

OLD TESTAMENT OVERVIEW TEACHER'S NOTES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Lesson 21	Divine Longings Over the Foolish.....
Lesson 22	What a Believing Man Can Do.....
Lesson 23	Song of the Putting Off of the Armor.....
Lesson 24	The Kiss of the Backslider.....
Lesson 25	The Priestly Word of Peace.....
Lesson 26	Human Anodynes.....
Lesson 27	Spiritual and Carnal Weapons.....
Lesson 28	Divine Silence and Human Despair.....
Lesson 29	Jewish Unbelief and Gentile Blessing.....
Lesson 30	The Restoration of the Banished.....
Lesson 31	The Farewell Gift.....
Lesson 32	God's Dealing with Sin and the Sinner.....
Lesson 33	God Finding a Resting-Place.....
Lesson 34	The Moriah Group.....
Lesson 35	Diverse Kinds of Conscience.....
Lesson 36	The Soul Turning From Man to God.....
Lesson 37	Man's Dislike of a Present God.....
Lesson 38	True and False Consolation.....
Lesson 39	Gain and Loss for Eternity.....
Lesson 40	Man's Misconstruction of the Works of God.....
Lesson 41	The Two Cries and the Two Answers.....
Lesson 42	The Knowledge of God's Name.....
Lesson 43	Deliverance From Deep Waters.....
Lesson 44	The Excellency of the Divine Loving Kindness.....
Lesson 45	The Sickness, the Healer, and the Healing.....
Lesson 46	The Consecration of Earth's Gold and Silver.....
Lesson 47	The Gifts of the Ascended One.....
Lesson 48	The Speaker, the Listener, the Peace.....
Lesson 49	The Believing Man's Confident Appeal.....
Lesson 50	The Love and the Deliverance.....

LESSON 21

DIVINE LONGINGS OVER THE FOOLISH

"Oh that they were wise." – Deuteronomy 32:29

THESE are the words, not of anger, but of love, of disappointed affection, of a sorrowful friend, of a tenderhearted father, of an earnest, gracious, long-suffering God. In them God yearned over Israel. In them He still yearns over us. In them we learn the attitude in which God is standing over us, all the day stretching out His hands to a disobedient and disagreeable people.

1. GOD'S DESIRE TO MAKE US WISE.

Himself the infinitely wise God, He longs to make us partakers of His wisdom. He has no pleasure in our ignorance; indeed, it excites His compassion as much as His displeasure. He knows the preciousness of wisdom, and He does not love to see us without it. He wishes us to be wise. Why then does He not make us that way, seeing He is as powerful as He is wise? I cannot explain this whole puzzle, it is unknowable. Only let us remember, (1.) That He is sovereign as well as loving; (2.) That wisdom, from its very nature, cannot be forced; (3.) That the power of a human will for evil, for resistance both to wisdom and to love, is very great, far greater than can be supposed from the feebleness of the creature in who possesses it. We cannot disentangle the whole knot, but we know from His own words that He desires sincerely and honestly, to see us wise. What else can our text mean "Oh that they were wise." Is that not good news? God desires to make you wise! If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.

2. MAN'S UNTEACHABLENESS.

The wish to be wise and the unwillingness to be taught is one of the many strange contradictions of humanity. The search for wisdom and the rejection of it when God presents it, is a spectacle, strange, but not quite unaccountable. For the wisdom man searches for is wisdom of his own selecting; it is wisdom without God, it is wisdom which will not contradict his propensities and lusts, it is wisdom reasoned out by himself and conferring to himself the credit of discovery. Submission to divine tuition is what he especially dislikes; liberty to take or reject God's

instruction is what he claims for himself, and the present age is developing man's unteachableness to the full. He claims to be his own teacher, and to be the judge of the wisdom which he is to receive. He insists that his own reason, his own conscience, his moral sense, shall sit in judgment on all that is presented to him. The authoritative presentation to him of any doctrine he holds to be inconsistent with his liberty, and therefore even when he receives the doctrine presented in in this way he rejects the authority on which it comes; he may receive the truth, but it is because his own reason has proved it or accepted it, not because God has offered it. He would have his faith to stand in the wisdom of man, and not in the power of God.

3. GOD'S PROVISION FOR OUR BECOMING WISE.

He has not left us to gather wisdom at random, nor contented Himself with the mere expression of a wish that we should be wise. He has given substantial proof of His sincerity in this thing. He has provided,

(1.) The lesson. This book of his contains that lesson. It is full, varied, complete, simple. It is a lesson for learned and unlearned, for Jew and Greek, for rich and poor, the same lesson for all. In this one book is written the lesson of lessons; the lesson which, when learnt, removes darkness, ignorance, disquietude, and gives light, peace, health, and an eternal salvation.

(2.) The school. It is the school of Christ. For our first step is to become His disciples, to accept Him and His rules for the guidance of our studies. "Make disciples of all nations" was His commission. So we enter His academy, we enroll among His scholars. This discipleship is the first step to wisdom; it is the renunciation of the false schools, of the world, of man, of philosophy, and the submission of our whole man to the regulations of this school.

(3.) The discipline. It is not simply pouring in information that is required. The mind, the soul, the conscience must be so disciplined and prepared as to receive it in the right way. Various is this discipline, this training. Hardship, sorrow, trial, all kinds of chastisement are required in order to fit us for the reception of the wisdom. In this divine school all these are brought into use, daily use, to make us receptive, pliable, teachable, submissive.

(4.) The Teacher. He is the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we are said to "learn of Christ" and to "learn of the Father," but the Spirit is the

special teacher; " he shall teach you all things;" "who teacheth like him." His teaching is perfect, irresistible, yet not miraculous; gradual, natural, yet supernatural. He teaches us out of that book which he has inspired.

Consequently God yearns over us, grieving at our ignorance, mourning over our unteachableness, offering to teach us, to make us wise. Therefore pitying us, He provides for us; leaving us inexcusable if we remain untaught. Oh that you were wise, He sincerely says to each one of us. Let us place ourselves entirely in His hands for instruction, for light, for blessing. All He asks is that we enroll ourselves as His scholars and submit to His teaching. In His infinite compassion and love He beseeches us to be wise.

LESSON 22

WHAT A BELIEVING MAN CAN DO

Joshua 10:12-14

THERE are several miracles referred to in Scripture in connection with the sun. When the sun was darkened in Egypt (Ex. 10:21); when the "light of it shall become sevenfold"; when the shadow went back on the dial of Ahaz (Isa. 38:8); when the sun was darkened at the crucifixion (Matt. 27:45); when the sun shall become black as sackcloth (Rev. 6:12); when it shall scorch men with fire. But this is the most extraordinary of them all, indeed, of all the miracles of the Bible. It is quiet and beneficent; it is conservative, not destructive; it arrests but does not injure. It is not like the flood, or the plagues of Egypt, desolating and death-dealing; nor like the Red Sea, or Sinai, or Jordan, or the descending fire on Carmel. It is simply a stoppage of creation's movements, the arresting the descent of the two great lights, making day a little longer. It does not look like a miracle, for there is no change in sun, or moon, or sky, or earth; yet it is this "no change" that is the greatest of all miracles, "There was no day like that, before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man." The time had not come when they should have no more need of the sun.

The thing was done in a moment, without premeditation or preparation; not by fasting and prayer, or an appeal to God, as in the miracles of Moses and Elijah; but by a command, a word, addressed directly to sun and moon; as if Joshua were assuming the Creator's authority; the command of faith, uttered in simple confidence in God; the word of one man; the word of a man in sympathy and fellowship with God. O confidence in God, what can you not accomplish! Joshua is a man of like passions as we are, yet he speaks to the sun and it stands still!

It is not only a very extraordinary miracle in itself, but it is a very manifest one; not done in a corner, but open to the eyes of all. That long, long day in Palestine would doubtless be remembered forever. It could not be hid. It was in one respect a benevolent miracle; in another, indirectly, destructive; for it enabled Israel to overthrow their enemies; and in such a ruin God is glorified. It was, we might say, a very superfluous miracle. Why not enable Joshua to cut short the work, or send the lightning or the earthquake? God does not always economize His forces, His gifts, His treasures. He loves sometimes to show how He can lavish His fullness, how He can be, as men say, extravagant. How

completely a much lesser miracle would have served the purpose! Yet he does not grudge this, in answer to the word of one of his saints.

Stupendous and superfluous it does seem to us, for the one stoppage of the sun (or earth) includes so many other stoppages and the putting forth of an amount of Power, absolutely inconceivable. We can measure the amount of power put forth in severing the Red Sea or the Jordan; but the stopping of sun and moon involves an amount of power beyond all calculation or conception.

1. FAMILIARIZE YOUR MINDS WITH A GREAT MIRACLE LIKE THIS.

Do not try to lower it or diminish it, or empty it of the supernatural. Take it for what it is here stated to be. God means what he says. He does not exaggerate. Take it for what it is.

(1.) It will enlarge your thoughts of God. He is seen in this miracle as infinitely great and powerful; able to arrest sun and moon in a moment. We need to have our thoughts elevated, expanded, greatened. It is with a great God that we deal with. In days when man tries to make himself look great, and to think himself powerful; it is well to remember the greatness of God.

(2.) It will increase your reverence. Reverence of God comes, in part at least, from what we see of his power and majesty. We must be steeped in such views of God as this miracle gives us that we may be delivered from flippancy and frivolity in dealing with God, in prayer and praise. Are we sufficiently reverential? Are we bowed down in spirit before this mighty God?

