

Judges 5 Notes

SONGS OF DELIVERANCE

by C H Spurgeon

Sermon on Judges 5:11

(Ed note: This sermon emphasizes application more than exposition)

"They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates."-Judges 5:11.

Deborah sang concerning the overthrow of Israel's enemies, and the deliverance vouchsafed to the tribes: we have a far richer theme for music; we have been delivered from worse enemies, and saved by a greater salvation. Let our gratitude be deeper; let our song be more jubilant. Glory be unto God, we can say that our sins, which were like mighty hosts, have been swept away, not by that ancient river, the river Kishon, but by streams which flowed from Jesus' side. Our great enemy has been overcome, and his head is broken. Not Sisera, but Satan has been overthrown: the "seed of the woman has bruised his head" for ever. We are now ransomed from the galling yoke; we walk at liberty through the power of the great Liberator, the Lord Jesus.

The results which accrued from the conquest achieved by Barak, are upon a small scale similar to those which come to us through the deliverance wrought out by the Lord Jesus Christ. I shall take our text and spiritualize it, viewing its joyous details as emblematic of the blessings granted to us through our Redeemer. Those who went to draw water at the wells after Barak's victory, were no longer disturbed by the robbers who lurked at the fountains for purposes of plunder; and instead of drawing the water by stealth and in hasty fear, the women joined their voices around the well head, and sang of the mighty acts of God; and the citizens who had been cooped up within the town walls, and dared not show themselves in the suburbs, ventured beyond the gates into the open country, transacted their business openly, and enjoyed the sweets of security. I think we can readily see that this is an instructive type of the condition into which our Lord Jesus Christ has brought us, through the destruction of our sins and the overthrow of the powers of darkness.

We shall, this morning, first, for a little time, think of the wells of salvation as cleared of enemies; then we shall talk together upon the songs of praise to be rehearsed at the wells; and, thirdly, we shall have a little to say upon the visitation of the gates, which we can now enjoy with safety.

I. Our text tells us of Wells Cleared From The Foe, and speaks of those who "are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water."

We thank God that we who are the children of the Most High, have wells to go to. The world is a wilderness; say what we will of it, we cannot make it into anything else. "This is not our rest; it is polluted." We are passing through the desert of earth to the Promised Land of heaven, but we praise God that we have wells to drink of on the road. As Israel drank at Elim, and as the patriarchs drank at Beersheba, so have we wells of salvation, out of which we joyfully draw the living water. Our great inexhaustible well is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is, indeed, the great "deep that lieth under," the "deep that coucheth beneath," the secret spring and source from which the crystal streams of life flow, through the wells of instrumentality and ordinance. "All my fresh springs are in thee." Whenever we come to the Lord Jesus Christ, we drink and are refreshed. No thirst can abide where he is. "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him," saith he, "shall never thirst." Glory be to his name, we know the truth of this-

"I came to Jesus, and I drank Of that life-giving stream; My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, And now I live in him."

As often as we muse upon his person, commune with him in holy fellowship, think of his wounds, triumph in his ascension, and long for his second advent, so often doth our spirit drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, and we lift up our head.

Arising out of this greatest fountain, we have wells from which we draw the waters of comfort. First there is this book, this golden book, this book of God, this god of books, the word of God, with its thousands of promises, suitable to every case, applicable to all seasons, faithful and true, yea and Amen in Christ Jesus. Oh! how frequently when we have been fainting and ready to die, we have found that promise true, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground I" when we have turned to the word, and searched there and found the promise, and fed upon it, as one that findeth great spoil have we rejoiced in God's word. The doctrines of this book are inexpressibly reviving to us. He that understandeth them shall find them to be a well of life and comfort. I need not instance those doctrines, for you know them, you feed upon them, they are your daily bread. Beloved, when we think of God's eternal love to his people, when we meditate upon redemption by blood, when we consider the truth of effectual

calling by the Holy Spirit, when we remember the immutable faithfulness of the Most High, the covenant suretyship of our Lord Jesus, when we look forward to the perfection which will be ultimately ours, and to the haven of eternal rest to which every one of the Lord's people shall be brought, we do indeed find that- "Here in the fair gospel-field,

Wells of free salvation yield streams of life, a plenteous store, And our soul shall thirst no more.'

