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C. H. Spurgeon Sermons on Psalms Part 9

Psalm 119:82 God's Time for Comforting

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“Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?” — Psalm 119:82.

David, in his troubles, knew where to turn for consolation, and that is no small piece of wisdom. When a man is ill, he may not know to which physician he had better send; but if he knows of one who has had much experience with the disease from which he is suffering, he sends for him at once if he is a wise patient. David knew that the best place for a true believer to find consolation was in God's Word, so he did not look in a thousand places, but his eyes were turned to God's Word; and though he did not immediately find the comfort that he sought, yet he continued still to look even till his eyes seemed to fail him, till they ached with looking, till they wearied with watching, till his disappointed expectation made his heart sick. Yet the idea never entered into his mind that he had better knock at another door, or seek another friend, or try another fountain; but he continued still in the attitude of expectancy, and desire, his eyes still searching the Word of God to find the comfort that he so greatly needed.

Christian, learn this piece of heavenly wisdom from the psalmist's experience, — there is no other comfort for thee beneath the skies like that with which the Word of the Lord will furnish thee. If God's promises cannot comfort thee, rest assured that no speech from the lips of man can do it. If thy God shall not yield thee the consolation that thou needest, thou wilt go in vain to the giddy world and its pleasures and follies in the hope of finding it. If that overflowing well could ever dry up, thou wouldst indeed be the subject of despair. Resolve in thy mind never to expect any good thing apart from God. Say with Toplady, —

“I will not be comforted

Till Jesus comforts me.”

Refuse all consolation but that which comes from the Most High, for it will be fictitious, delusive, dangerous, perhaps fatal, but cling thou to thy God whatever happens. Though he smite thee, still cling to him. Though he slay thee, still trust thou in him. If his Word

should seem to be like thunder and lightning to thee, though every page of it should seem to bristle as with bayonets, and not a single thought of consolation should be found in a thousand verses, yet still cling theft to thy father's Bible, held fast to the good old Book which made glad thy mother's heart; for, ere long, comfort shall shine forth from it upon thee, like the sun in the fullness of its strength, and the day shall break, and the shadows flee away. Go not elsewhere to look for consolation; seek out no strange doctrines. Weary not thyself in searching for other comfort; but let thine eyes, even if they fail, still look to the Word of God for the consolation that thy soul needs.

David, however, besides looking to the Book of the Lord, looked to the Lord of the Book, saying, "When wilt thou comfort me?" He did not expect the Word in itself to be a sufficient consolation to him; but he looked to the Word as applied by God the Holy Spirit, the Word as spoken over again by the mouth of God into the silent soul of the waiting believer. Paul tells us that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life;" and the psalmist so far anticipates that truth as to cry to the Lord, "When wilt thou comfort me?"

Christian, I again exhort thee to imitate the psalmist's example by going to thy God for comfort. Thou art still far too apt to lean upon an arm of flesh; but hast thou not yet learned what disappointments are always to be met with there? Wilt thou still go to the broken cisterns that can hold no water when they have already only mocked thy thirst? When wilt thou give up running to thy neighbors, and going to thy brother's house in the day of thine adversity? Thou wilt do far better if thou wilt go to thy Father's house, and to thine Elder Brother. Even our common proverb says, "Straightforward makes the best runner;" so, run thou straight to thy God. Go not roundabout, and beat the bush in the hope of getting at God through second causes, but go to the great fountain-head of all consolation at once. Depend upon it, that the more absolutely thou dost hang upon the bare arm of God, the better will it be for time, and the more wilt thou learn to live independently of those poor creatures of earth whose breath is in their nostrils. The more thou dependest upon the great, invisible, omnipotent, eternal Jehovah, the stronger and happier wilt thou become. Then shall thy head be lifted high above thine enemies round about time, and thou shalt sing praises unto God for very gladness of heart.

Troubled ones, I urge you to resolve that, if you cannot have comfort from God, at any rate you will not have it from the devil; — determine that, if you cannot do business with heaven, you will not trade with hell; and say that you would rather live in a dungeon with God than dwell in tents of ease with Satan. If your life must always be one of sorrow, be content that it shall be so if the Lord so wills it; but be resolved that you never will dally with sin or Satan for the sake of any present consolation. You cannot afford to buy your gold so dearly as that, nor to part with heaven for the sake of the richest comforts of earth.

It is worthy of note that the psalmist, even in his worst condition, always expected to be comforted. Our text, was probably uttered by the same man who more than once asked himself, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?" Some men readily fall into a state of despair; but the psalmist was not a man of that sort. When all God's waves and billows had gone over him, he still said, "Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me;" and where deep called unto deep at the noise of Jehovah's waterspouts, he could still hear the still small voice of hope, so that he said to his soul, "Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

Beloved, let none of us give way to despair. No doubt Satan will tell us that it is humble to despair, but, it, is not so. The pride of despair is truly terrible. I believe that, when a man altogether doubts the power of God to save him, and gives himself up to sin because he thinks he cannot be saved, so far from there being any humility in it, it is the prouder action that depraved flesh and blood can perform. Man, how darest thou say that there is no hope for thee? If the iron gates of hell were shut upon thee, and God had hurled the key of the pit into the infinite abyss, then thou mightest say that there was no hope for thee; but as long as there trembles in the air that blessed invitation of Christ, "Come unto me, all ye that, labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," it is only a lying voice that tells thee that there is no hope for thee. No hope, man! Why, if thou wert in the very jaws of death, and the grim monster's teeth were about to close upon thee, there would still be hope for thee. The dying thief on the cross did but trust to the expiring Savior by his side, and that very day he was with his Lord in paradise. Never despair, sinner, but trust in Jesus when at thy worst.

And as for thee, Christian, what hast thou to do with despairing? Be thou of good cheer, for thy sins are forgiven thee.* (*See Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No. 3,016, "Good Cheer from Forgiven Sin.") Even though thine eyes fail, God's eye does not fail, nor his arm either; and though thou growest weary with thy long waiting, yet, when he comes to thee, he will make amends for that, and thy weary waiting shall be well repaid. Wait, thou still at the posts of his doors, for —

"He never is before his time;

He never is too late."

If thou wilt but play the man, and let patience have her perfect work, thou shalt be well rewarded ere long. Wherefore, wipe away thy tears; and "wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."

Now, although the psalmist expected to receive comfort from the Lord, whatever his trouble might be, yet he was careful to do what he could in order to obtain it. He looked into God's Word for comfort, and he asked the Lord, "When wilt thou comfort me?" — as if

he meant to say, "If there is anything, on my part, which prevents my receiving the comfort, let me know it; and, Lord, I will put it away from me. Shouldst thou be withholding thy consolation from me because of any sin which I am harboring, only say the word, Lord, and my sin shall be taken out to execution; quick shall be my hand, and sudden shall be stroke, for I must have thy comfort to sustain my soul; I cannot longer live in state of sadness."

I trust that this will be the language of anyone here who is seeking the forgiveness of his sins. Peradventure I may be addressing someone who has been seeking mercy for months, and he has not yet found it I hope he is not satisfied to go without it, I trust that he will hunger and thirst until he gets it, and that he will, at this moment, put up these requests to God, "Show me, Lord, wherefore thou contendest with me. When wilt thou comfort me? What is there which parts me from thee, and hides the light of thy face from my poor, guilty, dying spirit?"

Perhaps the words which I am about to utter, in answer to the question in my text, may be the means of bringing comfort to some who are groping for it in the dark like blind man trying to feel the waymarks which they cannot see. I shall first address myself to Christians, and then to seekers after salvation.

I. First of all, I speak to you, beloved believers, — to you who are saying, with the psalmist, that your eyes are failing for the Word of God, — to you whose hearts are saying to him, "When wilt thou comfort us?"

God will answer your question in his own good time and way, but it is certain that God will comfort you one day. He cannot leave his people without comfort. You know that he said, in the olden time, by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." The mother ought not to be able to forget her child when it is in that specially dependent stage of its existence; when it is a sucking child, not only her love, but the very force of nature ought to compel her to remember it. Yet, though she may forget her child, God cannot and will not forget you who are his children. That is impossible; the whole force of his divine nature constrains him in lovingkindness to remember you, and to say to you, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." His message to his servants shall be, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned." Now, how can comfort be withheld from those whose sins are pardoned? Christian, you must have comfort from your God sooner or later.

To help you to answer your question as to why you do not have that comfort now, consider, in the first place, that God may, of his own sovereign will and pleasure, withhold from you the comforting light of his countenance. He has his reason for doing so, but he may not give you that reason; but, surely, if he does not tell you the reason, you will submit to his will. Remember the good advice of the prophet Isaiah, "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." If you do but get to heaven at last, if the Lord should take away his candle from you on earth for a little time, you may cheerfully submit to that privation. You may cry out to him, for "his own elect" do that; they "cry day and night unto him," yet you must not be impatient if he does not at once grant your request. With ardent desire, you may long for him to comfort you in the night seasons; but, amid the darkest shades, you may still say to him, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." It may be because of divine sovereignty that comfort is, for a while, being withheld from you. If so, then the same sovereignty which shuts you up in the dark room, will in due season open the door, and set you at liberty.

But more likely, dear friends, you will get comfort when you have cast away your present unbelief. Most of us owe a great part of our sadness to our want of faith in God. Is it any wonder that you are sad when you will not believe your Heavenly Father's promise? Child of God, is it a surprising thing that your mind should be ill at ease when you mistrust the veracity of your Father? Would you expect your own children to be happy if they were always doubting the truth of their father's promises to them? What a wretched household such dark suspicions would soon make! Away, then, with all suspicion of the truth of your Heavenly Father's promises. It is utterly groundless; it is unworthy of yourself, and it is dishonorable to God. Testify against him now if you can. When did he ever fail you? Has he been a wilderness to you? Has he ever forsaken you? He has chastened you, it is true; but has he ever deserted you? "Come now, testify, O my people; bear witness against me if ye can!" saith the Lord. "Have I wearied you with labor? Have I borne you down with burdens, and not given you help?" Oh, no! we all bear witness that he is a good and gracious God, and we pray for the Holy Spirit's power to rest upon us that we may have done with our cruel, wicked, disgraceful unbelief. Come, child of God, take down thy Bible, find out some Precious promise, grasp it, believe it, and expect to see it fulfilled to thyself. Thou wilt not then have long to ask, "When wilt thou comfort me?" Thou wilt be comforted as soon as thou hast cast away thy sinful unbelief from thy soul. Ask the Holy Spirit to help thee to do so at once.

Possibly, the answer to thy question may take another form, — The Lord will comfort thee as soon as thou hast done with complaining. There are certain people in the world, whom God will never comfort until he has taken their present murmuring spirit out of them. I know some such people, to my sorrow. If they prosper very much, if they get on a great deal in their business, they

say, "Oh, yes; we have had a tolerably good year!" They never admit that they have had anything beyond "a tolerably good year." That is all that they will say even when their money is rolling in in floods. Many a farmer, when his ground is bearing as much corn as it possibly can, says, "Yes, I shall do pretty middling this year." He calls the very best that he can possibly have "pretty middling!" And if he should happen to have a little loss, or a little trouble, or some little vexation, then straightway his mouth is filled with murmuring against God; and though he would not like to have it called by that name, yet it is a sort of minor blasphemy against the Most High, — envying others, speaking of them as though they had all the sweets of life, and talking of himself as though he had to drink all the bitters, and all the dregs of the cup. Some of you know people of that kind, who seem to be "cut on the cross;" — a queer sort of people, who can always see clouds on the finest day, and who will say that the grass is all dried up even when all can see that it is beautifully green.

Ah, my dear friends, you must get rid of all this if you want God to comfort you! There is something expressive in that word murmur; — I have often wondered at the wisdom of the man who gave it the meaning that it has, though I do not know who he was. "Murmur" — two ugly little syllables, such as any cross child could easily sound; but it is a childish, foolish, wicked habit for any of us to fall into, to be murmuring against God; for, after all, our mercies far outnumber our sorrows. As long as we are out of hell, we have no right to complain; for, if we had received our deserts, we should have been there now. Dear friends, may God help you to shake off this murmuring spirit as Paul shook the viper off his hand into the fire; and when you have done that, then you will probably find that the Lord will speedily appear to comfort your heart.

Again, in some persons, there is an absence of divine consolation because there is some sin which is tolerated within them. There might be very startling discoveries made here, this very hour, if every professing Christian were compelled, by his accusing conscience, to stand up, and tell out to the congregation what his secret, besetting sin is. I fear that at least some of you would never dare to show your faces in the Tabernacle again; you would be ashamed to be seen any more amongst those who knew such things about you. Yet the smoke of these hurrying sins rises in clouds, and shuts the face of God away from such inconsistent Christians. God loves his people, but he does not love their sins. Sin is hateful anywhere, but it is most hateful in the Lord's own people. You are none of you fond of loathsome diseases, such as fevers; but I am sure that you loathe the fever most of all when it attacks your own dear child. So, sin is a disease which God hates everywhere, but he hates it most of all when he sees it upon one of his own children; and, for this reason, he takes his rod into his hand, and causes his sinning child to smart, and to cry out, with Job, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." When the Lord's people are really in earnest about this matter, he points to their idol-gods, or to some other evil thing which they have harbored in their hearts, and so aroused his anger. Then, if they arise, and cast out these abominations, the rod is put away, and God once more gives them the comforts of his grace. Wherefore, my brethren and sisters in Christ, if you lack comfort, search and see where the fault lies; for it is my firm conviction that, in nine cases out of ten, it is owing to some sin that has been indulged. I quoted Job's question just now, and Eliphaz asked him, "Are the consolations of God small with thee? is there any secret thing with thee? Why doth thine heart carry thee away? and what do thy eyes wink at, that thou turnest thy spirit against God, and lettest such words go out of thy mouth?" I pass those searching questions on to anyone here to whom they may apply, and I trust that, as the result of doing so, such a soul will be able to present the poet's petition with the poet's confidence, —

"The dearest idol I have known,

Whate'er that idol be,

Help me to tear it from thy throne,

And worship only thee.

"So shall my walk be close with God,

Calm and serene my frame;

So purer light shall mark the road

That leads me to the Lamb."

Possibly, the lack of comfort is owing to some other cause. Dear Christian brother or sister, you may be at this moment without comfort because you have neglected some duty. I believe that many of God's people, who know their Lord's will, yet do it not, do get beaten with many stripes. They say that they do not understand why they are thus chastised, and they do not know what it is that causes them to be so frequently and so sorely afflicted. It is because there is some precept, which they know to be their Lord's precept, yet they wink their eye at it, and leave it neglected. Learn a lesson from Jonah's experience. If the Lord should bid any of us go to Nineveh, and cry against it; and, instead of doing so, we go down to Joppa, and find a ship going to Tarshish, and get in it, we must not reckon upon having a smooth passage. Before long, there will be "a mighty tempest in the sea." If we had not been God's servant, there might have been fair weather; but when a child of God runs away from his plain duty, God will send a tempest

after him, and he may be very thankful if God also sends a whale; for, although the whale may swallow him, yet it may bring him safely to land; but he will be sure to rue the day on which he turned away from his clear duty, and sought out a more comfortable path.