(3.) It will give you a true insight into the true supernatural. The tendency of the age is to disbelieve the supernatural; to assume that man occupies the whole space of being; and that beyond what he sees, and hears, and feels, there is nothing, no room for angels or spirits, no room for God, no room for agencies apart from known forces and ascertained laws. The Bible is full of the superhuman and supernatural. In studying it we are delivered from superstition, which is the supernatural of the fake, and taught the world of faith, which is the supernatural of the true. For faith deals with the true supernatural, the divine supernatural. It is the evidence of things not seen.

2. HAVE FAITH IN GOD.

Here is a miracle so great that we can hardly ask for a greater; so we ought to say, "Is there anything too hard for God." It cherishes faith and expectation. It shows what God is willing to do for men like ourselves. Let us not be staggered by the greatness or difficulty of any work, or the power of any enemy. What if we needed a miracle? If not a visible miracle, yet something as great? Is not God willing to do it for us? There is still power, still love. He still takes part with His Israel against their enemies. Let us be trustful, believing, brave. If God be for us, who can be against us? What cannot faith do? What cannot unbelief mar? Have faith in God. Not in self, man, schemes, societies, organizations, churches, money, intellect, science, progress; but in God. Let us be Joshuas. Let us show what one living man, armed with the living word, can do with the living God!

LESSON 23

SONG OF THE PUTTING OFF OF THE ARMOR

"O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength." – Judges 5:21

THIS is one note of the warrior's song; a note loud and glad. It is the exulting cry of victory; the song of triumph; victory and triumph; when the battle was not merely for Israel but for God. It is the song of Deborah and Barak; a song inspired by the Holy Spirit; a song of earth, yet doubtless responded to in heaven; the song of the putting off of the armor; the song of one who was strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

We might suppose it uttered by Abraham on returning from the slaughter of the kings; by Moses when he saw Pharaoh overthrown; by Joshua when he discomfited Amalek; by David when he slew Goliath; by Israel in the latter day (Isa. 14:3-4). It is the song of one who out of weakness had been made strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

We might suppose it to be Christ's song of triumph when he died, with "It is finished" on His lips; or still more when He rose again from the dead; or still more when He ascended on high, leading captivity captive.

We might take it as the song of apostles on the day of Pentecost, when, "not by might or power," they saw three thousand saved; and as the song of apostles wherever they went preaching the gospel, Ephesus, Corinth, Colosse, or Rome, that wondrous gospel, proving itself mighty in their hands to the pulling down of strongholds, and the overthrow of enemies. Surely it was Paul's when he said, "I have fought a good fight."

We might take it as the church's song in the day of her coming triumph over all her enemies; over Antichrist, over Babylon, over Satan; when caught up into the clouds, or standing on the sea of glass: "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."

It must be ours (1) daily; (2) specifically at certain seasons and emergencies; (3) at the last, like Paul; (4) hereafter throughout eternity, as we look back upon the past, and understand more fully our own impotence, as well as the greatness of the powers organized against us. How often shall we find ourselves repeating, even in the new Jerusalem,

the song of the ancient prophetess, "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."

1. OUR WARFARE.

It is "a good warfare," or more exactly, "a glorious warfare." It is against enemies within, around, beneath; self, the flesh, the world, but specifically, the principalities and powers of evil. "Fight the good fight of faith." It is our battle. It is God's battle. It is the church's battle; for we are but one of a mighty army of warriors. It is a warfare from which we cannot escape, save by deserting Christ's ranks; for there is no discharge in this war. It is a constant warfare. It is a lifelong warfare. It is earnest and terrible; no child's play; no mere sound or name; but an intense reality. Nowhere out of Scripture do we find it better described than by Bunyan in his Pilgrim's Progress. He knew the reality, and has painted it well. Our life is then a warfare; a warfare which enters into everything; because at every step our great adversary stands to bar our progress, and to prevent us glorifying God in each portion and transaction of life. You complain of the power of sin. Well, fight! Of the difficulty of believing. Well, fight!

2. OUR WEAPONS.

We need to be armed, both for defense and offense; fully equipped in every instrument of battle. No half-furnished soldier can fight a battle like this. There must be no broken swords, no rusted spears, no shattered helmets.

(1.) What our weapons are not. They are not carnal; not earthly; not self-made, nor man-made. They are not the weapons of science, or philosophy, or human intellect. These avail nothing against sin, or the flesh, or Satan.

(2.) What they are. They are divine and heavenly, forged and hammered on no earthly anvil. They are God-made and God-given. They are complete, both for attack and defense. Sword, shield, sandal, helmet, all that is needed in this warfare, and described by the apostle (Eph. 6), are provided for us. No man loses this battle for want of offered armor.

3. OUR STRENGTH.

We need power to use the provided weapons. Not the weapons without

the power, nor the power without the weapons, but both together. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Our sufficiency is of God; all strength is in the Lord. What are sword and shield to palsied limbs? We need strength, divine strength for divine armor. The fullness of Him to whom all power is given, is at our disposal. There need be no lack of strength to us in this warfare.

4. OUR VICTORY.

It is no vain warfare this of ours; no idle battlefield. We go forth to win! Yes. Our eye is fixed on victory from the outset. We are assured of triumph from the moment we draw the sword. We are made more than conquerors. How often are these words sounded in our ears: "To him that overcometh." We aim at daily victory, we aim at final victory, such as that of Paul. Fight and conquer. Let us anticipate the warrior's song: "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."

5. OUR REWARD.

All that win have their rewards; but some victories are harder to win; some more or less complete. And there is a difference in the degree of reward. The seven rewards promised to the seven churches are representative rewards. They represent seven different kinds or degrees of glory, set before the conqueror. Yet the least reward is unutterably excellent; worth all the struggle, and the sacrifice, and the sorrow.

Brethren, let us fight! Let us aim at victory; at complete and perfect victory. Let us covet a high reward; let us be ambitious of no common crown. Our great Captain speaks to us, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me." How soon He may appear we do not know. And He comes with the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory in His hand for His own. If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.

LESSON 24

THE KISS OF THE BACKSLIDER

"Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her." – Ruth 1:14

IN this book we have the Gentile sheltering the Jew, and the Jew in return inviting the Gentile to partake of Israel's land and blessing. Moab receives Judah, and feeds him in the day of famine (as the prophet in later years speaks, "Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab," Isa. 16:4), and Judah bids Moab welcome to his better portion. Israel's famine first sent Israel to Egypt for food; Israel's persecution drove Israel's true Son Messiah, Son of David to seek protection in Egypt; so now we see Naomi leaving Bethlehem, passing over the rugged hills of Judah, crossing the Dead Sea, and settling in the land of Moab, till the calamity was over. Whether it was faith or unbelief that led her to flee from Bethlehem, we cannot say. It was faith that led her to return. It is as a believing woman that we now find her leaving her exile to seek her own land again, though as yet she did not know that Messiah was to come from her line.

She sets out with her two daughters-in-law, after a ten years' sojourn in Moab. They travel onward for a little, till they come to some particular spot, perhaps the shore of the Dead Sea, which they must cross. There Naomi tests them; and there the difference comes out between the two. It is to this difference our attention is drawn to.

The difference is brought out in Orpah's kissing and Ruth's cleaving. There was great resemblance up to a certain point. Both were Moabites; related by marriage, if not by birth; both attached to Naomi up to a certain point; both linked to Bethlehem by their marriage; both going out with Naomi to dwell in Judea. There were many points of likeness between the two. It will be profitable to notice these. There are many Orpahs among us, few Ruths; many Balaams, many Demases, many who follow a while, and then go back and walk no more with the Lord.

1. ORPAH AND HER KISSING.

There are many kinds of kissing spoken of in Scripture; some evil, some good. There is the murderer's kiss that of Joab (2 Sam. 20:9); the harlot's kiss (Pro. 7:13); the kiss of the enemy (Pro. 27:6); the kiss of idol worship (Hos. 13:2); the flatterer's kiss (2 Sam. 15:5, Absalom); the traitor's kiss (Luke 22:48). These, however, have nothing in common with

Orpah and her kiss. Then there is the kiss of affection (Gen. 50:1, Joseph); the kiss of homage (1 Sam. 10:1, Samuel); the kiss of reconciliation (2 Sam. 14:33); the kiss of meeting (Luke 15:20, The prodigal); the kiss of parting (Acts 20:37). In some of these we find Orpah's kiss. It was the kiss of affection, and the kiss of parting. So far it was good and not evil. But we must consider its meaning in the circumstances. Everything depends on that. It meant that,

(1.) She was not prepared to leave Moab. The ties between her and it were still unbroken, though for a time a little loosened. Moab was still Moab to her, the home of her family, the center of her affections, the dwelling place of her gods. Consequently millions are not ready to leave the world, though often in some measure broken from it. They cling to their old haunts of vanity, foolishness, pleasure, lust, or literature.

They cannot think of forsaking these. Indeed, they soothe their consciences with the argument, that it would not be right to break off from all these. To them the world is still the world; attractive and excellent. They cannot think of crucifying it, or themselves to it. They have been born in it, lived in it, their friends are in it, why should they leave it? Their hearts are still here, their treasure is here; and they linger in it, though at times they feel the necessity of leaving it. What would life be to them without the novel or the ballroom, the theatre, the assembly, the banquet, the party, the folly, the drinking, and the song?