As the word read is thus precious, so is the word preached. If we listen to one whom God helps to speak in his name, we shall often find ourselves returning from the place of worship in a very different state from that in which we entered it. How often have you lost your burdens when you have been sitting in the assembly of the saints! I know, ye feeble ones, ye have oftentimes been refreshed; ye have bowed yourselves down to Siloah's brook that flows hard by the oracle of God, and as you drank of its cooling streams, you have felt as though you could face the enemy once more, and go back to a world of toil and trouble, strong for labor, and patient for the endurance of suffering. Happy are ye to whom the word has come with demonstration of the Spirit and with power. The fruitful lips of the preacher who speaks experimentally, who speaks clearly, who speaks of that which he has tasted and handled of the good word of truth-these sanctified lips, I say, "drop as the rain," and "distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb." The mouth of the righteous becometh a well of life unto the people of God. So, my brethren, it is also with the well of the ordinances. I think we shall never forget the time when we drew water out of the well of baptism-when we were baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, upon our profession of faith. We found believers' immersion to be a most instructive emblem of our death, burial, and resurrection with the Lord Jesus; and we have not forgotten, to this day, that we then avowed ourselves to be dead to the world, dead to the law, dead to self, dead with Christ; nor has the thought of resurrection with Jesus, as typified by the uplifting out of the pool, been forgotten by us. We know and feel that we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God, and we rejoice that he "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The recollection of that happy day when we gave ourselves up publicly and unreservedly to Jesus, is still fragrant. Oh! how sweet to sing humbly but heartily-

"'Tis done! the great transaction's done; I am my Lord's, and he is mine: He drew me, and I followed on, Charm'd to confess the voice divine."

So with the Lord's Supper. My witness is, and I think I speak the mind of many of God's people now present, that coming as some of us do, weekly, to the Lord's table, we do not find the breaking of bread to have lost its significance-it is always fresh to us. I have often remarked on Lord's-day evening, whatever the subject may have been, whether Sinai has thundered over our heads, or the plaintive notes of Calvary have pierced our hearts, it always seems equally appropriate to come to the breaking of bread. Shame on the Christian church that she should put it off to once a month, and mar the first day of the week by depriving it of its glory in the meeting together for fellowship and breaking of bread, and showing forth of the death of Christ till he come. They who once know the sweetness of each Lord's-day celebrating his Supper, will not be content, I am sure, to put it off to less frequent seasons. Beloved, when the Holy Ghost is with us, ordinances are wells to the Christian, wells of rich comfort and of near communion.

But I must not forget the mercy seat. What a well that is to the Christian when he can draw nigh unto God with true heart! It is a glorious thing to have such a well as that in the family, where, in prayer with the children, you can bring all the necessities of the household before God, and mention each child if you will, and all the troubles of the past, or all the expected difficulties of the coming day. Let us never give up that well. But, as for private prayer, brethren, this world were drear indeed if we could not pour out our sorrows into our Father's ear. This is the poor man's riches; this is the sick man's medicine; this is the faint man's cordial; this is the weak one's strength; this is the ignorant man's school; this is the strong man's confidence. Neglect prayer, and you will soon discover that all your spiritual powers wax weak; but be much in supplication-and he that is mighty on his knees, is mighty everywhere. He that looketh God in the face every morning, will never fear the face of man; and he who looketh Christ in the face each evening, may well close his eyes in sweet repose, feeling that, if he should never wake to this world of care, he shall wake up in the likeness of his Lord. Oh, yes! the mercy seat is a well of refreshment indeed! Over and above this, every form of fellowship with Jesus, wrought in us by the Spirit, is a well of salvation. This is an unknown thing to the ungodly, he entereth not into this secret; but you, my fellow Christians, know what communion with God means, for oftentimes, even when we are in business, or taken up with the world's cares, our hearts are away with our Beloved on the mountains of myrrh and in the beds of spices; we get us away from the world's toils to lean our head upon his bosom, to set in his banqueting-house, and see the love-banner waving over our heads. Beloved, we are no strangers to Jesus Christ, blessed be his name, and he is no stranger to us; we have seen him through the lattices of the ordinances; we have found the means of grace to be like windows of agate and gates of carbuncle, through which we have beheld him; we have him in our hearts full often, he embraces our soul-we carry the fire of his love flaming on the altar of our affections. He is our dear companion, our ever present help in time of trouble.