Master John Bunyan, whom I cannot help quoting, tells us the result of Christian and Hopeful going over the stile into By-Path Meadow. They thought it would be much smother walking just on the other side of the fence, and Christian tried to assure his companion that the path ran along by the way-side. No doubt they thought that they could keep so close to the King's highway that they would see, in a minute, when the park began to turn away from the right road, and then they would just jump over the fence, and get into the right way again. They felt sure it would be all right; at least, Christian did, for Hopeful was doubtful all the while, though he gave way to his older companion. But when Giant Despair found them sleeping in his grounds, and drove them off into his dungeon, and came, the next morning, with a great crab-tree cudgel, and gave them, not a mouthful of bread, nor a drink of water, but plenty of crab-tree; and when, the day after, he counselled them to destroy themselves, and left them lying, day after day, pining in their filthy prison, — then they understood that smooth walking is not always safe walking, and that it is best to walk in the right road even though it may be a rough one. Let us be careful where we walk, for we may lose our comfort very speedily unless we keep strictly to the path of obedience. Let us, at all times, with a cheerful and willing spirit, wear our Master's yoke, for his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

I will speak very plainly to some of you who get downhearted and desponding, for I am rather glad that you do get into such a state of mind. There are some who think that the blame rests with the preacher if they become despondent; they say that he ought to comfort them more than he does. Ah, but lazy professors must remember what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." As for you busy preachers, Sunday-school teachers, tract-distributors, and other earnest workers for Christ, when you do get to a sermon, how sweet it is to you! You have been hard at work for the Lord, and it has sharpened your spiritual appetites; but lazy Christians, who never fail to win souls for the Savior, and who only want to be spiritually fed without doing a stroke of work in the Master's service, get to be very dainty. No matter how good the fare may be, nor however much others enjoy it, they are sure to say, "That is not the food that we like." They want it spiced up to a wonderful degree, and it must be carved so daintily or they will not touch it; whereas, if they had been hard at work, they would have gained a healthy appetite, which would have turned even the bitters into sweets.

I pray God that those professors, who do nothing for him, may be miserable. "That is a very unkind prayer," say some of you. No, it is not, for it is meant for your good. See, if you get to be happy in your idleness, you will keep in that sinful state; but if you are unhappy while you are doing nothing for the Master, I think you will be the more likely to say to him, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Then I hope you will soon get to work, and I believe that comfort will be sure to come to you when, in an evangelical spirit, depending upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Ghost, you go out to do what you can for the Lord. Some of you, perhaps, have a great heap of money stored up, and you cannot make out why there is such a bad smell of canker all over the house; I could tell you! Some of you, who have not been doing anything for your Master for a long while, think that surely your blood must be congealed in your veins, for it does not seem to move; I think I could tell you why that is. If you would again exercise yourself in God's work, as you used to do, you would soon find that the blood would again course through your veins, and that the dew of your spiritual youth would come back to you. Our sorrows are often manufactured by our sins, — our sins of omission, or of commission. May we all have grace, then, to search within ourselves to see if we can discover the answer to the question, "When wilt thou comfort me?"

II. Now I am going, for a few minutes, to deal with the case of anxious, seeking sinners.

Where are you, anxious one? Never mind where you may happen to be at this moment; let the Word of the Lord come straight to you as though nobody else were here. You are sorrowfully saying, "I have been praying for pardon for months; I am in the house of God whenever it is open; I search the Bible as diligently as I can, yet I cannot find comfort. Oh, that I could get my sins forgiven! I must get that blessing, or I shall die. Tell me, sir, when will God comfort me?"

My dear hearer, it may be that comfort is withheld from you because you have not fully confessed your sin. We have God's Word for it that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Then, if we do not make a complete confession to our God, we must not expect to receive pardon. "Oh!" say you, "I have said, 'Lord, I am a sinner.'" That is right, but you must do more than that. To-night, before you go to bed, think over your past life. Recapitulate your faults, and confess the whole of them to God, and do not keep anything back. I have heard of a professor, who was guilty of backsliding for a time; and therefore was suspended from church-membership. He prayed about the matter, but he used to pray thus, "Lord, thou knowest that I have indulged a little; have mercy upon me!" Of course, no comfort came to him. Then a Christian brother said to him, "Tell the Lord the whole truth; he knows just what it is." The man was wise enough to follow this good advice, so he prayed, "Lord, thou knowest that I was drunk, wilt thou not forgive me, for Jesus Christ's sake?" Then the comfort came to him; and you also must, call your sin just what it is when

you go before God, for you are not truly humbled and penitent as long as you try to put a gloss upon your sin. David could get no peace till he prayed, "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God;" and, my dear hearer, you must confess the worst aspect of your case before God. "Make a clean breast of it," as we commonly say; tell the Lord all about your sin. Perhaps it is the lack of this that keeps you from being comforted, — the want of an explicit, plain, full confession of your sins.

Again, if you ask me why you do not have comfort, although you do try to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, I answer, Perhaps there is some sin that you have not given up; and, depend upon it, if that is the case, although salvation is all by the grace of God, and we are not saved by our own works, yet you, sinner, never can have peace with God till you have made a clean sweep of every known sin. There may be a man here, who has attended the Tabernacle for a long time, and who says that he cannot get peace. Now, where was he last night? His conscience knows, and I will ask him whether he expects to get peace with God while he can be found in such society? There is another man here, who says that, he cannot get comfort; but where is he to be found the greater part of the week? Does he not regularly go to the gin-palace, and can he expect that the Lord Jesus Christ will go there with him? Nay, that cannot be; there was no room for Christ in the inn when he was born, and there is certainly no room for him in the gin-palace of the present day. There are some men who can cheat in their business; they know very well that they do not deal fairly with their customers. Their goods are adulterated, and they give short weight; yet they expect to have peace with God while this is the case! How can it be? Do you suppose that God will patch up a truce with your sins, and give you his forgiveness while you are harboring such evil things in your house? Nay, that cannot be. Though you cannot be perfect, yet you must want to be perfect, and there must not be any sin which you knowingly spare. Cut them in pieces, every one of them; as soon as you know that anything is wrong, I pray you to have such a tender conscience that you will seek to escape from it; for, as long as you harbor even one of them, comfort will never come to you.

"But this is such a little sin," says one. Ay, and those little errors are like the little boys that the big thieves take with them, to put through the little windows, and then they open the door, and let the big thieves in. Those little sins will be your ruin unless you forsake them, and get them forgiven. One of our proverbs says, "Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves." Turn that proverb round, and it will teach you that, if you look sharply after your little sins, you will not fall into great ones. It is these so-called little sins — mixing with worldly society, going into bad company, and so on, — that keep so many of you from getting peace with God. Some of you, young women, get walking with ungodly young men; and some of you, young men, form acquaintances that are no good to you; and then you come here, and your consciences are somewhat touched, and you ask that you may be found "accepted in the Beloved." How can that be when you will walk straight away from this service, and talk in such a way as would be impossible if the Holy Ghost were really in you? The Holy Dove would fly away from such talk as that a defiled heart is no nest wherein he can take his rest.

Once again, is it not very likely that the reason why you do not get peace with God is this, — that you have not trusted to the Lord Jesus Christ wholly and entirely? There is the root of the mischief. You still hope to save yourself in some measure; and, as long as you cling to a rag of self-righteousness, you cannot get peace or comfort. If ever a sinner is to be saved, it must be entirely by the mercy of God shown to him solely because of the merit of Jesus Christ; and, as long as a man puts so much as a shadow of a trust in himself beside his trust in Christ, his comfort will be marred. You must be to yourself as though you were dead, so far as any confidence in yourself is concerned, and you must rest alone in Jesus. The finished work of the exalted Redeemer must be your only confidence.

"How was it, Sam," asked a Christian master of his servant, "that, when you and I were, both under conviction of sin, you got comfort so much sooner than I did? As far as I know, Sam, my life seemed to be as good as yours before conviction came to me, yet I could not get comfort, though you did." Ah!" said Sam, "you see, master, I was a great deal worse than you were; and when God the Holy Spirit showed me what I was, I looked at my rags, and I said, 'Ah! they are nothing but a lot of filthy rags, they will never patch up;' so I took them off at once, and I put on the robe of Jesus Christ's righteousness, for I knew my rags would never match that spotless garment of his; but, master, when you got a little light, you looked at yourself, and you had been so good, you had lived such a decent life, that you said, 'Ah! my coat wants mending; there is a hole in the elbow, and a rent here and there, but it can be patched up, and I shall do a little longer; and so, master, you did not get the robe of Christ's righteousness as quickly as I did." And some of you, moral people, will have hard work in fighting against your self-righteousness. When good Mr. Hervey questioned a godly ploughman as to what was the greatest hindrance to a sinner's coming to Christ, he thought the ploughman would say, "Sinful self," but he said, "Righteous self," and so it is. Righteous self-confidence in our prayers, self-confidence in our repentance, self-confidence in something we mean to do, or something we feel that we already have, — all this keeps us back from true peace and comfort.

All the candles in the world will not enable us to do without the sun. Some of you light your poor little candles, and try to get comfort that way. Put the extinguisher on every one of them, and you go and stand in the sunshine, for then you will have light indeed. Give up all your carnal hopes, your earthly confidences, your good works, your own righteousnesses, — away with them all, and come as poor, guilty, condemned sinners, and trust in Jesus Christ, and you shall get comfort this very instant; for, the moment a sinner trusts in Jesus Christ, he is saved; peace and pardon immediately follow trust in Jesus. Only come to him with your sins and

miseries, your burdens and your unworthinesses, your hardness of heart and your coldness of spirit; come to him just as you are, for "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." The Lord Jesus is a physician who heals the sick when their disease is at its worst, he does not want you to try to make yourselves better, but to come to him just as you are, and then he will heal you as you are. That was a beautiful act on the part of the good Samaritan who found the poor wounded man half dead by the roadside, He did not stand, and gaze at his injuries, and say to him, "My dear fellow, when your wounds are less painful to you, I will come back, and bind them up." He did not say to him, "My dear man, when you are more conscious of your need of my services, and can sit up, and ask me to help you, I will do what I can for you." He did not say, "My dear man, when you are very sorry that you ever came down this dangerous road, where you have been waylaid and injured, I will come and heal you." Oh, no! there the poor man lay, half dead, and the good Samaritan went just where he was, and stooped over him, and looked at his wounds. Probably the man did not feel anything just then, for most likely he had been stunned, but the good Samaritan felt for him. The man could not plead for himself, but the heart of the good Samaritan pleaded for him; and he tenderly bound up his gaping wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and lifted him up, set him on his own beast, carried him to the inn, and there did all he could to ensure the completion of his cure. As the Samaritan went to the wounded man where he was, so Jesus Christ "the good Samaritan" in the highest sense of the term, comes to the sinner where he is.

But, sinners, though you are trying to make your hearts ready for Christ, you will never succeed in doing it You are wasting your strength upon a task that must end in failure. Remember that, if you cannot come to Christ with a broken heart, you can come to him for a broken heart If you cannot come as you ought, come just as you are; and if you have no good thing to plead as a reason for your acceptance, so much the better will it be for you.

I have tried to put this matter of finding comfort plainly, and in as simple language as I could. O Sacred Spirit, come now, and bring the sinner to Jesus, for his dear name's sake! Amen.

Psalm 120:5 The Sojourn in Mesech

NO. 2780

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 25TH, 1902,

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,

ON A LORD'S-DAY EVENING, DURING THE SPRING OF 1860.

"Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar! — Psalm 120:6.

Mesech was the son of Japheth, from whom, according to history, were descended the men who inhabited that most barbarous of all regions, according to the opinion of the ancients, the northern parts of Muscovy or Moscow, and Russia. The inhabitants of the tents of Kedar were the descendants of one of the sons of Abraham, who had taken to nomadic habits, and were continually wandering about over the deserts; and were, besides, thought, and doubtless were, guilty of plundering travelers, and were by no means the most respectable of mankind. We are to understand, then, by this verse, that the people among whom the psalmist dwelt were, in his esteem, among the most barbarous, the most fierce, the most graceless of men; and therefore it is that he cries, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" "He felt a woe in his heart because of that evil companionship in which he was compelled to abide.

This has been the cry of the children of God in all ages. Lot had his ears vexed with the filthy conversation of the men of Sodom. Many of the woes of Micah sprang from those men who were sharper than a thorn-hedge, every one of them ready to tear and scratch his neighbor. David's deepest grief's came from the men who surrounded him;—on the one hand, the unfriendly sons of Zeruiah, who were too strong for him; and, on the other hand, Shimei and the sons of Belial, who made a reproach of every word he uttered, and every deed he did. Even Isaiah himself, that happy spirited prophet, one day cried, "Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips!" and then he added another cause of his woe, "and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;" and I expect I may truly say that, to this day, you, my brothers and sisters, who are followers of Jesus, have often had to cry out, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" and you have longed to be far away from this dusky world, so full of sin, and traps, and pit-falls, and everything that makes us stumble in our path, and of nothing that can help us onward towards heaven.

I propose, on this occasion, first, to say a word or two in justification of the psalmist's complaint; secondly, to justify God's dealings with us in having subjected us to this dwelling in the tents of Mesech; and thirdly, a few words, by way of comfort, to those who are sad at heart, by reason of those ill times, and those ill places, in which they abide.

I. First, then, brethren, A Word Or Two In Justification Of The Psalmist's Complaint.

I will not say that it is thoroughly commendable, in a Christian man, to long to be away from the place where God's providence has put him. But I will say, and must say, that it is not only excusable, but scarcely needs an apology, for that Christian man sometimes to cry out, "My soul is weary, I am almost weary of my life, because of those wicked men that surround me on every hand."

Think, my brethren, of what Christians have to suffer from the wicked world, and you will not wonder, you will not feel, I am sure, that they should excuse themselves when they cry, "Woe is me;" for think how the wicked world slanders the Christian. There is no falsehood too base for men to utter against the followers of Jesus. There was a shameful slander, that was circulated among the heathen, that the early Christians, when they came together, met for the most obscene, and even cruel, rites; whereas those holy men and women only gathered together to eat bread and drink wine, in remembrance of him whom they loved; and, to this day, the chosen weapon of Satan, with which the evil one does great mischief, and on which he relies, as his masterpiece of hellish ordnance against the Church, is slander; and this often wounds the Christian, and cuts him to the quick, when he finds his good name suddenly blasted, when filth is thrown upon his snow-white garments. It is but little marvel, when he has sought studiously to avoid the very appearance of evil, when he has picked his steps, knowing the world is a miry place, When he has sought in everything to avoid giving offense to any man, and yet he sees himself abused on every hand, it is but little marvel that he should cry, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech!