(2.) For the sake of Moab she was willing to part with Naomi. She was not without longings after Naomi and her city, and her family, and her God. But her old longings and ties kept her back, and in the end prevailed. Yet she wished to part in peace, to bid a decent farewell to her mother-in-law. She kissed that she might not cleave. Her kiss was a farewell; a farewell to Naomi, her land, and her God. Have we not many Orpahs? They would desire to have both Israel and Moab. They would rather not part with either. Their heart is divided. They would like to cast in their lot with God's people, and obtain their inheritance. They are not scoffers; not openly godless; not reckless pleasure-seekers. But half-and-half, or rather not so much. They would be religious up to a certain point, to the point when a choice must be made, and then their heart speaks out. They give up Christ, and turn back to the world. Yet they do so quietly, as it were, and kindly. They kiss at parting; but will that kiss benefit them? Will God accept the kiss as an excuse for turning back, or as a substitute for the whole-

hearted service which He desires? What does that kiss mean now? What will it stand for in the great day of the Lord? It is not the kiss of Judas certainly, but it is the kiss of the "fearful and unbelieving" (Rev. 21:8).

2. RUTH AND HER CLEAVING.

Orpah kissed, but Ruth clave. Orpah kissed that she might not cleave. Ruth cleaves silently, and without show or demonstration. She does not linger or stop. Moab is behind her, Israel is before her, Naomi is at her side. Her choice is made. She hesitates neither in heart nor in step. Yonder are Judah's hills; behind them lies Bethlehem; she presses forward. God must be her God, and God's land her heritage. Nothing shall come between. She forgets her family and her father's house. What are Moab's hills, or cities, or temples, or gods? God, God of Israel, is now her God forever. Here is cleaving; here is decision; here are faith and love; here is the undivided heart.

It is this that God looks for still. Nothing else will He accept. Not half a heart or half a life. Not Orpah's kiss, but Ruth's cleaving. He wants decision. He abhors vacillation and compromise. If you prefer Moab, go dwell there; enjoy its pleasures, and worship its gods. If you choose Israel, pitch your tent there, and take God for your all. It is a mean and poor thing to divide yourself between the two. Be decided, brave, manly, and determined. Do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Love not the world. Love the world to come. Love Him who is Lord and King of that coming world. Come out and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing.

Indecision will profit nothing. Even in its gentlest and kindest form, it is hateful to God. It will not satisfy you; it will not satisfy God. A whole world and a whole Christ you cannot have. Half of the world and half of Christ is equally an impossibility. Alliance with the world and alliance with Christ is out of the question. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils. Beware of carnal fascinations and snares. Beware of pleasures and vanities. Meddle not with worldly amusements. Suspect that of which the world is enamored. Blind not yourselves by creature-love and creature-beauty. Lull not your conscience asleep by an outward religion, a fantastic, and pictorial, and sensual worship. It is not religion but Christ that God points you to. Forsake all for Him. Let Him be all to you.

Look to Bethlehem, where Naomi and Ruth were on their way. He was

born there. Let your heart rest there. Look a little farther, to Jerusalem and Golgotha. There He died, the Just for the unjust. There He finished the work. There He shed the reconciling blood. There He gave full testimony to the free love of God. Let your conscience get its purging and pacification there. Let your whole soul go forth and abide there, with Him who died and rose again, and who has promised, saying, "I will come again, and receive you to myself!"

LESSON 25

THE PRIESTLY WORD OF PEACE

1 Samuel 1:12-18

HERE we have an earthly high priest dealing with a child of sorrow; and in his treatment of her we find both a contrast and a comparison with the heavenly High Priest. The contrast comes out strikingly. Eli shows, first, want of knowledge; for he speaks under a mistake, in ignorance of the person and the condition of her whom he addressed. Secondly, want of charity; for he charges her at once with drunkenness. Third, want of patience and caution; for he does not wait to inquire. Fourthly, want of tenderness; for he speaks harshly as well as rashly. How great the contrast in all these respects between the earthly and the heavenly High Priest. Contrast this scene with that of the woman of Sychar, or the woman taken in adultery. What a contrast between Eli and the Lord! How differently does Jesus deal with a sinner from the way in which Eli does! The way in which Eli acts makes it necessary for the woman to defend herself; the way in which Jesus acts creates no such necessity; for the ones He speaks to feel that their unworthiness is no bar to His grace, and that the admission of their unworthiness does not alter that grace in the least. The words and acts of Jesus do not set them upon self-defense, as did Eli's. How great the difference between this holy man of Israel and Him who is "The Holy One of Israel!"

But there is comparison or likeness as well as contrast. Eli, though imperfectly, does represent the better High Priest; even him who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who can have compassion on the ignorant, who is a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, and whoever lives to make intercession for us. This will come out as we consider (1.) the application to the high priest; (2.) the answer; (3.) the confidence; (4.) the consolation.

1. THE APPLICATION.

Hannah deals directly with Eli. She is in God's tabernacle; she has access to its altar; she speaks to the high priest face to face. Two special requests she makes, (1.) count me not a daughter of Belial, treat me not as a sinner; (2.) let me find grace in thy sight. These are our two special petitions in our dealings with the better High Priest: deal not with me as a sinner, let me find favor with thee. Forgiveness and favor, these are what we need, and they are what we come to the Priest for; for he is the High

Priest of the good things to come. Let us deal with him directly. Let us put our whole case into His hands. We apply to Him as the Son of God, as the Priest, the God-man who sits on the throne of grace. He waits for us; let us wait on Him. He is our Eli, our Aaron, our Melchisedec; all fullness is with Him. He sets open that fullness to us. Though sinners, let us remember we have to do with one who can manage the worst case and can undertake for the chief of sinners.

2. THE ANSWER.

His answer is, Go in peace, may the God of Israel grant thy petition. He speaks peace to her. She was sorely troubled and tempest-tossed; she needed peace, and it is with peace that he begins. So is it with peace that our Eli begins; he has made peace, and he speaks to us the peace which he has made, "Go in peace," He says to everyone who comes to Him, for "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." This answer is sure to everyone who comes to Him. He does not stand on ceremony with His petitioners. He gives what is asked; He sends no one away empty. Let us believe that we have what we ask of Him. And then, as if speaking to us of the Father, he says, "God hear thee, and grant thy petitions." We do not hear His voice; but just as surely as Eli speaks to Hannah and grants her prayer, so does He speak to us and does for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask. Everyone who goes to our High Priest is quite sure of an answer, and that a gracious one. He sends none away unsatisfied. Peace and favor from the God of Israel, these are the things He gives. Hannah went to Eli uninvited, but we go invited; it is our heavenly Priest who says, Come unto me!

3. THE CONFIDENCE.

Hannah went her way. She did not trouble, nor aggravate, nor affront Eli with a second or a third application. She took him at his word, like the nobleman who came to Jesus about his son. It is in this way that we are to deal with our Eli. Take Him at His word. Trust Him. Do justice to His faithfulness and honesty. Let us not stand on ceremony, or approach in terror and doubt; but believe that He is the rewarder of all that seek Him. Nor let us deceive ourselves and mock Him by saying, I don't distrust Him, I only distrust myself. This is absurd. You are really distrusting Him, and doing so on the ground that you are not fully complying with His conditions (as if He made any conditions!); whereas He bids you trust Him just as you are. If your faith is not good enough, come with it as it is. If your way of coming is imperfect, add that to the number of your sins, and still trust. Let nothing in yourself produce distrust, so long as it is true

that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. "They trusted and were not put to shame" is a truth for us now.

4. THE CONSOLATION.

She not only went her way; but she ate, and her countenance was no longer sad (literally, no more what it was). Deep had been her sorrow; now it passed away, at the gracious voice of the High Priest. In this we learn what it is that relieves a disquieted soul. It is the voice of the High Priest, "Go in peace." We have an High Priest with whom to communicate in our troubles, a greater than Aaron or Eli; and we know, even more surely than Hannah when she heard Eli's voice, that His words to every soul that comes to Him are, "Go in peace." He is not "meticulous," nor does he wait to scrutinize the quality or excellence of our manner of approach. The moment that our words, "God be merciful to me," come up to Him, His answer comes down. "Go in peace." Let us be sure of this; let us give credit to His promises, even though we do not actually see His face, or hear His voice. Our application must be successful. He cannot deny Himself. He cannot dishonor His priesthood nor break His promises. How long are we to wait before believing Him? How many signs are we to ask for before we are sure that He will do as He has said? Why will we persist in doubts, which all take for granted that He is not true to His word, and which disguise their wickedness under the name of humility, and under the presence that as we do not know whether we have asked in the right way, we cannot know whether he will answer till he has answered. Let us beware of the Pharisaism that is always asking for a sign before it will trust the Son of God.

LESSON 26

HUMAN ANODYNES

1 Samuel 16:14-23

OF Saul we may say, "Thou didst run well, who hath hindered you?" He began well, but ended badly. His first days and works were better than his last. So with Demas; so with the church of Ephesus; so with the Jews, whose following God at first was contradicted by their last apostasy. So is it still with souls, churches, nations, ages.