Thus have I mentioned some of the wells. Now, concerning them all, it may be said, that they can never be stopped up by our foes. We read that in old times the enemies stopped up the wells, but neither hell nor its infernal train can ever fill up one of the wells which the Lord has digged and filled by his Spirit. If outward ordinances be stopped, yet the great deep that lieth under will find a vent somewhere; and if we were forbidden to draw near to the Lord's table, or to meet to listen to the word, yet, blessed be God,

we could pray, and we could have secret fellowship with Jesus, and so the wells could not so be stopped that the thirsty Christian should be deprived of his drink in due season.

Moreover, as they cannot be stopped, so neither can they be taken away from us. The Philistine king, Abimelech, strove with Abraham and with Isaac to take away the wells; but these are ours by covenant engagements, these are given to us in the eternal council, they are guaranteed to us by the solemn league of the eternal Three; and none of these covenant blessings shall be wrested from the heirs of life, who are heirs of all things in Christ Jesus.

Though these fountains cannot be stopped up or taken away, yet we can be molested in coming near to them. It seems that archers and wells frequently go together. It was the blessing of Joseph- "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall." But what next? "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him." And so in the text: here are wells, but there is the noise of archers, which greatly disturbs those who go to draw water. Brethren and sisters-I think you know, but I will refresh your memories-you know what the noise of archers has been to you when you have tried to draw water. Years ago, with some of us, our sins were the archers that shot at us when we would fain come to Christ and drink of his salvation. When we bowed the knee in prayer, a fiery arrow would dart into our hearts- "How dare you pray? God heareth not sinners!" When we read the word of God, another barbed shaft would be shot against us- "What hast thou to do with God's word? There can be no promise there for such as thou art. Knowest thou not that thou art a condemned sinner, and that book curses thee solemnly? Turn away from it, of what service can it be to thee?" Do you not remember how you were wont to come up to this house sighing for comfort, and though the preacher frequently invited you to Christ, and tried to exhibit a crucified Savior before your eyes, yet the noise of the archers prevented you drawing from the well? Arrow after arrow of remorse, conviction, terror, and alarm, pierced your soul, so that you could not obtain peace with God. You used to envy the very least of the Lord's people when you saw them rejoicing in Christ, while you could not so much as hope yourself. You were told to believe, but faith seemed impossible to you. You were hidden to rest upon the finished work, but you only could say, "I would, but cannot trust." The twanging of the bow and the whizzing of the shaft were a terrible noise which prevented all drawing of water; while sometimes Satan beat the big hell drum in your ears: "The wrath to come! The wrath to come! The wrath to come!" And as you thought about the judgment day, and the great white throne, and the resurrection, and the dividing of the sheep from the goats, and the "Depart, ye cursed," and the everlasting fire, and all the terrors of a dread eternity, divested of every beam of hope, it seemed impossible for you to draw water out of any one of the wells, though perhaps you tried them all, and tried them again and again, as I did, year after year, and yet could not obtain so much as a single drop to cool your parched tongue, while it seemed as if it would cleave to the roof of your mouth in utter despair. Ah! but beloved, you are delivered from the noise of archers now; your sins which are many, are forgiven you; now you can come to Jesus, now you can come to the ordinances, now you can read the Bible, now you can hear the word, and you find that God's paths drop fatness. There is to you a river, the streams whereof make glad all your powers. Oh! how precious now these wells have become, because you can in unmolested peace draw water; and though sometimes the devil would fain shoot at you, yet you know you have a glorious shield, who is the Lord's anointed, and has turned away all wrath from you, so that none can lay anything to your charge, for you are accepted in the Beloved, justified by faith, and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Will not you who are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, bless the Lord? But I should not wonder if since that first race of archers called sins has died out, some of you have been much molested by another tribe of bowmen, who a great deal trouble me at times, namely, the archers called doubts and fears. These sad villains will, if they can, attack every soul that desires to enjoy the means of grace and the grace of the means. "Ah!" says Satan, even to God's child, "remember your slips and your failings! Recollect your shortcomings, your slackness in prayer, your indifference to God's glory, your hardness of heart! How can you think of receiving a promise?" Just as you are going to grasp some divine word out of your Bible and suck out its honey, it seems as though something smote your hand, and you were obliged to drop the text altogether, lest you should be acting presumptuously. No hymn of joyful assurance suited you, but you began moaning out-

"'Tis a point I long to know, Oft it causes anxious thought, Do I love the Lord or no? Am I his or am I not?"