But if slander were all, though this might suffice to apologize for the complaint, yet would there be something lacking; but, alas! the Christian, dwelling as he does among wicked men, finds his good things are continually marred, so that he has to cry, "When I would do good, evil is present with me; not only here in my own heart, but in my own house, and round about my neighborhood." I know that some of you live, in crowded places, where you can scarcely pray without being overheard, and laughed at; and- if you have a meeting for prayer, and friends join you in singing the songs of Zion, a crowd soon gathers round your little window, and the mockers make all manner of discordant sounds. If you would learn a lascivious song, you have but to throw up your window, and listen to what is being sung in the street; but if you would have thoughts of heaven, and sing of God, how hard it is when you have those about you who will cast these things in your teeth, suggest all manner of ribaldry, and turn your best words into a reproach against you! The Christian is like an eagle chained. How often does he fret over that chain, and bite it! He sees the stars up yonder, and he knows that he is brother to the lightnings, and he wants to be aloft there in his own native element; how he frets and fumes at his captivity! His mighty spirit struggles within his body, and he longs to stretch his wings, and fly straight to yonder lofty heights; and when he sees those about him feeding upon the husks that swine eat, or when they hurl their carrion at him, how often does he long to be free, to break down the bars of his cage, and get away to his own companionship, to some associates that are fit for him, some spirits that are congenial with his spirit; how he pants to be with his congeners, the cherubim and seraphim, the holy ones that, day without night, keep cease-less watch and sing in unending harmony around the throne of Jehovah, who liveth and abideth for ever! Were he a worldling, he would be satisfied with the world; but since he is of nobler blood, these things here below all tend to check the aspirations and the longings of his heaven-born spirit. 'Tis, indeed, no strange thing that he should cry, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!

But, besides this, the Christian is conscious that evil companionship is damaging to him. If he is not burnt, he is at least blackened by contact with the ungodly. This world is to him a place where, if he does not accumulate actual filth, it is hard to travel an hour along its roads without being covered with its dust. Though, by the grace of God, he is kept upright, yet he feels, when he goes upon his knees again, he has suffered from contact with poor, fallen humanity. He goes up into his chamber of communion with Christ, and his spirit seems to drink the dew of heaven fresh from the throne of God,-the drops from the womb of the morning,-but he has to go down into the world, and the hot sun of business shines upon him, and then comes the dustiness of this world to mar him, and he goes back to his chamber, and feels like Samson when his hair was shorn away. He begins to cry, "My soul lies cleaving to the dust." Sometimes he longs to get away from his fellows; he would, if he could, keep himself abstracted and alone, that he might cultivate continual friendship with Christ, and abide near to the bleeding side of Jesus. That is a foolish wish, as I shall have to show by-and-by; but yet it is no wonder that he cries aloud, when he finds his spirit so confined, and his best things so deteriorated, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!

There are divers other reasons, doubtless, why the Christian longs to be gone from the company of the ungodly, and why he would be far away from them if he could. I shall be content, however, with mentioning one other, namely, the continual process of temptation which surrounds the Christian who is situated in the midst of men of unclean lips. Men lay traps for us, and sometimes they lay them right warily and craftily; and unless our God has given us the wisdom of the serpent, as well as the harmlessness of the dove, we shall find our heels tripped up before we are aware. Often, in my own case, am I asked questions, apparently by enquirers who are anxious to know something about truth, only with the desire to entrap me in my words, and make some capital out of my answer; and, doubtless, it is so with each one of you. You are questioned merely that your answer may become the

theme of ridicule. Some temptation is put in your way,-a supposed friend advises you to do this or to do that. Perhaps you do it, and he is the first man to accuse you of having done wrong. Before, he said, "Oh, it is just the thing I should do if I were in your place!" Perhaps he would; and when he has seen you do it he has become your accuser; your tempter has afterwards turned round to bring an accusation against you. The Christian will long to be out of a world like this, where there is a Satanic rifleman behind every bush, where there is a devilish archer behind every crag; and where, oftentimes, while we are going along some quiet vale of life, all secluded and peaceful, the arch-fiend comes behind us, and we hear his flattering words, and, all of a sudden, he gives a shrill call, and from every side of the defile start temptations; we see every one of them armed to the teeth, and with their arrows winged for flight, and thirsty to destroy; and we wonder why we are brought into such a place, where all seemed so calm and secluded; and now we are surrounded by the enemy, and we have to cry, "Good Lord, deliver us; come from above, and snatch us out of this danger; cast down our foes, and put our feet in a large place." Well may God's dove long to roost in heaven, when there are so many snares here, and so many archers with their bows all ready, seeking its life. This made the psalmist talk of fleeing as a bird to the mountain. Well may we sometimes wish we could do so, and even begin to sing, in the language of the poet,-

"Jerusalem, my happy home,

Name ever dear to me;

When shall my labors have an end,

In joy, and peace, and thee?"

II. Having thus spoken a word of justification for the psalmist's complaint, I am going, next, To Justify The Ways Of God With Us, In Having Subjected Us To This Dwelling In The Tents Of Kedar.

Well, brethren, whatever God does is right;-we believe that once for all; if he should do that which seemed, to our reason, to be the wrongest thing in the world, we should believe our reason to be a liar sooner than imagine that God would either be unkind or unwise. It is a happy thing when we can believe God to be right when we cannot see it, when we can trust him if we cannot trace him. It is pleasant to believe that, but we would rather see it. Now, I think, in this case, we can see a little why God deals thus with us.

It is right, and just, and good that God has spared us to be here a little longer; for, in the first place, my brothers and sisters, has not God put us here to dwell in the tents of Kedar, because these, though perilous places, are advantageous posts for service? The angels, those mighty spirits that serve God perfectly, seem to me to be like the soldiers in an army, who bring up the rear-guard; they are behind; there, the arrows do not reach them. When the volleys' of Satanic malice are being fired off, the angels are behind, and can scarcely hear their echoes; but we men that are born of women must face the fire, and lead the vanguard in the heavenly battle between the Son of God and that great arch-traitor. We must go into the front rank, and every shot must tell upon our harness, and rattle upon our armor; and is it not a glorious thing to stand in the front! Who would care to be behind in such a battle as this? Angels might long to come where we are, and earnestly desire to stand in the front of the battle; for if this be a place of danger, it is the place of honor, too.

That was a noble speech of our old English king, at Agincourt, when he was surrounded by multitudes of enemies, "Well, be it so. I would not lose so great an honor, or divide my triumph. I would not," said he, "have one man the fewer among my enemies, because then there would be a less glorious victory." So, in like manner, let us take heart even from our difficulties. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge; Jehovah-Nissi is inscribed on our banner. We are privileged above all the creatures of God. We have' a high and noble honor to fight for Jehovah; and standing out as the soldiers of the cross,-the Church militant of the Divine One,-we can do what the angels themselves have not the power to do; and therefore we have great reason to bless God that he lets us stop here, because we are doing something for him that even they cannot do. If you had been an angel, and never been a man, you might sit down, if such thoughts could ever pass through an angelic mind, on some sunny crag high up on the celestial hills, and muse thus-"I am a glorious being. The great God has made me to be happy and blest; but, down yonder, on that little planet that is glittering in the light of the sun, there are glorious creatures living that are more blest than I am, for they can do what I must not. They tell of Jesus' love; they wipe the tear from the eye of the mourner. I can carry the soul a-loft, and glad am I when I have the commission to do so; but I cannot go and bring the wanderer back, and tell him how Jesus Christ has bought him with his precious blood." Methinks an angel might almost fold his wings, and cherish that wish; if such a thought could ever go through a cherubic spirit, such a wish might be conceived to be quite natural. For really, my brethren, they cannot do what we can do. There are works of charity and resignation, and deeds of heroic suffering, that those blessed spirits can never perform. "Give me a body," says the angel, "and let me be a martyr, for a martyr is greater than an angel. Give me a tongue, and let me be a preacher; for the noble army of the apostles is more noble than the glorious hosts of cherubim and seraphim. They have suffered for God; they have testified for God; they have stood in the midst of a multitude of enemies, firm as a rock in the time of storm;

and they have been kept 'steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.'" If there were nothing else to say upon this point, it should certainly be satisfactory enough to the Christian to remember that God has kept him here on purpose to do him honor.

Yet another thought, my brethren and sisters. You never will wish, I am sure, to get away from the tents of Kedar if you will recollect that it was through another Christian tarrying here,-when, perhaps, he wanted to be gone,-that you are this day a Christian. Look back upon the instrumentality that God used for your conversion. It may have been the teaching of some aged woman, who herself had long ago wished to go home to her Father and her God. But she was kept here, pale and shivering with old age, in order to point you to the City of refuge. Or, perhaps, it may have been some younger servant of God, who preached the gospel, and you heard it, and were blessed. But that man of God had often wished to be in heaven. Had he been in heaven when he wished it, where would you have been? It is true, God might have found other instruments; but we are to speak, as men, after the manner of men. Have we not reason to thank God that these instruments were spared, and still kept here, that we might be brought to him by them?

And now, mark, is it not the fact, and will you not look out, and see whether it be so, that there are many of God's elect ones, purchased with the precious blood of Christ, who are parts of Christ's mystical body, who are not yet brought in, and you are to bring them in? Brethren, if you were to go to heaven now, perhaps you would go almost alone; but you must stop till there is a companion to go with you. There are two stars very prominent just at this season of the year, the Gemini, the twins, glistening in the sky. You can see them, in about an hour's time, almost overhead. Ay, and you, perhaps, would have been a star, all alone, in the heavenly firmament, if you had had your own way; but, now, there will be two of you glittering together. But with some of us, blessed be God who has given us this honor, there will be a whole constellation of stars, which, though they did not borrow their light from us, yet through us have been able to receive their light from Jesus Christ. And who would like to go to heaven alone,-to go through those bright fields of ether with no other redeemed spirit with him? I sometimes think it would be a noble thing for the minister of God to have a host behind him, and to look back, and say, "Who are ye that are following after me?" and to hear them reply, "We are they whom God has given you. As the sheaves come with the husbandman in the day of harvest, so we are coming after you;" and then to enter heaven, and cry, "Here am I, and the children that thou hast given me!" To say, "Here am I," is a blessed thing; but that other clause, "and those whom thou hast given me," that is a grand addition. What must it be to be in heaven? Glory be to God if we ever are there; but to be in heaven with others who are given to us,-this shall be to multiply heaven, to heap celestial mountains upon one another, to double the light of the sun, yea, to make it sevenfold, to make heaven more than heaven,-heaven multiplied in the heaven of others; to say, not simply, "I see the sun," but the sun reflected from a thousand glasses,-the souls of others who have been led to Christ, and then reflect that enjoyment upon the man who, through God, was the means of bringing them to glory. Well, brethren, this should make us willing to stop here. There is, however, one other reason left, namely, perhaps our Master keeps us in the tents of Kedar because it will make heaven all the sweeter. The old Romans-you hear a great deal of praise of the Greeks and Romans; but the Greeks were the biggest thieves who ever lived, and the Romans were about the greatest gluttons and bullies that ever existed;-well, the Romans were such gluttons that, before they came to their meals, they were accustomed to drink all the bitterest things they could get, that they might be thirsty, and that they might drink as much as they could;-very nasty things, such as one would not like to think of;-but they always liked to get their palates in such a state that, when they drank their wine, they should enjoy it. Verily, brethren, this is something like our case. After those draughts of wormwood, which we have had to drink, how sweet will be heaven's nectar! Yes, we have had to drink the gall, as we think, to the very dregs; but when that cup is drained, and God gives us some of the new wine of the kingdom, how sweet that will be! Nothing makes a day of rest so sweet to a man as having long labored and long toiled. The tradesman, who goes home to his little country house, thinks, "Well, if ever I can make enough to come and live in this house always, I shall be so happy." He does it, and yet he doesn't like it. In a week, he cannot bear it. The reason he used to enjoy the rest was because the toil of the day sweetened it. Brethren, it will be so with us when we get into heaven;-then, when our rest shall last eternally, it will be sweet indeed. The long wilderness of drought shall make the joys of heaven rare and real. The waters of the Nile were considered by the Egyptians to have an excellent flavour. Our travelers say it is not so, but the reason is because the Egyptians have never drunk any water but that of the Nile; while we, who have it in all our streets so abundantly, think but little of that turbid stream. Now, we who have had much, but not too much, of sorrow from the men that dwell in the tents of Kedar, how blessed will it be there when we shall be-

"Far from a world of grief and sin, With God eternally shut in"!

III. My third topic is, A Word Of Comfort To The Christian While Placed In These Apparently Evil Circumstances.

Well, there is one word in the text that ought to console him in a case like this. "Woe is me, that I sojourn"-thank God for that word "sojourn." Yes, I do not live here for ever; I am only a stranger and a sojourner here, as all my fathers were; and though the next sentence does say, "I dwell," yet, thank God, it is a tent I dwell in, and that will come down by-and-by: "I dwell in the tents of Kedar." Ye men of this world, ye may have your day, but your day will soon be over; and I will have my nights, but my nights will soon be

over, too. It is not for long, Christian, it is not for long. They may laugh at you; every day, there is one day less for you to be laughed at. They may scoff and mock, and set you in the pillory with cruel mockings, but you will not stand there for ever. Perhaps, to-morrow, you may be in heaven; we never know how near we are to the gates of Paradise. But, at any rate, suppose we should live to the longest period of human life, it is not long after all. When we get home to heaven, and come to look back, what a short way it will seem! While we are travelling in it, and our feet are covered with blisters and sores, we think all the inches are miles; but when we get up there, we shall say, "Why, that light affliction was but for a moment. I thought 'twas half a century; 'twas but for a moment; yet it has wrought out for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." We say, sometimes, "God has appointed unto us wearisome days, and nights of weeping." But when we are there, we shall say, "Weeping endured but for a night, but joy came in the morning." I say to the Christian,-

"The way may be rough, but it cannot be long;

So let's smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."

Up, man! a few successful struggles, and you will not have one conflict more; another blow or two, and your foot shall be on your foeman's neck. What! give up the battle when it is near its termination? Wouldst thou sit down in the shades when the sun is rising, and the morning star of promise is giving thee the first token of the dawn? Cheer up, cheer up, I beseech thee! The end will make amends for all that thou endurest, and thou wilt thank God that he kept thee, and blessed thee, and enabled thee to suffer and endure, and at last brought thee safely home.

