at liberty, you ought at once to let your glad heart magnify the God who has broken your bonds, and brought you out of prison.

7. *The righteous shall compass me about;*

This is a beautiful idea, it seems to imply that they would be so astonished to find him at liberty that they would all come round him to hear his story, they would be so glad to see the mourner rejoicing that they would all begin to inquire what God had done for his soul.

7. *For thou shalt deal bountifully with me.*

In the 13th Psalm, David said, “I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me;” but here he looks into the future, and sings, “Thou shalt deal bountifully with me.”

PSALM 142

An instructive psalm of David, for we speak to one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, and they are a means of instruction, as well as a means of utterance of praise. “A prayer when he was in the cave”; and, therefore, likely to suit any of you

who are in trouble — a prayer when he hid away from Saul, and was hunted like a partridge upon the mountains — “A prayer when he was in the cave.”

1. *I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication.*

Of course, the essence of his prayer was in his heart, but it often helps the heart to use the voice. It is much better to pray in silence if you will be heard by others, for we are not to pray to be heard of men, but if you have opportunity to pray aloud, I am sure you will feel it very helpful to devotion to do so. “I cried unto the Lord with my voice: with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication.”

2. *I poured out my complaint before him:*

As if it were in a vessel, and I turned the vessel upside down, and poured it all out. That is true prayer. It is the pouring out of what is really in; not an utterance of words which may, perhaps, go no farther than the mere lips, but the pouring out of whatever is within, whether it is praise or complaint. “I poured out my complaint before him” — realized his presence, and then told him my complaint.

2. *I shewed before him my trouble.*

We must believe that God is, and that he is the hearer of prayer. We must be conscious that we are not only using proper words, and feeling proper thoughts, but that we are doing it before him. “I showed before him my trouble.”

3. *When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.*

I did not know it. I was so puzzled — so in a maze, like a man at his wits’ end. My spirit seemed turned bottom upward, like a thing that is overwhelmed.

3 *In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me.*

I could not find out where the snare was, but “thou knewest my path.” I knew the trap was cunningly laid, but I could not see it. “Thou knewest my path.” We are not ignorant of Satan’s devices, but sometimes we are completely ignorant as to what devices he is using just now, but “then thou knewest my path.”

4. *I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.*

It is a bad time always when friendship seems to have died out, when those that we rely upon turn their backs upon us and refuse to sympathize with us in any degree. It is a sad case to be in. “No man cared for my soul.”

5. *I cried unto thee, O LORD:*

Ah! that is the thing to do. When no man will know you, God will know you. When no man cares for you, God will care for you. Prayer is an unfailing resort. “I cried unto thee, O Lord.”

5. *I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.*

See how he clings to his God now. We never do cling to God so well as when everything else fails us. To a greater or less extent, all those who yield us comfort do, in some little measure, take our heart off our God; but when it comes to be lonely, friendless, helpless, forgotten, despised, rejected, and outcast, oh! then it is a blessed thing, with a two-handed faith, to lay hold on God and say, “Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living.”

6. *Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low:*

What a blessed argument! Nothing can move God’s pity like it. “I am brought very low.” It is not your height that God will respect: it is your lowliness. O soul, it is not thy excellence that God regards: it is thy need —not thy goodness, but thy want of his goodness that he looks at; not thy fullness, but thy emptiness; not thy strength, but thy weakness. Nothing that thou hast. It is thy lack of everything that moves his heart. “Attend unto my cry, for I am brought very low.”

6, 7. *Deliver me from my persecutors: for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name:*

He asks for deliverance, and it is that he may praise God in it. So ought we always to desire mercies with this in view — that we may praise God the better for them.

7. *The righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.*

Lord, if thou art kind to me, all thy people will hear of it. When I get out of prison, they will say one to another, “Such-and-such a brother has got cheered and comforted. His face has changed. He is no more sad”; and they will come round me. They will begin to ask me how it came about. Thus I shall tell out thy praises — encourage

others and get to thee a great and glorious name, if thou shalt deal bountifully with me. Now, the next psalm, much after the same fashion.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 142. AND 143.

PSALM 142

Maschil of David. A prayer when he was in the cave. This “Maschil of David” is instructive to us, for the experience of one believer is very edifying to another. We are so much alike that, as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of men answereth to man, and what one believer has felt awakens sympathy in the rest of God’s people.

1, 2. *I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble.*

David mentions that he prayed with his voice. This is an unimportant matter compared with praying with the heart; but when the heart is full of prayer, it is often very helpful to be able to use the voice to give expression to the emotions of the soul. To have a room in which, without disturbing others, and without ostentatiously revealing your private experiences to others, you can speak aloud unto the Lord, will be found to be a great advantage in prayer. Some men’s thoughts become more concentrated, and how more freely, and their hearts are better able to pour out their deepest and fullest expressions, when they can pray aloud. So David says that, in the cave, where he would not be likely to disturb anybody, he cried with his voice unto the Lord: “With my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication.” You can see from verse **2** what was the style of his prayer. “I poured out my complaint.” The figure is a very simple one. Just as you pour out water from a bottle, so David let his heart’s complaint flow out before the Lord. In pouring out water, it sometimes comes slowly gurgling, and sometimes fast; at times with a rush, followed by a pause. There is no prayer better than that which naturally flows from the renewed heart, without any strain or effort, it was so with David: “I poured out my complaint before him, I shewed before him my trouble.” Just as a patient shows his wounds to the surgeon, so take away the covering from your broken heart and wounded spirit, and set your trouble before the Lord, who already sees it. It will be no novelty or cause of surprise to him, but

he desires you to manifest such trustfulness in him as will lead you to lay before him your complaint and your trouble.

3. *When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.*

“My spirit was so overwhelmed within me, that I did not know where I was, or what I was. I could not make head or tail of myself. I seemed to be like a skein of silk or wool in a tangle. My thoughts, as George Herbert would have said, were all a case of knives, sharp to cut and wound. I could not make myself out; I was a puzzle even to myself, but thou knewest my path even then.”

3, 4. *In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.*

This is a terrible condition for anyone to be in, — to have every friend forsake you, — to find that those who used to know you best, do not want to know you any longer, but turn their heads away as if it would be a disgrace to them to be known to have been your friends. This is a grand opportunity for testing the reality of your faith. Can you believe God now? Can you take him to be your Friend now that you have not another friend in the world? Fine weather faith is very cheap, and easily to be obtained; but the faith that can stand fast in the time of the storm and tempest, — that hardy mountaineering faith which hides in God in the coldest winter, and finds its summertime in him alone, — that is the faith that is worth having and worth keeping.

5. *I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.*

“I left the broken reeds alone, and leaned upon my God. I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.”

6, 7. *Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.*

This is a beautiful metaphor, suggesting that, when the saints heard that God brought him out of prison, they would round about him, gaze upon him as a miracle of mercy, and ask him to tell them his wonderful tale. He would be the center of their delighted observation, and their own faith and hope in the Lord would be

greatly increased. As a little imprisoned bird might long for emancipation, David says, “O Lord, open my cage-door, and let me fly; and I will sing, as I mount, to the praise of him who gave me my liberty. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about, for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.”

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 51. and 142.

PSALM 143

1, 2. *Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness. And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.*

That is, of course, apart from the wondrous system of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, whereby believers are made the righteousness of God in him. Apart from that righteousness, no man living can be justified in the sight of God.

3, 4. *For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.*

Are any of you passing through this trying experience? If so, does it not encourage you to find that somebody else has been this way before you? The road is very rough, but there is a man's footprint there, the footprint of a man whom God greatly loved, even the man after God's own heart? Ah, dear friends, in those deep sorrows of yours, you are not alone; David has passed this way before you; and, what is better still, David's Lord has traversed this rough road. In all our afflictions he was afflicted, he was tempted in all points like as we are, so he can most perfectly sympathize with us in all the troubles through which we are called to pass.

5, 6. *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands. I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.*

One of the things which God's people are in the habit of doing, when they are in deep trouble, is to look back upon their past experience. You may have seen the bargemen on the canal push backwards that they may propel the barge forwards; and, sometimes,

we who believe in Jesus Christ have to push backwards, — to look back on our past experience in order to derive fresh courage for the present hour of trial. So the psalmist says, “I remember the days of old, I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands.” Yet in David’s day of distress, when he had meditated upon his experiences in the past, that did not satisfy him. He wanted his God, therefore he cried unto the Lord, “I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land.” When the fields have been long dry, because there has been no rain, you see how the earth opens its mouth in great cracks as if it gaped for the rain it so sorely needs, and David’s soul seemed thus gaping with a strong desire after the living God: “My soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land.”

7, 8. Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.

This is a beautiful prayer, which any one of you might present to the Lord: “Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk.” You are perplexed as to what you ought to do, you wish to do that which is right, but you are not sure what is right. Yet God can cause you to know the way wherein you should walk; he leadeth the blind by a way that they know not, and in paths which they have not seen. So breathe this prayer to him in the hour of your perplexity, —

“Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land:
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand!”

Or say with David, “Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto thee.” He seems to say, “My soul is like a dead weight which cannot lift itself up; but in the strength which thou dost impart to me, I lift it up, I will not let it lie like a dead log before thee: ‘I lift up my soul unto thee.’”

9, 10. Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will;

This is another most blessed prayer: “Teach me to do thy will.” Most of us want to have our own will, and to go our own way; but each one who is truly wise prays to the Lord, “Teach me to do thy will.”

10, 11. *For thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness. Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.*

What earnest pleading is this, and how powerful it is! Every word is so fitting that, if I had time to explain it, you would note the force and appropriateness of every syllable that the psalmist here uses.

12. *And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.*

PSALM 143

1-3. *Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness. And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead.*

This is a very graphic description of David's sorrow; and those who have ever come under the power of Satan so as to be crushed in spirit, and see all their hopes blighted and withered, know what David meant when he penned these words. Only think of a soul dwelling in darkness like a body that has been long dead, and shut up in the grave.

4. *Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.*

What a sad expression that is! It would be difficult to bring out all its meaning: "My heart within me is desolate;" — lonely, deserted, desponding, despairing, almost destroyed.

5. *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands.*

This is a gracious exercise, which tends greatly to the comfort of mourners; yet it does not always succeed, for God's works cannot satisfy us, if God hides himself from us.

6. *I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.*

"My soul seems scarcely such a living thing as a thirsty stag panting for the cooling stream; but, as the parched earth, that cannot call to thee, and yet doth gape with open mouth as if she silently

implored the rain, so is it with me.” God sends the dew to the grass which cannot call to him for it; then how much more will he send the dew of his grace to us who do cry to him for it, and with anguish thirst after it!

7, 8. *Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.*

What a dead “lift” it is sometimes! Yet we must not let our soul lie in the gutter. By God’s help, we must lift it up; and the nearer the soul is lifted up to God, the more it comes into the light, and the more sure it is yet to obtain its liberty.

9, 10. *Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good;*

“Make my spirit good!”

10, 11. *Lead me into the land of uprightness. Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name’s sake:*

Do not these prayers fit you, my brothers and sisters? Do you not feel as if you were being taught how to pray by the reading of this Psalm? I think it must be so at least with some of you.

11, 12. *For thy righteousness’ sake bring my soul out of trouble. And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.*

We cannot join in the prayers in this verse just as it stands, for we live in another dispensation, in which we are taught to pray for our enemies, not against them; but as far as this verse relates to our spiritual enemies our sins, and temptations, and Satanic foes, we do pray that they may be utterly out off, and that the very name of them may be blotted out from under heaven. May God hear that prayer, and answer it, for his dear Son’s sake! Amen.

PSALM 143

“A psalm of David.”

1. *Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.*

It is a theory held by some persons of skeptical minds that the only benefit of prayer is the good it does to us. That was not David's theory. Here, three times, he begs to be heard, and to be answered. Oh! do they think us such idiots that we would go on speaking in a keyhole with nobody to hear us? Do they think us brought so low — so destitute of wit — that we think it worth our while to speak out what is in our heart if God does not hear and does not answer? I reckon prayer to be the most idiotic of all occupations unless there be really a God to hear, and a God to answer. And the benefit of prayer is not in itself so much as in the full confidence that it is a real thing, and an effective thing — that God does hear and does interpose on our behalf.

2. *And enter not into judgment with thy servant:*

“Thy servant I am. I am not one of the ungodly, whom thou wilt judge and cast away, but still even thy servant though I am, enter not into judgment with me. I know thou wilt not judge me now as a rebel, and condemn me, for thou hast put away my sin, but even as thy servant I fear thy chastising rod, if thou enter into judgment with me.”

2. *For in thy sight shall no man living be justified.*

I have heard some living that think they would. They have said that the very root and branch of sin have been cut up in them, and that they walk in the fear of God perfectly well, but times must have changed very wonderfully. Ah! but I think they have not, but that these are mistaken, for still it is very true concerning the very best of men that they have need to pray, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.”

3, 4 *For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate.*

Children of God, do not expect to be always happy, or else you will be disappointed. You will have more troubles, if nobody else does. Depend upon it, that adversity is one of the covenant promises. “In the world ye shall have tribulation,” is your Master's own word to you, and you must not expect to find it untrue. You will find it true to the letter. And sometimes the troubles of life will penetrate even to your heart, and make you feel desolate. When you

are so, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial as though yours were a new path in which nobody ever walked before you. Ah! no; David was there. Many others have been there.

5, 6. *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands. I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.*

As a child puts out its hand to its mother, so did he stretch out his hands to his God. As a thirsty land chaps — becomes dry — turns to dust in its longing after rain, so did his whole being thirst for his God.

7. *Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.*

“Lest I swoon away — lest I die — lest my hope should utterly expire. Come, Lord: come, Lord, and rescue me.”

8. *Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.*

Very heavy, but I lift it up. With all my might, as though it were a dead lift, I seek to raise it out of its doubt, and out of its sorrow.

9,10. *Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will; for thy art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.*

Or “lead me in a straight path.” So it is rendered by the best scholars.

11. *Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name’s sake:*

Felt as if he should die, and, therefore, he says, “Quicken me: put new life into me.” To whom should we go for life, but to the living God, and who can communicate with us, but the same God who first made us live in his name.

11, 12. *For thy righteousness sake bring my soul out of trouble. And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 142. AND 143.

PSALM 144

A Psalm of David. No doubt written after some great victory, and also before another severe struggle. The Christian man seldom escapes from one difficulty without falling into another. Thanks be

unto God, he that is with us in six troubles will not forsake us in the seventh!

1. *Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hand to war, and my fingers to fight:*

David does not ascribe any honour to himself. Human strength is from within, from the nerves, and sinews, and muscles, but the believer's strength is from without: "Blessed be Jehovah my strength." Now, if Jehovah be our strength, then nothing can be too difficult for us, for he whose strength is the omnipotence of God can do all things. "Which teacheth my hands to war:" just as the young soldier was, as it were, bound apprentice to the old warrior, went out to learn the drill, and afterwards was taken by him into the battle, so does the Lord by providence and by experience train his people's hands to war, and their fingers to fight.

2. *My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust;*

Here are six names, or rather, five titles of God, and then an inference from them: "He in whom I trust." Oh! I know, ye people of God, you can say of Jehovah, "He is the One in whom I trust." Rely upon anyone else, and your hopes are doomed to disappointment, as a bowing wall shall he be, and as a tottering fence. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his refuge! Mind that ye stand to this, and never depart from it.

2. *Who subdueth my people under me.*

Probably this Psalm was written after the crushing out of the great revolt under Absalom, and well might David ascribe to the divine hand his deliverance from that trial. It seemed as if the kingdom had gone from him; his ungrateful son had stolen the people's hearts, and yet God was pleased to give him back his kingdom, and to set him upon his throne yet more firmly than before: "Who subdueth my people under me." Christian, say that it is God who subdues your troubles, God who conquers your sins, God who enlightens your darkness, God who doeth all things for you; give him all the praise for every deliverance.