It is poor work coming to the Lord's table when you are afraid that you are none of his; it is wretched work even listening to the ministry when you dare not claim the precious things which are delivered; yes, and even the word of God is a comfortless book when you cannot feel that you have a saving interest in its promises. Yet I thank God, when our faith is in exercise, and our hope is clear, we can see our interest in Christ; we come to him just as we came at first, and cast ourselves wholly upon him. Then we no longer fear the archers, but are rid of every fear; we "know whom we have believed, and are persuaded that he is able to keep that which we have committed unto him;" and, no longer disturbed by our enemies, we sit by the well's brink, and are refreshed.

Yet, I should not wonder if another band of archers has sometimes attacked you when you have been at the wells, namely, your cares. Dear mother, the thought of the children at home, has frequently disturbed your devotions in the assembly of the saints. Good friend engaged in business, you do not always find it easy to put a hedge between Saturday and Sunday. The cares of the week will stray into the sacred enclosure of the day of rest, and thus the cruel archers worry you. Ay, and perhaps in the case of those of us who are engaged in God's work, even our solemn engagements enlist against us a set of archers unknown to others; I mean anxieties about the right conducting of services, and arranging the various departments of the church. We become, like

Martha, cumbered with much serving, even though we are serving the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and this deprives us of the delightful sitting at his feet, which is heaven below. It is well to be able to cast all our cares on him who careth for us, and thus, by an act of faith in our heavenly Father, to be delivered from the noise of these archers.

One thing you have, dear friends, for which you cannot be too thankful, namely, you have a deliverance from the archers of ecclesiastical discord. We have peace within our borders. We have not this bickering and that division, we are not divided brother against brother, as some of our churches are, which are rent by schisms, torn in pieces by stripes, which might well cause them great searchings of heart; when we do come together, we come to edify one another in peace, for we love each other in the Lord. We have not to lament that the house of God is a place of our sorest wounding; it is to us a place of rest-where our best friends, our kindred dwell, where God our Savior reigns. We are delivered from that noise of archers at church-meetings; and you who know how sharply some can shoot, may well be glad of rest.

Again, we are happily delivered from political persecutions. We have not to set scouts upon the mountains, as the covenants of old, when they met in some lonely glen for worship. We have not to put one of the deacons at the door to warn us when the constables were coming to arrest us, as the members of this very church did according to our records, in years gone by. The minister has not to escape and hide himself from the officers, and the members have no need to hasten to their homes like scattered sheep, hunted by the wolf in the form of an armed band, but every man under his own vine and fig tree we sit, none making us afraid, for which we are not thankful enough, I am quite sure. May God grant that, recollecting our peaceful privileges in being now screened from persecutions, from ecclesiastical troubles, from carnal cares, from inward doubts, and above all, from the plague of sin, we may be like those who in the days of Deborah, were delivered from the noise of archers in the places of the drawing of water.

Enough upon that, only make sure that you pay your need of gratitude to your gracious God. This reminding you of your mercies I am afraid is dull work to some of you, but if you had them taken away, you would think differently. One might almost sigh for a brush of persecution to wake some of you up! Just a little salt cast here and there to make some of the sore places smart! Surely we go to sleep unless the whip be now and then laid on. A stake or two at Smithfield might once again give back the old fire of enthusiasm to the church, but in these warm sunny days we forget our mercies. We go to sleep upon the bench, instead of tugging at the oar; and when we ought to be serving God with all our might and soul, I fear that the most of us who are saved are dreaming our lonely way to heaven, indifferent to a very great extent to the glory of God, and forgetful of our indebtedness to Christ for what he has done for us.