This, however, is not all the comfort I have for you, because that would look like something at the end, like the child who has the promise of something while it is taking its medicine. No, there is something to comfort you during your trials. Remember that, even while you are in the tents of Kedar, you have blessed company, for God is with you; and though you sojourn with the sons of Mesech, yet there is Another with whom you sojourn, namely, your blessed Lord and Master. You are not alone, for Christ is with you. It is true that those who are round about you are uncongenial companions; but then, there is One who walks through the midst of all these scenes and snares, who says to you, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God." There may be a noise in the street, but Christ is with thee in thy chamber. There may be a storm within your very doors, a husband who will not let you rest, and children who east your religion in your teeth; but there is another Husband in that house too, a heavenly Husband, and his consolations are far more powerful than all the sneers of the other husband; the manna that he gives is so sweet that it can take all the bitterness out of the sarcasm's of your foes. Surely, when Christ is with us, the bitterness of death is past; much more, then, the bitterness of those little trials which daily come to us from those sons of Mesech, and those inhabitants of the tents of Kedar. If, my Lord, thou wilt go with me, I will not choose the path. If I must go alone, alas! alas! for me, though the road be grassy, and the sky be clear, and the sun be bright, and the rills be flowing on every side; though the birds are singing on the trees, and though my OWN eyes have a lustre in them, yet I am miserable, I am wretched, I am unsafe, I am in danger, if thou art not with me. But come, my Master, if the sun be set, if no moon or stars appear, if all around me there are found those that would devour me; if there be a ditch on this side, and a yawning gulf or a quagmire on the other; if there be all kinds of horrible things and evil spirits; if under my feet there be dead men's bones, and snares, and chains, and pit-falls; if over me there be the shadow of death, that keeps the sunlight from reaching me; and if within my heart there is fear, yet, if thou art-with me, into the very gates of hell itself my soul unharmed should enter; through the wall of fire, amidst the blazings of divine vengeance, my soul unscathed may walk. Nothing can harm me if Jesus be near. Does not this make the tents of Kedar as white and fair as the tents of Solomon if Jesus has visited them; and are not the men of Mesech, with their rough beards, their stern faces, and with their unknown tongues, as friendly angels when we know that Jesus Christ is with us for evermore?

I have but one thing more to say, and with that I shall conclude. Brethren, ye may be comforted yet again with this sweet thought,- that not only is God with you, but your Master was once in the tents of Kedar; not merely spiritually, but personally, even as you are; and inasmuch as you are here too, this, instead of being painful, should be comforting to you. Have you not received a promise that you shall be like your Head? Thank God that promise has begun to be fulfilled. If you were happy in the tents of Kedar, you might think, "I am not like my Master, for he was a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" but inasmuch as you have evil things thrown at you, and your way is hard and rough, you may say, "Now I know what it is to have fellowship with him in suffering, in some feeble measure. As I was buried with him in baptism unto death, so with him I trust I have had conformity unto his death." When any pang rends your heart from slander or misrepresentation, then can you say, "Now I know what he meant when he said, 'Reproach has broken my heart.'" When you find yourself abused and misrepresented, you can say, "Now I understand what Christ endured when they said, He is a gluttonous man and a winebibber; a friend of publicans and sinners." It is worth while to be like Christ in the worst times, because that is an assurance that we shall be like him in the best times. If I carry a cross as he carried one, I shall wear a crown as he wears one. If I have been with him in the degradation of the flesh, I shall be with him in the glory of the Spirit. If I have been with him when men hooted and hissed, and dogs compassed him, and the bulls of Bashan beset him round, I shall be with him, too, when angelic hosts are round him, and he shall be admired of all that love him, and adored of all creation. You shall be like your Head, poor sufferer,-like your Head; then, what more can you want? Is not this a sufficient honor, that the servant is as his Master, and the subject is as his Sovereign?

This may seem strange language in the ears of some hearers. All that they know is, that they sometimes sneer at Christians themselves. Well, sir, you have spoken ill of your wife and children because they follow Christ. I would not be in your clothes for half the world, nor for the whole of it. Do you see that man there with the millstone round his neck? He is going to be cast into the midst of the sea; that man is better off than you are, for Christ has said it, "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone we-re hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." Don't laugh at a Christian or a professing Christian, even if he be a beggar; for he may be a child of God, and it will be an ill thing for you to be caught laughing at a child of God. There is nothing that makes a man so angry as to laugh at his children; there is nothing, which brings a man's spirit up like touching his children. "Say what you like against me, but don't say anything against them. Touch them," says the man, "and you touch me; touch them, and you shall feel my wrath." Our Father loves them, and he that touches them t-ouches the apple of his eye. If you want to be damned, go and do something else, but don't do that; but if you want to go to perdition, and to the hottest fire of hell, go and vent your spleen on God's people. If you do it, you shall surely be punished for it. Herod shall be eaten of worms, though the voice be as t-he voice of a god, and not of a king. There shall be creatures who, like Antiochus, shall have their very bowels burnt because they hurt the people of God; and you who touch them with your little finger shall feel the weight of the divine arm; and if you have smitten them with the arm, you shall find his loins crushing you to the very lowest hell. But, remember, there is mercy for the persecutor. Did not the Lord say, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." "John, John, why persecutest thou me?" "Lord, I only laugh at my little daughter." "Thou hast persecuted me; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." "Thomas, Thomas, why persecutest thou me?" "But, Lord, I only told my wife I would shut her out if she went to the week-night services." "Thou hast done it unto me, inasmuch as thou hast done it unto the least of these my people." But he cries to you, and says, "It is hard for thee to kick with naked feet against these, pricks." And do you say, "Who art thou, Lord?" his answer is, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." And then, if thou sayest, "Canst thou forgive me, Lord?" his answer is, "I am ready and willing to forgive. 'Come now, and let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like' crimson, they shall be as wool.'" Trust in Jesus, and you are safe. Cast yourself once for all on him, and you cannot be lost, for he that relies on Jesus is a saved man. May God add the blessing of his Spirit, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Psalm 130:3, 4 Psalmist's Question and Answer

NO. 2792

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"If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."-Psalm 130:3, 4.

NOTE, dear friends, that the Psalm begins with this remarkable expression, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord," and I call your special attention to that utterance of the psalmist because there are many who are afraid to pray when they are in the depths of soul-despair. It is comparatively easy to think you are praying when you have a fine notion of your own excellence. At such a time, you can stand up in the temple, with the boasting Pharisee, and pour out, as glibly as possible, expressions which you call prayer, but which God will never accept. But the very best prayer in all the world is that which comes from a broken heart and a contrite spirit,-when, away in the corner there, beside the conscience-stricken publican, we smite upon our breast, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Do not, I beg you, think that your prayer will not succeed because you are in the depths. There is no place for praying like that; if ever a man is more sure to succeed with God at one time than at another, it is when he is in his greatest straits. You know those men, who are wisely generous, when they are about to distribute their alms, like to give to the most necessitous cases. The plea with them is the greatness of need, the urgency of distress; and it is just so with God and yours selves. It is not your goodness that will ensure an answer to your prayer; it is the greatness of your need. Even if you have sunk very low in your own esteem, till not a ray of hope seems left to you, and you are shut up in the blackest darkness of despair, now is the very time for you to pray, even as the psalmist said, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." No prayers are more true, more real, and, consequently, more acceptable, and no prayers are so likely to be quickly answered, as those that come up from the very depths of soul-distress. I begin my discourse with this observation, because I want to cheer some of you who at present hardly dare to pray. Yet you are the very people who may pray; you who think that the Lord will never hear you are the people whom he is certain to hear and answer. When you are cleaned right out, when even the last rusty counterfeit farthing has been emptied out of your pocket, and you stand before your God as a wretched, starving, and bankrupt beggar, your abject poverty and dire need will commend you to his mercy and love. Now,-if never before,-now that you have come to your worst, dart up to heaven your prayer; and the Lord, who heard Jonah when he was in the whale's belly, and Manasseh when he was in captivity in Babylon, will hear you, and send you a speedy answer of peace to your supplication.

Note, also, how intensely the psalmist pleads. In the second verse of the Psalm, he says, "Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." So, when you pray out of the depths, mind that you plead with all your might. Cold prayers ask God to refuse our requests; but the red-hot petition of a soul on fire with agony after grace is certain to be heard. If thou hast hitherto knocked in vain at mercy's door, knock again, only knock more loudly than before; and if one blow of the hammer of prayer has not sufficed to make that portal open, knock, and knock, and knock again, determined that, if thou dost perish, thou wilt perish praying and pleading; but thou shalt not perish if thou wilt but ask, and seek, and knock with that importunity which will take no denial. he who has this holy resolve strongly wrought within him by the blessed Spirit of God shall soon come into the morning light of gracious acceptance, and his heart shall be glad because the Lord has granted his petition.

This brings us to the threefold position, which the psalmist occupied when he prayed this prayer. It was, first, one of confession: "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" It was also one of humble confidence: "But there is forgiveness with thee;" and it was one in which he saw the consequences of God's mighty pardon: "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

I. First, then, in our text, we have A Confession,-a confession which it will be well for every one of us to make: "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand!"

The psalmist may have felt that, if a human witness had been appointed to mark his sin, he might have been able to stand; but he says, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, who shall stand?" "If my fellow-man should watch me honestly, and speak of me candidly, it may be that he would not be able to see a flaw in my life." There are some men who could say as much as that; they have been enabled, by the grace of God, so to behave themselves in all integrity and uprightness that no one could justly bring any accusation against them. If the policeman were set to watch, or a spy were put into their house, or if even wife or child were the watcher, there are some who might be able to say, "I have borne myself uprightly both in the house and abroad among my fellow-men, and I could pass such a test as that." But the psalmist said, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand!" He knew that the Lord sees what no one else can see, and he sees behind the action into the motive of it, the secret design hidden in the heart.

If any one of us will just think how we have been watched everywhere,-at our board and in our bed, in our home and in the public street,-if we will remember how the omniscient eye of God has seen everything, and how he has recorded everything that we have thought and said, as well as what we have done,-such a person must feel the force of the psalmist's question, "O Lord, who shall stand?" When I have occasionally met with brethren who have talked about their own perfection, I must confess that I have felt a sort of shudder go through me. The very last thing, in this world, that I would dare to claim would be my own perfection; and I believe that all of you will say that, when you have lived nearest to God, it is then that you have mourned most your distance from him. When your prayer has been most prevalent, it is then that you have seen most of its imperfection; and when your faith has been most vigorous, it is just then that you have had to lament your unbelief. I firmly believe that it is only the gross spiritual darkness of ignorance that makes any man think himself perfect. If he had more light, he would see how abundant are the spots upon him. You have sometimes had a white pocket handkerchief, and you have admired its whiteness; but when the snow has fallen, and you have laid your handkerchief upon the newly-fallen snow, it has looked quite yellow instead of white; and so is it with the holiest life when it is placed by the side of the life of Christ, or looked at in the light of the perfect law of God; then we see how stained and defiled it really is. So, Lord, we might stand up before our fellow-men, and plead "Not guilty," when they belie and slander us, as they do; but, before thy holy presence, "if thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

The psalmist not only mentions the Divine Witness of his sin, but he also speaks of a special form of guilt. He does not say, "If thou shouldest mark open and overt transgression,-the breaking out of bounds, and going astray into the paths of evil;" but he says, "If thou shouldest mark iniquities." Pull that word to pieces, and it becomes "in-equities"-whatever is not right in the sight of God. If he were to mark those in-equities, who could stand before him? Not one of us could do so. God observes how, after obeying the first commandment, we forget the second; or, if we are mindful of the first table of the law, which concerns our relationship to God, we neglect to observe the second table, which relates to our duty to our neighbor. Sometimes, perhaps, we spend much time in private devotion, yet do not attend to our family duties. At another time, family duties are attended to, but private devotions are forgotten. Sometimes, there is a well-balanced relationship towards wife and children, but not towards our parents; or towards our own household, but not towards the world. It may be that we are kind to our friends, and act according to the rule of equity with regard to them; yet we may be ungenerous towards those who are not our friends, and so be guilty of in-equity there. Our character ought to be harmonious throughout, and no life can be right in the sight of God unless it is holy. Let me alter that word a little, and spell it in a different way, yet retain the same meaning,-that is, whole,-not part of it devoted to righteousness, and part to unrighteousness, but all of it of one character, so that it is whole and holy. If that is what God requires, who among us can stand before him? If thou, Lord, shouldest mark in-equities, who among us could stand in thy sight? Not one; we must all fall down before thee, and confess our guiltiness.

Notice, next, how the psalmist enquires, "Who shall stand?" If there were any way of getting into heaven by a back door, or of hiding our sins from God's eye, we might have some ground of hope; but, brethren, there will come a day when we shall stand before God like prisoners at the bar. In that grand assembly, which shall be summoned by sound of trumpet around the judgment seat of God, at the last assize, there is no one who will then be able to find a place of shelter, for the rocks will not yield to our entreaties, and fall on us, nor will the mountains fulfill our wish, and hide us from him who will then be seated upon the throne. No; we must then be before him; and when he begins to judge, then shall the wicked flee from before his face like chaff before the wind. And unless you and I have some better righteousness than our own, when God begins to mark iniquities, and to punish them, we shall no more be able to stand than will the rest of mankind, but we, too, shall be driven before the blast of justice into the fire which never can be quenched.

Think of this, my brethren; could any one of you now, apart from Christ, stand up before the living God? If you had, at this moment, to enter the dock, and plead for your life before the Most High, without any Mediator to intercede for you, could you do so? No; you know that you could not. There is nobody here who would dare to appear before God except through Jesus Christ, we should all shudder at the very thought of such fatal presumption. Even those who are clothed in the righteousness of Christ are not always quite clear about appearing before God; how much less, then, must they be who have no robe of righteousness at all, but are only clad in the rags of their own iniquities? How shall they stand in that last dread day?

The psalmist asks, "Who shall stand?" as if he felt that he could not himself do so, and, moreover, that he did not know anybody, in the whole range of his acquaintance, who could thus stand. David, who probably wrote this Psalm, had known many good men in his time, and he was accustomed to associate with the excellent of the earth; yet he says, "O Lord, who shall stand?" And I may repeat his question now, since God has marked our iniquities, "Who among us can stand in his sight upon the footing of our own good works?" Echo answers, "Who?" Did you think that you could, my friend, before you came in here? You say, "I am a regular church-goer; I have been baptized, and confirmed, and have taken the sacrament; I can stand." Oh, do not attempt to stand on such a rotten plank as that; you need something far more substantial than that to support you! Or did you say, good friend,

Well, I have always been a Dissenter; I have taken my seat, almost from a child, in the meeting-house; and I have lived so that others esteem me, and reckon me to be a man of God, and I think I can stand in my own consistency of character"? Ah, my brother! thou knowest not what the requirements of God really are if thou canst talk like that, for there are none of us who shall be able to stand, when he cometh to judge and try us, unless we stand upon Christ's merits. When God puts us into his scales, one by one, we shall all be found wanting. When he puts us into the furnace, one by one, he will find us nothing but a mass of dross. I mean, of course, unless we are saved by grace, and are trusting in the perfect obedience and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's only-begotten Son.