1. SAUL'S SIN.

For the root of all was sin. This sin was simply disobedience to a command of God. He was commanded to slay Agag and his people. A cruel command, some would say, to which disobedience was better than obedience. But it was a divine command, whether the wisdom, or the justice, or the mercy were visible. God had His reasons for it, and that was enough. Saul's sin was not misrule, nor oppression, nor wickedness, but simply disobedience to a command which some might call arbitrary, if not harsh and stern. This is the kind of stress that God puts on obedience, simple obedience, unreasoning obedience. His will must be done; for He is Sovereign, and He is the God only wise. Saul's sin was the preference of his own will and wisdom to God's. Let our consciences be tender as to this; and let us beware of acting on our own reasons or ideas of fitness, or doing our own will. "To obey is better than sacrifice."

2. THE CONSEQUENCES.

(1.) His crown is taken from him; he is rejected from being king. (2.) Samuel leaves him (1 Sam. 15:35). But the two special things mentioned here are these:

(2.) The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul. We are not going to take up the question as to whether Saul were a true child of God; this passage does not determine the point. He might be so; and these words might be like Paul's: "Whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim. 1:20); "deliver unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (1 Cor. 5:5). But certainly "the Spirit which departed from Saul" was good, not evil. It was the reversal of what is said: "God gave him another heart," a heart for governing, which He now takes away. The good Spirit is grieved, and departs. Saul's last act

of disobedience has quenched Him; he is left without heavenly guidance.

(3.) An evil spirit from the Lord troubles him. He is not left alone; for as one Spirit departs, another enters. (a.) He is troubled. His soul is now the abode of darkness and fear. He becomes moody and sad; he is aggravated, perplexed, desponding. This is the fruit of sin! (b.) He is troubled by an evil spirit. The clean spirit goes out, and the unclean spirit comes in, comes in to torment, and sadden, and annoy. (c.) He is troubled by an evil spirit from the Lord. God lets loose Satan upon him. The unclean spirit returns with others more wicked than himself, and his last state is worse than his first. These words are very awful: "I will choose their delusions;" and "God shall send them strong delusion!"

Consequently is his chastisement double negative and positive; a departure of the good, and the arrival of the evil. And this affliction is God's doing. Not chance, nor disease, nor natural depression of spirits, but a visitation from God; judgment for disobedience, judicial punishment.

3. HUMAN SOLUTIONS.

Here is music, religious music, the music of the harp, the harp of David. This is soothing but it does not reach the seat of the disease. It is something human, something external, something materialistic and earthly, something that man can originate and apply. It is effectual to a certain extent; it drives away the evil spirit, and restores temporary tranquility; as a result possibly deceiving its victim. In like manner we find the human spirit afflicted in every age, sometimes more and sometimes less. And in all such cases man steps in with his human and external means. I do not refer to the grosser form of dispelling gloom, drunkenness and extravagance, in which men seek to drown their sense of want, and make up for the absence of God. I refer to the refined means; those of art, science, music, gaiety, by which men try to minister to a mind diseased. The soul needs soothing. It is irritated and troubled with the world, its conscience is not at ease, it is anxious and weary. It takes itself to forms, something for the eye and ear, to chants, and vestments, and postures, and performances, sweet sounds and fair sights, sentimental and pictorial religion, which is but a refined form of worldliness. By these the natural man is soothed, the spirit tranquilized; the man is brought to believe that a cure has been found, because his gloom has been alleviated by these religious displays, these exhibitions which suit the unregenerate

soul so well. They but drug the soul, filling it with a sort of religious delirium. They are human sedatives, not divine medicines.

4. THE RESULTS.

A partial and temporary cure. It is said that the evil spirit departed, but not that the good Spirit returned. Saul's trouble was alleviated, but not removed. The disease was still there. The results of David's harp were only superficial and negative. So is it with the sinner still. There are many outward applications, which act like spiritual chloroform upon the soul. They soothe, and calm, and please, but that is all. They do not reach below the surface, nor touch the deep-seated condition within. Men try rites, sacraments, pictures, music, dresses, and the varied attractions of ecclesiastical adornment; but these leave the spirit unfilled, and its wounds unhealed. They cannot regenerate, or quicken, or heal, or fill with the Holy Spirit. They may keep up the self-satisfaction and self-delusion of the soul, but that is all. They bring no true peace, nor give rest to the weary. They do not fill, they merely hide our emptiness.

Our age is full of such human solutions, literary and religious, all got up for the purpose of soothing the troubled spirits of man. Excitement, theatres, concerts, ecclesiastical music, dresses, performances, sports, what are all these but man's means for casting out the evil spirit and healing the soul's hurt without having recourse to God's one remedy? They do not bring it nearer to God, they do not work repentance, or produce faith, or fix the eye on the true cross. They leave the soul still without God, and without reconciliation. The religion produced in this way is hollow, and fitful, and superficial, and sentimental. It will not save nor sanctify. It may produce a sort of religious inebriation, but not that which God calls godliness, not that which apostles pointed out as a holy life, a walk with God.

LESSON 27

SPIRITUAL AND CARNAL WEAPONS

"And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel." – 1 Samuel 17:25

HERE are two men, and in these men two nations, two religions; two bodies or companies, the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent. Israel and Philistia are now brought face to face. There must be war, not peace; not even an alliance, not even a truce. The world's table is not spread for the church, nor the church's table for the world. The "earth" may sometimes help the woman, and swallow up the floods which would overwhelm her; but friendship with the earth is not to be cultivated or sought after. The friendship of the world is enmity with God.

Here are two men, the one the personification of power, the other of weakness; the one of self-reliance, the other of confidence in God. We see man, nothing but man, in the one; God, nothing but God in the other. In the Philistine we see man fighting against God, in David man fighting for God. What the world admires and prizes is to be found in the one, what it despises in the other.

One thing marks them both: they are full of courage and of confidence; both equally sure of success, though the one boasts, and the other boasts not. The sources and grounds of their confidence are very different; but their confidence itself seems very much alike.

The object of each is, in one respect, different; in another, the same. They meet for battle, each bent on the overthrow of the other. But Israel has not provoked nor challenged the conflict; nor is Israel desirous of seizing Philistia. She has Jerusalem: why should she seek Gaza? But Philistia desires to have Israel and her land and her power, and she makes continual inroads for this end. She is not content with Gaza and Ashkelon; she must have Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

But it is not the Gentile giant that I ask you especially to, notice, but the Jewish boy of Bethlehem. In him we have

1. THE REJECTION OF HUMAN WEAPONS.

He was fully aware (1.) of the greatness of the issue depending on this combat; (2.) of the strength of the adversary; (3.) of his own weakness; (4.) of the great things to which he had pledged himself. Yet he declines to avail himself of any of those things which would have helped to make up his deficiency, and made him, as man would say, adequate for the struggle. He takes only that which is expressive of weakness, which would make him incur the accusation of being a fool, like the apostle in later years. He had to become "weak" as well as a "fool," that he might be both wise and strong. His taking unlikely and unsuitable human weapons was more expressive of his faith than if he had taken none; for, through such, God got the opportunity of showing His power, His power, not as directly coming down from heaven, but as coming through the feeble instrumentality of a shepherd, and a shepherd's sling. It was God identifying Himself with David, and using the sling as His own two-edged sword. Accordingly the true beginning of all strength is weakness; the starting-point for success is the abnegation of self-power and human resources. How often is it true, of individuals, and of churches, and of societies, that they are too strong for God to work by or with; too well equipped, or too well organized; too rich, or too numerous, or too great, for God to get glory from! He must have His work done by hands, regarding which there will be no mistake as to who is the doer of the whole work, and the author of all the success. David did not reject these weapons because they were sinful. He often used the sword, and the spear, and the shield, in fighting the battles of the Lord. He had built a tower for an armory, wherein there hung a thousand shields of mighty men. But, in certain cases, that which is lawful is not expedient. Lawful instruments sometimes become, if not unlawful, at least inexpedient and useless, when they give God no room to bare His arm. We are, generally speaking, far too solicitous about our strength, and forget that it is always by weakness that God works. We are too solicitous about intellect, learning, numbers, money, as if we could have no hope of success without these. No one is too weak to work the work of God; many are too strong. We are slow to believe this, slow to act on it. Yet it is one of the great truths on which God has set His seal during the ages past.

2. THE ADOPTION OF DIVINE WEAPONS.

David leaves the human weapons to the Philistine; he prefers the divine. The sight of human weapons in his adversary had not made him afraid to do battle with him, nor made him say, Oh I wish I had a sword like his! And as he drew nearer, and saw his whole strength and array, his confidence does not sink; it rises. He sees in the giant an enemy of the

living God, and his weapons directed against Him. That sword, that spear, that shield, are used against God, the God of Israel. David is not dismayed, but goes forward triumphantly, assured of being more than conqueror. He has a weapon, only one, framed by no human hand, brought out of no earthly armory. It is called "the name of the Lord." With this he can face, not only Goliath and the Philistine armies, but Satan and the hosts of hell. This "name" is our weapon still. It is sword, and shield, and spear. Armed with it we can do any work, fight any battle, and engage any foe. Only let us be sure that we are on God's side, and our enemy against Him, we can go forward with confidence. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" is one side of the maxim. "If we be for God, who can be against us?" is the other. In using this name as a weapon, or as a plea, I come as if God and I were one; as if God, and not I, were on the battle-field. We stand in God's stead, and He in ours. We fight in God's stead, and He in ours. It is not so much we that work as He. Using His name, is simply confiding in His revealed character and sure word, and in nothing of ourselves, making use of no arm of flesh, no power of man's arm or man's intellect, but God's alone, the Lord God of Israel. Have faith in God! Not in man, nor in the flesh, nor in genius, nor in science, nor in numbers, nor in rank, nor in influential names, nor in great schemes, but in the living God, David's God and ours.