II. Now we turn the subject, and come secondly to notice The Songs By The Well.

As when the people came to the wells of old, they were wont to talk with one another if all was peaceful, so when we come up to the ordinances of God's house, and enjoy fellowship with Jesus, we should not spend our time in idle chat, but we should rehearse the works of the Lord. In Deborah's day, when one friend came to the well and met another, and half-a-dozen gathered together, one would say, "Delightful change this! We could not come to the well a month ago without being afraid that an arrow would pierce our hearts." "Ah!" said another, "our family went without water for a long time. We were all bitten with thirst because we dare not come to the well." Then, another would say, "But have you heard how it is? It was that woman, the wife of Lapidoth, Deborah, who called out Barak, and went with him to the battle. Have you not heard of the glorious fight they had, and how the river Kishon swept Jabin away, and Jacl smote Sisera through the temples?" "The Lord hath done it," said another. "It was the Lord's doing, and is not it marvelous in our eyes?" And so, around the well's brink, when they were delivered from the noise of archers, they rehearsed the works of God; and before they wended their way to their several homes, they said one to another, "Let us sing unto the praise of God who has set our country free;" and so, catching the tune, each woman went back to her village home, bearing the pitcher for her household, and singing as she went. This is very much what we ought to do. When we come together, we ought to rehearse the work that Jesus Christ has done for us, the great work which he did on Calvary; the great work which he is doing now, as he stands before the Father's throne. We should talk experimentally, and tell one another of what we have known, what Christ has done for us; through what troubles we have been sustained; in what perils we have been preserved; what blessings we have enjoyed; what ills, so well deserved, have been averted from us. We have not enough of this rehearsing the works of the Lord. It was a sign of the saints in the olden times, that "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard." O let us get back to that primitive simplicity of conversation, and let us rehearse, as the text says, the righteous acts of Jehovah; let us go through our rehearsals for the grand orchestra of the skies. Let us begin to praise God and stir each other up to gratitude here, that we may be getting ready to join the overwhelming hallelujah with the ten thousand times ten thousand who for ever praise God and the Lamb. Around all the wells, whichever they may be, of which we drink, let our conversation be concerning Christ and his dying love; concerning the Holy Spirit and his conquering power; concerning the providence of God and its goodness and its faithfulness; and then, as we wend our way to our different homes, let us go with music in our hearts, and music on our lips, to take music to our households, each man and woman magnifying the name of the Lord.

Did you observe carefully what it was they sang of? "The acts of the Lord." But there is an adjective appended, "The righteous acts of the Lord." Righteousness is that attribute which the carnal man fears but he who sees the righteousness of God satisfied by the atonement of Christ, is charmed even by the severe aspect of God dressed as a judge. The justified child of God is not afraid of the righteousness of God, for he can meet all its demands. He likens it to the golden lions which stood in pairs upon the steps of the throne of Solomon-not meant to drive away the petitioner, but to let him see how strong, how powerful, was that throne upon which Israel leaned. I see the righteousness and holiness of God like huge colossal lions, as I look at his throne, and I delight, as I ascend the steps to bow before the glorious Father's face, to know that his righteousness is engaged to save those for whom Jesus died. Let us recount the righteous vengeance of Calvary, the terrors that God cast forth upon his Son when he cursed our sins by making Christ to be a curse for us, though he knew no sin. This is a subject upon which we should delight to dwell.

Then, if you observe, it was "the righteous acts of the Lord toward his people." Yes; the very marrow of the gospel lies in special, discriminating, distinguishing grace. As for your universal grace, let those have it who care for such meatless bones; but the special gospel of electing love, of distinguishing grace, this is the gospel which is like butter in a lordly dish to a child of God, and he that has once fed on it will take no meaner fare. I delight to believe in the universal benevolence of God-he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works; but his saints shall bless him, for they are not received with benevolence merely, but with complacency; they are not only his servants, but his sons; not so much the works of his hands, as the children of his loins, the darlings of his bosom, the favourites of his heart, the objects of his eternal choice, the delight of his eyes, his peculiar treasure, his chosen portion, his precious jewels, his rest and delight. The Lord prizes his saints above all the world beside. He gave Egypt and Ethiopia for them-he did more, he gave his Son for them; he gave heaven's brightest jewel, heaven's glory, heaven's heaven he gave that he might redeem them from all iniquity, to be his own peculiar people. Thus, my beloved brethren, take care when you converse upon the Lord's acts, that you speak of his peculiar favor towards Israel, his chosen, his elect.

Note with care that the works which are to be rehearsed are done towards the inhabitants of the villages of Israel. Does not this suggest that we ought frequently to magnify the Lord's choice favor and tender indulgence towards the least and feeblest of his family? Those villagers, those who knew so little, those who possessed so little, those who could do so little, those who were so weak, so undefended, these were rescued by the divine hand. Speak, then, of the mercy of God towards the little ones of Israel, and you will have no narrow field of speech. Why, if there be a choice word in the Bible, it is always for the weak ones; if there be a peculiarly precious promise, it is generally for the feeble minded. The best carriage in all the world that I ever heard of is Jesus' bosom, but then that is for the lamb, not for those who are strong, but for the tender and frail. Those most compassionate of sentences in which Jesus seems to have most fully expressed his gentleness, and to have employed the tenderest similes, are evidently spoken with an eye to the trembling and timid. Take for instance that one, "The bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Such words as these we may well talk of together when we meet at the wells of ordinances, and so rehearse the praise of God and his righteous acts, even his righteous acts towards the villagers of Israel.