Let us, therefore, all repeat this confession of the psalmist, and own that we are all guilty before God; for it is clear that no mercy can come to us until we are willing to put ourselves in the position where mercy can rightly deal with us. Mercy is for the guilty, forgiveness is for the unrighteous; so, if we will not class ourselves among the guilty and the unrighteous, mercy and forgiveness can never come to us.

II. Now, secondly, we come to The Psalmist's Confidence. Although he felt that none could stand before God by themselves, yet he said, "But there is forgiveness with thee." How did he know that, and how do we know it?

Well, we know that there is forgiveness with God, because we have been informed by revelation concerning the character of God; and we find one prominent feature in the character of God is that "he delighteth in mercy." It gives him the greatest possible pleasure when he can righteously forgive sin. He needs not to be entreated, as though he were slow to pardon, for it is one of his special joys to cast iniquity into the depths of the sea. God's character, as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures, convinces us that there is forgiveness with him.

Moreover, this impression, conveyed to us by the general tenor of the Scriptures, is deepened by the direct teaching of the gospel. Why did Jesus come into the world to be a Savior if God does not delight to save the lost? Why did he offer an atonement if it were not that sin might be put away by that atonement? Why was the fountain filled with blood if it were not God's intent to wash away the stains of his people's guilt? Oh, yes! that accursed and yet blessed cross, or, rather, that bleeding Savior dying upon it, ought to give us such an assurance of God's forgiveness that we might never doubt it. There is forgiveness with God; each wound of Christ proclaims it with an emphasis, which makes it an absolute certainty.

Further, beloved, we are assured that God will forgive sin because we have so many definite promises to that effect. I shall not stop to quote many of them, for I hope you know them for yourselves; here are three: "Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah,

and they shall not be found.” “He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” This blessed Book is as full of promises and proclamations of mercy as an egg is full of meat. It abounds in messages of love and grace; it tells us that God willeth not the death of the sinner, that he delighteth not in judgment, for that is his left-handed work, but that his compassion freely moves towards the blackest and vilest of sinners when they repent, and return unto him. He is never so much at home, so completely fulfilling the purposes of his being as when he presses the wanderer to his bosom, and cries, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repenting are kindled together.” This is the doctrine that is clearly taught in the Word of God and therefore we share the psalmist’s confidence that there is forgiveness with him.

In the Scriptures, we are told that God’s forgiveness is full; he does not half forgive, as men often do. “I can forgive,” says somebody, “but I cannot forget.” But God-wonderful as it seems to us,-forgets as well as forgives. This is his own declaration: “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” Man’s forgiveness is often only verbal; the venom of anger lingers in his heart while the profession of forgiveness is upon his lip; but God’s forgiveness is full and ample; when he says that he forgives, he means it in the fullest sense of the word. He will treat you, repenting sinner, as-though you had never transgressed against him. He will make you a new creature in Christ Jesus; and you shall stand before him, throughout eternity, as if even a thought of sin had never defiled your mind.

It is full forgiveness that God bestows, and it is as free as it is full. You are not to buy it with your tears or your good deeds; for it is freely given to you by God. He is more willing to forgive you than you are to be forgiven; and it is more easy for him to blot out your sin than it was for you to commit that sin. If there were no provision for the removal of your sin, what would you do? But there is abundant provision, made by God, for your forgiveness; his great mercy has been at work, from before the foundation of the world, so as to have everything in readiness for the complete forgiveness of all who repent of sin, and trust in Jesus.

That forgiveness is also immediate; it is yours as soon as you repent and believe. Oh, how my soul leaped with joy when I first understood that God had forgiven me all my sin! That great act was instantaneous, and it may be so with you also, Your coming to God may take time, but God’s forgiveness of your sin is bestowed. The instant that a sinner believes in Christ, his sin is all gone, just as much gone as it will be if he lives fifty years, and is a diligent servant of God all the time. Yes; I venture to say that the dying thief, when he had given one penitent glance at Christ, was as truly delivered from sin as those blessed spirits which had been for centuries before the throne of God on high. Only think, my friend, what it would be for thee to receive forgiveness in a moment. Thou mayest have come in here as black as hell itself through sin, yet go out without a stain upon thee. “It cannot be done,” says someone. Yes it can, but only by God; for with him all things are possible, and he has already done it for many whom I know, and he will do it for all those who come to him in penitence, and put their trust in his dear Son. And this forgiveness, once received, is irreversible. It is not God’s way to pardon a man, and then afterwards to condemn him. That is the fashion of a certain set of theologians who believe in people being once forgiven and yet ultimately lost. I find no such teaching as that in the Scriptures. If the Lord says to anyone, “I absolve thee,” it is done; and, in that moment, every sin is for ever put away. I even go the length of Kent’s hymn,-

“Here’s pardon for transgressions past,

It matters not how black their cast;

And O my soul, with wonder view

For sins to come, here’s pardon, too!”

There is no playing fast and loose with you, beloved. If thou believest in Christ, thou art justified with a justification that will stand the test of time, the strain of death, and the trial of eternity. “He that believeth on him is not condemned,” and he shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end. What sayest thou to this full, free, immediate, and irreversible pardon?

And this pardon is for every sinner, of every kind, who repents and believes in Jesus. Many people seem to think that, when we preach about the pardon of sin, we mean the pardon of not having “taken the sacrament,” as they express it, or not attending regularly a place of worship, or some such matters; but we mean the pardon of the greatest sins that anyone can commit,-the pardon of thieving, the pardon of lying, the pardon of swearing, the pardon of infidelity, the pardon of fornication, the pardon of adultery, the pardon of murder. We do not preach a sham forgiveness for sham sinners. Christ Jesus is not a physician who came into the world merely to cure the finger-ache. No, but it is the deadly disease of sin that Christ has come to cure. He has not come all the way from heaven to earth, and died, in order that he might simply wash a tiny spot of blackness from a fair lady’s hand; but he has come to make a blackamoor white, to make the foulest and most abominable wretch that curses the earth, whiter than the snow. I will go as far as ever I can, and say, that, if there be anybody who has committed every mentionable and every unmentionable sin,-if he has even lived in secret vice and transgression till he would not dare to sit on the seat he occupies if others

did but know one-tenth of what he has done,-I am sent to tell even him that Jesus receives just such sinners as he is so soon as they repent and believe in him. Well may we sing,-

“Who is a pardoning God like thee,

Or who has grace so rich and free?”

So we have come thus far with our subject. First, there is the confession that none of us can stand before God without a Mediator; and, next, there is the confidence that, with God, there is forgiveness.

II. Every thoughtful person will be glad to follow on to the third point, which is, The Consequence Of Forgiveness.

I do not know whether you have noticed, but I have, that, together with the return of Popery to this country,-and it is coming back fast; there is scarcely a street in London in which you may not smell it at one end or the other;-there has come back with it a kind of Roman fog which has obscured the vision of the general public. The editor of one precious newspaper-the newspaper editors, as you know, are all very profound theologians, and you may always accept any theology that you find in the newspaper when it agrees with the teaching of the Bible,-one of these clever men is alarmed because people are taught to sing,-

“Till to Jesus work you cling

By a simple faith,

Doing is a deadly thing,

Doing ends in death.”

“This is dreadful,” says the critic. All those gentlemen, who bring out newspapers, are so moral that they are afraid for the morality of Christian people, so they give us a great deal of warning and exhortation against such teaching as that hymn contains. The time was when almost every pulpit in England rang with the grand doctrine of justification by faith, and then the whole current of religious thought was strongly set against anything like salvation by the works of men; but, alas! it is not so now; for, with this Popery, which has returned to our land, there has come back the common notion that, after all, salvation must be by works, and there must be some merit in what man is doing; and that, if we go in for preaching the free pardon of sin, we shall demoralize this wonderfully pious country; and if we preach Lutheranism and Calvinism, we shall run the risk of making London a most wicked city! It would be a dreadful thing, certainly, to make London worse than it is; to my mind, that is a thing almost impossible of achievement; but, still, that is the fear which is held before us, that we might pollute the precious intelligence and purity of this wonderful nineteenth century by preaching the full justification of all who believe in Jesus. It will stand a good deal of polluting, and then not be much worse than it is at present; but that is the fear with which our newspaper editors are trying to alarm us. Now it so happens that this was the constant talk of the Papists against Protestantism; their cry was, “If you preach justification by faith, men will never do good works. If you preach that pardon of sin is freely given, you will never get the people to be even decently honest.” But this theory has been exploded by fact. Remember what Dr. Chalmers said,-that, in his first pastorate, he preached morality till he had scarcely a moral person in his parish, he preached righteousness and goodness till he could hardly find a single decent honest man anywhere about him; but, as soon as he began to preach salvation by the grace of God, there came a total change over the characters of those who were round about him; and, therefore, that man of profound erudition, and of a masterly mind, sat like a child at the feet of Jesus to bear his testimony that it is the gospel of the grace of God, and not the preaching of the works of the law, that creates holiness, and produces good works. You may go to the work-mongers to hear about good works, but you must come back to the believers in Christ to find them. Their changed lives prove that the gospel does produce the best possible results. The more we trample down human merit, the more do we exalt the merit of Christ. The more we show the absolute uselessness of good works to merit salvation, the more do we promote the highest type of morality, and the more do we lead men to live unto God from motives of gratitude for what he has done for them. This is a matter of fact.

What did the Romanism and the work mongering of Laud produce? The Cavaliers, with their dainty perfumed curls; but what did the justification by faith, preached by Owen, and Howe, and Charnock, produce? Our Puritan forefathers, who, with all the sternness against which some speak, were the godliest race of Englishmen who have ever lived in this land; God send us back the like of them! You usually find that side, which boasts its practicalness, to be impractical; and, on the other hand, the side which cries out against human works as a ground of trust, to be the very side which abounds in holiness unto the glory of God. Well now, the text says, “There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” Thus, you see, the doctrine of free forgiveness actually produces in man’s mind a fear of God. You might have thought the psalmist would have said, “There is no forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;” but it is not so.

The opposite of our text is very manifest. When there is no forgiveness, or when a man thinks there is none, what is the

consequence? He is driven to despair, and despair often leads to desperate living. Our old proverb says, "You may as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb," and that is the spirit that actuates the despairing sinner. He says, "I cannot be forgiven; I must be damned; so I may as well enjoy life while I have it. There is no hope of heaven for me, so why should I not make the most I can of earth? If I cannot obtain salvation from God, I will see what I can get out of the devil." Is not that kind of talk quite natural? If there is no hope of forgiveness, then there is no proper fear of God.

Many are abiding in a state of carelessness, because they really do not know whether there is any pardon to be had. When a man is in doubt as to whether he can be forgiven, he says, "I am afraid it would be a very long process, and I do not know whether I should get it even then. Perhaps, however, there is no pardon to be had, so I might become a religious man, and yet miss the forgiveness of sins." That is the thought of many, and therefore they become torpid and lethargic, careless and indifferent; but when the Holy Spirit teaches a man that there is forgiveness to be had, he would leap out of his very body rather than miss it. Now, you will see him gird up his loins, and run with endurance till he reaches the goal; now the man will play the man. He says, "What! is there forgiveness for such a sinner as I am? Is a new start in life possible for one who has been so sad a failure? Is the picking up of the harlot off the street, and the thief from the prison, and the debauchee out of the gutter possible?" This hope gives the man something that is like a new mainspring to a watch. You have put within him that which will help him to subdue his sin, and become a better man throughout the rest of his career. Is it not so? Only assure the man of the pardon of his sin, and that assurance supplies new vigor to his soul.

How encouraging, too, is the belief that there is pardon to be had! But, more, how sanctifying is the actual reception of it! Imagine the experience of some dear friend, who has just believed in Jesus, and to whom the Spirit of God bears witness that he is forgiven. What sort of a man will he be? I will try and picture him to you. Already I see his eyes glistening with a light I never saw there before. The man looks positively handsome; you would hardly recognize him if you knew him before this great change happened to him. He had a burden on his mind that made him always look careworn. That has gone, and now he looks supremely blest. But I also see tears in his eyes; how came they there? He was not much given to weeping in his old days. He is grieving to think that he should ever have offended so kind a God; for nothing makes us so sorry for sin as the sense of being completely forgiven. He knows he is pardoned, he is sure of it; he knows that God loves him, and now he loathes himself that he should ever have sunk so low. Yet, if you will take one of his tears, and put it under a microscope, or analyze its component parts, you will find that there is no bitterness in it. Joy is mingled with his sorrow as he stands at the foot of the cross, and bathes his Lord's feet with his penitential yet rainbow tears. Now see him go home. He has some Christian friends there, I hope; and if so, he will not be long with them before they begin to notice the change in him, and he is not long before he wants to tell them the blessed secret. Mother wants to know what has happened to her boy, and his arms are thrown around her neck as he says, "Mother, I have found the Lord." She is very delighted, and perhaps very surprised, for it was not his usual way to talk about religion; he used sometimes to sneer and jeer at it. Will he go to bed without prayer? No; he needs nobody to tell him to pray; he has been praying all the way home, and while he has been sitting there. These are the first real prayers he has ever presented; but it has now become as natural for him to pray as it is for a living man to breathe.

Watch that man, to-morrow, when he goes to his work. Perhaps he does not introduce the subject of religion among his workmates, but he keeps himself to himself as much as he can. By-and-by, they begin using filthy language around his bench; and, at last, he cannot endure it, so he lets fall just a little word or two of protest, and then they have found him out. For the next few days, they will cluster round him, jesting and jeering. "He is a hypocrite, of course." That is their notion of fair play, everybody who does not think as they think must be a hypocrite! "He has some selfish motive for turning Methodist." They know very well that they would not do anything good unless there was something to be got by it, so they measure the other man's corn by their own bushel, and they impute to him some unworthy motive; and now he, who was always "Hail fellow well met," gets abundance of banter and abuse, if not anything worse. He gets away, sometimes, where he can pray by himself, and he likes to find a quiet corner where he can read his Bible. He used to read nothing but the low trashy novels of the day, if he read anything at all; but the Word of the Lord has now become sweet and precious to him. He has a little two-penny Testament in his pocket, and he gets a few minutes, whenever he can, that he may become better acquainted with his Master's Word. He is missed very much over at "The Black Bull" or "The White Horse," and he is likely to be missed there, for he has found a better tap to draw from, and to drink at; and he no longer goes to the entertainment's where his former companions revel in rioting and chambering and wantonness. They ask, "Where is old Jack gone? What has become of him?" It has happened to him, as to many more, "Old things are passed away; all things are become new."