3. *LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him!*

Have you not often felt like this? You have said, "Lord, how couldst thou have bestowed such favors upon me, so utterly

unworthy, so insignificant, so unknown, so worthless? “What is man, that thou takest knowledge of him!”

4. *Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away.*

You know that a shadow is nothing; it is rather the absence of something than anything in itself. Shadow is the absence of light; and what is man but, as it were, the absence of light, the absence of anything that is substantial? He is but the fleeting shadow of some earthly object, which soon passes away. Having thus magnified God for the past, and marvelled at his loving-kindness, the psalmist now turns to prayer: —

5. *Bow thy heavens, O LORD, and come down: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.*

God did but set one foot upon Mount Sinai, and it became altogether on a smoke. “The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord.” Well, believer, you have many mountains; but you can ask God to “touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.” No matter what the mountains may be; high as the heavens your troubles may ascend, till they even seem to block up your pathway to the skies, yet one touch of the divine finger shall make them melt away, like wax before the fire, and you shall march on triumphantly to your God.

6, 7. *Cast forth lightning, and scatter them: shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them. Send thine hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children;*

Moses, you know, was called “one drawn out of the water”, so are all Gods people, they are drawn out of floods of tribulation. They are surrounded by those floods as though deserted, and left there to perish; but keen is the eye that watches over them, strong is the hand that preserves them, and sure is the arm that delivers them.

8. *Whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood.*

They swear, but they perjure themselves; they lift up the right hand, but they lie all the while. Rid me, O God, from such men; for, of all enemies, those that can lie are the worst, for you never know where you are with such people. Snakes in the grass are the most dangerous reptiles and enemies who will do any evil thing in order to ruin you, and who will tell any lie in the world in order to injure you, are just the hardest to overthrow.

9-11. *I will sing a new song unto thee, O God: upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee. It is he that giveth salvation unto kings: who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword. Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood:*

You see, good men sometimes repeat their prayers; they present the same petition over again, and they thus follow the example of Christ, who prayed three times, "saying the same words."

12. *That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace:*

Or, rather, "of a temple." This should be the prayer of every parent, that his sons may be bringing forth fruit unto God, that his daughters may be fixed as polished stones in the Church of God, to form a part of the great spiritual temple.

13. *That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store:*

When this is the case spiritually, when there is milk for babes, meat for strong men, and not a little of each, but more than enough for all, then are we very happy. Spiritual fertility is a blessed thing, when each Christian, each of the Lord's sheep, becomes prolific in increasing Christ's flock.

14. *That our oxen may be strong to labour;*

That the ministers of God may be mighty; that Sabbath-school teachers, and all earnest labourers, may have strength given to them.

14. *That there be no breaking in, nor going out;*

That there be no wolves to destroy by breaking in; and that there be no sheep to suffer injury by going astray.

14, 15. *That there be no complaining in our street. Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD.*

May this be our case! And if it is our case, then the Lord is our God even at this day.

13. *That our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets:*

Spiritual fertility is a blessed thing, when each Christian, each of the Lord's sheep, becomes prolific in increasing Christ's flock.

14. *That our oxen may be strong to labour:*

That the ministers of God may be mighty; that Sabbath-school teachers, and all earnest labourers, may have strength given to them.

14. *That there be no breaking in, nor going out;*

That there be no wolves to destroy by breaking in; and that there be no sheep to suffer injury by going astray.

14, 15. *That there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD.*

May this be our case! And if that is our case, then the Lord is our God even at this day. Now let us read about two interesting incidents in David's warrior life.

This exposition consisted of readings from Psalm 144., And 2 Samuel 5:17-25.

PSALM 145

I am going to preach about prayer, so we will read "David's Psalm of praise." Thus we shall have two parts of true worship.

1, 2. *I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.*

Notice how long David expected to praise God. He was going to praise God for ever, and then after that, "for ever and ever." "Every day will I bless thee,"—that is, when I do not seem to be partaking of any choice temporal blessing, I will still bless thee. When I sit like Job on the dunghill, 'every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name,'—thy character, all that has to do with thee, 'for ever and ever.'" The first two verses are the preface of the Psalm; now the psalmist begins his music:—

3. *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;*

He is great without bound; let him be praised without end. There is no end to his greatness; let there be no end to our adoration.

3, 4. *And his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.*

The fathers shall be the preachers to their sons, and the sons shall be the preachers to their sons. The flaming torch of Jehovah's praise shall be passed from hand to hand all down the centuries; as long as men shall live, God shall have the praise of the godly: "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts."

5. *I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty,*

This is a beautiful expression: "I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty." It is a heaped-up expression. David was in an ecstasy of delight when he wrote it; he did not know how sufficiently to express his adoration of God. Other men might praise God for themselves, but that is not enough for David; he must take his own cut at the blessed business: "I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty,"—

5, 6. *And of thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness.*

"And I will declare." Yes, in comes David's personal note again; he cannot let the praises of God alone, he must take his full share in this heavenly task. I wish that, whenever there was work to do for God, or prayer to be offered or praise to be given to the Lord, you and I would always interject this personal pronoun, "and I." You know, perhaps, dear friends, that you never find Bartholomew's name by itself in any of the Gospels, it is always somebody else "and Bartholomew." It is well to be a good helper of other people; and when others are praising the Lord, it is good to come in as David did with the personal resolve and confession, "and I will declare thy greatness."

7. *They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness,*

Mark every word in this choice expression: "They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness." They shall see this goodness, and they shall appreciate it as great goodness; they shall remember it, and so have the memory of God's great goodness; and then they shall speak of it: "They shall utter the memory of thy great goodness;" and when they have done so, they shall do it again and again: "They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness."

7, 8. *And shall sing of thy righteousness. The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion;*

He has no passion, but he is full of compassion. What a mercy that is for us! Sometimes we hear persons say that God cannot do this or that,—that he cannot feel, and cannot suffer. That is not true, for he can do anything that he likes. A god who has no feeling is a poor god, of no service whatever to us; but "the Lord is gracious and full of compassion;"—

8. *Slow to anger, and of great mercy.*

Oh, what a blessing it is for you and for me that he is slow to anger!

9. *The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

Whether you search for the far-distant with a telescope, or peer into the minute with the microscope, the Lord's tender mercies are found everywhere. Like the light, without which you see nothing, so is the mercy of God; it enlightens everything: "His tender mercies are over all his works."

10. *All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee.*

"Standing in the inner circle, 'thy saints' shall mingle their love with their praise, and so 'shall bless thee.' Theirs shall be a choicer, tenderer worship than that of all 'thy works' besides." The works of God are like a great organ, but it is man who puts his finger upon the keys, and brings forth all the music. Man is the interpreter of the universe; he praises God as the inanimate creation can never do.

11. *They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power;*

I wish we did speak more of such subjects, and talk more upon these sacred themes. I do not think there is ever any deficiency of talk; but I am afraid there is a very great lack of such talk as this: "They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power."

12. *To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.*

See how David keeps to the subject with which he began the Psalm: "I will extol thee, my God, my king." Ay, and he sings about the King all through this Psalm. His great object is to make us see that there never was such a King as the infinitely-glorious Jehovah, who surpasses all the kings of the earth.

13. *Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,*

Other kingdoms come and go; they last during their little day, and then they vanish away. Look, for instance, at the kingdom of Alexander the Great, who only reigned for about twelve years, and when he died left no successor. We talk of great earthly monarchies; they are but monarchies of an hour compared with the kingdom of

Jehovah. Well might David say to him, “Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,”—

13. *And thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.*

What kind of a King is this whose kingdom is everlasting, and what are the acts that make him famous? Notice the first thing he is said to do:—

14. *The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.*

This is his glory; this is the majesty of the King of kings, that he takes notice of the poor and weak. The compassion of God is to a great extent the glory of God. That he has such tender mercies toward the unworthy, is the subject of the loudest of our songs: “Jehovah upholdeth all that fall;” that is, such as would fall were it not for his upholding. Jehovah lifts up all those who have fallen, and raiseth up those who are bowed down. Blessed be his holy name!

15. *The eyes of all wait upon thee;*

What a King is this, who must needs feed all his subjects, and who must have all his subjects depend upon himself alone! “The eyes of all wait upon thee;”—

15. *And thou givest them their meat in due season.*

It is an act of grace, not of debt: “Thou givest them their meat.” Did you ever think of the vast variety of the separate sorts of food that the Lord provides for each of the creatures he has formed? The meat that feeds an elephant would not feed a lion, that which feeds a lion would not feed a sparrow, that which feeds a sparrow would not satisfy the fish of the sea. To every creature God gives its own food: “Thou givest them their meat in due season.” The fruits of the earth do not ripen all at once, but the various harvests succeed each other. Notice how each of the many flowers is full of honey just at the time when the particular insect which is to come down into the flower-bell is needing that nectar to feed upon. It is marvellous to see how God has timed creation to the ticking of a watch; and when the flower is ready, then comes the fly, the bee, the butterfly, or the moth, that shall be fed thereby. “Thou givest them their meat in due season.”

16. *Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.*

As men feed doves in their courtyard, carrying down to them their little handful of food, and opening the hand to pour it out, so does God feed all living creatures readily and easily enough by the simple opening of his hand. But he does it. He satisfies the desire of every living thing, and he will satisfy your desire, dear soul, if you take it to him. You say, perhaps, that you are very poor; well, then, cry to him, he has never failed his creatures yet, and he will not fail you. He hears the young ravens when they cry; and he will hear you, a man created in the image of God, when you cry to him.

17, 18. *The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his work. The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.*

As the omnipresent Deity, the Lord is not far from any one of us; but there is a peculiar nearness of God to his people,—a nearness of knowledge, a nearness of affection, a nearness of heart by which he looks upon them as his own special portion, his own peculiar heritage: “Jehovah is nigh unto all them that call upon him.” That is the name of his people; they are a calling people, they are a praying people, and they pray to him “in truth.” There are some who offer the mockery of pretended prayer, but God is not near to them in the special sense in which he “is nigh unto all them that call upon him in truth.”

19. *He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him:*

“He will fulfill”—he will fill full—“the desire of them that fear him.” If you fear him, you need not fear any lack; indeed, you have nothing at all that you need to fear.

19, 20. *He also will hear their cry, and will save them. The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy.*

These two things always go together; as surely as the Lord does the one, he will do the other. While he preserves his saints, he will certainly destroy the wicked.

21. *My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord:*

God move us each one to do this! Then with the psalmist we may fitly say,—

21. *And let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.*

PSALM 145

When you get to the 145th Psalm, you enter the Beulah Land of the Psalms. Henceforth, the time of the singing of birds is come; and you go from one Hallelujah to another. In the Hebrew, this is one of the alphabetical Psalms, but one letter (nun) is omitted, perhaps, as Dr. Bonar suggests, that “we must be kept from putting stress on the mere form of the composition.” Those ancient singers sang their way through the alphabet from A to Z, and it is well for us also to begin to praise the Lord while we are yet children, and to keep on praising him till we get to the “Z” in the very hour of death, gasping his praises till we get into eternity.

“My God, I’ll praise thee while I live,
And praise thee when I die,
And praise thee when I rise again,
And to eternity.”

1-3. I will extol thee, my God, O king, and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee, and I will praise thy name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.

Such as the Lord is, such should his worship be. If he were a little God, he would deserve little praise; but the great God is “greatly to be praised.” There is no fear of going to any excess in our praises; we must never laud him too highly, however lofty our expressions may be. “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.” David knew what it was to be himself searched by God and he prayed, “Search me, O God;” but he could not search the greatness of his God. There, he was utterly lost, the utmost range of his faculties could not compass the greatness of Jehovah: “his greatness is unsearchable.”

4. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.

There is a hallowed tradition of praise; each generation should hand out the praise of God as a precious legacy to the next one. Train up your sons and daughters to praise your God, so that, when your voice is silent in death, another voice, like your own, may continue the strain.

5. I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.

“I will speak.” What a powerful speaker David was! Note how he piles up his golden words. He is not content merely to talk of God’s majesty, but he speaks of its “glorious honour.” When he talked of God’s works, he calls them “wondrous works.”

6. *And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts:*

If they will not speak of anything else, they shall be obliged to speak with awe when the terrors of the Lord are abroad in the earth. If they were as dumb as fishes before, they shall begin to say to one another, with bated breath, when earthquakes, and famines, and war, and pestilence are rife, “What a terrible God he is!”

6. *And I will declare thy greatness.*

While other men were talking, David did not say, “Now I can be quiet.” When they did not speak, he did, and when they began to speak, he still added his quota of praise to Jehovah.

7. *They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness.*

What a beautiful expression! “They shall abundantly utter.” The original has in it the idea of bubbling up, boiling over, bursting out like a fountain; men’s hearts shall get to be so full of gratitude to God that they shall overflow with the memory of his great goodness. Then they shall sing. Singing is the language of jubilant nature: “The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing.” Singing is the language of men when they wish to express their highest joys. The saints sing the high praises of their God. Singing is the language of the holy angels; did they not, when they came to Bethlehem, sing concerning the newborn King? Singing is the language of heaven, and most marvellous of all, singing is the highest language that ever God uses: “He will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.” Oh, for more holy singing!

8. *The LORD is gracious, —*

That alone is enough to make us sinners sing, for we need grace, and “the Lord is gracious,” —

8. *And full of compassion; —*

There is no “passion” in him, but there is “compassion” in him; what a mercy that is for us! He is full of compassion;” —

8. *Slow to anger, and of great mercy.*

Hear that, ye great sinners, and ye saints who need great forbearance.

9. *The Lord is good to all:*

Even to his enemies. Does not the dewdrop hang upon the thistle as well as upon the rose?

9. *And his tender mercies are over all his works.*

He cares for the worm in the sod and for the fish in the sea as well as for men upon the face of the earth.

10. *All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saint shall bless thee.*

Their voices can reach a higher note and a loftier strain than God's works can ever reach: "thy saints shall bless thee."

11. *They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom,*

For the saints love God as their King, and they rejoice to remember what the King's Son said to his disciples, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom;" so well may they sing of it.

11-13. *And talk of thy power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.*

What is the use of preaching if it does not glorify God? What is the use of a tongue that does not speak or sing of the glory of God's kingdom? But let one of God's bards have this as the theme of his song, and he feels like a hind let loose, rejoicing in glorious liberty.

14. *The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.*

Does not this seem to be a singular change in the strain? The Lord is a King, and his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; yet what is he doing? Why, he is upholding, propping up those that are ready to fall, and lifting up those that are crushed and oppressed. Earthly kings often glory in the terror of their power, and the splendor of their majesty. What a condescending God is ours, whose glory is a moral glory, and whose chief delight consists in blessing the poor and needy! Let us bless his name for this. Are any of you ready to fall? Then praise him for this glorious truth, "The Lord upholdeth all that fall." Are any of you bowed down? Daughter of Abraham, have you been bowed down these many years? Oh, that you might be

made straight this very hour! And you may be, for God can lift you up, for he “raiseth up all those that be bowed down.”

15,16. *The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfied the desire of every living thing.*

What a glorious God we have! How easily can he supply the needs of his people! He has but to open his hand, and it is done! We need not be afraid to come to him, as though our needs would be too great for him to supply. The commissariat of the universe is superintended by this truly Universal Provider, who hath but to open his hand to satisfy “the desire of every living thing.”