III. Lastly, the text says, "Then shall the people of the Lord Go Down To The Gates;" by which, several things may be intended.

First, when the people of God are altogether delivered from their sins, and their cares, and their troubles, by the great redemption of the Lord Jesus and the power of his Spirit, then they enjoy great liberty. At times we are like Jeremiah, who said, "I am shut up and cannot come forth;" or like another whose way was hedged up with thorns; but when we live in great nearness to Christ, the gates are all opened, and we are the Lord's freemen: instead of needing to keep within the limits which fear prescribes, we take our walks abroad in the fields of blessed liberty and gospel privilege. We walk from Dan to Beersheba in covenant mercies. Do you know what the liberty of a child of God is, dear friends, or are you all your lifetime subject to bondage? If you are a child of God, you do know something of it, but if you are not initiated into the mystery of the inner life, you will very probably confound liberty with license. The liberty of the man of the world is liberty to commit evil without restraint: the liberty of a child of God is to walk in holiness without hindrance. When the believer's ways are enlarged, he delights to run in the statutes of the Lord; obedience is freedom to the Lord's servant. Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden is light. I fear that very many of you who are present this morning are slaves-some of you slaves to fashion, you wear the fetters most conspicuously. You are the serfs of custom, and you have not the moral courage to rebel. You bow your necks to human dictation, and own that you must do what others do. You have neither the manhood nor the grace to strike out a path of your own. Now, the true child of God does not care one snap of his finger what others may do, to his own Master he stands or falls. He does what is right, and would sooner take the lion of hell by the beard than do wrong. If others like his integrity, so much the better for them; if they do not like it, they are condemned out of their own mouths. I take it that the genuine Christian who has once come to fear God, fears nobody else; that he scorns to hamper himself with the sinful customs which sway the slavish hordes of mankind. He chooses for himself by the light of God's word, and when he sees a thing to be right, he does it, and he asks no man liberty on that account. It is a most glorious liberty which a man possesses when he is no longer in

bondage to me, to smart under their threats or to fatten in their smiles. Glorious was that ancient father who threw back the threatenings of his enemies, and laughed them to scorn. "We will banish you!" said they. "No!" said the Christian hero, "you cannot do that, because I shall be at home anywhere; I am a citizen of heaven; I am a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth." "But we will shut you out from all your friends!" "No!" he said, "you are not able even to do that, since my best Friend will always be with me." "We shall deprive you of your goods!" But he replied, "That I know you cannot do, for I gave them all away to the poor but yesterday." "Well, we will take away your life!" "In that, too, I am undismayed," said he, "for death will only give me the life for which I long." No wounds could be inflicted upon a warrior so invulnerable; just so secure is every man who is clad in the armor of faith. He is above the molestation of mankind, for his life is hidden with Christ; his Conversation is in heaven; he is free from fear, since he has nothing to fear; all his interests are secure. He has cast himself upon his God in Christ, and since God has made him free, he is free indeed. "He is the freeman whom the truth makes free, and all are slaves beside." You do not know what a joy it is to walk erect in conscious, mental, moral, spiritual, God-given freedom. Slaves of priest-craft, we pity you, your chains we would not wear for all the wealth of India! Bondslaves of the law, we mourn for you, for your service is heavy, and your captivity is terrible. Serfs of custom, you are more to be scorned than pitied: break your bands asunder, and wear the yoke no more. This day we feel as emancipated slaves must have felt when the last fetter fell to the ground. O glorious liberty, no price can show thine excellence, and all the things which we can desire are not to be compared with thee.

To go down to the gates, however, means something else, for citizens went down to the gates to exercise authority and judgment. He that is in Christ discerneth spirits, and separateth between the excellent and the reprobate. "The spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man." The saints, being led of the Spirit, discern between the precious and the vile; they know the voice of their Shepherd, but a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers. The saints judge this world, and by their living testimony condemn its sin. "Know ye not that we shall judge angels" in the day of the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ? Instead of being judged and following others, they who love God become the leaders in right, and are as God's mouth rebuking iniquity.