LESSON 28

DIVINE SILENCE AND HUMAN DESPAIR

"And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at En-dor." – 1 Samuel 28:6-7

THE scene of this sad strange narrative is the plain of Esdraelon, a place of battle-fields. The Philistines are in the north, at Shunem. Israel at the south, in Gilboa. It is a critical hour for Saul, and for his people. The enemy is in strength; Samuel is dead; Saul's conscience is not at ease; he has provoked the Lord; how shall he face the enemy? "He is afraid, and his heart greatly trembles." He does not know what to do. He does, however, the right thing so far: he consults God. But this inquiry is in vain. "The Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." Then in his despair he joins himself to the woman with the familiar spirit.

So heaven, earth, and hell are brought before us. A little of the veil is drawn aside, and we learn something of the workings of the invisible as well as of the visible. We notice, (1.) God's silence; (2.) Saul's despair.

1. GOD'S SILENCE.

Saul in his terror cries, but there is no answer of any kind. No dream of the night reveals the secrets of the future; no prophet comes instead of Samuel; no voice comes from the high priest. All is silent. Silent just when utterance was most desired and needed. Saul knocks at the gate of heaven, but it is barred against him; there is no response. That silence, how dreadful! The roar of thunder, the crash of the earthquake, the rush of the hurricane would have been a relief, though terrible in themselves. But that silence, it is absolutely intolerable. It is the silence of heaven; the silence of Him whose voice was so anxiously expected. We read of the silence of the desert, the silence of midnight, the silence of the church-yard and the grave; but this is something more profound and appalling: the silence of God when appealed to by a sinner in his extremity. There must be a meaning in that silence. It is not the silence (1.) of indifference; (2.) nor of inability to hear; (3.) nor of weakness; (4.) nor of perplexity.

He is alive to the case; he can hear; he is able to deliver; he knows what would meet the case. Yet he is silent. It must then be the silence of refusal, of rejection, of displeasure, of abandonment. Terrible silence! Anything would be better than this.

Such is the position in which God represents the sinner at certain times: "When they call I will not answer" (Pro. 1:28); "I will not be inquired of by you" (Eze. 20:31). The foolish virgins going for oil too late; the knocking for admittance too late; the crying Lord, Lord, too late; the calling to the rocks and hills in the great day. The only answer is silence! Oh, terrible silence for the sinner! He would not call when he would have been heard, and now it is too late! God called on him during his lifetime, but he would not hear. Now he calls, but God keeps silence. Yet even this awful silence will be broken. God will speak; He will speak from the throne. Depart, ye cursed, will be the breaking of the silence, and the answer to the rebel's cries!

2. SAUL'S DESPAIR.

Danger presses; the Philistines are mustering; the crisis has come. Yet there is no answer. What will he do? There were three courses open to him: (1.) he might sit down in quiet hopelessness, and let the evil come; or (2.) he might, in faith and penitent submission, commit the whole matter to God, even amid this awful silence: or (3.) he might address himself to hell for counsel since heaven was deaf. He chooses the last! In his despair he goes to the enemy of that God who was refusing to answer; he turns to the wizards whom he had himself put away; he turns from the living to the dead; he consults with hell. It must have been a dreadful day of suspense for Saul; a dreadful night, when having formed the fatal purpose, he sets out across the hill to Endor. What his thoughts and feelings were in that awful hour we do not know. They must have been of the wildest and gloomiest kind. "God has cast me off, I will take myself to Satan; heaven's door is shut, I will see if hell's is open." And when crossing the hill, and approaching the village of the enchantress, he must have felt, Now I am going on an errand to Satan; I am going to try to see if he can do for me what God will not." Oh terrible journey! He is determined to get a glimpse of the future, though his prophet be the evil one himself. The past is dark; the present is gloomy; what is the future to be? God will not tell him. Will Satan? So he rushes on in despair; he the king of Israel, the friend of Samuel, the conqueror of Israel's enemies, the forty years' monarch and warrior, who has never trembled before an enemy, he, the tall, stately Benjamite. So in melancholy madness, he moves in that dark midnight, over the heights that overlooked his own

camp and that of his foes. What a picture! Nothing in Milton half so grand or sad, hardly anything out of hell half so terrible, as this man of war, and might, and commanding stature, striding on over these hills to the gate of the pit. His despair had blinded him; he had not learned to say with one who was a greater sufferer than himself, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." He despaired because God was silent. Yet the silence was meant to lead him to repentance and acknowledgment of sin. It was God's last appeal to his conscience. Let us learn,

(1.) The perils of backsliding. Here is one whom God favored and honored; the friend of Samuel, turning his back on God.

(2.) The terribleness of the silence of God. It means something dreadful: it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; to cry and get no answer; to find no light!

(3.) The evils of despair. No sinner here ought to despair. His case may be sad; God's silence long and deep; his sins many; yet on no account let him turn his back on God; rather let him fling himself into His arms. This would be blessed despair.

LESSON 29

JEWISH UNBELIEF AND GENTILE BLESSING

"And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household."
– 2 Samuel 6:11

IT was into the house of a Gentile that the ark was brought; a Philistine; a dweller in Gath; a "Gittite;" but one who knew the Lord God of Israel.

It was the sin of an Israelite that led to its being brought here. Uzzah offended and was slain. He was afraid to trust the ark to take care of itself. He laid distrustful hands upon it when the oxen stumbled. Perhaps this was not his first offense of this kind. He seems to have been forward; perhaps proud, proud of his office.

It was David's unbelief that brought it. He did not rightly interpret God's dealing; and was afraid; afraid of God, because He was holy, and ready to vindicate His holiness. He began the work, but broke it off in the midst, through fear, unbelieving fear.

He dreads danger to himself; but, strange, he does not dread it for Obed-edom. He was willing that Obed-edom should run the risk which he would not. In what a strange conflict of feelings this was done! There is more of unbelief and less of faith in David than we should have expected. He thrusts the ark into Obed-edom's house, that whatever ill might happen might fall on him. It was not in love to Obed-edom, nor with a design of honoring him, nor with the wish to confer blessing on him. None of these motives seem to have influenced David; but blind fear, a wish to keep himself out of danger. He does not seem to have cared about this Gentile; it would seem as if he were saying, If there is danger, let it fall on a Gentile. He does not seem to have meant it for good to him, yet good came.

The ark of the God of Israel came to Obed-edom. It knocked at his door seeking shelter, seeking a home. He received it gladly. He was not forgetful to receive this stranger; and truly he received an angel unawares. He seems to have been a man of faith, one who knew the God of Israel, who knew Him even better than did Israel's king! When David, in terror, would have nothing more to do with the ark, Obed-edom opened his door

and bid the God of Israel welcome. Truly it might be said, "I have not seen such great faith, no, not in Israel."

In this unexpected way, blessing entered this Gentile house; indeed, God Himself entered, and with Him all blessing. It was but a transient stay of the ark, a three months' sojourn; but God Himself had taken up His abode, and He would not depart. No doubt all kinds of blessing came in, temporal and spiritual; and these did not leave. What a gainer Obededom became by this failure of David! Through David's fall, salvation came to this Gentile! God was not unrighteous to forget his work of faith. Verily he had his reward. It was a high one. David was a loser, but Obed-edom was a gainer.

Jerusalem was a loser, but Gibeah was a gainer! Thus wonderful are the ways and works of God! Now turn to the lessons.

1. HOW GOD PUNISHES IRREVERENCE.

It was irreverence in Uzzah to put forth his hand. God had provided for the carrying of the ark by Levites. He will not allow this to be encroached upon. He will not permit men to do evil that good may come; or to be judges of what is right, when He Himself has spoken. Beware of irreverence in the things of God; irreverence in church; in touching holy vessels; irreverence as to the name, or book, or day of God. Woe to the irreverent! They are Uzzahs, and shall know it at length, though they be long spared.

2. HOW GOD'S PEOPLE MISINTERPRET HIS DEALINGS.

David did so. He shrunk from the ark; he dreaded it; he shrunk from God; he dreaded Him; he went back to Jerusalem without that for which he had specifically gone forth; all through misconstruing this judgment upon Uzzah and his irreverence. God in smiting Uzzah did not mean to repel or terrify David; He merely wished to warn, to check undue familiarity. David in haste and unbelief supposed it to mean that God was frowning upon him, that God was a hard Master, eager to take advantage of every slip or stumble. Thus David wronged God.

3. HOW MUCH THEY LOSE BY THIS MISINTERPRETATION.

Professing to shun Uzzah's presumption, they fall into David's unbelief; and like David they lose the honor and the blessing which might have been theirs. Such is the way in which hundreds lose the blessings of the Gospel. They misinterpret God and His dealings; they flee from Him, they doubt Him, they suspect Him; and so peace is lost, fellowship is lost, God Himself is kept out of the soul.

4. HOW MUCH THEY GAIN WHO RECEIVE GOD SIMPLY.

While David was the loser, Obed-edom was the gainer. He was not afraid of God. The ark came knocking at his door asking admittance, and he gladly received it. And with the ark God came in, and with God all blessing. Everything prospered in his house now that God had come in. See how God can overrule the unbelief and failures of his people.

(1.) Beware of flying from God, or shutting out God. He comes to you and knocks; whether you are a Jew or Gentile. Be not alarmed. It is a friend, not an enemy.