17. *The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.*

This is a thing for which many modern divines do not praise God. The attribute of righteousness in the character of God is expelled from a good deal of modern theology. But he, who loves God aright, loves the righteousness of God. I would not care to have even salvation if it were unrighteous salvation. The righteousness of God gleams like a sharp two-edged sword, and it is terrible to those who are at enmity against him; but the true children of the Most High delight to see this sword of state carried in the front of the great King of kings. The seraphim cried, one to another, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts.” The redeemed in glory sing, “Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints; but the captious critics of the present day care nothing for these attributes of Jehovah.

18. *The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.*

If you read this Psalm through carefully, you will notice the great number of “alls” with which the latter part of the Psalm is studded; and this is appropriate, for God is All-in-all, he is the One, the All, so let him have all praise from all.

19. *He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.*

When you have respect to God’s will, God will have respect to your will. When you fear him, you will have no one else to fear, and when you make his service your delight, he will make your wants his care.

20. *The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy.*

As in a state of sanitary perfection, everything that breeds miasma and disease is banished, so must it be in God's great universe, when he has completed his works "all the wicked will he destroy."

21. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

PSALM 146

1. Praise ye the LORD.

Or, "Hallelujah." I am sorry to see that great word, Hallelujah, Hallelu-Jah, praise to Jah, Jehovah, become so hackneyed as it is, by talk about "Hallelujah lasses", and Hallelujah — I know not what. The Jews will not even pronounce the word Jah, or write it; it seems a great pity that it should be thus dragged in the dirt by Gentiles. "Praise ye the Lord." Whenever you make use of the word Hallelujah, let it be with the due reverence which should be given to that blessed name, for remember "the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

1. Praise the LORD, O my soul.

Whatever we exhort others to do, we should be ready to do ourselves; yea, our own soul should praise the Lord most of all, since, if we rightly know our obligations, no one in the world is so much indebted to God as each one of us should feel himself to be. "Praise the Lord, O my soul;" not my lips only, but my innermost spirit, for soul-music is the soul of music: "Praise the Lord, O my soul."

2. While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.

I will lisp his praises when I can do no more; when my being seems to be dried up, in the weakness of the death-throe, still, "I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being."

3. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.

What is the connection here between praising God and not trusting man? Why, this connection, that we never praise God better than by exercising faith in him! Quiet trust is among the sweetest music that reaches the heart of God; and when we put our trust in

man, we rob God of his glory; we are giving to others the confidence which belongs alone to him.

4. *His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.*

What is man, — with a life dependent upon his breath, such a vapory thing, each a thin, unsubstantial thing is human life, — what is he that we should trust in him?

5. *Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God:*

He is the happy man who has learned to trust in the invisible God.

6. *Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever:*

Never did his promise fail. Perhaps, dear brother, you have not pleaded the promises enough of late. Then the mercy-seat is the place where promises must be pleaded, with the certainty that then they shall be fulfilled.

7. *Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry. The LORD looseth the prisoners:*

Souls that are in bondage will never get freedom till the Lord looses them. Oh, that prisoners of hope, who are here this evening, might have grace to look to God! You cannot pick the lock of your prison yourself, nor forge your way through the iron berg of despair, but, “the Lord looseth the prisoners.” Ay, but when they get loose, they are blind, for man by nature is blinded by sin! Therefore the psalmist adds, —

8. *The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind:*

He can not only give you liberty, but understanding, insight into his Word, a knowledge of himself. Ay, but when men get their eyes opened, they see much to make them sorry, and he that increaseth knowledge often increaseth sorrow! Yes, but look at the next words, —

8. *The LORD raiseth them that are bowed down:*

He can take away depression of spirit, and relieve the heart of its burdens and, as the woman who was bowed down for many years was made straight by the word of Christ, so can those that suffer from mental infirmity be restored. And best of all, —

8. *The LORD loveth the righteous:*

He loves them, and his love is wealth and health. The love of God is all a creature wants.

9. *The Lord preserveth the strangers;*

When our eyes are opened, and we are no more bowed down, but feel we have a sense of God's love, yet still we know that we are exiles, banished ones, strangers and foreigners, as all our fathers were. It is comforting, therefore, to be assured that "the Lord preserveth the strangers."

9. *He relieveth the fatherless and widow:*

He does so literally: "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation." He also relieves such spiritually. When any feel themselves to be poverty-stricken, and unable to help themselves, let them look to him who is both able and willing to succor them, for "he relieveth the fatherless and the widow."

9. *But the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.*

Where they looked for joy, they experienced disappointment, where they expected success, they met with defeat, and whereas they thought to heap to themselves pleasures according to their lusts, they find that they have only increased their misery.

10. *The LORD shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the LORD.*

The sovereignty of God should be the delight of his people. God anywhere is blessed, but God on his throne should make his people shout their Hallelujahs with all their heart.

Now let us read in the New Testament about one who glorified God and gave thanks to Jesus.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 146, and LUKE 17:11-19

PSALM 147

This is one of the Hallelujah Psalms; it begins and ends with "Praise ye the LORD." May our hearts be in tune, that we may praise the Lord while we read these words of praise!

1. *Praise ye the LORD:*

It is not enough for the Psalmist to do it himself. He wants help in it, so he says, "Praise ye the LORD." Wake up, my brethren; bestir yourselves, my sisters; come, all of you, and unite in this holy exercise! "Praise ye the LORD."

1. For it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.

When a thing is good, pleasant, and comely, you have certainly three excellent reasons for attending to it. It is not everything that is good; but here you have a happy combination of goodness, pleasantness, and comeliness. It will do you good to praise God. God counts it good, and you will find it a pleasant exercise. That which is the occupation of heaven must be happy employment. "It is good to sing praises unto our God," "it is pleasant," and certainly nothing is more "comely" and beautiful, and more in accordance with the right order of things, than for creatures to praise their Creator, and the children of God to praise their Father in heaven.

2. The LORD doth build up Jerusalem:

Praise his name for that. You love his church; be glad that he builds it up. Praise him who quarries every stone, and puts it upon the one foundation that is laid, even Jesus.

2. He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.

Praise him for that. If you were once an outcast, and he has gathered you, give him your special personal song of thanksgiving.

3. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.

Praise him for that, ye who have had broken hearts! If he has healed you, surely you should give him great praise.

4. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.

He who heals broken hearts counts the stars, and calls them by their names, as men call their servants, and send them on their way. Praise his name. Can you look up at the starry sky at night without praising him who made the stars, and leads out their host?

5. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.

Praise him, then; praise his greatness, his almightiness, his infinite wisdom. Can you do otherwise? Oh, may God reveal himself so much to your heart that you shall be constrained to pay him willing adoration!

6. The LORD lifteth up the meek:

What a lifting up it is for them, out of the very dust where they have been trodden down by the proud and the powerful! The Lord lifts them up. Praise him for that.

6. *He casteth the wicked down to the ground.*

Thus he puts an end to their tyranny, and delivers those who were ground beneath their cruel power. Praise ye his name for this also. Excuse me that I continue to say to you, "Praise ye the Lord," for, often as I say it, you will not praise him too much; and we need to have our hearts stirred up to this duty of praising God, which is so much neglected. After all, it is the praise of God that is the ultimatum of our religion. Prayer does but sow; praise is the harvest. Praying is the end of preaching, and praising is the end of praying. May we bring to God much of the very essence of true religion, and that will be the inward praise of the heart!

7. *Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God:*

"Unto our God." How that possessive pronoun puts a world of endearment into the majestic word "God"! "This God is our God." Come, my hearer, can you call God your God? Is he indeed yours? If so, "Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God."

8. *Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.*

They did not talk about the "law of nature" in those days. They ascribed everything to God; let us do the same. It is a poor science that pushes God farther away from us, instead of bringing him nearer to us. HE covers the heaven with clouds, HE prepares the rain for earth, HE makes the grass to grow upon the mountains.

9. *He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.*

Our God cares for the birds and the beasts. He is as great in little things as in great things. Praise ye his name. The gods of the heathen could not have these things said of them; but our God takes pleasure in providing for the beasts of field and the birds of the air. The commissariat of the universe is in his hand: "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing."

10, 11. *He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.—*

Kings of the olden times rejoiced in the thews and sinews of their soldiers and their horses; but God has no delight in mere

physical strength. He takes pleasure in spiritual things, even in the weakness which makes us fear him, even that weakness which has not grown into the strength of faith, and yet hopes in his mercy. "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."

12. *Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion.*

Let whole cities join together to praise God. Shall we live to see the day when all London shall praise him? Shall we, ever, as we go down these streets, with their multitudes of inhabitants, see the people standing in the doorways, and asking, "What must we do to be saved?" Shall we ever see every house with anxious enquirers in it, saying, "Tell us, tell us, how can we be reconciled to God?" Pray that it may be so. In Cromwell's day, if you went down Cheapside at a certain hour of the morning, you would find every blind drawn down; for the inmates were all at family prayer. There is no street like that in London now. In those glorious Puritan times, there was domestic worship everywhere, and the people seemed brought to Christ's feet. Alas, it was but an appearance in many cases; and they soon turned back to their own devices! Imitating the Psalmist, let us say, "Praise the Lord, O London; praise thy God, O England!"

13. *For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee.*

As a nation, we have been greatly prospered, defended, and supplied; and the church of God has been made to stand fast against her enemies, and her children have been blessed.

14, 15. *He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat. He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly.*

Oriental monarchs were very earnest to have good post arrangements. They sent their decrees upon swift dromedaries. They can never be compared with the swiftness of the purpose of God's decree. "His word runneth very swiftly." Oh, that the day would come when, over all the earth, God's writ should run, and God's written Word should come to be revered, believed, and obeyed!

16. *He giveth snow like wool:*

Men say, "it" snows; but what "it" is it that snows? The Psalmist rightly says of the Lord, "HE giveth snow." They say that according to the condition of the atmosphere, snow is produced; but the

believer says, "He giveth snow like wool." It is not only like wool for whiteness; but it is like it for the warmth which it gives.

16. *He scattereth the hoar frost like ashes.*

The simile is not to be easily explained; but it will often have suggested itself to you who, in the early morning, have seen the hoar frost scattered abroad.

17. *He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?*

None can stand before his heat; but when he withdraws the fire, and takes away the heat, the cold is equally destructive. It burns up as fast as fire would. "Who can stand before his cold?" If God be gone, if the Spirit of God be taken away from his church, or from any of you, who can stand before his cold? The deprivation is as terrible as if it were a positive infliction. "Who can stand before his cold?"

18. *He sendeth out his word, and melteth them; he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow.*

The frozen waters were hard as iron; the south wind toucheth them, and they flow again. What can God not do? The great God of nature is our God. Let us praise him. Oh, may our hearts be in a right key tonight to make music before him!

19. *He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel.*

This is something greater than all his wonders in nature. The God of nature is the God of revelation. He hath not hidden his truth away from men. He hath come out of the eternal secrecies, and he hath showed his word, especially his Incarnate Word, unto his people. Let his name be praised.

20. *He hath not dealt so with any nation:*

Or, with any other nation. He revealed his statutes and his judgments to Israel; and since their day, the spiritual Israel has been privileged in like manner: "He hath not dealt so with any nation."

20. *And as for his judgments, they have not known them.*

Even today there are large tracts of country where God is not known. If we know him, let us praise him.

20. *Praise ye the LORD.*

Hallelujah! The Psalm ends upon its key-note: "Praise ye the LORD." So may all our lives end! Amen.

PSALM 147

1. *Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant;*

Ye that know him, ye that love him, “praise ye the Lord.” “It is good: “it is right, it is acceptable; it is good for you, the Lord counts it good. “It is good to sing praises unto our God;” and to God alone. There is no better argument for anything than that it is good, for good men delight in that which is good because it is good. “For it is pleasant.” That is a very happy conjunction, for it is not everything that is good that is pleasant, medicine to wit. It is not everything that is pleasant that is good, for there are some things that are pleasant in the mouth, but they are poison in the bowels. But to sing praises unto our God is both good and pleasant.

1. *And praise is comely.*

Or, beautiful, delightful, it is the right thing. Men never look so like angels as when they are praising God, and angels are never more heavenly than when they are engaged in the worship of heaven; and that worship is praise. Here are the psalmist’s reasons for praising God,-

2. *The LORD doth build up Jerusalem:*

Praise him for that. He is the great Builder, the Builder of the Church. He laid the foundations in the everlasting covenant, he carries on the building with infinite skill by his Divine Spirit: “The Lord doth build up Jerusalem.”

2. *He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.*

These are the stones with which he builds, men who were like outcasts. What wonderful living stones these outcasts make! They love the Lord best who once were most his enemies. None sing of “free grace and dying love” with sweeter accents than the men who have had much forgiven. “The Lord doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.” Mark the connection between the two; it is when great sinners are saved that the Church is built up. There was more done when Paul was converted, I wot, than at almost any other time, for he became the great apostle to the Gentiles through whom myriads were saved.

3. *He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.*

To be a builder and a physician, too, are strange offices to be combined in one, yet so it is with God. Is there a broken heart here? The Lord is ready to heal you. See how he does it. "He bindeth up their wounds,"-puts on the strapping, wraps round the linen cloth, and secures the flesh until it heals. A wonderful surgeon is the Lord God Almighty, there is none like to him. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." What a singular thing it is that the next verse should be what it is!

4. *He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.*

In his condescension, stooping over a broken heart; in his omniscience, telling the number of the stars. The word signifies as when a merchant counts his money into a bag. So does God, as it were, count the stars over, like so many golden coins. "He calleth them all by their names." as when the muster-roll is read, and the soldier answers, "Here!" so does the Lord speak to the stars, and they answer to their names.

5, 6. *Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. The LORD lifteth up the meek:*

They are down very low in their own estimation, but the Lord lifts them up.

6. *He casteth the wicked down to the ground.*

The Lord is the great changer of men's positions; those that are up he throws down, and those that are down he lifts up. Thus the blessed virgin sang, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree."

7, 8. *Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.*

This is the true science, this is the real philosophy; not merely the laws of nature, but God everywhere; God cloud-making, God rain-preparing, God clothing even the hill-tops and out of the way places with grass which no man has planted, and which no man will ever mow. Perhaps there is somebody here who, when at home, is like grass on the mountains, away from all means of grace, with nobody to help you, nobody to guide you. Listen to this Psalm, and

praise the name of the Lord, “who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.”

9. *He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.*

The very best illustration of that verse is to be found, I think, in crows going to bed at night. You may have heard their caws. White says, in his *Natural History of Selborne*, that a little child said in his hearing, “Hark, father, the rooks are saying their prayers.” It does seem something like it; and I believe David had heard it, and that is why he put it here: “the young ravens which cry,” for those strange birds, rooks, crows, ravens, and the like, even with their wild cries, do speak to God. Who can listen to the birds in the early morning without feeling ashamed of himself for not singing more to the praise of God? Some of the feathered songsters lift up their voices even in the night; the nightingale charms the hours of darkness, and should not we sing unto God when all nature rings with his praise? “He giveth to the beast his food.” Any of you who are in great distress may pray to God, “Lord, feed me, for thou givest even to the beast his food.” Do any of you need spiritual food? Cry to him to feed you, for he giveth even to the beast his food. Are you not much better than many animals? I remember “Father Taylor” once saying to himself, and then writing it, “I am in distress just now, and full of doubts: but what am I at? When the great whale goes through the deep, the Almighty Father gives him a ton of herrings for his breakfast, and never misses them; surely he can feed me.” Assuredly he can; he can give to all of us all that we need.