There is another man in that workshop, who swears occasionally, and drinks a great deal, and he says that he does not believe in this doctrine of grace, he thinks its tendency is immoral. Ah! his own talk is not very sweet, but he is very strong upon that point of morality. Give him a pint of beer, and see how he will argue; give him another pint, and then see how he will denounce this Calvinistic doctrine of immediate pardon through faith in Jesus. He says that, if everybody believed in that way, he does not know what would happen, but he appears very horrified at the prospect, especially after he has had a third pint of beer. I notice that some of you laugh at my description. Well, the thing I am alluding to, the miserable hypocrisy of the world, ought to be laughed at, unless we cry over it, which would be better. They call us cants, but the biggest cants are on the other side. I tell you that there is no cant,

in all the world, so despicable as the mean hypocritical man who picks out every honest Christian, and says that he is a hypocrite. Such people know better, yet they must bespatter us with mud in order that their own filthiness may not be observed. I may well speak upon this matter, for I am one of the principal sufferers from this kind of treatment, and I contend that we do not deserve this at the hands of the world. We know, too, that it is enmity against our Master, and against his truth, that provokes such attacks. Yet, sometimes, a converted man has a different experience from that which I have been describing.

There is a dear brother,-not present now, or else I might not tell the story,-an earnest and useful member of this church. Many years ago, I recollect his writing to tell me of his conversion. He was then a butler in a noble family, and I rejoiced with him over his conversion. Some months after, he came and brought me two guineas as an offering to God; and, as he laid them on my vestry table, he said, "This is how I came by them. I am employed as butler to Lady So-and-so. When I became a Christian, I cleaned my plate so much better than I had ever done it before that her ladyship took notice of what I did; and, on one occasion, when she had company, she brought a number of distinguished individuals into the butler's pantry to see how beautiful her plate looked. One of them said to me, 'You do this work thoroughly well, young man, there are a couple of guineas for you.' So I said to him, 'It is very kind of your lordship, but I shall take that money, next Sunday, to Mr. Spurgeon.' He made some jesting remark, and then asked, 'Why are you going to do that?' I replied, 'It is because I love the Lord Jesus Christ that I have become a better servant to her ladyship than I used to be; I hope I am not careless now about any of my duties, and I want my Savior to have the credit of all I do.'" So, dear friends, you see that you can glorify Jesus Christ in cleaning plate, or digging in a garden, or selling potatoes, or anything else that is right, so long as you do it unto him, and to his praise; doing the best you can, because you feel that a Christian man ought never to do anything badly. Even the commonest thing that he turns out should be done by him as a servant of Christ to the very best of his ability. If you act so, I shall not care what profession or occupation you choose, so long as it be a lawful one, nor in what line of life you may be called to move, so long as this is your firm and fixed resolve, "I will not seek the glory of self; I will not seek my own honor; but I will seek the glory of God alone."

Brethren, come and put your trust in Jesus, take his blood and righteousness to be your only hope; and then you may, by your blameless, honest, upright, sober, kindly, Christian lives, put to silence the accusations of foolish men; or, at least take away from them any ground of accusation. Walk carefully, prayerfully, humbly before God and men, putting your trust, not in yourselves, but in Christ alone, and you shall then find, in your experience, the best exposition of the text, "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;" for you will prove, by your own fear of God, which is continually before your own eyes, that his free, rich, sovereign grace, manifested in your pardon, did not produce in you indulgence in sin, but gave you the sweet liberty of walking in holiness, and in the fear of the Lord. God bless you all, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Psalm 143:9 Hiding in Thee!

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"I flee unto thee to hide me."-Psalm 143:9.

What a great mercy it is for us that David had not a smooth path and an easy life! We should have lost much valuable instruction if he had been able to hold on the even tenor of his way continually; whereas, now, we are great gainers by his trials and sufferings. In reading the Psalms of David, you will often find a verse which just suits your own case. It is hardly possible for you to be placed in any position without discovering that the son of Jesus has been there before you. I cannot, in all respects, liken him to the Lord Jesus Christ, who was in all points tempted like as we are; yet, to a large extent, it was so with David as well as with "great David's greater Son." He seems to have been, not merely one man, but "all mankind's epitome," and to have known almost all human temptations, and human sins, and human joys, having been led, sometimes by the Spirit, and sometimes, alas, by his own frailty and foolishness, into all sorts of strange places in order that he might become an instructor to us.

You have probably heard this remark a great many times, but, did it ever strike you that very much the same may be said concerning your own experience? When you are wondering why you are so strangely tried, and why your experience is often so remarkable, may it not happen that the reason does not lie in yourself so much as in others to whom God means to make you useful? You are being led along a rough road, and being tried and instructed, in order that you may be the means of helping others whom you will find in some of the dark places of the earth. You are being trained as a hardy mountaineer in order that, when the Lord's sheep are lost on wild craggy places, you may know how to climb up after them, and bring them down to a place of safety. You are being taught how to find your way through the fen-country of despondency and despair in order that, when the pilgrims to the Celestial City lose their way, and get into the marshy places of fear and doubt, you may know how to bring them out again, and

set their feet again upon the rock, and establish their goings once more. The bearing of any one man's life upon the lives of other men can scarcely be fully known to us here. Even when we are able to look upon the completed life, we shall hardly know how much it has been inter-twisted with other men's lives; and, certainly, until the life is completed, no man can know how much his present sufferings have to do with his usefulness to others; nor can he fully understand how he is being prepared here, there, and in a thousand other places, for usefulness in a position of which he little dreams that he will ever be the occupant. Yet he is one day to be placed where all this mysterious training will be of the utmost service to other people. The steel blade, that was put into the fire again, and again, and yet again, to be tempered, did not know that the Cid would use it in the day of battle to cut through the armor of his adversaries; if it had not been prepared for use in this fashion, it would not have been fit to be placed in such a hero's hand. Believers are being made into vessels meet for the Master's use, and it is not every vessel that is fit for him to employ in his divine service. David was prepared, but he could only have become so by means of the remarkable life of trial through which he was called to pass.

Whenever we read the story of David's life, or note in the Psalms where he went and what he did, we should not merely notice how David acted and suffered, and what he did while undergoing the suffering, but we should try so to study his experience as to be able to do as he did if we are placed in circumstances similar to his. Avoid his sin; let that be a beacon to warn you; but imitate his virtues. Pray the Lord to make you a partaker of the fullest measure of the grace which the psalmist possessed; but never look at his life as you gaze at a statue, — merely to admire it, and to say how beautifully it is wrought; — but look at it as a boy should look at his copy, that he may imitate it; look at it as the soldier looks at the fugleman, that he may march step by step as he sets him the example, and, above all things, ever keep your eye on David's Lord and Master, lest even David should be the means of misleading you. Let your admiration both of David and of the Lord Jesus Christ be practical; there is far too much of that kind of religion which consists in merely admiring other people, or in seeing what we ourselves ought to be, or in regretting that we are not what we should be, but true godliness is manifested as we bring forth the fruit of the Spirit by being and doing that which we feel we ought to be and to do. To this end, gracious Spirit, be plead to help us! Let us give to our text that sort of meditation which shall all the while be aiming at a practical result, and while we see how David fled to his God in the time of trial, let us each one also make this resolve, in the strength of the Holy Spirit, "I also will do the same as David did; I will flee unto God to hide me." In our text we have David's declaration to the Lord, "I flee unto thee to hide me. We also ought to do as David did, but no man will do this unless he has the five things of which I am about to speak.

I. And, first, no man will ever flee unto God to hide him unless he has A Sense Of Danger.

David was in danger from many cruel enemies, and he fled to God to hide him from them. You and I may not be in any such danger as that, physically. We live in a country where, happily, we are protected from such a danger as that; — at least, the most of us do; but there are other dangers to which we are exposed. David fled to God to hide him because he realized the danger in which he was placed, and we shall only flee unto the Lord to hide us when we realize our own personal peril.

We are all well aware that many persons have perished because they have not realized their danger. You know how often this is the case. Men have gone, without any thought of peril, into places where there have been pestilential odours or the seeds of deadly diseases. If they had known what there was there, they would not have gone in that direction, or they would have taken various precautions to guard themselves from infection; but, in ignorance of their peril, they have breathed the fatal air, and have gone home to sicken and to die. Many a gallant ship has struck upon a hidden reef, or upon a sandbank that was not marked on the chart. I have never heard of any vessel being wrecked through its officers keeping too good a look-out; nor do we often read of ships being lost because the captain was too anxious to keep far away from the treacherous sands and the dangerous headlands; but we often hear of wrecks which have occurred through the captain's ignorance of the danger to which his vessel was exposed. Every now and then, we learn that some obstruction has been encountered upon the railway as the express train has come rushing along. If the driver had but known that the permanent way, as it is called, was out of order, and that there would be a collision if he did not stop the train, he would have done all that he could to avoid such a calamity; but because he did not know that he and his passengers were in danger, he went on as though all had been well, and the most terrible consequences ensued.

Many have perished — I am using the word "perish" in the ordinary sense, — because they have not known that they were in danger; and we know (oh, that it were not so!) that, concerning spiritual things, there are millions of our fellow countrymen who are in danger of the eternal wrath of God, yet they are not conscious that it is so. They know that they are living in sin, and they have some dim perception that sin is as evil thing in God's sight, yet they do not fully conscious what sin is. Many of them do not know, in the full meaning of the word, that, they are sinners. See how contented they are with their fancied righteousness, conceiving themselves to be in perfect safety all the while that they are in the utmost peril. They eat and they drink, they are married and they are given in marriage, as though such a state of things would last for ever. Talk to the concerning the last dread conflagration which is to consume the world, and they will laugh you to scorn, and cry, "Peace and safety," even though sudden destruction is coming upon them. If we could once make men realize that they are in danger, there would be some hope that they would seek to escape

from the peril that threatens, them; but we cannot make them believe in its reality and certainty. They are unbelieving with regard to such disturbing news. If we cried aloud to them, "Peace, peace," although we know there is no peace for them as long as they continue as they now are, they would probably believe us, for they lend their credulous ears to any superstition that seems to promise them a false peace; but if we try to warn them of their danger, — danger of the most terrible kind, — they will not, as a rule, be persuaded to listen to such unwelcome tidings; or if they do listen, they do not believe our message, and they will not admit they are in danger.

If any such persons are present with us here, — and I fear that there are some, — I mean, those who have no sense of danger, and yet have never trusted in Christ for salvation, let me remind you, dear friends, that your sins must inevitably bring punishment upon you. There is a Judge of all the earth, who must do right; and every transgression of his righteous law must be followed by punishment; else, why should there be a Judge of the earth at all, if he is indifferent to the iniquities of man? Let me also remind you that your sin is holding you in its power, and though, at present, you may not indulge in the grosser forms of vice, you are in great danger of going much further in to paths of sin than you like to think you will. You cannot stop in an evil course just when and where you please. You cannot say to sin, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no further." The beginnings of evil are like the letting out of water, and when the dyke is once broken, and the pent-up flood is set free, it soon deluges the fields, and, perhaps, sweeps away multitudes of men and their habitations as well. Oh, that men could but realize that, while they are living in sin, they are always in danger of committing more sin, and yet more sin, going on from bad to worse, and from worse to the very worst of all! Many a young man would shudder with horror if he could foresee what he will yet become unless the grace of God shall prevent it. You have often seen that familiar picture of the child, and the kind of man that he will yet become, — either drunken or sober. If that child should be told that, one day, he would be like that red-faced old drunkard, he would not believe that he could ever grow to be as bad as that; neither will most young men, who are now living in sin, believe that they can ever grow to be what they will be if they continue in their present course. Yet that is the danger to which they are continually exposed, — the danger of sin ever producing yet more sin; and, to my mind, it seems to be punishment of a most grievous kind, even if these were no other, that sin should be allowed to breed within itself something yet more black and foul and filthy than it is itself, — till, on the cancer of sin there comes yet another and another, more foul and loathsome, and yet another, and another, and another; or till the man, who was possessed with one devil, becomes possessed with seven devils even more wicked than the first one was. There is this real danger, this grievous danger, in the case of every unconverted man or woman upon the face of the earth. Therefore, each one of them should cry unto the Lord, "I flee unto thee to hide me."

No man ever flees to God for shelter until he realizes that he is in danger, yet all men, whether they are the children of God or the children of this world, are in danger of one kind or another. As for the men of this world, the children of disobedience, they are in danger of the punishment which is due on account of their present sin, and that awful growth of sin of which I have been speaking; but are the children of God also in danger? Ask them, and they will tell you that they are pilgrims to the Celestial City, which they will, in due time, reach by God's grace; but they will also tell you that, all along the road to heaven, there are dangerous places where the traveler might fall to his very grievous hurt; — for instance, the descent, in the Valley of Humiliation, with Apollyon waiting there, determined to slay, or at least to wound the pilgrim; or the Valley of the Shadow of Death, a little further on, with its miry bog, and its hobgoblins, and all manner of terrifying sights and sounds; — and then the Enchanted Ground, with its temptation to the pilgrim to sleep, and Vanity Fair, where there are all sorts of ill wares to allure and deceive, the pilgrim. Dangers of every sort beset the followers of the Lamb, and they are only safe as they are divinely protected. The moment you become a Christian, you are-

"Safe in the arms of Jesus,"

so far as your ultimate and final perseverance is concerned; but, all the while you are on the road to heaven, you must wear the armor provided for the good soldiers of Jesus Christ, for you are always exposed to danger from the adversary's arrows and sword. All the while that you are in the earthly pastures, you need the protection of the good Shepherd. Why? Because you are in danger from the roaring lion, who goeth about seeking whom he may destroy; and, unless the great Shepherd's rod and staff protect you, you will certainly be destroyed.

Let me also remind you that some dangers are not readily perceived, and those are generally the worst of all. We may be able to keep clear of "the arrow that flieth by day;" but who can guard himself against "the pestilence that walketh in darkness"? Possibly we do not fall into open sin; but the dry rot of gradual declension, — the silent sliding away of the heart from Christ, — who but God can guard us against that? Many a man is caught in the invisible nets of Satan, and well-nigh destroyed, even while he dreams that he is safely pursuing the path that leads to heaven. Therefore do I sound the tocsin and ring the alarm bell again and again, to remind you that we are all in danger, though some think they are not; those are the very persons who are in the greatest danger of all because they think they are not in peril. I wish I had the power to arouse all of you to a true sense of your danger with regard to spiritual things, for then you would, like David, flee unto God to hide you. You never will do that, until you realize the peril in which you are placed, and recognize that, so long as you are not abiding in Christ, you are in continual peril, and that your only safety lies in fleeing unto God to hide you, even as the psalmist did long ago.