To go down to the gates signified also to go forth to war. When a Christian man is saved, he is not content with his own safety, he longs to see others blessed. He can now go out of the gates to attack the foe who once held him in bondage, and therefore he girds on his weapon. When will the church of God be inflamed by the sacred desire of carrying the war for Christ into the enemy's territory? I think I see a great deal in our churches now of a dangerously lethargic conservatism, a settling down contented with our churches, delighted to strengthen our own hands to keep together what we have, and careless about enlargement. The object of many churches of considerable age seems to be consolidation, and nothing more: but rest assured that the truest consolidation is enlargement, the best conservatism is progress, the truest way to keep what you have is to get more, the best way to retain the grace you now possess is to crave for more and more of the blessed spiritual gift. Brethren, if Christ has delivered us from the noise of archers, and we are at perfect peace with heaven, do not let us fold our arms and say, "The work is done, let us sleep in peace." O you saved men, hasten to the armoury, array yourselves in the panoply, and grasp the sword, for now you are called by Christ to a holy warfare. If you are saved, you must seek to save others; if you have received the light, carry it into the dark places. If you have escaped from the jaw of the lion, and the paw of the bear, now go forth to fight with the monster and tear others from his power. I trust that the most of you are engaged in some Christian service, but so often as I come into this pulpit and think of the numbers of believers in this church, I feel concerned that we should not suffer any part of our territory to lie idle as waste ground, that we should not have a single member in this church who is doing nothing. I shall be satisfied, perfectly satisfied, if each one is doing what he can; we cannot expect more, neither does the Lord expect according to what a man has not, but according to what he has. But are you, my brethren, who have been lifted up into the glorious position of saved souls, are you glorifying Christ and finishing the work which is given you to do? I fear that some of you are not. You can eat the fat and drink the sweet, but you make but small return unto your Lord. I speak to you as a loving brother in Christ, and I pray you think how life will look in the light of its last hour. Think of your residence on earth as you will view it from those summits of bliss beyond the river! Will you wish then to have wasted time, to have lost opportunities? If you could know regrets in the realm of blessedness, would not these be the regrets that you have not served Christ better, loved him more, spoken of him oftener, given more generously to his cause, and more uniformly proved yourselves to be consecrated to him? I am afraid that such would be the form of the regrets of paradise, if any could intrude within those gates of pearl. Come, let us live while we live! Let us live up to the utmost stretch of our manhood! Let us ask the Lord to brace our nerves, to string our sinews, and make us true crusaders, knights of the blood-red cross consecrated men and women, who, for the love we bear Christ's name, will count labor to be ease, and suffering to be joy, and reproach to be honor, and loss to be gain! If we have never yet given ourselves wholly up to Christ as his disciples, now hard by his cross, where we see his wounds still bleeding afresh, and himself quivering in pain for us, let us pledge ourselves in his strength, that we give ourselves wholly to him without reserve, and so may he help us by his Spirit, that the vow may be redeemed and the resolve may be carried out, that we may love Christ, and dying may find it gain.

Brethren and sisters, I cannot press this home to you as I would; I must leave it with your own consciences and with the eternal Spirit. If Jesus be not worthy, do not serve him; but if he be right honorable, serve him as he ought to be served. If heaven and eternal things be not weighty, then trifle with them; but if they be solemn realities, I beseech you as honest men treat them as

realities. If there be a day coming when all your business, and your worldly cares, and your fleeting pleasures, will seem to be mere children's toys, if there be an hour coming when to have served God will be glory, when to have won souls will be renown, then live as in the light of that truth, and God help you by his blessed Spirit. Amen and Amen.

THE PRAYER OF DEBORAH

Charles Simeon

Judges 5:31

OF the victories gained by God's ancient people, many are so incredible, that we could never believe the histories that record them, if we did not know those histories to have been written by holy men, under the direction and inspiration of the Holy Ghost. The destruction of a mighty army by means of trumpets, and lamps in broken pitchers, seems altogether fabulous: yet was this effected by Gideon, in conformity with the direction given him, and in dependence upon God. The overthrow of Jabin the king of Canaan, by ten thousand men under the command of a woman, was scarcely less miraculous, especially if we consider to what a low state the whole kingdom of Israel was reduced, and how exceeding powerful was the army of their oppressors: yet was Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, routed by this little band, and not so much as a single individual of that mighty host survived the contest. (Jdg 4:16-note) The hymn of thanksgiving, wherein Deborah celebrated this wonderful event, is recorded in the chapter before us; and she closes it with a prayer,