10. *He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man.*

As the kings did in those days; their infantry and their cavalry were their glory. The Lord does not care for that sort of thing; what gives him pleasure, then? Listen

11. *The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.*

As kings have gloried in their troops, so does God glory in tender hearts that fear him, and that hope in his mercy. I love that double description-“ them that fear him,” “those that hope in his mercy.” There is a mixture there,-fearing and hoping,-but the mixture makes a sweet amalgam of grace. It is like a fisherman’s

net; there is the lead to sink it, and here are the corks to float it. If you only hope in his mercy, you shall not come back empty from the great banquet of everlasting love: “Jehovah taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.”

12, 13. *Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee.*

Happy Zion, which God secures so well that even bars and posts are finished; not merely walls and gates, but the bars of the gates. There is nothing wanting in the covenant of grace. If the gates need bars, God thinks of the little as well as of the great: “He hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee.”

14. *He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat.*

An old commentator says, “Generally, if you get quantity, you do not get quality; but when you deal with God, ‘he filleth thee,’ there is quantity, ‘with the finest of the wheat,’ there is quality.” You get both in God, an abundance of the best.

15. *He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly.*

Great kings have tried to make their postal arrangements act with rapidity; in the olden time, they employed swift dromedaries for this purpose, but “his word runneth very swiftly.” When God has a message to send, he can flash it by lightning, or dispatch it in an instant by one of his angels: “His word runneth very swiftly.” I wish it would run to some of you who are rushing fast into sin, and that it would overtake you, and arrest you, and bring you to repentance and to faith in God. Here is a verse that may help to cool you on this summer’s evening

16. *He giveth snow like wool:*

It is as soft as wool, and, like wool, it is a covering, and keeps the earth warm in the bitter frosts, and saves the plants from death: “He giveth snow like wool.”

16, 17. *He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?*

I want you to notice how, in the olden days, good men felt God to be very near. They thought that all this was caused by God: “he

giveth snow; he scattereth hoarfrost;” and they speak of “his ice, his cold.” It is a poor progress that philosophers have made, to try to get us farther off from God than we used to be; but I bless his name that he is as near as ever he was to those who believe in him. They can see his working, and feel the touch of his hand. But what a wonder-working God this is who uses snow to warm the earth, and makes the frost to act like ashes,-yea, who makes bread out of ice, for when there is no frosty weather, the harvests are not half so good; but the very frosts break up the clods, and help to create bread for men! The Lord works by contraries. Perhaps, at the time that he means to save you, you will think that he is destroying you. If he means to heal you, he will wound you. If he means to lift you up, he will throw you down. Learn to understand his method, then, for this is the mode of his working.

18, 19. *He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow. He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel.*

That is the best news of all, that God reveals himself to his children. All he works in nature is eclipsed by what he does in grace.

20. *He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD.*

PSALM 147

1. *Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.*

“It is good,” that is to say, it is a thing that ought to be done, it is a right thing “to sing praises unto our God.” “It is good,” that is to say, it is profitable, it is beneficial to our own hearts. Prayer is refreshing, but praise is even more so, for there may be, and there often is, in prayer, the element of selfishness; but praise rises to a yet higher level. Prayer and praise together make up spiritual respiration; we breathe in the air of heaven when we pray, and we breathe it out again when we praise. “It is good to sing praises unto our God.” What a mercy it is that it is pleasant, too! There are many things that are good that are not pleasant, and many more things that are pleasant that are not good; but here is a holy duty which is also a heavenly pleasure. It is the bliss of heaven to praise God; let us

anticipate that bliss by praising him now, “for it is pleasant.” And then there is a third commendation: “and praise is comely.” That is to say, it is beautiful, it is a good thing in its right place, it is according to the natural and spiritual fitness of things that God should be praised. In God’s sight, one of the most beautiful things in the world is a grateful heart: “it is pleasant; and praise is comely.”

2. *The LORD doth build up Jerusalem:*

There is something for which to praise him. When the Jews came back from captivity, and found their beautiful city all in ruin, God helped them to build it up again, so they sang, “The Lord doth build up Jerusalem.” We may sing the same sacred song, for the psalmist does not say, “The Lord hath builded,” but “The Lord doth build up Jerusalem,” he is going on to build it: the Divine Architect’s plan of salvation is still being carried out, the great Master Builder is still placing stone upon stone in the wondrous courses of his election of grace: “The Lord doth build up Jerusalem.” O Lord, build up this part of the wall!

2. *He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.*

Those that were far away, captives in Babylon, he brought back again. God has a long arm, which he is casting round his outcast chosen ones, for he means to gather them all to himself. He has an elect redeemed people, and they are scattered throughout the whole world; but even Caiaphas knew enough of the truth to declare that Christ “should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.”

3. *He healeth the broken in heart,*

He does it still, mark you, for the verb is in the present tense: “He healeth the broken in heart.” These are two of God’s great occupations, to gather outcasts, and to heal broken hearts.”

3. *And bindeth up their wounds.*

Oh, what a blessed God he is, thus to interest himself in the sorrows of mankind, to give his infinite mind and heart to this wondrous work of healing the wounds of our lost humanity! You see, it is thus that the Lord buildeth up Jerusalem; the two verses are the complement of each other. “The Lord doth build up Jerusalem,”—with what? Outcasts, and broken hearts, and wounded spirits. Many of the stones that God puts into his great temple are such as men would exclude. Broken hearts and bruised spirits, that look as if they

never could have any strength in them, God uses in building up his Church. What a wonderful leap it is from this third verse to the next!

4. *He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.*

Yet is there as much grandeur and glory in his compassion as in his omniscience. To bind up wounds, is as God-like a work as to count the stars; God doth both, taking perhaps a greater delight in the first than in the second. There is not a star in the church's firmament to which God has not given the light, he knows the number of his shining ones, and he keeps their light burning; their names are all in the Lamb's Book of Life.

5, 6. *Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. The LORD lifteth up the meek:*

That is the Lord's usual way; those that are down, he raises; but

6. *He casteth the wicked down to the ground.*

This is what God is always doing, uplifting and overturning, putting people and things in their right places.

7. *Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God:*

False gods have been served with discordant yells and cries of agony, but our God is to be worshipped with songs of thanksgiving. Think not that he desires you to come before him with groans and moans: he will hear them if they be sincere, but he would have you raise your hearts to something higher and better.

8. *Who covereth the heaven with clouds,*

Little children do not think that is a matter for gratitude; they are sorry to see the clouds and the rain, but wise men know how fraught with blessing are the clouds God sends. It is even so in providence and grace.

8. *Who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.*

For every blade of grass, we ought to thank and praise the Lord. If he be a benefactor who makes two blades of grass grow where only one grew before, what a Benefactor must he be who makes all the blades of grass to grow, without whom there would be none at all! Even on the mountains, where it may be that we have no cattle, yet there are wild creatures that must be fed, so the Lord maketh the

grass to grow there. We are often selfish, and we talk of things so being useless if they are of no use to us. Are there no other living things, then, but men; and is God only to care for those animals which most of all rebel against him? Let us think differently of this matter, and bless the Lord even for the grass that grows on the waste places, where only the chamois or the wild gazelle will feed, for they, too, have their purpose to fulfill in God's sight.

9. *He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.*

Unclean creatures though they be, God feeds them. We have known people have only one bird in a cage, and yet forget to feed it; but God has myriads of birds, millions of beasts, and fishes innumerable, yet they are not starved. The commissariat of God never fails: my soul, will he not feed thee? If he hears ravens, will he not hear thy cry?

10. *He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man.*

Man boasts of his strength, and he looks at his fine horse, and glories in its strength; but God has something higher and better than sinew and muscle to boast about.

11. *The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him,*

That is his joy. As a man is proud of his horse, or of the muscles which enable him to run swiftly, so God takes delight in those that fear him, —

11. *In those that hope in his mercy.*

These are his jewels; these are his glory.

12-14. *Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders,*

What a blessing this is, not only in a nation, but in a church! If you were ever members of a church where they seemed to quarrel punctually once every month, you would soon be sorry to be a professor of religion at all, but to live in a church where brotherly love rules, this is a thing for which to praise the name of the Lord. "He maketh peace in thy borders," —

14. *And filleth thee with the finest of the wheat.*

There is generally peace where there is plenty. Dogs fight when there are few bones, and when God's people are well fed, they do

not so often quarrel with one another. If they are fed with the finest of the wheat, there will be peace in their borders.

15, 16. *He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly. He giveth snow like wool:*

Light and fleecy, it covers the plants, and protects them from the cold; the snow is a kind of garment to them from the frost.

16. *He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes.*

You must often have been reminded of white ashes as you looked at the hoarfrost in the early morning.

17. *He casteth forth his ice like morsels:*

Hailstones, like little pieces of bread, broken off and scattered abroad,-

17. *Who can stand before his cold?*

In all this, the Lord is really fattening the soil, and preparing food for man and beast in the coming spring and summer.

18. *He sendeth out his word, and melteth them:*

He has only to speak a word, and the ice, the snow, the hoarfrost, and every sign of winter will disappear, and we shall begin to swelter in the heats of summer.

18. *He causeth his wind to blow,*

That is all, —

18. *And the waters flow.*

Ice-saws and axes could not set free the frozen rivers but his wind, the very breath from the mouth of God doth it at once.

19. *He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel.*

And we have come into the place of Jacob and Israel, even we who have believed; for Abraham is the father of believers, and we are his spiritual seed according to the promise. So we have to bless God that he has showed unto us his word, his statutes and his judgments.

20. *He hath not dealt so with any nation:*

There are no other people who know the Lord as God's people do; and remember, they constitute one nation. We are Englishmen, perhaps, or Americans, that is a skin-deep distinction: but if we are in Christ, we are one family, we are of that one peculiar nation which, all over the world, is distinct from every other nation.

20. *And as for his judgments, they have not known them.*

If they have been left in the dark, let us do all we can to carry or send the light of the gospel to them; and so we think of the great things God has done for us, let us join in a joyful Hallelujah, as the Psalm ends, —

20. *Praise ye the LORD.*

PSALM 147

This Book of Psalms ends its golden stream in a cataract of praise. The last Psalms are Hallelujah Psalms; this one begins and ends, as several others do, with “Hallelujah.”

1. *Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God;*

His “our God,” whether he be the God of other men or not.’ He is “our God” by his choice of us, and by our choice of him; “our God” by eternal covenant, to whom we also pledge ourselves: “This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Then let us “sing praises unto our God,” for “it is good” so to do.

1. *For it is pleasant; and praise is comely.*

It is the most pleasurable of all exercises; it is the occupation of heaven. “It is pleasant;” it is delightful to the heart. Nothing tends to lift us out of sorrow and trouble like giving ourselves to singing the high praises of God. “It is good;” “it is pleasant;” “it is comely:” it is becoming, fitting, beautiful. Praise and Jehovah should go together. He is so worthy-to be praised that, to withhold his praises, would be an uncomely thing; but to adore him, to magnify him, is the very beauty of holiness.

2. *The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.*

There is the first reason for praise. The Jews were pleased to behold their city rising out of the heap of ruins, they were glad to see the scattered ones, the outcasts, coming back to their native place, and entering into citizenship in Zion. Shall not the Church of God, of which Jerusalem was a type, praise God that he is steadily and solidly building up a Church to his praise and glory? He is building it out of strange materials; outcast sinners, who were far from him by wicked works, are brought nigh by the blood of Christ. Stones from nature’s quarry are changed into living stones, and then

built up into a living temple for his praise. "Jehovah doth build up Jerusalem." Not the minister, not the workers in the church, but the Lord himself does it. "He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel." An uplifted Christ draws all men to him; the gathering power is with him. "Unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Let us praise God that this does take place in a measure in our midst, and in other churches where his name is honoured.

3. *He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.*

He is such a condescending God that he walks the hospitals, and is familiar with despondency, and enters in sympathy into the cases of distress which others shun because they are unable to help. Where he comes as the Good Physician, "He healeth the broken in heart."

4. *He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.*

I call your attention, dear friends, to the wonderful change from the sick to the stars, — from the broken in heart to the starry hosts of heaven. Our God is equally at home with the little and with the great; with stars, which to us are countless, and with men, who to us are comfortless. God is just as great in dealing with our sorrows as in guiding the stars in their courses. He is as great as he is good, and as good as he is great.

5. *Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.*

There are three things here predicated of him, — first, that he is great in himself, great in the vastness of his being; next, that he is of great power; and, then, that he is of great, yea, of infinite understanding. Here is the mercy of it all, that he brings that greatness, that vastness of power, that infinity of knowledge, to bear upon poor broken hearts, — that he is just as wise in meeting our distresses as he is in marshalling the stars that he has made. Oh, what a God is ours!

6. *The LORD lifteth up the meek; he casteth the wicked down to the ground.*

Ours is a singular God; there is none like him. He is undoing all the things that are, turning things upside down. The lowly, he lifts up; but the proud, he throws down to the ground, even into the dust. This is his way; and this is always a special note in the songs of

God's people. Remember how Mary sang, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away." This singular behavior of our God, who has no respect unto the persons of men, is a special cause for our thankfulness; therefore, let us magnify his name.

7. Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God:

Let every form of melody and harmony be consecrated to him. Give him thanks-giving and thanks-living; and as he is always giving to you, take care that you give to him what you can, — namely, your thanks.

8, 9. *Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.*

God, the Infinite One, makes the clouds; not the laws of nature, which are dead, inoperative things without him; but Jehovah himself fashions the clouds, and prepares the rain. There is an infinite wisdom about the preparation of every raindrop, and the sending it in such form and way that it shall be balanced upon each blade of grass, and shall hang there glittering in its perfection, and nourish even the least herb of the field. Only infinite wisdom could have thought of or prepared a single shower of rain. This rain is for the grass; does God think of the grass? Yes, not only of the cedars of Lebanon, but of grass, and not only of the grass that grows in the fruitful meadow, but of those little tufts which are here and there upon the rugged mountains. He thinks of clouds, and of rain, and of grass which he makes to grow upon the mountains, that he may feed cattle. Does God, the high and lofty One, stoop to give to the beast his food? Ah! and more than that, he feeds all those wild birdlings that seem of no use to men, the young ravens which clamor for the parent bird to return, and fill them when they are hungry. Does God turn feeder of ravens? Ah, so it is; then, again, blessed be his name! Praise ye the Lord, for it is good to sing praises to such a condescending God as this. I am sure that you can draw the inferences for your own comfort. Do you seem like a little bit of grass on the bare mountain-side? He has clouds and rain for you. Do you seem like a neglected bird in its nest, crying for food? He who feeds the ravens will feed you. The Hebrew has it, "the sons of the

ravens,” and if God gives food to the sons of the ravens, he will certainly feed his own sons.

10, 11. *He delighteth not in the strength of the horse; he taketh not pleasure in the legs of man. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.*

Again, you see, it is the same strain; it is not the great things or the mighty things that attract him, but the little things, and the weak things, and the despised things.

12, 13. *Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee.*

There shall be special hallelujahs from God’s own people. His holy city and his holy hill should magnify the thrice-holy God. O beloved, if we are indeed children of that Jerusalem which is from above, which is the mother of all believers, let us prepare a new song to the Lord our God for all his mercy to us. Praise him in your own houses, in “Jerusalem.” Praise him in his own house, in “Zion.” Let your praise thus be continuous, where you dwell and where he dwells: “He hath strengthened the bars of thy gates.” The fortifications are finished, and he has made all secure; therefore, magnify his name.

14. *He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat.*

When the Church is peaceful, and when the gospel fills the saints, and they feed upon it, and feel it to be the very finest of the wheat, should not God be praised? Does not the hallelujah come in here again? Praise ye the Lord for spiritual meat, and spiritual peace, and spiritual security.