II. The second great need of a man, in order that he may flee unto God to hide him, is A Sense Of Weakness.

A man who thinks that he can fight his own battles in his own strength will not flee unto God to hide him. But we are all of us as weak as water if we are left to ourselves, and we soon show that we are quite unable to cope with our spiritual foes. The unforgiven sinner proves how weak he is by yielding at once to the tempter. He has a traitor within his own heart, who opens the gates to Satan, and so he is easily overcome; and the believer, though he hath within him the new life which hateth sin, is as weak as other men if he be left without the Spirit of God for a single moment. There is enough of the fire of hell in thee, my brother, — thou who art the most spiritual and most like Christ, — to set all hell aright again if the infernal fires were ever put out. Thou art inclined toward that which is good; but if the grace of God ever left thee, thou wouldst be quite as much inclined toward that which is evil. I will not quite say what Ralph Erskine said concerning himself, —

“On good and evil equal bent

And both a devil and saint;” —

but I will say that, if a saint could ever be left of God, he would soon become a devil; and he, who was so eager after that which was good, would be just as eager after that, which is evil; so again I say that we are all of us as weak as water if left to ourselves.

But some people think that they are very strong. Hear how the boastful man says, “I can drink my glass of beer or wine, but I shall never become a drunkard. I can attend the theater, and see what a low standard of morals prevails there, but I shall never fall into such an evil thing as fornication or adultery. I shall never become a blasphemer; I am not in the habit of even using coarse language, and it is quite impossible that I should become profane.” He thinks, when he stakes his small sums of money, that he will never become a gambler. “No,” he says, “I am not such a fool as that.” Yet, often, when a man says that, you may write his true name in large capital letters, “A FOOL,” for there is no other fool who is so foolish as the one who thinks he is not such a fool as other men are. When Hazael was told by Elisha what he would afterwards do, he exclaimed, “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” Ah, brethren! we are all sadly weak, and those are the weakest of all who think themselves to be strong. Past failures ought to have taught us all how great is our weakness? I wonder if any of you ever tried to soar away into the clouds with the perfectionists who delight to go up in a balloon, and seek to live far above all ordinary mortals. If so, and if you are at all like me, — and I expect your flesh and blood are very similar to mine, — I imagine that you soon discovered your mistake. The very day that you thought your temper was perfect, you found that it was very imperfect; and at the very time that you intended to have no thought or care, and when you had made up your mind that you were not coming down again to the level of this poor grovelling world, you found that you could not rise an inch above the ground, and that you were, so far as spiritual things were concerned, just like a lump of lead. You were made to feel that the best of men are but men at the best; and, in that way, your failure taught you how weak you are. Even if you are the best man or woman in the world, in yourself you are utter weakness, and only Christ himself can make anything of you; saint as you are, you are still a sinner saved by grace, and you are only holy as you are made so by the blessed Spirit who sanctifieth you. If you were left by him for a single moment, your sinnership would come to the front all too prominently, and your saintship would retire to the rear.

Now, brethren and sisters, in our weakness lies our strength. The apostle Paul says, “When I am weak, then am I strong;” and I wish it were possible for me to produce in all of you, whether you are sinners or saints, the sense of positive inability and utter weakness; for, until you feel that, you will never say to the Lord, “I flee unto thee, to hide me.” On the contrary, you will stand out boldly in the place of danger, and you will even defy your foes to do their worst against you. You will venture into worldliness; you will go up to the very mouth of the furnace of sin; you will become more daring and more presumptuous, and you will be less on your watch-tower; you will keep on going further and further in the wrong way as long as you imagine that you are strong. But if the Lord will aim his arrows right at the very heart of your strength, and lay all your fancied glory in the mire, and make you to know that you are less than the least of all saints, then it will be better for you. But before you will reach this point, you will have to confess your own nothingness, and say, —

“But, oh! for this no strength have I;

My strength is at thy feet to lie.”

Then you will flee unto the Lord to hide you, and then you will be hidden by him in a safe place, but never till then.

III. A third thing which we must all have before we are likely to use the language of the text with truth is A Prudent Foresight: “I flee unto thee to hide me.”

The ungodly man, and, in a measure, the unwise believer also, will perceive the peril in which he is placed, and yet hesitate, linger, delay, deliberate, procrastinate. This is great folly, yet it is just what thousands are doing. I feel sure that some of you, who are here, are not prepared to live; — much less are you prepared to die. I am glad to see you come to the house of God on a weeknight, for it looks as if you had some desire to find out the way of everlasting life. Yet how many there are among you who are living as if this life were all! You are quite unprepared for that great day to which you all know you are hastening; and you do not like even to hear anything about death and the judgment to come, because you are utterly unfit to face those stern realities. Are you always going to put off thoughts about these all-important matters, and to go on living-without the slightest preparation for eternity? You know that you are in danger, and that you are too weak to face that danger all alone, though you have not yet fully perceived how great your weakness is. Oh, that you would be wise enough to begin to look about you for a way of escape! When you are in this sense wise, you will flee unto God to hide you; but until you do get at least a little of this sacred prudence, and some of the wisdom which the Holy Ghost teacheth, you will delay, and delay, and delay, till, on some dread day, the long-gathering clouds will discharge the awful storm of divine judgment upon your devoted head; and, then, you will not be able to flee unto Christ to hide you, for the harvest will be past, and the summer will be ended, but you will be “not saved.”

The Lord, by his grace, has made Christian men and women, more full of forethought than the ungodly are, and they have desired to escape from the wrath to come, and they have done so. And let me tell you, sinner, you who have not yet fled to Christ for salvation, that, while it is a blessed thing to be delivered from the wrath to come, it is also a most delightful thing to be delivered from the fear of it even now. I do not think that I could live an hour without being in the bitterest agony, if I had any sort of doubt about my safety in Christ Jesus, for I have a most vivid sense of my danger and my weakness apart from him, and these, like wings, bear me to the Rock of Ages, where I can hide in absolute security. But I could never rest in peace if I thought that God was angry with me, or if I knew that, or if I were to drop down dead, my soul would be in hell. How can any of you remain unconcerned in such a sad condition as that? Surely it must be because you do not realize what your true condition is. If I could lock some of you up in a room, and make you think about your position with regard to God, you would be very uncomfortable; you would almost as soon go to prison as sit down to think about the needs of your immortal spirit. Yet it is wrong for a man to be afraid to look into the books in which he keeps his soul's accounts; it is worse than foolish to be afraid to test the soundness of the foundation of the house in which he dwells; it is sheer madness to be afraid to look to the state of his soul to see whether it has the marks of death upon it or not. Do not any of you be so foolish, so insane. You insure your lives, you insure your houses, you put on warmer garments as winter approaches, and if you have only some slight ailment, you run to a doctor. Have you no care about your immortal souls? Have you no anxiety concerning death and eternity? Or are you resolved to play the fool before high heaven? I pray you, do not so; but awake to something like prudence; and any one of you who does so will say to God, as David did, “I flee unto thee to hide me.” You never will do this until you exercise such wise forethought as I urge upon you.

IV. Now, fourthly, and briefly, before any one of us will say to the Lord, “I flee unto thee to hide me,” there must be A Solid Confidence.

What kind of confidence do I mean? A solid confidence that God can hide us. Did you notice the second hymn that we sang? It always seems to me that the writer had a wonderful conception of God in his awfulness and greatness to be feared, and then he says, —

“Yet I may love thee, O my God!”

Think of the great God who made the heavens and the earth, who is everywhere, filling all things, and doing all things according to the good pleasure of his own will, and then say to yourself, “If I flee unto him, — if he will permit me to flee unto him to hide me, — how safe I must be! It is he of whom I have been afraid; but if I can hide in him, how secure I shall be! If I can find a shelter in him, what a perfect shelter that must be!” When God lifts up his sword of justice, in his almighty hand, to smite the sinner, if that sinner can lay hold upon his arm, and cling firmly to it, how can God smite him? And he urges us to take hold of his strength. A heavy blow falls with the greatest force upon those who are some little distance away from the striker. When a man intends to strike a tremendous blow, if his adversary runs up close to him, and clings to his arm, what can he do with him? And fleeing to God to hide us does, as it were, disarm God; therefore I urge you to flee unto God in Christ that he may hide you from his justice, and he can rightly do this because Christ has borne for all believers the punishment that was due to their sin; and, therefore, the God of justice can himself smile when he sees a sinner hidden in the Christ who made a full and complete atonement for his sin. Whither can any of you flee away from the presence of God? If you ride upon the sunbeams, he will track you. If you plunge into the deeps of the sea, he will discover you. If you could climb up among the stars, he could pluck you from your hidingplace, for he is everywhere; but if you flee to God in Christ to hide you, you must be safe for ever. I have read an old story of a rebel, who was hunted by a certain king, but who disguised himself, and entered into the king's tent, and partake of his hospitality before anyone discovered that he was the very man whose life the king had been seeking; and the king nobly and generously scorned to smite the foe who had fled for shelter to his own tent. O poor guilty soul, this is the message of the gospel, — Flee to God to hide you from God; turn to him as

the prodigal returned to his father to obtain forgiveness of the wrong which he had done to his father!

And, ye Christian men and women, this is to be your constant joy, that you always can hide in God, that there is no trouble, difficulty, or danger, from which God will not be a shelter to you; for, as he is a shelter from his own justice, he must be a shelter from everyone else and everything else that would harm you. And you may always hide in God. You will never say to the Lord, "I flee unto thee to hide me," until you know that you may hide in him. Yes, beloved, you may flee unto God to hide you, for God is never more truly God than when he receiveth poor souls that make him to be their hidingplace. It is said that on one occasion when certain wise men were sitting together in council, a poor bird, which pursued by a hawk, flew into the bosom of one of the councillors, and he — the only man in the whole company who would have done such a thing, — plucked the trembling bird out of his bosom, wrung its neck, and threw it away from him, whereupon the other councillors all rose up, and voted for his immediate expulsion from their assembly, for they all felt that any man, who could do such a deed as that, was unworthy to have a place in their ranks; and we may be quite sure that the ever-merciful Jehovah will never take a soul that has flown in his bosom for shelter, and destroy it. Thou dreadest God, poor soul, but thou needest never do so. If thou art in Christ Jesus, God is so fully reconciled to thee that, when thou art pursued by sin, or Satan, or trouble of any kind, the safest place for thee to fly to is his bosom, and there thou art safe for ever, for he will never cast thee out. If you have this confidence in God, you will say to him, as David did, "I flee unto thee to hide me."

V. One thing more is needed, and that is Activity Of Faith.

There are some of you, who have heard what I have been saying about hiding in God, and as you go home you will say, "Yes, we know that was are in danger, we know that we are weak, we know that we need a secure hidingplace, and we know that God is willing to hide us." Well, then, if you know that, will you not at once flee unto him to hide you? Beloved, you who have often fled unto him to hide you, will not you again flee, unto him? Some of you may have a new form of trouble which has just come upon you, and it is of such a kind that you do not like to tell anybody about it. I pray you, do not keep it to yourself for even another minute, but flee unto God, and tell him all about it. I must confess my own folly in this respect; for I have been foolish enough, partly through weariness of body and brain, to nurse a trouble which I ought to have cast upon the Lord long ago. One does not mind nursing his own children, who may grow up to be a comfort to him, but it is always a pity to nurse trouble, for that often means taking a serpent's eggs, and putting them into our bosom to hatch these into serpents that will sting ourselves. This is a most foolish course of action; would it not be far wiser for us, is soon as any trouble comes upon us, to flee unto the Lord to hide us from it? Let us be cowardly enough to run away from our trouble. Nay, it will not be cowardice, but true bravery, always to run unto God directly any trouble comes upon us, each, one of us crying to him, with David, "I flee unto thee to hide me." Suppose that twenty troubles should come to us in a day, and that we should flee unto God twenty times with them, I think that was might almost pray to God to send twenty troubles more, so that we might flee unto him forty times a day. Any reason for going to God must be a blessing to us, for going to God is going to bliss; so we may even turn our troubles into blessings by making them drive us unto him.

I want to keep you, dear friends, to the practical point of my subject. Have you been worrying yourself, since you have been here, about a trial that you expect to fall upon you towards the close of this year! You fear that Christmas is not likely to be "a merry Christmas" to you; there are many bills coming in, and not much hope of the money with which to meet them; well, then, flee unto God with that trouble; and whatever is burdening your heart or your mind, flee unto God about it, and leave it all in his hands, and go on your way rejoicing.

Last of all, is there not some poor sinner here, who has never yet believed in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior? How happy I should be if, even before you leave this place, you would flee unto the Lord to hide you! You do not need even to go into the vestry, to talk to the elders. You may do that, if you like, and they will be glad to see you; but your best plan is to tell the Lord, while you are sitting in that seat, that you are a sinner far off from, him, and that you wish that he would save you. Ask him, for Christ's sake, to have mercy upon you. Trust his dear Son to save you; tell him that you do trust him to save you, and he will do it, for, according to thy faith shall it be unto thee. Flee unto him to hide you. There are his dear wounds, and you are a poor feeble dove, and the cruel hawk is after you. You cannot fight with him for he would tear you in pieces; you can only escape from him by flying to the wounds of Jesus; do so, then, for your pursuer can reach you there.

"Come, guilty souls, and flee away

Like doves to Jesus' wounds

This is the welcome gospel-day,

Wherein free grace abounds."

Psalms 144:15 Pictures of Happiness

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“Happy is that people that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.”—Psalm 144:15.

Sometimes God's people are unhappy when they ought to be happy. God observes this. Therefore he tells them when they possess the materials of happiness, and gives them a description of the peace and prosperity of those who are truly happy men. Recollecting thus the choice mercies which surround them, and not attaching so much importance to the little trials of the day, they may become of God's mind, and feel themselves to be as happy as he declares they are. The pure in spirit are said by our Savior to be blessed. They often think themselves to be cursed, and feel as if there were no blessing for them. But blessed they are, for Jesus knows whom he hath blessed. And God's people are sometimes in their own consciences unhappy, but a happy people they are, and to be congratulated on their condition notwithstanding. They have reasons for happiness; they have satisfactory grounds for happiness; they have springs of happiness; they have future prospects of happiness. If you are God's people, you cannot err in exercising faith about this thing. You are numbered with those who are the happiest people under heaven.

The text speaks not only of the persons, but also of the condition of God's people—a condition which I believe is to a great extent parallel to our own as a Christian church. It seems to me that we have, according to the gospel standard of interpretation, all the privileges, all the blessednesses, which, in the verse preceding the text, David ascribes to this happy people. I shall ask you, therefore, to look at these things, that each particular may be an incentive to gratitude. He declares here:—

I. The Elements Of Happiness.

First, David accounts those to be a happy people who are in a healthy and vigorous condition. The sons have “as plants grown up in their youth, and the daughters as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.” It is a great blessing to a church to have in her midst fruitful, earnest young men, aye! and I will say that, whatever their age may be, it is no small measure of a church's strength to have her sons about her, who, having grown up and become mature in knowledge, mental force, and spiritual vigor, bear fruit unto the glory of God.