(2.) Let God in. Both into heart and home. Let God dwell in you and in your house. Bid Him welcome. Do not forget to entertain Him. He comes in love. Fury is not in Him. He is seeking entrance for Himself, and shelter for His ark among the sons of men. Let Him not pass by your door. Go out to meet Him, and bid Him welcome. He will bless you.

LESSON 30

THE RESTORATION OF THE BANISHED

"For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person; yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from Him." – 2 Samuel 14:14

SUCH is "the wise woman's" argument, or rather Joab's, addressed to King David, in order to persuade him to be reconciled to Absalom. God does not deal with us as you are dealing with your son, though we have deserved his anger. He punishes, yet he devises means for the cancelling of the punishment and the restoration of his exiles. He is just, yet the Savior. Mark the woman's statement.

1. WE MUST DIE.

This is the law, the inevitable, inexorable law; not of nature or fate, but of God. "Unto dust shall thou return;" "It is appointed unto men once to die." This is no probability, but a certainty, a necessity; greater than that the sun will rise and set tomorrow. "He died," is the conclusion of each man's history. Our world's story is one of death. It might be Methuselah's nine hundred or David's seventy, but it is death at last. Even when the Son of God took our nature, he must die. None have escaped this, save two; none shall, save those who shall be alive when Christ comes. You may have health, friends, riches, honors, but you will die. When, where, how, you do not know.

2. WE ARE AS WATER SPILT ON THE GROUND, WHICH CANNOT BE GATHERED UP AGAIN.

Man lies down and does not rise. He is not like some building, which when ruined may be re-erected; nor like fallen fruit, that may be gathered up; but like water, which mingles with the soil and cannot be laid hold of. He mixes with the earth, and cannot raise himself, nor be raised by his companions. He passes away and does not return. Look at the churchyard, there is the water spilt on the ground. Look at earth's battlefield, there is the water spilt. Look at the depths of ocean, which have swallowed up tens of thousands, there is the water spilt. Not one drop has yet been gathered up of all that has been spilt since the world began, save one

drop, one precious drop, even Him who saw no corruption. No grave has given up its dust. Each slumbering atom lies till the great morning. We may walk among and weep over them, and raise monuments with names and epitaphs, but we cannot gather them up. There they remain till He comes, who is the resurrection and the life, to put forth His hand and take up each forgotten particle.

3. GOD DOES NOT RESPECT PERSONS.

In His sight all are alike, as sinners, as creatures, as sons of Adam, as dying men, young or old, low or high. He cannot be bribed to spare. He accepts no man's person. The sickbed and the death-bed are spread for all. The tomb opens for all; the simple turf it may be, or some rich marble monument, but still it is a tomb, a receptacle for human bones and dust. No ornaments can make it otherwise. You must die, is the recorded sentence, and God makes no exceptions.

4. HE DEVISES MEANS FOR THE RESTORATION OF HIS BANISHED.

He is righteous, and will not tolerate sin, nor repeal His sentence. Yet He does not leave us without hope. Mark here,

(1.) His banished. We are God's banished ones, no longer in our father's house or the king's palace, cast out like Adam from Paradise, or Cain from God's presence, or Absalom from Jerusalem, or Israel from Canaan. Sin has done it all. The brand of exile is upon us; it is God himself who has banished us. Elsewhere we are described as prodigals leaving our Father's house, here as criminals banished from His presence. O man, you are an exile! Perhaps you do not feel your loneliness, you have gotten familiarized with the place of exile, nevertheless you are a banished man, banished from Him who made you and in whose favor is life.

(2.) God's love to the banished. He has expressed His displeasure against their rebellion by banishing them, yet He has not forgotten them. He pities them, yearns over them, beckons them back. Distance has not erased their names from his paternal heart. No other may pity them, but he does. The Father sees his prodigals in the far off country; their misery, loneliness of heart, weariness, call forth his pity. He stretches out his hands, and the words of his lips are, "Come unto me," return, return.

(3.) God's design to restore them. He has a purpose of grace. The good pleasure of his goodness shows itself in a gracious design, a plan of mingled sovereignty and goodwill, righteousness and grace. He has resolved that they shall not remain afar off. His purpose shall stand.

(4.) His means for this. These are not stated here, but the Bible is the revelation of them. He does not spare His Son, but sends Him in quest of the exiles. He comes into the land of banishment, lies in an exile's cradle, becomes a banished man for them, lives a banished life, endures an exile's shame, dies an exile's death, and is buried in an exile's tomb. He takes our place of banishment that we may take His place of honor and glory in the home of His Father and our Father. Such is the exchange between the exile and the exile's divine substitute. Though rich, for our sakes He becomes poor. Though at home, He comes into banishment, that we may not be expelled forever. And here, in connection with our restoration through a substitute, there are three questions.

QUESTIONS:

(1.) Will the Father accept a substitute? Yes, He will; indeed, He has. His purpose of grace has been carried out by His providing the Substitute. He has sent His Son! He has sent Solomon to seek Absalom, to bear Absalom's penalty. He has not spared His Son that He may spare us.

(2.) Is the Son willing to become a substitute? Will Solomon quit Jerusalem and David's palace, and take the place of the banished Absalom? He will. Indeed, He has done it. He has come down in quest of us. He has borne our sins.

(3.) Are you willing to take this substitute? He has come. He offers the exchange. Give me your guilt and take my righteousness. You rebellious son, you banished Absalom, you hater of the heavenly Father and conspirer against His government, will you not return? Your Father's heart yearns over you; He longs to have you back. Return, return! If not, He weeps over you as over Jerusalem; and when you die He cries out, O Absalom, my son, my son.

LESSON 31

THE FAREWELL GIFT

"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." – 2 Kings 2:9-11

THIS is the parting of two friends; of the master and the servant, Elijah and Elisha. They journey together, they cross Jordan together, they come up to the gate of heaven together. They must separate; the one to go up to heaven, the other to remain a little longer here. They part, not in anger like Paul and Barnabas, but like David and Jonathan, in love. Elijah speaks first, and his love to his faithful companion shows itself in the words, "Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee." All that he possesses, all that is in his power, he will give.

But Elisha's request goes beyond what he had expected, or what he could grant. "Thou hast asked a hard thing," a thing beyond my power to give; a thing which only God can give. I must refer you to him; but I am permitted to give you this sign, "if you see me when taken;" that is to be the token that God grants your request; if not, then the request cannot be granted.

The sign was given. Elisha saw his master ascend; indeed, was allowed to obtain the mantle of his master, in token of his receiving his spirit. And acknowledging this sign, he tears his own clothes into two parts, as if putting his former self aside and putting on Elijah.

But the request of Elisha is a striking one. It was not what Elijah expected or could grant; but it was in sympathy with his own feelings, and he therefore referred it to God. It was for the Spirit, that Spirit that rested on and dwelt in Elijah, indeed, a double portion of that Spirit. He admired and loved his master; and his desire was to be like him; to get beyond him; to rise higher; to do and say greater things than Elijah said or did.

In this narrative we find, in Elisha, the indication of such things as the

following:

1. SPIRITUAL SYMPATHY.

He is of one mind and spirit with his master. He has been witness of his life and doings; he sees the spirit which has pervaded all his words and deeds; not merely the spirit of power and miracles, but of holiness, and zeal, and prayerfulness, and boldness. Sympathizing with all these, he longs to have the same mind; to be filled with the same spirit. How well for us if our sympathies were like this with the men in whom the Spirit of God dwells or has dwelt in ages past! Not with this world, nor with the spirit of the world, but with the world to come, and with the spirit of it, should our sympathies be. Not with the men of the world's genius, or science, or learning; not with earth's poets or philosophers; but with prophets and apostles. Whatever there is of truth and beauty in Homer, or Plato, or Demosthenes, or Shakespeare, or Bacon, or Milton, or Wordsworth, or Tennyson, let us accept; but let our spiritual sympathies ascend far higher; let us realize our true oneness with Enoch, and Elijah, and Elisha, and Isaiah, and Ezekiel; our fellowship with that Holy Spirit which dwelt in them. The sympathies of this age are confessedly not with prophets and apostles. These are looked on as fragments of obsolete antiquity and old-fashioned narrow-mindedness. Let us, however, go back to these ancient times and men, not concerned to be "abreast of the age" if we be "abreast" of the Spirit.

2. HOLY IMITATIVENESS.

His desire is to be like Elijah. He wishes not merely to have "the Spirit," but "thy spirit," the spirit that dwelt in Elijah. To be like him in the divine features of his character; like him in the possession of the Spirit and in that special form in which he possessed it; this was what he sought. There is certainly but one great model; but there are subordinate ones also. Paul said, "Be followers of me," and the eleventh chapter of Hebrews is a collection of models, a book of patterns, in each of which we may find something to copy. While copying Christ, then, let us not overlook the inferior models, either among the inspired men of Bible-days, or the uninspired worthies of later times. May the spirit of Elijah, and Paul, and John rest on us; the spirit also of Wycliffe and Huss, of Luther and Calvin, of Knox, and Welsh, and Rutherford, and Whitefield, and M'Cheyne, and Hewitson.