15. *He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly.*

Oriental kings made a point of having swift postal arrangements by which they could send their decrees to the extremity of their dominions, sometimes on horses, and sometimes on swift dromedaries; but God’s command, God’s decree, God’s “word runneth very swiftly.” He dwells in the midst of his people, and forth from Zion he sends his decree; he dispatches his couriers, and they run very swiftly to work his will. It is so in providence; it is assuredly so in grace. As to providence, see what God does : —

16. *He giveth snow like wool: —*

People say, nowadays, “It snows.” They said among the Hebrews, “HE giveth snow.” There seems to be a tendency to get further and further away from God in these very learned days. If this is all that science can do for us, — put God further off, — it shall be our injury rather than our benediction. “He giveth snow like wool.” The flakes are like the fleece, and fall softly. Snow clothes the earth with a white, warm garment, as the well-washed sheep are clothed with wool.

16. *He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes.*

There are black frosts and white frosts; and you know how, sometimes, vegetation appears to be burnt up with cold. It is God who does it all: “He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes.

17. *He casteth forth his ice like morsels :-The hailstones come like morsels, — like crumbs, that is the word, — like crumbs of ice; or, as the ice is formed upon the lake, it comes like crusts.*

Either way, “He casteth forth his ice like morsels:” —

17. *Who can stand before his cold.*

If God displays himself as fire, who can stand against his burnings? Or if he chooses to display himself in cold, there is as much of consuming force about intense cold as about vehement heat: “Who can stand before his cold?”

18. *He sendeth out his word, and melteth them:-*

The icebergs float southward, and are melted. The rivers that had been held in chains of ice leap into liberty, and all at the word of the Lord: “He sendeth out his word, and melteth them.”

18. *He causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow.*

“This is the result of the laws of nature.” So say those who are still in nature’s darkness. “This is the work of God,” say those who have come out of that darkness into his marvelous light.

19. *He showeth his word unto Jacob, —*

Observe that, when God’s people know God’s Word, it is as much the work of God as when the waters are loosed from their bands of ice.

19. *His statutes and his judgments unto Israel.*

The Lord does it according to his own sovereign will.

20. *He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. -Praise ye the LORD.*

Here, you see again, is a peculiar reason for thanksgiving: “Praise ye Jehovah.” “It is good to sing praises unto our God, for he hath dealt with us in a special manner, with peculiar and discriminating grace. ‘He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments, they have not known them.’” Therefore are they silent, but let us not be dumb. With such a revelation as we have, with such teachings of his Spirit to make the Lord known to us, let us not be ungrateful, but ever praise his name.

PSALM 147

1. *Praise ye the LORD:*

This Psalm begins and ends with Hallelujah. So may this service, and so may our lives, commence and conclude with Hallelujah!

1, 2. *For it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely. The LORD doth build up Jerusalem:*

Oh, that the Lord would do so here tonight!

2. *He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.*

We want that blessing, too. Oh, that some outcasts might be gathered together! It shall make our hearts cry “Hallelujah!” indeed, if there be a building up of the church and an ingathering of the outcasts.

3. *He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.*

As we read that, we may well say again, “Hallelujah!”

4. *He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.*

And the Hallelujah is not louder because of that fact than it is for the other truth. What a condescending God: “He healeth the broken in heart.” How infinite is his mind: “He telleth the number of the stars.”

5, 6. *Great is our lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.*

The LORD lifteth up the meek:

How wonderful it is that the Lord should use the greatness of his power and the infinity of his understanding for the lifting up of those whom men often despise, “the meek”!

6-11. *He casteth the wicked down to the ground. Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.*

Other kings tell of their cavalry and infantry, they boast of their regiments of horse and foot guards, but our great God finds his delight in them that fear him and even in the feebler sort of these: “those that hope in his mercy.” These are the courtiers of Jehovah. These are the forces of our God, through whom he will win great victories.

12-16. *Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat. He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly.*

Our King’s warrant runs everywhere, all over the world. He has universal power in nature, in providence, and in grace: “His word runneth very swiftly.”

16. *He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes.*

The Hebrews saw God in all the phenomena of nature; let us do the same. Let us attribute every snow-flake to the divine hand, and every breath of frost to the divine mouth.

17, 18. *He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sendeth out his word, and melteth them:*

It is just as easy for him to send warm weather as to give us the chill of winter.

18. *He causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow.*

His own soft south wind comes, and the fetters of frost dissolve, and the waters flow. It is the Lord that doeth it all. He is not far from any of us; therefore let us not forget him.

19. *He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel.*

The rest of the world can only see him in nature, but his own people see him in revelation, in the movements of his Holy Spirit.

20. *He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord.*

Therefore, ye who are favored with his special manifestations of love, take you up the joyous song even if others do not. Hallelujah! "Praise ye the Lord."

Now let us read in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 26., beginning at the sixth verse.

This exposition consisted of readings from Psalm 147, And Matthew 26:6-30.

PSALM 148

We will first read a short Psalm inciting all to praise the Lord, and then we will read part of the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, specially noticing Mary's song of praise. It is a blessed thing to indulge our holy gratitude, and to let it have speech in sacred psalm and song. Praise is the end of prayer and preaching. It is the ear of the wheat: it is God's harvest from all the seed of grace that he has sown.

1. *Praise ye the LORD.*

Hallelujah!

1. *Praise ye the LORD from the heavens:*

Begin the song, ye holy angels before the throne; lead us in praise, O ye glorified spirits above!

1. *Praise him in the heights.*

Sing aloud, ye that sit at God's right hand in the heavenly places; let the highest praises be given to the Most High

2, 3. *Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light.*

Shine out his glory. Ye are but dim reflections of his brightness; yet, praise ye him.

4. *Praise him, ye heaven of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens.*

Stored up there for man's use and benefit. Ye clouds that look black to us, and yet are big with blessings, praise ye the Lord. See, beloved, how the song comes down from the praises of the angels

nearest the throne, to the glorified saints, then to the sun, and moon, and stars, and the clouds that float in the firmament of heaven.

5, 6. *Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created. He hath also established them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass.*

Or, pass away. Now the psalmist begins at the bottom, and works up to the top.

7. *Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps:*

Right down there, however low the caverns may be, let the strange creatures that inhabit the secret places in the very bottoms of the mountains and the depths of the seas, — let them send out the deep bass of their praise.

8-10. *Fire, and hail; snow, and vapor; stormy wind fulfilling his word: Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl:*

If you cannot praise God by soaring up like eagles, if you feel more like the creeping things of the earth, still praise him. There is something very pleasant in the spiritual allusion that grows out of this verse. You who seem like poor worms of the dust, or insects of an hour, can yield your little need of praise to God.

11-14. *Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children: Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven. He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him.*

They ought to sing best and most sweetly, because they are nearest to his heart. “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.” If all other tongues are silent, let them praise the Lord.

14. *Praise ye the LORD.*

The Psalm ends, as it began, with Hallelujah! “Praise ye the Lord.”

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 148; AND LUKE 1:5-35; 46-56.

PSALM 149

The whole Book of Psalms is full of praise, but the praise culminates at the close. There are five “Hallelujah Psalms” at the end of the Book; they are so named because they both begin and

conclude with the word Hallelujah, "Praise ye the Lord." It must be to the intense regret of all reverent persons to find the word Hallelujah so used today, in a hackneyed way, that it is made to be a commonplace instead of a very sacred word,-Hallelujah, or, Praise be unto Jah, Jehovah. He who uses this word in a flippant manner is guilty of taking the name of the Lord in vain.

1. *Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song,*

You have had new mercies from the Lord; give him in return a new song. You have a new apprehension of his mercy, you who live under this gospel dispensation have something more to sing of than even David experienced; therefore, "sing unto Jehovah a new song,"-throw your hearts into it; do not let it be a matter of routine, but let your whole soul, in all its vigor and freshness, address itself to the praise of God.

1. *And his praise in the congregation of saints.*

All saints praise God; they are not saints if they do not. The praise of any one saint is sweet to him; but in the congregation of saints there is a linked sweetness, a wonderful commixture of precious things. Sing his praise, then, in the congregation of his holy ones.

2. *Let Israel rejoice in him that made him:*

Adore your Creator for your being, and for your well being. He has twice made you, ye people of God; give him therefore double praise,-not only the song of those who sang when creation's work was done, but the praise of those who sing because they are made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

2, 3. *Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise his name in the dance:*

The holy dance of those days differed altogether from the frivolous and lascivious dances of the present time. It was a sacred exercise in which the whole body expressed its delight before God.

3. *Let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp.*

The one to be struck and the other to be gently touched to yield its stringed sweetness.

4. *For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people:*

Should not they take pleasure in the condescension on his part to take any pleasure in them? Oh, what a lift up it is for us when we learn to take pleasure in the Lord!

4. *He will beautify the meek with salvation.*

He dresses all his children; but the meek are his Joseph's, and upon them he puts the coat of many colors, and they shall inherit the earth.

5. *Let the saints be joyful in glory:*

God is their glory; let them be joyful in him.

5. *Let them sing aloud upon their beds.*

If they cannot come up to the congregation, yet, when they rest at home, or when they suffer at home, let them not cease from their music. God's praise comes up sweetly, I do not doubt, this Sabbath evening, from many a lonely chamber where the saints are waiting for the appearing of their Lord.

6. *Let the high praises of God be in their mouth,*

"In their throat," says the Hebrew, for God's saints sing deep down in their throats. There is a deeply rooted music when we praise God, which is altogether unlike the mere syllables of the lips that come from a hypocrite's tongue.

6. *And a two-edged sword in their hand;*

For we have to fight today with principalities, and powers, and wickednesses everywhere. With the sword of the Spirit in our hands, we fight the battles of the Prince of peace.

7, 8. *To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron;*

So was it when Israel came into Canaan, ordained to execute the vengeance of God upon the heathen nations. We have no such warrant, and no such painful duty; but there is a prince who shall be bound with chains and with fetters of iron one day. The Lord shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly; and, meanwhile, we fight against the powers of evil of every kind. Oh, that God would help us to bind King Drunkenness with chains, and King Infidelity with fetters of iron! Would God the day were come when impurity, which defiles so many, were overcome and vanquished by the two-edged sword of the Spirit of God!

9. *To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints.*

Or it may be read, "He is the honour of all his saints." "Unto you that believe he is precious," or, "he is an honour," says the apostle;

and there is no honour like that which comes of being coupled with God, living in him, and living for him.

9. *Praise ye the LORD.*

What bursts of praise must have risen from the hosts of Israel when they gathered for their annual festivals, and sang together these last great Hallelujah Psalms!

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALMS 149 AND 150.

PSALM 149

1. *Praise ye the Lord.*

This is a Hallelujah Psalm; it begins with, “Praise ye the Lord,” and finishes in the same way. It is a complete circle of praise. The long streams of the Psalms end in glorious cascades of hallelujahs. One after another these jubilant notes roll out, as in Handel’s magnificent Hallelujah Chorus.

1. *Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.*

There was an old song previous to this new one, — in the 148th Psalm, — the Psalm for sun and moon and stars, for deeps and dragons, for old men and maidens, and so on; but this is a Psalm for saints, so it is “a new song” for the new creation. Therefore, let all the new creatures of God sing it from their hearts.

2. *Let Israel rejoice in him that made him:*

This is the best and highest form of creation, — the making, not only of men, but of men of God, the making of Israels, the making of prevailing princes.

2. *Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.*

Let them rejoice that their Maker reigns, that he rules over them, and that he rules over all things: “Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.”

3. *Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp.*

That is, let them repeat the joy of Israel at the Red Sea, when Miriam “took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances; and Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously.” So, O ye children of God, let the praises of your God and King ring out as with the music of the timbrel and harp.

4. *For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people:*

Then, should not they take pleasure in him? If he looks upon them with divine delight, should not they look up to him with adoring gratitude? What is there in us to give him any pleasure? But if his delights are with the sons of men, surely the sons of men should have their delights in him: "For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people."

4, 5. *He will beautify the meek with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory:*

Let them glory in God, and be joyful in him. Let their spirits seem to rise even beyond grace up to the anticipation of glory: "Let the saints be joyful in glory."

5. *Let them sing aloud upon their beds.*

If they be sick, or if they lie awake at night, or if they have enjoyed sweet rest, let them not fail to praise God for it: "Let them sing aloud upon their beds."

6. *Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand;*

But let it be a spiritual sword, that two-edged sword of God's Word which will cut through coats of mail; and as they wield it, let them ever rest satisfied that victory shall surely be theirs. One of the poetical versions of this Psalm rightly renders this verse, —

"Ye saints of the Lord; as round him ye stand,
His two-edged sword, his word, in your hand,
To sound his high praises your voices employ!
To victory he raises, and crowns you with joy."

7. *To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people;*

So they had to do in those old times: but we, happily, have not to do so now, except it be in a spiritual sense that, with the sword of God's Word we are to cut down the idols of the heathen, and subdue the nations to our King.

8. *To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron;*

Reading the passage in a gospel sense, we lead men captives in the bonds of love that are stronger than fetters of iron. O soldiers of Christ, army of the living God, this is the battle you have to fight; be this your victory, too!

9. *To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the LORD.*

So the Psalm ends upon its key-note, — “Hallelujah.” “Praise ye the Lord.’ Now let us turn to the 5th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, and see what we have to rejoice in there.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 149.; AND MATTHEW 5:1-12.

PSALM 150

1. *Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary:*

Notice how, in this last Psalm, it is praise, praise, praise, all the way through. I think we have the word “praise” some thirteen times in the six verses. It is all “praise him, praise him, praise him.” It is not enough to do it once, or twice, we should keep on praising the Lord till we should make the very heavens ring with the music of his praises. “Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary:” that is, in his holy place where he dwells. Begin, ye angels, cherubim, and seraphim, pour forth his praise.

1. *Praise him in the firmament of his power.*

Let every star shine forth his praises, and sun and moon cease not to extol him: “Praise him in the firmament of his power.”

2. *Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. There is a task for us; we shall never attain to that height. We sometimes sing,-“*

Wide as his vast dominion lies,
Make the Creator’s name be known;
Loud as his thunder shout his praise,
And sound it lofty as his throne;”
but who can compass such a feat as that?

3, 4. *Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.*

So that there were all kinds of music in those days praising God,-the wind and the stringed instruments, the timbrel and the pipe. Everything that can praise God should praise him. The spiritual significance of these verses is this, let men of different orders and different sorts praise the Lord,-men, women, children, those who are deeply taught and those who know but little, those who are great and those who are small. Let every heart regard itself

as an instrument of praise, and use itself wholly for the Lord's praise. Having got so far, the psalmist recollected that there were discs of brass, which were struck together, and gave forth a sound to be heard at a great distance, so he said,-

5. *Praise him upon the loud cymbals:*

Crash!

5. *Praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.*

Then came another crash!

6. *Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.*

A Jewish Rabbi once remarked to me that the name Jehovah was not made up of letters, but only of a series of breathings. (The preacher here uttered the three syllables of the sacred name, Jehovah, as though they were not composed of letters, but only a succession of breathings.) That is the nearest approach to the name of God, three breathings; therefore since all breath comes from him, and his very name can only be pronounced by breath, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord." Hallelujah! "THERE IS FORGIVENESS."

PROVERBS

PROVERBS 27

1. *Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*

Let us never boast of future days and years, or what we mean to do when we come to any age, or what shall be our position when we grow gray. Let us never boast of anything in the future, for we cannot tell what even a day may bring forth.

2. *Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.*

For he who praises himself writes himself down a fool in capital letters.

3. *A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both.*

One might endure almost any sort of labour sooner than have to live with one who is perpetually and foolishly angry.

4. *Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?*

Envy is a snake in the grass. Christians, beware of envy. You will, perhaps, be tempted to have it in your heart when you see another Christian more useful than you are, or when some Christian brother seems to have more honour than you have. Ah, then! cry to God against it. Never let this venomous reptile be spared for a single moment. The best of men will find envy creeping over them at times; it may be envy of the wicked who are rich. We must seek to overcome that at once. And even envy of the best of men, what is it but covetousness and hatred, and a breach of two commandments? God save us from it!