I. For the destruction of all God's enemies—

Imprecations, when personal and vindictive, are contrary to the mind of God: but when uttered as denunciations of God's determined purpose, they are not unsuited to the most holy character. Even St. Paul said, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha." (1Co 16:22) Thus, in imprecating destruction on God's enemies, Deborah must be understood to express,

1. Her approbation of it as just—

[Who does not see, that those who rise in rebellion against their God, deserve punishment? — — — There is not a creature suffering under the displeasure of the Most High, who must not say, "True and righteous are thy judgments, Lord God Almighty." (Rev 15:3-note)]

2. Her desire of it as good—

[The Law of God, which denounces a curse against every transgression, is declared to be "holy and just and good." (Ro 7:12-note) In like manner, all considerate men are agreed in acknowledging it a blessing to live under laws wisely enacted and faithfully administered. What though the execution of the laws prove fatal to some? it is a benefit to the community, who are thereby enabled to live in peaceful security. So the execution of God's laws proves doubtless terrible to those who are called to sustain his vengeance; yet to the whole universe is it the means of displaying the justice and holiness of the Deity, which, if sin were unpunished, would be altogether compromised and eclipsed.]

3. Her expectation of it as certain—

[In fact, her imprecation has the force of a prediction; a prediction which shall assuredly be accomplished in its season. Of Sisera's army not one survived: and of those who die in their sins, there shall not one be found at the right hand of God in the day of judgment. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished."]

To this she adds a prayer,

II. For the advancement of all his loving and obedient people—

Well is the distinction drawn between the enemies and the friends of God. The latter are described as "those who love him." (Ep 6:24-note) If, between men, we could admit a medium between love and hatred, we can by no means admit of it between God and his creatures. Indifference towards God would be constructive enmity. Those only who love him can be numbered amongst his friends. In behalf of these, therefore, she prays, that they may "be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." Under this beautiful image she prays,

1. That they may shine with ever-increasing splendour—

[The sun in its early dawn casts but feeble light upon the world; but soon proceeds to irradiate the whole horizon, and to burst with splendour upon those who but a little before were immersed in darkness. Thus, the

goings-forth of those who seek the Lord diffuse at first but an indistinct and doubtful gleam (Hos 6:3): but, through the tender mercy of God, they advance; and “their light shines brighter and brighter to the perfect day.” (Pr 4:18) How desirable is this to be realized in us! Let us so walk, my Brethren, that “our profiting may appear unto all.”]

2. That they may diffuse benefits whithersoever they come—

[The sun is the fountain of light and life to the whole world. Look at the places where, for months together, the sun never bends its course: the whole face of nature wears the appearance of death: and nothing but the return of his kindlier influences restores her to life. Thus in countries where the friends of God are not found, the whole population are in a state of spiritual and moral death: but “in their light is light seen,” (Ps. 36:9-note) and from them is spread abroad a vital influence, to animate and fructify the sons of men. View the path of the Apostle Paul “from Judea round about unto Illyricum:” in all his way he was the instrument of “turning men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” (Acts 26:18) Such should we also be, my Brethren, according to the ability which God has given us, and the opportunities he affords us: we should “shine as lights in a dark world, holding forth to all the word of life,” (Php 2:15, 16-note) for the illumination and salvation of all around us.]

3. That they may reflect honour upon God in the eyes of all who behold them—

[Who ever contemplated the sun shining in his strength, and did not admire the wisdom and goodness and power of Him who created it? “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work; nor is there any speech or language where their voice is not heard.” (Ps. 19:1, 2, 3-note) Such should be the effect of the light diffused by the saints of God: it should constrain all to confess that “we are God’s workmanship,” and “so to shine before men, that they may be compelled to glorify our Father which is in heaven.” (Ep 2:10-note)]

Address—

[Inquire, Brethren, to which of these classes you belong: for, however they may be confounded now, there will be an awful difference between them ere long; the one “awaking to everlasting shame and contempt,” (Da 12:2, 3-note) and the other “shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” On the one shall the justice of God be magnified; but in the other shall his love and mercy be glorified, to all eternity.] (Simeon, C. 1832-63. Horae Homileticae)