There has been a tendency in the Christian church to decry instrumentality. But God always has worked by instruments. So far as we know, he always will. When Christ ascended up on high and led captivity captive, the gifts which he received for men were men, apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, and the like. It is no small riches to a church to have in her midst men, teachers qualified to teach, and seeking to save as well: to become evangelists, in this way and in any other way, thus aiming to promote the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Ah! unhappy is that church where her sons are all slumbering, where they are all stereotyped in their beliefs, and in their several states never make any advance, feeling no throbs of sacred ambition, never caring to come to spiritual attainments, resting satisfied with the lowest possible eminence of grace, without any desire to advance to a high degree of love to God. Blessed is that church where her sons seek to grow up and to bear fruit unto God! And not less blessed to have in her midst sisters who are like those pillars we sometimes see in public buildings—beautifully fluted, carved, polished, the very adornment of the structure, placed at the corner, corner-stones that help to cement the entire structure and bind it together. It seems to be to be one of the peculiar gifts of the Christian sisterhood to be the means of holding the entire fabric of the Christian church in sacred love; and though in our belief they ought not to do this by public speech, yet by quiet conversation, active sympathy, and the patient endurance and holy tenacity of affection, they may help to keep the church well bolted together, well barred and banded, well cemented, so that the stones of the church shall not be detached the one from the other. Happy is the church that abounds in Christian matrons and younger women willing to be serviceable for Christ!

Do I remind you that this is our happy case, you may, perhaps, think little of it, and lightly esteem the cause for gratitude. But were you in some churches where there are not men nor women enough to take the Sabbath school—and such churches I have visited—where there are none, positively none to assist the pastor, where the whole work must be confined to a one-man ministry because the rest of the members do not seem to be alive in the sacred service—if you were members of such churches, you would deplore their lamentable poverty both day and night. Has God made it otherwise with us, let us bless his name, and, while thanking him, acknowledge that we are happy to be in such a case.

Next to that the Psalmist describes plenty as a peculiar pleasure. “That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store.” Bountiful provision of the gospel! The ministry is to have all things desirable for Christians, if they are to be made happy. Unhappy they who can seldom hear a sermon, or who, hearing it, might well have spared their ears the trouble of listening to the words.

Thrice happy they who hear the pure truth of Jesus Christ, even though it be spoken in a rough manner, and in a style that has no enchantments for the soft lovers of rhetoric and elocution. If ever you are laid up a while upon a bed of sickness, you may heave a deep sigh for the privilege you scarcely know how fully to appreciate till you lose it, that you can go up to the house of God. I heard but the other day from one who has been unable to worship with us for months such words as these, "Oh! Zions, Zions, the loved of my heart, when shall the day return that I shall again rejoice with the multitude that keep holy day, and lift up my song with them, and bow my head in the midst of the great congregation?" By your regrets which you will feel when you are thus laid aside, value the privilege while you possess it—the privilege of having an open Bible expounded, and of being able to join with the whole company of the faithful in the worship of the most high God. If at any time the Word has been marrow and fatness to you, then think yourselves happy, yea, rejoice to-night, and give to God the gratitude of your souls.

Further, the Psalmist represents multitude as being a cause of thankfulness. "That our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets." Sheep are always a favorite type of the servants of the Lord Jesus. I cannot, nor indeed need I, enter into the illustration, you yourselves understand it so well; but the peculiar blessing is when these sheep are multiplied by thousands and by ten thousands. Alas! for the church when she is satisfied with an increase of one or two during a year. Ah! miserable church that shall be content if the pool of baptism is never stirred by those that profess their faith in Jesus! if at the sacramental table there should be no fresh visitors at the feast of love. Ah! miserable state of religion in which the churches shall think this to be their fit and proper condition, and shall say they are comfortable while the world is perishing and none careth for souls. Oh! what a joy it is when every member of a church becomes fruitful in leading others to Christ. I know this is much the experience of my dear brothers and sisters in church fellowship here. The greater number, I believe, are striving to be missionaries for Christ. I wish I could honestly hope that all were so doing. It is to the shame of those who are not doing so that they can sit side by side with earnest Christians and not be more earnest themselves. Yet I thank God and take courage, as I remember many of you who, by tears and prayers, and afterwards by earnest labors, some of them of the most self-sacrificing kind, have gone forth to bring others to Jesus, so that from a handful of men we have multiplied and shall multiply yet as the dispensation of God's grace shall be continued to us.

Now, brethren, these may not seem to some selfish spirits any great things to rejoice in. But lovers of Christ, who have some of Christ's likeness in their hearts, will account it a matter for which to clap their hands and indulge in holy mirth when souls are converted. Is it not better to see a sinner saved than to see your purse full or your lands extending? Should it not give you greater joy that Christ is glorified, than that anything, however desirable, should transpire for your own carnal gratification? Let him reign if I perish. Let the crown sit well upon his head, if I be trodden like mire in the streets. Let him be King of kings and Lord of lords, even if his poor servant die forgotten and unknown.

The next blessing mentioned in the Psalm is the happiness of God's people is their strength: "That our oxen may be strong to labor." I think here, by oxen, there is mystically and spiritually intended all the workers of the church, but especially ministers of Christ. Paul expressly calls these the oxen—"Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." It is a blessed circumstance when those that essay to plough any part of God's field are qualified for the work. Whenever I see a man driving a horse with a load that is too much for it, I thank God it is not my task to have such work as that. A company of people attempting a work for which they are not qualified either by gifts or grace is an unhappy spectacle. If God makes men strong to labor so that their labor is their delight, and the service of God is a very recreation to them, it ought to be, and it must be, a cause of thanksgiving. Perhaps some of you have been refreshed of late. I know my Sunday School teachers can bear me witness. You have had such visitation from God that teaching in the Sunday School has become a greater joy to you than it ever was. There are, I know, others of you whose service to Christ is by no means misery. You go forth to the battle, not with dolorous sounds, but with music in your hearts, with a happy beaming of your eye, with the precision of saints, and with the attendant symbols of victory. Be thankful for this, for it is no small blessing when the laborers are strong for their work.

Then comes the blessing of peace: "That there be no breaking in, nor going out." No secession fomented by discord; no heresies invading the midst of the happy family and rending asunder hearts that should be as one. If it should ever be your wretched lot to be a member of a church that has been distracted by schism and discord, you will confess that, perhaps of all things in Christian experience, there is nothing that humbles the soul more, nothing that wounds the heart more, and that does more mischief to the inner life, than personal jealousies and the party divisions they occasion. It is a blessing unspeakable when God keeps so many hearts in holy union. We so easily divide, our tastes naturally are so different, there are such varieties of circumstance and of temperament among us—some rich, some poor, some lively and cheerful, some gloomy and desponding—it is not likely that a company of men will all agree together year by year without some jarings; and where peace rules, and there are no breakings forth of the waters of strife, everyone ought devoutly to bow his head in a gratitude which he cannot express, and say, "Lord, with thee there is no breaking in nor going out."

The last mercy which David mentions is that of satisfaction "that there be no complaining in our streets." And can we not appropriate this when, instead of hearing the voice of murmuring on the right hand and on the left—murmuring against the preacher, murmuring against the officers, murmuring against one another; each one is encouraging his fellow to do the work of the Lord, and all are unanimous together in this sole regret, that we can't love more, can't work more, can't glorify God more? Oh! this makes a happy

church. It is evidence of a people near to God. Theirs is a happy case.

Now, brothers and sisters, these things may have in them little interest for strangers, but they will have, I trust, some force, though I put them thus hurriedly to you, for those who have been with us from the beginning, and whose history has proven how God has multiplied his blessings. Unworthy of the least of all his mercies we were, and the church was brought low by affliction and sorrow, till it seemed as though our name would be blotted out from his Israel, and Ichabod was written on our walls; but God turned his hand in mercy upon us. That is fifteen years ago, and by the space of these revolving years he has never ceased to bless. We have had no startling phenomena of revival, we have had no excitements such as have passed over different parts of the Christian world; but steadily, as though all had been regulated by an ever-progressing geometry, we have gone on to increase and to multiply, and have been led on from service to service in the name and strength of the Lord God. Not one particle of this is ascribable to human agency, only so far as God may have pleased to use it. The whole of it belongeth unto God. We then at least, whatever others may say, ought to keep in the same frame of mind in which we were last Monday evening when we gathered round that communion table, instant in prayer, constant in fellowship, continuing to be happy in blessing, and praising, and magnifying the Lord.

II. The Source Of Happiness.

The latter part of the text carries up to higher ground. Happiness, a practical outflow from the favor which God shows, is traced to its source, the God of all grace; and accounted for by the covenant relations into which he has entered. "Yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord." Now, beloved, our God is the Lord, our God is Jehovah. Let me refresh your memories with this truth in two or three of its aspects, that you may remember and act in the spirit suggested by them. Our God is the Lord.

He has revealed himself to us in that character. We knew him not. We said, "Who is the Lord that we should obey his voice?" When we heard of him in the preaching of his truth, it only reached our outward ear, we felt no power in our spirits till it pleased God to reveal himself to us. It was years ago with some of us, it was only a few months with others of you. Oh! I charge you, go back to that blessed day, when those blind eyes were opened, and when that dead heart began to feel the divine light. Oh! then it was you said, "He is my God." You did not come to him and ask him to be your God, but he who gave himself to you in the eternal covenant before the world was, in the, fullness of time, gave himself to you by his effectual grace, making you willing to accept him and to kiss his silver scepter. Yes, you have been changed from an enemy into a friend. Your back is no longer toward your God.

"But now subdued by sovereign grace,

Your spirit longs for his embrace."

Now, bless him for that with all your heart be-night.

Moreover, he is your God because you have been brought to acknowledge him as such. Most of you have been baptized into the name, the one glorious name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and by that act you declared to all men that you would be dead to all the world besides, and alive only to Christ. You came forward years ago moved by earnest zeal, and you said, "Let others do as they will, but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord." This work of grace led you from believing with the heart to confess with the mouth. I trust that many a time since then, you have stood in the gap for God when his name has been dishonored by the ungodly, that you have avowed it in your family and business that you are the Lord's servant. Whilst others have disregarded his law and his truth oppressed, my soul followeth hard after him unto shame and derision, and I will follow where my Savior leads. Now, you are happy to be able to do this.

Happy is the people who acknowledge God to be the Lord. Be happy tonight, then, and show your happiness by praising the name of the Lord in your heart. The Lord has been your God since then, inasmuch as you have believed in him. In the day of trouble your soul has found peace by confiding in his goodness.

When you have felt the weight of sin, you have got rid of that weight by coming to the pardoning God. Oh! the mere professors do not know what it is to take God as he really is. They take him to be, what shall I say? to be anything but their Almighty Sovereign. They take the Lord to be their lackey, to help them in some grievous hour when they can't help themselves—to be their make-weight, on an emergency just to supply a few of their deficiencies. They pick and choose his commands. They will be fruitful enough in duties that bring them honor, but they are barren enough in any duties that are sacred, that only belong to God and their own soul. As to outward ceremonies, they can indulge abundantly, but to spiritual religion they are utter strangers. They have never taken God to be altogether their God. Why, that means something more than Master, more than Father, more than King. Oh! dost thou know what it means? Is he all in all to thee? That is what Godhead is, all in all. Dost thou take him to be all in all to thee, henceforth and for ever? Happy are the people that can say that in very truth. It may cause them loss, it may often make their course run contrary to flesh and blood; but if they own God to be their Lord, so as to give him entire obedience as his grace enables them, they are pronounced happy by the highest authority, and happy they shall be, come what may.

We have taken God to be our God, not merely to trust in him, but, to go further, to enjoy him. Have you not had sweet enjoyment with your God, beloved, when he has brought you to feel that all things around you might be shadows, but that God was true? Have you never so realized God in your little chamber that you did forget there was a world of sin and sorrow, and care, and only did remember him? Have you never felt as you have come down from that mount of fellowship, that when the atheist, said there was no God, you could laugh him to scorn, for your spirit had seen him face to face, and your soul had come into contact with the soul of the infinite God, and you had as truly communed with him as ever man communed with his fellow, or ever heart had fellowship with heart. Yes, oh! seek this yet again. Yea, let it be your element to live in the enjoyment of communion with God, for those are the happy people who, to the highest degree by inward fellowship, take God to be their God.

And then, over and above that, having enjoyed something of the Lord, we have taken the Lord to be our God that we may serve him, It has been our delight, when we have had opportunities, to try and spread abroad the theme of his great and glorious name. You have chosen to give him of his substance; I trust you have not held back any of the talent which your Master has entrusted to you. In proportion as any man or woman here answers to the description we have been reviewing, in that proportion shall they be truly happy. If thou hast but partly trusted and partly communed, and partly served, thy happiness may well be shallow. But if thou hast trusted with thy whole heart, leaning thine own entire weight upon the Lord, and if thou hast loved with all the power of thy passion, and communed day by day in closest fellowship with him, if thou hast served him with thy whole heart, and soul, and strength, then happy art thou. God declares thee such, and in the highest degree thou certainly shalt be such, world without end.

The believer who thus has taken God to be his God is happy, because he has a portion with which he never can grow discontented. Men outgrow their books. Students come to look on the volumes they once valued as being worn-out things. Men outgrow their friends; those that were their superiors once they can outstrip. Men outgrow their substance and their wealth. The comfort they once had in these things they find no longer. The most pleasant pleasures of the world are the first to expire as men advance; especially as they grow old that which once contented them becomes vanity of vanities in their account. But no man outgrows his God. No soul ever runs at such a rate that he passes beyond the powers that God has given him. No, beloved; but the more our capacities are enlarged and our desires expanded, the more perfectly satisfied are we with the Lord our God. He that hath this portion has one that can never be taken away from him. The world did not give it, and the world cannot steal it. The devil has tried often to take away from us our God, but he shall never do that. Time may rob us of our health, the world may rob us of our wealth, sickness may deprive us of a thousand comforts, but there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Our inheritance cannot be alienated; it is where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal!

Hence the Lord's people are a happy people, because they have a portion they can die with; they have a pleasure that can make their dying pillow soft, and riches they can take with them through the last rim rivers-can pass its floods without losing a single farthing of their heritage—nay, can pass the flood and land upon the other shore to enter more fully into the bliss which God has prepared for them that love him.

I wish we were all such happy people; I wish we were all of us happy to the fullest degree. If you are not, you may be: if you are not, if you trust in Christ, you shall be; if you come empty-handed and simple, and take Christ to be your Savior. He never did reject one yet, and never shall. He will accept you to-night, and put you in the same happy case as others of his people. I knew there are some here that are hard to comfort, but the Master, I trust, will do it yet, for he looseth the prisoners and delights to find out the hard cases and to deal with them. If there is a dungeon door that no key can open, he delights to come with the mighty hammer of his Word and dash the door in pieces and give the spirit liberty. May he do that to-night, and we will sing together then of his pardoning power. Amen!

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