5. *Open rebuke is better than secret love.*

That I should love my fellow-man is a good thing; but to have love enough to be able openly to rebuke his faults, is a very high proof of affection, and far better than secret love that is silent when it ought to speak. And yet, how many persons there are who are very angry with you if you give them an open rebuke, and how many

there are who are foolish enough to prefer secret love to open rebuke, though they have Solomon's wisdom to teach them better! Our Lord Jesus Christ has a secret love to his people, yet he never spares them the open rebuke when he knows that it will be good for them.

6. *Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*

Beware of the flattering world, believer; beware of the flattering devil, and of the cozening of the flesh. When things go smoothly with you, there may be the greatest danger. Whatever you do in times of storm, keep a good look-out when the sea is calm and the sky is clear.

7. *The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.*

“The full soul loatheth” (even that luscious thing) “an honeycomb.” No true preaching will go down with him who is full of himself, full of his own importance. Unless there shall be many of the flowers of rhetoric in the discourse, he will not listen to sound doctrine. “But to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.” Happy hunger is it when the soul hungereth and thirsteth after righteousness. Then there are no hyper-critical observations about the minister's delivery, and no carping at words and phrases. It is spiritual food that the soul seeks, and if it can get that, though it may not be to its taste in every respect, there will be a sweetness in it that will make it like a honeycomb.

8, 9. *As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.*

The Orientals were wont to smear their faces, and especially their hair with ointment and perfume, and those who came near them were pleased with the scent. When you can get a little conversation, especially upon points that help towards godliness, with those of a like frame of mind with you, when you can have sweet communion and fellowship with the people of God, then it is that your hearts are rejoiced as with ointments and perfumes.

10. *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not;*

Have but few friends, but stick closely to them. Above all, cleave closely to that “Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” If

he be thine own Friend, and thy father's Friend, never forsake HIM. Forsake all the world for him, but let not all the world induce thee to forsake him.

10. *Neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off.*

It is very sad that it should be so; but, sometimes, our nearest relatives are the farthest off, and those who ought to help us the most help us least. Many a man has had kindness shown to him by his neighbour, who was but a stranger, when he has had little or no kindness from his own relatives. But there is one Brother into whose house we may always go. So near of kin he is to us, and so loving of heart, that he never thinketh a hard thought of us; but, the more we ask of him, the more delighted he is with us, and is only grieved with us because we stint ourselves in our prayers.

11. *My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me.*

A good son is his father's honour. If any say of such-and-such a man that he is a bad man, yet, if his children walk orderly, he can answer the slander without speaking a word. Would a bad man have brought up his children in that way? Would they be walking in the fear of God if he had not walked in that way himself? So the sons of God ought to seek, by their consistency, to keep the name of their Father clear of reproach. The consistency of our conduct should be the best answer to the accusations of the infidel.

12, 13. *A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself, but the simple pass on and are punished. Take his garment that is surety for a stranger,*

He that taketh surety is sure, but he that goeth surety for another, and especially for a stranger, will smart for it, perhaps to the day of his death.

13, 14. *And take a pledge of him for a strange woman. He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.*

There are some men who always use such sweet words; they are so fond of you that they are up early in the morning to give you their praise, and they continue all day pouring out their flattering unction. Such blessings as these are a curse, and the wise man will loathe these parasitical people who will see no faults, or pretend that they

do not see any, but will always be extolling mere trifles as though they were the sublimest virtues. A sensible man is not to be overcome by this flattery.

15. *A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.*

When there is a little leak in the roof, and the rain keeps dropping through, it is very uncomfortable; but it is ten times more comfortable than it is to have to dwell with a contentious woman.

16. *Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself.*

That is to say, if a man put sweet ointment on his hand, the smell of it would soon be perceived; so, if a woman be of a contentious, angry, quarrelsome disposition, her contentiousness will be discovered, there is no hiding it.

17. *Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.*

Hence the usefulness of Christian association, and hence also the evil of sinful company, for one sinner sharpens another to do mischief, just as one saint encourages another to righteousness.

18, 19. *Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured. As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.*

If I look into water, I see the reflection of my own face, not another man's; and if I look into society, I shall probably see men like-minded with myself. How is it that a drunken man always finds out drunken men? How is it that lascivious men always have a bad opinion of the morality of other people? How is it that hypocrites always think other people hypocrites? Why, because they can see the reflection of their own faces. When a man tells me that there is no love in the Church of God, I know it is because he sees his own face, and knows that there is no love in it. You will generally find that men measure other people's corn with their own bushels. They are sure to mete out to others according to their own measure; and they thus unconsciously betray themselves.

20, 21. *Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied. As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise.*

Many a man, who can bear adversity, cannot bear prosperity. The world's censures seldom do a Christian any harm, but it is the breath of applause that often gives us the scarlet fever of pride.

22. *Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.*

No troubles, no afflictions, can of themselves make a fool into a wise man. The sinner remains a sinner, after all providential chastisements, unless sovereign grace interposes.

23. *Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.*

Be not slothful in business; and, above all, let the Christian be diligent to know the state of his own heart.

24-27. *For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation? The hay appeareth, and the tender grass showeth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered. The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field. And thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance for thy maidens.*

Those who are diligent generally prosper, and they who are diligent in spiritual things shall have all that their souls need. They shall be clothed with the robe of righteousness, they shall be well fed, and shall be satisfied. May the wisdom of these proverbs be given to us in daily life, that we may be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves; but, above all, may heavenly wisdom be given to us in all spiritual things, to the praise of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

ECCLESIASTES

ECCLESIASTES 11

1. *Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.*

Hoard not thy bread; for if thou dost, it will mildew, it will be of no use to thee. Cast it on the waters; scatter it abroad; give it to the unworthy men if need be. Some here have seen an allusion to the casting of seed into the Nile when it overflowed its banks. When the waters subsided, the corn would grow, and be gathered in “after many days.”

2. *Give a portion to seven,*

And if that be a perfect number, give beyond it,

2. *And also to eight;*

Give to more than thou canst afford to give to. Help some who are doubtful, some who are outside of the perfect number, and give them a portion, a fair portion. Our Saviour went beyond Solomon; for he said, “Give to every man that asketh of thee.”

2. *For thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.*

Thou knowest not what need there may be of thy help; nor what need may come to thee, and how thou thyself mayest be helped by those whom thou helpest now.

3. *If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth;*

The tree falls the way it is inclined; but when it has fallen, there it must be. God grant that you and I may fall the right way when the axe of death hews us down! Which way are we inclined?

4, 5. *He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.*

There are great mysteries which we can never comprehend. God alone knows how the soul comes into the body, or even how the

body is fashioned. This must remain with him. We do not know how sinners are regenerated. We know not how the Spirit of God works upon the mind of man, and transforms the sinner into a saint. We do not know. There are some who know too much already. I have not half the desire to know that I have to believe and to love. Oh, that we loved God more, and trusted God more! We might then get to heaven if we knew even less than we do.

6. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

You cannot make the gospel enter into men's hearts. You cannot tell how it does enter and change them. The Spirit of God does that; but your duty is to go on telling it out. Go on spreading abroad the knowledge of Christ; in the morning, and in the evening, and all day long, scatter the good seed of the kingdom. You have nothing to do with the result of your sowing; that remains with the Lord. That which you sow in the morning may prosper, or the seed that you scatter in the evening; possibly God will bless both. You are to keep on sowing, whether you reap or not.

7. Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.

Take Christ away, and this is a truthful estimate of human life. Put Christ into the question, and Solomon does not hit the mark at all. If we have Christ with us, whether the days are light or dark, we walk in the light, and our soul is happy and glad; but apart from Christ, the estimate of life which is given here is an exactly accurate one — a little brightness and long darkness, a flash and then midnight. God save you from living a merely natural life! May you rise to the supernatural! May you get out of the lower life of the mere animal into the higher life of the regenerated soul! If the life of God be in you, then you shall go from strength to strength like the sun that shineth unto the perfect day.

9. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

Young man, will you dare, then, to follow your passions, and the devices of your own heart, with this ate the back, “God will bring thee into judgment?” Oh no, the advice of Solomon apparently so evil, is answered by warning at the end, which is also true, —

10. *Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.*

“Remove sorrow,” or rather, anger, ambition, or anything else that would cause sorrow, “from thy heart; and put away evil from thy flesh.” Let not thy fleshly nature rule thee; thou art in the period when flesh is strong towards evil, when “vanity” is the ruin of many.

This exposition consisted of readings from ECCLESIASTES 11-12

ECCLESIASTES 11:6-10

6. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.*

It is our business to sow the good seed of the kingdom, to sow it broadcast, to sow it at all times: “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand.” The result of our sowing does not rest with us, but with the great Lord of the harvest. Some of the seed may fall by the wayside, some among thorns, some upon a rock, or upon rocky ground with only a thin layer of earth; but if God has called us to be sowers, and we really sow gospel seed, some of it will fall into good ground, and bring forth fruit, thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or even a hundredfold.

7. *Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun:*

And as it is so pleasant for the natural eyes to behold the natural sun, how much more pleasant is it for the spiritual eye to behold the Sun of righteousness! Sweet as the light of the sun is, the light of the Sun of righteousness is far sweeter.

8, 9. *But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

Nobody in his sense supposes that Solomon exhorted young men to walk according to their own heart and according to the sight of their eyes. This is a common way of speaking; as we may say to a man who is going to excess in drink, "Well, drink your full, and be drunken; but you will have to suffer for it. It will certainly exact a penalty at your hands by-and-by." Nobody would be so foolish as to say that we had exhorted the man to drunkenness. On the contrary, we did, as it were, warn him not to continue in his evil course by reminding him of the penalty which would assuredly follow. So, here, Solomon seems to say, "Do this if you will; do it if you dare; but remember that there is a judgment day coming, and that God will judge you for all these things, and according to these things will he measure out your doom."

10. *Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.*

There is no doubt that, if we were holy, we should be happy; so, if we advise men to put away sorrow from their heart, we must remind them that they cannot do it except by putting away sin. The roots of evil must be cleared right away; else, to out down the shoots, and leave the roots, may be but to strengthen the evil in the long run. The removal of sorrow can only be effected by going deeper, and clearing the heart of sin; and this can only be accomplished by God's grace.

This exposition consisted of readings from ECCLESIASTES 11:6-10; AND 12.

ECCLESIASTES 12

1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;*

Do not give God the dregs of life. Do not offer in sacrifice to him anything that is worn out. Remember that, among the first fruits which the Jews were to bring to the priest to be offered on God's altar, there were to be "green ears of corn, dried by the fire, even corn beaten out of full ears." The Lord delights to have the hearts of his people while they are yet children. The Lord says, through Hosea the prophet, "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms;" as if, while they were but little, God had taught them to take their first steps in walking. There is also that passage in the prophecy of Jeremiah, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth,

the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness.” God delights in those early evidences of love in the morning of life, while the dew is upon everything, and there is a sparkling freshness all around. I pray that you who are young will remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

2. While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

As they do in old age, when troubles seem to multiply, and the brightness of life seems to have gone.

3, 4. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

This is a wonderfully vivid description of the failure of our natural powers. “The keepers of the house shall tremble;” these are our arms, which are the guardians of the house of our body. We naturally thrust out our hands and arms to protect ourselves if we are likely to fall, so they are “the keepers of the house.” “The strong men shall bow themselves,” that is, our legs and knees begin to shake. “The grinders cease because they are few.” Our teeth gradually decay, and at last fall from their places. They are like the first falling stones of a decaying wall, tottering to show how the rest will soon follow. “Those that look out of the windows be darkened.” The eyes begin to lose their quickness of sight; and fresh windows — double windows — are sometimes needed to assist the failing sight. “The doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low.” The voice fails. Then there comes sleeplessness, so that the first little bird that chirps in the morning wakes up the aged man; and as for music, his ears sometimes fail to catch the sweetest melody, and his own voice is unable to attune itself as once it did: “All the daughters of music shall be brought low.”

5. Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish —

This is one of the most beautiful pieces of poetic description that were ever penned. Here we have a true picture of the nervousness which creeps over men in the decline of life. Then there is the

flourishing of the almond tree; there are many before me now whose white hair shows that the almond tree is flourishing.

5. *And the grasshopper shall be a burden,*

Those things that we treated lightly in our youth become a very heavy burden in our later years. A little work wearies, a little care fatigues, and a little trouble frets us as it never used to do.

5. *And desire shall fail:*

The whole nature becomes more calm, and less ambitious, and less ardent than it used to be.

5, 6. *Because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.*

“The silver cord” is the spinal marrow, which gradually relaxes, for the strength and power of it are gone. The whole frame begins to show symptoms of the paralysis which is creeping on. “The golden bowl” is the skull, which contains the brain, and whoever has seen a skull must see how appropriate the figure is. Then, in “the pitcher” and “the wheel” we have a reference to the circulation of the blood, of which Solomon seems to have had at least some inklings. There have been writers who have affirmed that the entire system of anatomy might very well be gathered from these words. They are wonderful, not only because of the poetic imagery which is on the surface, but also because of the depth of meaning which lies beneath.

7. *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Thus will it happen to us all unless Christ shall first come. The machinery of our being will stand still. The fountain of life will be dry; no longer will the living floods rush through their appointed courses as they used to do.*

Please remember that we are not merely talking about people in the street, of whom we know nothing, but about ourselves also for we are mortal, so we must die. Let us believe this, and prepare for it.

8. *Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.*

This seems to be the conclusion to which Solomon came by the experiment of his own life, as well as by the teaching of God. This Book of Ecclesiastes begins thus: “The words of the Preacher, the

son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”

9. *And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.*

That man is not fit to teach who does not give good heed, and set his words in order. He who says whatever comes first into his mind, only gives out chaff which the wind driveth away. But he who would scatter his seed broadcast must take care that he has in his seed-basket good seed that is worth sowing in the broad furrows of the world-field.

10. *The preacher sought to find out acceptable words:*

The Hebrew expression means words of delight, for words that delight the ear may help to win the heart, and so prove to be “acceptable words.”

10, 11. *And that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goods, and as nails fastened by the Masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.*

The true preacher’s words pierce us like the sharp ox-goads pierce the cattle, but they are also like nails that are driven into the wood, and clinched so that they cannot come out. There must be something to stir our emotions, and something to retain in our memory. We need the goads, for we are like the ox that is slow at the plough; and we need to have the nails well driven into us for our memory is often like a rotten piece of wood which lets the nail slip out as soon as it has to bear any weight. May the Holy Spirit make all of us, who are preachers, to be wise so as to know how to use the good and how to drive the nail!

12. *And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end: and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*

That is what Solomon said, and he had never seen the British Museum, or the Bodleian and other noted libraries, for, if he had done so, he would have said, with an emphasis, “There is no end,” for the books of his day could scarcely have been one in a thousand, or one in a million, compared with those which are now produced. I should not wonder, however, if the one in a million was quite worth the million. There are many books made that may benefit the

printer, and the publisher, and the bookseller, but they are not likely to benefit anybody else.

13. *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*

Reverent walking before the Most High; reconciliation to him so that we can thus walk and thus live, and all this proved by a life of obedience to his commandments: "This is the whole duty of man."

14. *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Notice that expression, "every secret thing." It is not merely our public actions that God will judge, else might we be more at our ease; but he takes account of our most private thoughts, words, deeds, and intents. Who among us can endure that ordeal? Yet we must endure it if we are to stand before him. O Lord, prepare us, by thine infinite grace, through faith in thy dear Son, and by the regenerating work of thy gracious Spirit, for this solemn testing time! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from ECCLESIASTES 11:6-10; AND 12.