3. DIVINE AMBITION.

Elijah was not only full of admiration for his master, not only wished to be like him, but desired to get far beyond him. He asked for a "double portion" of his spirit. This is true ambition; this is coveting earnestly the best gifts of which Paul speaks, and in connection with which he points out the more excellent way of "charity," in which especially Elisha seems to have risen higher than his master, Elisha's ministry being more one of love than Elijah's. In such things as these let us be ambitious. There is no fear of aiming too high or seeking too much. Let us not give way to the false humility which says, "Oh that we had but the hundredth part of what Elijah had!" Let us rather at once, with Elisha, seek to have far more. Let us seek a double portion of his spirit. This is true humility. It is desiring to be what God wishes us to be. It is honoring his fullness and his generosity. It is acknowledging the extent of blessing in reserve; estimating it as quite unlimitable, and therefore not confining ourselves to what others have had before us, but going up into the divine fullness, for far more than has ever yet been obtained even by the fullest.

4. QUIET EXPECTATION.

He speaks and acts like one who fully expected to get what he asked. Elijah had referred him to God for "the hard thing" he had asked; it was in God's hand alone. "It is not mine to give" (as if anticipating the Lord's words). Elisha owns the divine sovereignty, and is calm; but he realizes the divine love, and expects. He believes, and therefore does not make haste, but goes quietly on beside his master to see the end. He believes, and therefore he assures himself that God is not likely to be less gracious than his master, nor to deny him what Elijah would gladly give if he could. Let us believe! Have faith in God. Trust Him for much, for he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.

5. CONSCIOUS POSSESSION.

He accepts the sign: he sees the prophet caught up; he seizes his mantle, and returns by the way he came, conscious of having received the "double portion." He believes, and therefore he speaks and acts. The sign promised has been given; can he doubt that the thing promised is also given? He may have nothing new in feeling to corroborate it, but that does not matter. He has it in simple faith in the bare word of the true God. The "double portion" is mine, he says to himself; and he goes back to exercise his prophet calling, in the calm consciousness of possessing more than his master did. What is Jordan to him now? A stroke of the mantle divides it; and from now on his life is to be one of mighty and gracious miracle. Let us speak and act as men who believe that God

fulfills His word to us. Let us trust that word when we use it. There is more in it than in Elijah's mantle. It is living and divine. Let us not blunt or deaden it by our want of confidence in its power.

LESSON 32

GOD'S DEALING WITH SIN AND THE SINNER

"Er, the first-born of Judah, was evil in the sight of the Lord, and he slew him." – 1 Chronicles 2:3

HERE we have, in one brief sentence, a statement of the way in which God deals with sin and the sinner. It is the repetition of a verse in Genesis, in a very unlikely place, in the midst of names and genealogies; God showing us the stress He lays on it. It is not for nothing that He repeats it. Such clauses as this, flung in apparently by chance, or what is called the transcriber's taste, are full of meaning. This certainly contains a very distinct and awful utterance.

Looking at it generally, we may say that it brings out, in a very outstanding and unambiguous form, such things as these:

1. GOD'S ESTIMATE OF SIN.

It differs widely from man's. It is one of condemnation. It is not simply disease, or misfortune, or an accidental deviation from the straight line; but guilt, which must be reckoned for according to unchangeable law. Sin, in the divine judgment, is not something vague, and loose, and shadowy, but well-defined and substantial. It is not a thing of sentiment or feeling, but a thing to be determined by the sharp test of unchanging law, law interpreted by an inflexible tribunal, and applied by an infinitely righteous Judge, without respect of persons; without fear, or favor, or partiality; without the remotest risk of mistake, or possibility of miscarriage of justice.

2. GOD'S TREATMENT OF SIN.

He does not merely pronounce a sentence or verdict, without meaning to carry it out. His deeds correspond with his words. He hates sin; He tells us this; He treats it accordingly. His treatment of it is

(1.) Prompt. Though he does bear with the sinner, yet this patience is not at variance with His promptness. He is both patient and prompt; yet is he not hasty. It does not take him unawares, nor show him as if at a loss how to deal with it. He is always ready to meet it and deal

with it, whether open or secret, greater or less.

(2.) Decided. He does not trifle with it, as if undecided how to proceed, or hesitating as to what sentence to pronounce. There may be, for wise and gracious reasons, some delay; but the delay does not arise from any want of decision, any changeableness or instability. He is altogether decided in words and ways. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?"

(3.) Severe. "The Lord slew him"; that is, struck him down, cut him off by a violent death. He did not die the death of men, but perished like Korah. God made a fearful example of him before the eyes of his brethren; though what it was we do not know. When God arises to smite, he is infinitely terrible in his vengeance. He is in earnest; and he punishes in earnest, when his wrath is kindled but a little.

(4.) Watchful. His eye is on the wicked, his eyelids try the children of men. Nothing escapes him. No sin, however small, is overlooked. Though fury is not in him, yet he is watchful. His eyes are as a flame of fire.

But it is not merely sin that God would have us consider here. It is the sinner specifically. For this non-information as to the sin (we are not told what the sin was) seems to be for the purpose of making prominent the sinner. And then the restraint as to the personal history of the sinner, fixes our eye on the other circumstances brought out in relief.

He is a first-born son. To him would pertain peculiar honor, and in him would center peculiar expectation. Yet he is slain – slain by God. How often do we find the natural order broken in upon, and human hope frustrated! It was so in Cain; it was so in Esau. Sin breaks up all order, and disappoints all hope. Were it not for sin, the river of human order (family and social) would flow on undisturbed.

He is the first-born of Judah. "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise." Judah, in God's purpose, is already the royal tribe; and this sinner, slain by God for his wickedness, is the first of the royal line, the first link in Messiah's royal chain. As Esau and Reuben had been set aside because of their sin, so is Er. Sin breaks the line; and the blow that severs it is dealt by God himself. "God slew him," because "he was wicked in the sight of the Lord." And if anyone says, "Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will?" our answer is, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

Yes, God is not afraid to break Messiah's line. He can rectify the breakage in His own way, but rather than that sin should go unpunished, He does not hesitate to break that line; to set aside Judah's first-born. So in finitely does God hate sin!

But there is something yet more remarkable. The broken link was to be refastened by the permission of sin as great as that which had broken it: the triple sin, first of Onan, then of Judah, then of Tamar! How mysterious! "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" What a strange fragment of human history is this breaking and this mending of Messiah's royal line! "Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" See how He hates sin; how He smites the sinner; how He does not spare even the first-born of Messiah's tribe! Yet see how His purpose stands! And see how He can make use of sin for remedying the breaches which sin makes! What a God is ours! So righteous, so wise, so powerful, so loving and gracious!

But how terrible the lesson regarding sin! God cannot pass it by. On whosoever it is found, it must be punished. Even when God's purpose is to remedy it, it must be punished; first punished before it can be remedied, lest men should make light of it, or think that God is trifling with it.

Yes; and when sin is at last found (though but by imputation) upon His well-beloved Son, it must be punished.

He must die. Yet He dies only to live; and he lives that we may live also. Judah's royal Son, David's Lord, is our Redeemer from sin.

Jesus, the true "first-born of Judah," he whom "his Brethren shall praise," was "made sin for us;" though not "evil in the sight of the Lord," but good, his beloved Son, "in whom he is well pleased," he was treated as evil, and slain of the Lord; "made a curse for us," though he was the blessed One; for "it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief." Thus He takes our evil as if it were His own; and we get His good as if it were our own. God dealt with Him on our account as if He were evil, not good; God deals with us on account of Him as if we were good and not evil. God slew Him, that He might not slay us. God condemned Him that He might pardon us. We listen to God's testimony concerning Him, and, in listening, we drink in the everlasting life.

Nor only life, but glory; royal glory. For in receiving that testimony we

are grafted into Judah's royal line. We become part of "the church of the first-born." We inherit a kingdom. Ours is David's palace, and David's city, and David's heritage. Ours is the better Canaan; the New Jerusalem; the throne and crown of the Son of God. We are joint-heirs with Him in His royal glory; sharers in His holy reign.

LESSON 33

GOD FINDING A RESTING-PLACE

1 Chronicles 21:1-30

THERE is something very peculiar about this fragment or episode of Israel's history. It is abrupt, and in a manner isolated, though not wholly so. It has also some very remarkable points about it. It is the introduction to the history of the temple. It shows the way in which David was led to Moriah as the temple site, and to Oman's thrashing-floor as the place for the altar of burnt-offering. It was through David's sin and punishment that God pointed out the "rest" which He had chosen, and the spot where He had purposed to place His name (2 Chron. 3:1). Accordingly God overrules human sin; indeed, takes occasion from it to display His grace. It was their king's sin that was the link between Israel and Moriah, between Israel and the temple, between Israel and the place of burnt-offering. Strange, but suitable and striking. It is sin that is, in one sense, the link, or at least the point, of contact between us and Jesus.

1. THERE IS PECULIARITY ABOUT THE SPOT.

It was the place of division between death and life, between condemnation and pardon, between pestilence and health. All up to this point was judgment; but here the sword stayed. This hill, this thrashing-floor, stood between the living and the dead. Such is really the character of the temple and the altar. Here life begins, and death is stayed. All up to this is death and vengeance; that temple was the shield of the world.

2. THE SPOT WHERE THE PLAGUE STAYED WAS GENTILE, NOT JEWISH GROUND.

It was the property of a Jebusite the last heir of the Jebusite kings (2 Sam. 24:23, "Araunah the king"); perhaps of Melchizedek; so that Moriah passes from Melchizedek to David. It was on Jebusite or Gentile ground that the angel of judgment sheathed his sword, and Israel's temple was erected. How much of that temple was Gentile, not Jewish! The ground, the cedars, the gold, and silver, and brass (1 Chron. 18:7; 1 Chron. 18:11), the workmen were Gentile; all but the stones, which were Jewish. Israel was therefore to learn that the Gentile had an interest in these courts. The Gentile could say, That rock is mine, that gold is mine, that cedar-wood is mine, that workman-ship is mine. Yes; in that temple all nations meet with one another, and meet with God. One in Christ, was the

teaching of the temple, as well as of the cross.