ECCLESIASTES 12

1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth:*

Now we get on solid ground. There is an irony in the advice, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." There is no irony here; there is solid, sound advice: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." May every young man take this advice, and carry it out!

1. *While the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,*

These arms and hands of ours shake by reason of weakness.

3. *And the strong men shall bow themselves,*

These limbs, these legs of ours, begin to bend under the weight they have to support.

3. *And the grinders cease because they are few,*

The teeth are gone.

3. *And those that look out of the windows be darkened,*
The eyesight begins to fail.

4. *And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;*

The old man sleeps very lightly; anything awakens him. He hides away from public business. The doors are shut in the streets.

5. *Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way:*

There is none of the courage of youth. Daring is gone; prudence, not to say cowardice, sits on the throne.

5. *And the almond tree shall flourish,*

The hair is white and gray, like the early peach or almond tree in the beginning of the year.

5. *And the grasshopper shall be a burden,*

A little trouble weighs the old man down. He has no energy now. The grasshopper is a burden.

5. *And desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets; or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken,*

Before the spinal cord is broken, or the skull becomes emptied of the living inhabitants.

6. *Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.*

The circulation of the blood begins to fail, the heart grows weak, it will soon stop. The man's career is nearly over.

7. *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

This will happen to us all, either to return to dust or else return to God. Whether we die, and return to dust, or live until the coming of Christ, our spirit shall return to God who gave it. May the return be a joyous one for each of us!

8. *Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge;*

Yes, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that

which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, They prick us onward, as the goad does the bullock, when he is trying to stop instead of ploughing in the furrow.

11. *And as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.*

The words of the wise are driven home, like nails, and clinched. There is one Shepherd who, by means of his servants' words, leads his flock where he would have them go.

12. *And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the duty of man. Or, "this is the whole of man." It makes a man of him when he fears God and keeps his commandments; he has that which makes him "the whole man."

14. *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Depend upon it that it will be so. At the last great day, there will be a revelation of everything, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Nor need the righteous fear that revelation, for they will only magnify in that day the amazing grace of God which has put all their iniquities away; and then shall all men know how great the grace of God was in passing by iniquity, transgression, and sin.

This exposition consisted of readings from ECCLESIASTES 11-12

SONG OF SOLOMON

SONG OF SOLOMON 1

We will this evening read in the one Book of the Bible which is wholly given up to fellowship; I allude to the Book of Canticles. This Book stands like the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and no man shall ever be able to pluck its fruit, and eat thereof, until first he has been brought by Christ past the sword of the cherubim, and led to rejoice in the love which hath delivered him from death. The Song of Solomon is only to be comprehended by the men whose standing is within the veil. The outer-court worshippers, and even those who only enter the court of the priests, think the Book a very strange one; but they who come very near to Christ can often see in this Song of Solomon the only expression which their love to their Lord desires.

1-2. *The song of songs, which is Solomon's. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.*

The Person here alluded to is not named; this omission is very common and usual to all-absorbing love. The spouse is thinking so much of Christ Jesus her Lord that it is not necessary for her to name him; she cannot make a mistake, and she is so oblivious of all besides, that she does not think of them, nor of those who would ask, "Who is this of whom you speak?" The communion is so close between herself and her Lord that his name is left out: "Let him kiss me." By the kiss is to be understood that strange and blessed manifestation of love which Christ gives from himself to his children. Inasmuch as the word "kisses" is in the plural, the spouse asks that she may have the favor multiplied; and inasmuch as she mentions the "mouth" of her Bridegroom, it is because she wishes to receive the kisses fresh and warm from his sacred person. "For thy love is better than wine." It is better in itself, for it is more costly. Did it not flow out in streams of blood from a better winepress than

earth's best wine hath ever known? It is better, too, in its effects; more exhilarating, more strengthening, and it leaves no ill results.

3. *Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.*

The spouse surveys all the attributes of Christ, and she compares them to separate and precious ointments. Christ is anointed as Prophet, Priest and King, and in each of these anointings he is a source of sweetness and fragrance to his people. But as if jealous of herself for having talked of the "ointments" when she should have spoken of him, she seems to say, "Thy very name is as an alabaster box when it is opened, and the odour of the precious spikenard fills the room." "Jesus, the very thought of thee With sweetness fills my breast." "Thy name is as ointment poured forth," and the spouse addeth, as a note of commendation, "therefore do the virgins love thee."

4. *Draw me, we will run after thee:*

She feels, perhaps, as you do now, beloved brethren, heavy of heart; she cannot fly, nor go to reach her Lord; but her heart longs after him, so she cries, "Draw me, we will run after thee." While she prays the prayer others feel it suitable to them also, so they join with her. When Christ draws us, we do not walk, but "run" after him; there is no heavy going then. When Christ draws us, how swiftly do we fly, as the dove to the dove-cote, when Jesus' grace enticeth us. Running soon brings the spouse to her Lord; for notice the next clause: —

4. *The king hath brought me into his chambers:*

It is done: "The King hath brought me into his chambers." Come you to him in prayer, and mayhap, while you are yet speaking, he will hear; while you are musing, the fire shall burn, and you shall be able to say, "Yes, he has brought me near to himself, to the retired chamber where I may be alone with him, to the chamber of riches and delights, where I may feast with him."

4. *We will be glad and rejoice in thee,*

This is the sure result of getting into the inner chamber with Christ.

4. *We will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.*

Not only the just in heart, those pure and lowly ones who, whithersoever the Lamb doth lead, from his footsteps ne'er depart,

but the upright, those who love moral excellence and virtue, they must love Christ. Now the singer's note changeth: —

5. *I am black,*

Ah, my soul, how true is that of thee! "I am black," —

5. *But comely,*

Oh, glorious faith, that can, through the blackness, still see the comeliness! We are comely when covered with the righteousness of Christ, though black in ourselves. "I am black, but comely," —

5. *O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar,*

Smoke-dried, foul, filthy, poverty-stricken.

5. *As the curtains of Solomon.*

Bedecked with embroidery made with gold and silver threads, and fit for a king's tent, so strangely mixed is the nature of the believer: "black but comely," ... "as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon."

6. *Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me:*

Perhaps you are afraid, beloved, that the Master should look at you, for you feel yourself so unworthy.

6. *My mother's children were angry with me;*

You have been persecuted until your spirit is broken.

6. *They made me the keeper of the vineyards;*

Perhaps you have been put to some ignoble work; you have toiled under the whip of the law; but you have a worse sorrow even than this, for you have to add: —

6. *But mine own vineyard have I not kept.*

You are conscious that you have restrained prayer, that you have neglected searching the Word, that you have not lived as near to God as you ought to have done; and all this seems to make you feel as if you could not come into close communion with Christ. Come, my brother, my sister, shake off your unbelief, may the Master shake it off from you! Then once again you can change the note, as the spouse does here: —

7. *Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?*

There are other shepherds, though they are false ones, and these pretend to be companions of Christ; but why should we turn aside to them? And yet we shall, O our Beloved One, unless thou dost tell us where to follow thee,

and how to abide close by thy side, or dost tell us where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon! Here comes the answer: —

8. *If thou know not, O thou fairest among women,-*

Just note that; she said that she was black, but Christ says that she is the fairest among women; in fact, there is a passage in the Song where he twice over calls her fair; as Erskine puts it, —

“Lo! thou art fair, lo! thou art fair,
Twice fair art thou, I say;

My grace, my righteousness becomes Thy doubly-bright array.”

O ye faithful ones, what joy is contained in this encomium which your Lord gives to you!” If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, —

8. *Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.*

There are two ways of finding Christ; first, follow after true believers; most of you know some experienced Christians; follow their footsteps, and you shall so find their God. Or else, go to the shepherds' tents; wait on the ministry of the Word; the Lord is often pleased to manifest himself to his people when they are willing to hear what messages he sends through his ambassadors.

9. *I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.*

True believers are as strong, as noble, as beautiful as the horses in Pharaoh's chariot, which were renowned throughout all the world. Let us be like those horses, let us all pull together, let us draw the great chariot of our King behind us, let us be content to wear his harness, that we may be partakers of his splendid triumph.

10. *Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold.*

Christ here praises his Church. Orientals were in the habit of wearing jewels in such abundance that their cheeks were covered with them, and then they multiplied the chains of gold upon their necks; and the graces which Christ gives to his people, and

especially the various parts of his own finished work, become to them like rows of jewels and chains of gold.

11. *We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver.*

As if Father, Son, and Holy Ghost would all work together to make the believer perfectly beautiful.

12-13. *While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof. A bundle of myrrh is my wellbeloved unto me;*

Not a sprig, mark you, but a bundle of myrrh.

13. *He shall lie all night betwixt my breasts.*

Christ, as a bundle of myrrh, shall always be near our hearts, so that every life-pulse shall come from him.

14. *My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi.*

He is not, I say again, one sprig or spray of camphire, but a cluster of it. The spouse, you see, multiplies figures to describe her Bridegroom, and even when she has done so, she cannot reach the height of his glory.

“Nor earth, nor seas, nor sun, nor stars,
Nor heaven, his full resemblance bears;
His beauties we can never trace,
Till we behold him face to face.”

15. *Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes.*

So Christ speaks of his Church, she has the soft, mild, tender eyes of a dove. Besides, she has the discerning eye by which the dove can distinguish between carrion and fit food; and then she has a clear eye like that of the dove. You know that the dove, or pigeon, when it is taken far away from home, and wants to reach its cote, flies round and round till it gets up high, and then it looks for miles, perhaps for hundreds of miles, till it tracks with unerring eye its own resting-place, or some familiar landmark, and then, with cutting wing, it flies through the ether till it reaches its home. So, every believer should have doves' eyes, — eyes that can see from earth to heaven, and see Christ in his glory, even when his cause is disowned by men.

16, 17. *Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed is green. The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir.*

We have the word “rafters” here, but it should be “galleries.” The “bed” expresses the near fellowship which Christ has with his people. The “house” is a larger expression, and perhaps denotes the whole Church; and the “galleries” signify the ordinances of grace. You notice that these are made of unrotting wood, the one of cedar and the other of fir; and truly, dear friends, in closing our reading, we can say to our Lord, — “No beams of cedar or of fir Can with thy courts on earth compare; And here we wait, until thy love Raise us to nobler seats above.”

SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-7

Now, concerning our love to him, let us read a few verses of the Song of Solomon, first chapter. You have been introduced to the Beloved, red with his own blood, but never so lovely as in his passion.

1, 2. *The song of songs, which is Solomon's. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth:*

No name. Is any name wanted? What name is good enough for him, our best Beloved? He plunges into the subject through excess of love. He forgets the name. “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.”

2, 3. *For thy love is better than wine. Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.*

There is such a sweetness in the name. It is not like a box of ointment shut up, but like a sweet perfume that fills the room. For the merits of Jesus are so sweet that they perfume heaven itself. It was not on Calvary alone that that sweet ointment was known: it was known in the seventh heaven.

4. *Draw me, we will run after thee:*

We want to get near to Christ, but we cannot. “Draw me,” we cry, “we will run after thee.”

4. *The king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.*

The wine shall help us to remember him tonight when we come to his table; but we will remember him more than wine.

5. *I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.*

A strange contrast is a believer. He is black in himself, but he is comely in Christ. In himself he is foul as the smoke-dried tents of Kedar: but in his Lord he is as comely and rich as the curtains of Solomon.

6, 7. *Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me; my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept. Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?*

A few verses of the next chapter.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 22:1-22; and SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-7, 2:1-7.

SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-7

1-4. *The song of songs, which is Solomon's. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine. Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee. Draw me, we will run after thee:*

Still is love pleading, you see, but here it is the other side pleading for nearness, the lowly one crying for help to get nearer to the Heavenly Bridegroom: "Draw me, we will run after thee."

4, 5. *The king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee. I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.*

The spouse was black in herself; sunburnt through her toil and hard suffering; yet lovely in the sight of her Beloved, and comely to look upon "as the curtains of Solomon."

6, 7. *Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me; my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyards have I not kept. Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest,*

—
Still is there that same craving for nearness to The Beloved. Since we love Christ, we desire to be with him, we cannot bear his

absence: “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest,”—

7. Where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?

See, dear friends, how this same seeking after the Beloved comes out in another shape in the third chapter of the Song.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 45:1-13; SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-7; 3:1-5.

SONG OF SOLOMON 2

Here we have a dialogue of love between the Lord Jesus and his people.

1. I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.

Amongst all flowers, there is none that can be compared with him.

“White is his soul, from blemish free,
Red with the blood he shed for me.”

2. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

The child of God cannot long be mistaken for a worldling. The lily rises up above its thorny companions, but everybody knows that it is not a thorn; and chiefly do the quick eyes of the Lord Jesus discern his people wherever they may be found. You, dear friend, may perhaps come of a graceless family, or you may live in a house where God is all but unknown; yet Christ always knows his pure lilies, even if they grow among the cruel piercing thorns.

3. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

You who love the Lord Jesus know what this verse means. He is a great variety of delights to you; — food for your soul, a shadow for your head in the day of the sun’s burning heat. When you are near to him, the sun does not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. There is no shadow like Christ’s shadow, and no fruit like his fruit.

4. He brought me to the banqueting house,

That, I trust, he will again do, as he has often done before, both while we are hearing his Word and when we approach his table: “He brought me to the banqueting house,” —

4. And his banner over me was love.

Not the fiery ensign of war, but the peaceful banner of love. You have had enough of the world, beloved, during the past six days; you will again have enough of it in the six days yet to come; but just now, let love's royal banner wave over you, and give up your thoughts entirely to him who has loved you with an everlasting love, and sealed his love to you by the blood that streamed from his pierced heart.

5. *Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love.*

The love of Christ shed abroad in our heart sometimes quite overpowers us. It is very possible to be so delighted, so full of joy with a sense of the love of Jesus, that one feels unable to bear any more of it. Oh, for more of this blessed sickness! "It is a strange thing," says one, "this love of Christ," —

"For, oh! when whole, it makes me sick,
When sick, it makes me whole."

6, 7. *His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.*

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, Those lovely, but timid creatures that are so easily scared away, —

7. *That ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.*

O ye carking cares, keep away from us! Ye distractions that are so apt to arise in our crowded assembly, ye aches and pains that come in and make the body drag down the spirit, keep away from us for a while.

8. *The voice of my beloved!*

The spouse knows it at once, her ear is so trained that she recognizes it as soon as she hears it. Jesus said that his sheep follow him, for they know his voice, and he added, "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers."

8. *Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.*

"I thought my sins would keep him back, for they seemed like great mountains, how could he come to me? But, 'behold,' he makes nothing of those barriers: 'he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.'"

9. *My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.*

When we observe the ordinances aright, they are like latticed windows; we cannot see our Lord through them as clearly as we would, but still, we do see him, and we are thankful for these windows until we get up yonder, where we shall see him face to face.

10-13. *My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;*

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. No matter what weather it is outside, it may be spring-time within. If your hearts have been frost-bound and barren, may they now begin to thaw at the approach of Jesus! Many of us have asked for his company, and believe that he will be here; and when he comes, he will make our souls rejoice. They shall be as watered gardens when the spring returns again.

14. *O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.*

Christ calls you out, you hidden ones, you who are half ashamed to be seen he bids you come to him. Come away from your doubting and your fearing, your halting and your hesitating; it is Jesus who calls you, therefore come to him at once.

15. *Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.*

Drive away every sin that would keep Christ away. Ask for his grace to subdue every wandering thought, that he may be with you in undisturbed communion.

16, 17. *My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.*

Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bethel.

Song of Solomon 3:1-5. *By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broadways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.*

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:1-7

We believe that this song sets forth the mutual love of Christ and his believing people. It is a book of deep mystery, not to be understood except by the initiated; but those who have learnt a life of sacred fellowship with Jesus will bear witness that when they desire to express what they feel they are compelled to borrow expressions from this matchless song. Samuel Rutherford, in his famous letters, when he spoke of the love of Christ as shed abroad in his heart, perhaps was scarcely conscious that he continually reproduced the expressions of the song, but so it is. They were naturally fresh enough from him, but they came from this wonderful book. It stands in the middle of the Bible. It is the holy of holies — the central point of all.

Thus he speaks — the glorious “greater than Solomon.”

1, 2. *I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.*

So does Christ's Church spring up singular for her beauty — as much different from the world — as much superior thereto as the lily to the thorns. Now see how she responds and answers to him.

3. *As the apple tree among the trees of the wood. so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.*

To him there is none like her; to her there is none like him. Jesus values his people. He paid his heart's blood for their redemption, and “unto you that believe, he is precious.” No mention shall be made of coral or of rubies, in comparison with him. Nothing can equal him. There are other trees in the wood, but he is the one lone

fruit-bearing — the citron tree, whose golden apples are delicious to our taste. Let us come up and pluck from his loaded branches this very night.

4. *He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.*

You and I know what this means — at least, many here do. You know how delightful it is to feel that it is not the banner of war now, but the banner of love, that waves above your head, for all is peace between you and your God. And now you are not brought to the prison-house or to the place of labour, but to the banqueting house. Act worthily of the position which you occupy. If you are in a banqueting house, take care to feast.

5. *Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love.*

Oh! that I knew him better! Oh! that I loved him more! Oh! that I were more like him! Oh! that I were with him! “I am sick of love.”

6, 7. *His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.*

If he be with me, may nothing disturb him — nothing cause him to withdraw himself. Our Lord Jesus is very jealous, and when he manifests himself to his people, a very little thing will drive him away like the hinds and the roes that are very timid, so is communion a very delicate and dainty thing. It is soon broken. Oh! may God grant tonight that nothing may happen to the thoughts of any of you by which your fellowship with Christ should be destroyed.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 116:10-19; SONG OF SOLOMON 2:1-7.

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:1-7

1. *I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.*

So he is, and much more than that.

“Nature, to make his beauties known,
Must mingle colors quite unknown.”

So rich is he—rose and lily both in one.

“White is his soul, from blemish free,
Red with the blood he shed for me.”

2. *As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.*

His church stands out like a fair lily in a thorn-brake—separate and distinct—often suffering, standing where she does not wish to be, but all the lovelier by contrast. But if Christ praises his church, she praises him again.

3, 4. *As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons, I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.*

So full of joy is she, that she can bear it no longer. She seems ready to faint with bliss.

5-7. *Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love.*

His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, —By every lovely, timid, tender, chaste thing.—

7. *By the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.*

If I have fellowship with him—if I am near his cross—if I am drinking in his love, oh! do not hinder me. Do not call me away. Do not break the spell; but let me go on with this blessed day-dream, which is truer than reality itself, till I see him face to face, when the day breaks, and the shadows flee away.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 22:1-22; and SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-7, 2:1-7.

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:1-7

1, 2. *I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.*

It is the nature of love to make the thing beloved like itself. If Christ be a lily, he makes his people lilies too. Certainly he is the lily of the valley, and ere long his Church is able to say, “As the lily among the thorns, so am I,” while for the present Jesus says it. She is among the thorns, thorns that hurt and vex her. The people of God are still in the tents of Kedar, still among the wicked, having their ears vexed with their filthy conversation. But the lily is all the more beautiful on account of the thorns that make the background, and so your piety may be all the more resplendent because of the evil men among whom you sojourn.

3. *As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.*

The citron tree towered aloft in the midst of the forest, and it was covered with its golden apples. Such is Jesus Christ, the most lovely of all objects, and though there be some that pretend to contend with him, yet to the believer, rivals are left in the distance, nay, they are altogether forgotten. "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, the most distinguished and the most lovely, so is my Beloved among the sons." How dost thou know?

3. *I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.*

I know his loveliness, for I have felt it, and I not only have comfort without, but I have food within.

4, 5. *He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love.*

A strange thing is this love of Christ, for, as Erskine puts it: —

"When well, it makes me sick;
When sick, it makes me well."

There is no infirmity which this love of Christ cannot cure, no conflicting passion which it cannot remove; and, on the other hand, a great amount of this love shed abroad in the heart will often prostrate the Christian with excess of delight, till he be ready to cry out, with good Mr. Welsh, the Scotch pastor, "Hold, Lord; hold; it is enough; remember I am but an earthen vessel, and if I have too much of glory I shall not live." I am afraid we shall not often have to say this, yet there are times when the believer's joy knows no bounds, and his hallowed delight in his God is so excessive that he needs to have some supernatural support to enable him to endure the delight which his Father gives him.

6. *His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.*

The hand with which he smites his enemies cannot smite me, for it is under my head, my sweet support; and his right hand, the hand with which he blesteth, the hand of his power and his glory, doth embrace each one of his people.

7. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

The next passage we shall read is at the commencement of the third chapter, and presents quite a different scene. Perhaps you will scarcely think it is the same person that writes it, but, oh! we are very variable. See now how that sunshine has just gilded that side of the house, and in another minute — see — it melts away and has gone again! Just so is it with our experience. We rejoice for a few moments, but anon the clouds hang heavy over us, and we scarce know what and where we are. The Spouse has now faltered, but her Husband never does falter, the Lord, the King, abideth still the same, and herein is our joy.

This exposition consisted of readings from SONG OF SOLOMON 2:1-7; 3:1-5.

SONG OF SOLOMON 3:1-5

1-3. By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?

The same question over and over again — only that. one thought, “Where is he?” Ministers were nothing; streets of ordinances were nothing; what the soul wanted was to find a personal Christ, and to have personal fellowship with him.

4. It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go,

Jacob’s wrestlings are succeeded by Jacob’s vows.

4. Until I had brought him into my mother’s house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

Fellowship that is sweet to me must be sweet to others of my brethren; therefore, will I bring him to the church, and tell to all the assembled people how sweet, how delightful he is to my soul.

5. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

This exposition consisted of readings from SONG OF SOLOMON 2:1-7; 3:1-5.

SONG OF SOLOMON 3:1-5

3:1. *By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.*

Sometimes, the most eager search does not at once obtain its end. For wise reasons, Christ sometimes hides himself from his seeking people.

2-5. *I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field,—*

“By everything that is timid, and delicate, and pure, and full of love, I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem,”—

5. *That ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.*

“I have found my Beloved, and I would not lose him again; he has come to me, so I will not grieve him, and drive him away.” That is the one of our reading: “Come near to me, I pray thee; and when thou comest near me, keep by me still.”

Extracted from an exposition of GENESIS 45:1-13; SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-7; 3:1-5.

SONG OF SOLOMON 4

This is a chapter which is, perhaps, more adapted for private meditation than for reading in public. Nevertheless, as this is a communion season, and I trust that the most of us are partakers of the life of God, I could not resist reading it this evening. It is a love-song, the song of the loves of Jesus. As he sets forth the beauties and charms of his Church, may the like beauties and charms be found in every one of us through the grace which he imparts to us by his Spirit! May we, as parts of his mystical body, be fair and lovely in his esteem because he has bestowed upon us so much of his own loveliness! Let us walk so carefully with God that there may be nothing to put even a spot upon our garments, or to defile our grace-given comeliness.

1. *Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair;*

“Twice fair, first, through being washed in my blood, and next, through being sanctified by my Spirit!”

1. *Thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks:*

Jesus prizes the love of his people which flashes forth from their eyes as they look upon him. The good works of his people, like the locks of hair which are the beauty and glory of the female form, are the beauty of the Church, and of every individual believer. It is a beautiful thing to have the eyes of faith glistening between the locks of our good works to the praise and glory of God.

1. *Thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.*

O my soul, see that thou dost have many such acceptable works of faith and labours of love!

2. *Thy teeth —*

Those parts of our spiritual being with which we feed upon Christ, and masticate and assimilate the Word: “Thy teeth “ —

2. *Are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them.*

We should seek so to feed upon the Word as to become fruitful by it. If we spiritually feed upon the flesh of Christ, we shall afterwards be the means of bringing forth an abundant harvest of holiness to his praise and honour.

3. *Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet,*

And well they may be, for what is there for the believer to talk about but the scarlet of the Saviour's blood, that matchless bath in which we are washed whiter than snow? My mouth, be thou filled with the praises of the Lord, that my lips may be like a thread of scarlet!

3. *And thy speech is comely:*

There is always a comeliness in that conversation which is full of Christ so, beloved, let your conversation ever be such as cometh the gospel of Christ; but that cannot be the case unless there is much of Christ in it.

3. *Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks.*

Those parts of us with which we think upon God's Word should ever be surrounded by good works. Doctrines in the head, without holiness in the life, are of no service, but when the temples are

covered with the locks of righteousness, then are they like a piece of a pomegranate, acceptable both to God and men.

4. *Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury,*

And what is this but our faith? Does not the neck join the body to the head, and is not faith that connecting link by which we are united to Christ? Oh, for that faith which is like the tower of David builded for an armoury! It is sure to be assaulted, let it, therefore, be firmly founded, and fully armed.

4. *Whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.*

They hung up their bucklers in memory of their triumphs. Read the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is a record of the victories of faith. The promises of God are also like these bucklers which are hung up in the armoury; let us be so familiar with them that we shall have them ready for use in every emergency.

5. *Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies.*

The ordinances of God's house are very delightful to Christ, and to his people too; and, consequently, that part of our spiritual being which seeks to feed others, and specially to nourish the young believer, is very precious in Christ's esteem. When he has finished the description of his Church, Christ says: —

6. *Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.*

Our Beloved has gone away from us until the day of his reappearing, —until the night of his Church's anxiety is over, and the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings Jesus has gone from earth, but where is he? He has gone to intercede for us before the throne of his Father above; he has gone to where there are mountains of myrrh. Think, beloved, of the sweet perfume that ever arises from his one great sacrifice for sins; well may he compare it to a mountain of myrrh and to a hill of frankincense.

7. *Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.*

Drink that truth in, Christian. If ever there was a honeycomb full of virgin honey, it is here. Though in thyself thou art defiled, yet in the eye of Jesus, looked upon as covered with his righteousness, "thou art all fair;" nay, more, "there is no spot in thee." Thou art as

dear to him as though thou hadst never sinned, yea, in his sight, thou appearest without a single fault, he has so cleansed thee in his precious blood that “there is no spot in thee.”

8. *Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.*

My heart, leave thou the world, leave its sweet places, though Lebanon be full of fragrance, leave it. Leave the world's high places; though the top of Amana may seem to reach to heaven, leave even that to have communion with thy Lord. “Come out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.” The best spots in the world are to you, O Spouse of Christ, but lions' dens and mountains of leopards. You are always in danger while you consort with worldlings, you are ever in peril while you are entangled with the world; so come away from Lebanon, from Amana, from Shenir and Hermon; leave everything for your Lord.

9. *Thou hast ravished my heart, —*

I think the Septuagint reads it, “Thou hast unhearted me,” as if Christ's people had taken away his heart, so that it was all theirs, and not his any longer. “Thou hast ravished my heart,” —

9. *My sister my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.*

The eye of love, and the neck of faith with its chain, hold captive the heart of Christ.

“So dear, so very dear to Christ,

Dearer I cannot be;

The love wherewith God loves his sons,

Such is Christ's love to me.”

Oh, what a miracle of mercy it is that Christ himself should be unhearted by such foul and loathsome creatures as we were, yet he loved us so that he would have us; and having determined to do so, he put a beauty upon us that is really now worthy of his love. I speak advisedly, for the righteousness of Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit have in them something really so fair that Christ does not now love that which is unworthy of his love, that righteousness which he has himself wrought in us now rightly claims his affection.

10. *How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse!*

Hearst thou that, O Spouse of Christ? Thy love is often very cold, and very feeble, and even at the best it is not what thou wouldst have it to be, nor what it ought to be; yet Jesus values it highly, and says, “How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! “

10. *How much better is thy love than wine!*

Yet he knows what the best wine is like, for he is one day to drink it new with us in his Father’s kingdom, yet he says that the love of his people is much better than wine, yes, even than that wine.

10. *And the smell of thine ointments than all spices!*

You know that he has the smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia upon his garments when he comes out of the ivory palaces, yet he considers that his people’s graces are sweeter than all the spices that ever grew.

11, 12. *Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon. A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.*

Oh, that my heart were like that at this moment! Jesus, shut the gates, and shut out the world, and every wandering, wayward, sinful thought; then shut thyself in my heart, and walk thou in it as in a garden that is walled around, into which no intruders dare enter!

13, 14. *Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices:*

Oh, that this were fully true of us, — that all our thoughts, and words, and notions, which are like the fruits of the garden, were as full of spices of heavenly fragrance as Jesus here declares that he thinks them to be! Yet, alas! how little we do for him, though he sets such store by our little that he regards it as much.

15. *A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.*

Such should the whole Church and each individual believer be. O my soul, be thou not only shut up for Christ, but be thou when the time comes, opened to do good to all the world! Oh, that I might be like a well of living waters in my speech at all times; and that you,

my beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, whenever you are dealing with others, might be a well of living waters to every thirsty soul! Speak of Jesus wherever you go; talk of Jesus whenever you can. You have been shut up, and Christ has been in you; now be opened to give forth to others what he has given you.

The chapter concludes with a delightful prayer; let us each one pray it: —

16. *Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.*

The Church here, you see, desires to feel two opposite winds. Though it should be the rough north wind of affliction that blows upon her, if it will but make her spices flow, she will be glad; but if it be the soft south wind of blessed and hallowed fellowship with her Lord, she is equally pleased, for what she longs after is that her Lord may take delight in her.

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:11-14

11, 12. *Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver. My vineyard, which is mine, is before me:*

“The great Husbandman has graciously let his vineyard out to me, that I may keep it, and dress it; he has made it mine for the time being. I have some ground to till, some plants to tend, some vines to prune. It may not be a very large vineyard, still, it is mine, and I am accountable for it, and must look well to it. It is before me, I am thinking of it, I am caring for it, I am praying about it.”

12. *Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.*

This is our resolve, — that our greater Solomon shall have the profits and proceeds of his own vineyard. It is ours on lease, but the freehold is his. He “must have a thousand,” and we shall be well content with our share of the vintage, joyful and glad that we may have “two hundred.”

13. *Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it.*

“For to hear that voice will be far better than the ‘two hundred’ which shall be my share of the fruit. If I may have thee with me, O my Lord, I will be better pleased, though my portion of fruit should

be very small indeed, for in having thee my portion will be great indeed! I hear, my Lord, that some of thy people live with thee until they are called thy companions. There are some whom thou dost call thy friends, there are disciples whom Jesus loves. These ‘hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it.’ Unstop my deaf ear, give me a sensitive spirit, let my soul thrill, and my heart throb, and my whole being delight to obey every syllable that falls from thy blessed lips. ‘Thou that dwellest in the gardenia, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it.’”

14. *Make haste, my beloved,*

“Do not let me have to wait long for thee, O my Beloved! Even at the beginning of this service, cause me to realize thy presence.”

14. *And be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.*

“Are there mountains that divide me from thee? Come and leap over them; for thou art swift of foot, and sure of standing: ‘Be thou like to a roe or to a young hart,’ and when thou comest, the mountains of division shall change into mountains of spices, and all around me shall be sweet.”

This exposition consisted of readings from SOLOMON’S SONG 8:11-14; ISAIAH 5:1-7; AND LUKE 13:6-9.