3. IT WAS IN CONNECTION WITH THE NUMBERING OF ISRAEL THAT THE TEMPLE-SITE CAME TO BE FIXED.

God's special promise to Abraham was that his seed should be as the sand of the sea and the stars of heaven; and now, when this promise is abused, and made a minister of pride, the judgment comes because of it; and yet, out of the judgment comes the voice which says, "This is my rest." The point of the destroying sword (not a voice from the glory) marks the temple; its flash reveals the long-appointed spot. That temple was to be a seal and pledge of Israel's numbers without number "the fountain of Israel."

4. IT WAS IN CONNECTION WITH THE COMMON OCCUPATIONS OF LIFE THAT THIS REVELATION OF THE TEMPLE-SITE WAS MADE.

"Oman and his sons were thrashing wheat" at the time when the angel came, and his sword stayed at the thrashing-floor. They had no share in David's sin and Israel's punishment, and they were not alarmed at the pestilence. They were not clad in sackcloth, like David and the elders. They were not on their knees, but engaged in the common duties of the day. God finds them at the thrashing-floor, and does not blame them. Indeed, He honors them and their employment; He honors that piece of ground where they were working, by turning it from a thrashing-floor into an altar. Let no man be ashamed of his honest trade, or think that God will not meet with him in the midst of it. Oman's flail was not a mean thing in the eyes of God.

5. THIS GROUND WAS BOUGHT AT ITS PRICE BY DAVID FOR ISRAEL.

There are only two spots which in this way passed by purchase into Jewish hands, Machpelah and Moriah, the one for burial-place, the other for a temple; the one bought by Abraham, the other by David. Of all the rest of the land Israel took possession, as God's gift, without money and without price. Strange that, for a spot on which to fix the symbols of resurrection and reconciliation, Israel (in the persons of Abraham and David) must pay the full price! As if to remind them that, in both cases, it was by ransom that the blessing was reached "a ransom for the sins of

many," "I will ransom them from the grave."

6. THIS FIXING OF THE TEMPLE-SITE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE TABERNACLE, OR THE ARK, OR THE PRIESTHOOD, OR THE URIM AND THUMMIM.

There was a break between them. The ark was on Zion, and the tabernacle (at this time) was at Gibeon, and it was not to the high priest that God made this new revelation, but to David, and Gad, and the elders of Israel. There was much in the temple that was a repetition or fuller development of the tabernacle, there was much in it that was new. The tabernacle was linked with Levi; the temple, in great measure, with Judah. It is the king, not the priest, that builds the house. God asks the help of David, and Solomon, and Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel, and such civil governors in the maintenance of His worship. Their giving it honors them, and defiles not the temple of God. God, in his sovereignty, led the ark about to Gilgal, Shiloh, Kirjath-jearim, Zion; and now that His purpose is served, He sets it aside, and chooses a new site for His place of worship; and that place is no longer a tent, but a temple; no longer connected with priesthood only, but with royalty as well; no longer frail and moveable, like a traveler, but fixed and unchanging, type of the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Such is the end of the tabernacle-age. It began with Moses and ended with David. It began with Sinai and ended with Zion. It began with the thunder of the burning mountain and ended with the pestilence and the devouring sword. A wondrous mixture all throughout of mercy and of judgment!

The temple-age ended in more awful judgment the desolation of temple, and city, and people. For man is always treasuring up wrath against himself and ripening for the final stroke, "Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse." "The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

LESSON 34

THE MORIAH GROUP

1 Chronicles 21:1-30

WE have taken up some general aspects of this narrative, chiefly in connection with the temple and Moriah; let us look at it from another point of view. Let us see the different characters or persons in it. Each comes out in a peculiar way.

1. SATAN.

He is very explicitly spoken of here, as in Job and elsewhere, as a person, a true being, not an influence. He is connected with earth; not with its heathen kingdoms only, but with Judea. He is not only in Babylon, but in Jerusalem; he has access not only to Nebuchadnezzar, or Herod, or Nero, but to David. He is watchful; he lies in wait for opportunities. He hated man at first in Paradise. He hates David; he hates Israel; he hates God. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil walketh about. He is powerful, cunning, subtle. He is that old serpent, the dragon, the devil, Satan. He will go on with his wiles and malice till the Lord comes to bind him.

2. DAVID.

He is a man of God, yet of like passion; with others; exposed to Satan. Mark (1.) his sin: pride, ambition, self-aggrandizing, like Nebuchadnezzar, "Is not this great Babylon?" (2.) His repentance (ver. 8): his conscience is touched; he cries out of his "iniquity" and "foolishness," even before the message of judgment came. (3.) His chastisement and humiliation: he is smitten in the very point of his pride; Israel's numbers; he clothes himself with sackcloth, and falls down before God. (4.) His alarm (ver. 30): he knows not what to do, the tabernacle is in Gibeon, with the altar of burnt-offering; what is he to do? The sword is between him and it; and besides, it is busy at work, and he has no time to go to Gibeon. (5.) His forgiveness (ver. 26); he cannot go to God, but God comes to him to the spot where he is. He answers his sacrifice by fire; this is forgiveness and acceptance. All is well; the light of God's countenance has returned; the blood of the burnt-offering has done its reconciling work; and on that spot where the blood was shed and the fire came down, Israel's daily propitiation was to be offered up in all days to come.

3. JOAB.

He is a rough warrior, often rude in speech and stern in deed. But he is a man of faith. He knows the law of the Lord, and he trembles at his word. He knows that, for certain ends, it was a right thing to number Israel; but here he sees this turned into evil, and used to cherish pride. He remonstrates. His conscience is sensitive in this matter. He sees the sin and the danger. He is bold also, not fearing the wrath of the king; but he is obedient also. We have here the bright side of Joab's character, and learn to think well of him, not only as one of David's mighty men, but as a man of faith and conscience.

4. GAD.

He and Nathan were David's seers, his divine counselors, two of his statesmen. It does not appear that David consulted Gad about this numbering; or, if he did, he did not heed his advice any more than that of Joab. But now Gad is sent from God to the king. He was, no doubt, a man in communion with God, and was waiting to know the divine will in secret. God comes to him, and gives him his message. It is a twofold one. (1.) Judgment (ver. 10): offering the king his choice of woes. (2.) Of mercy (ver. 18): commanding the altar to be built, a symbol of divine pacification, forgiveness for David and for Israel through the blood.

5. THE ELDERS (v. 16).

They acknowledge the stroke and the sin: "It is the Lord." They clothe themselves in sackcloth, they fall upon their faces. So far as we know, they had not shared David's sin, yet they at once place themselves by his side in confession and humiliation. David had sinned (ver. 8), Israel had sinned (2 Sam. 24:1). They identify themselves with both. It is in this way that we should take up a ruler's sin, or a brother's sin, or a nation's sin; not displaying it abroad in private gossip, or in the newspapers, but taking it on ourselves, and carrying it to God.

6. OMAN.

A Gentile, a Jebusite, a king (2 Sam. 24:23), owner of Moriah. He is quietly working with his sons, apparently ignorant of what was going on, till he is alarmed by the angel (ver. 20), and astonished by David's visit. He was a believing man, acknowledging not the gods of the Jebusites, but the Lord God of Israel; a generous man, handing over to David freely his own ancestral possessions. He is honored by God; his land is honored. He

loses his property in the land, but for a marvelous honor. The history of his thrashing-floor is interesting; probably it is the great rock, to this day, under the great mosque. In the temple, in the altar, in the rock, Oman is held in everlasting remembrance.

7. THE ANGEL.

There are specifically three destroying angels mentioned in the Old Testament: he who was sent to Egypt to inflict the plagues; he who was sent to the Assyrian host to slay its myriads; he who was sent to Israel to slay the 70,000. He is the messenger of wrath and vengeance; he comes directly from God; he is like one of those seven spoken of in the Revelation, that sound the trumpets, or of those who pour out the vials; or like him who launched the symbolic millstone against Babylon the great. Yet, in the case before us, he utters mercy as well as inflicts judgment. He is terrible in his might; yet he bears the message of forgiveness, the forgiveness of Him who is able to save and to destroy.

8. GOD HIMSELF.

He shows himself as the hater of sin, and its avenger, even in his saints. He has a watchful eye over all his people, to bless and to chasten. He has Satan in control, and uses him at pleasure. He has angels in command, and sends them on errands of judgment and mercy. He is holy and righteous, yet pitiful and gracious, not only to Jerusalem, but even to Nineveh. He smites, yet he spares. He chastises, yet he blesses. His tender mercies are over all his works. He has no pleasure in the death of the sinner. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

LESSON 35

DIVERSE KINDS OF CONSCIENCE

"So did not I, because of the fear of God." – Nehemiah 5:15

WHEN Joseph was dealing with his brethren he said, "This do, and live; for I fear God" (Gen. 42:18). Such was Joseph's motive. When Colonel Gardiner was challenged to fight a duel, he answered, "I fear sinning; you know I do not test fighting." Such was his motive. So when Nehemiah kept aloof from the evil ways of others, he gave his reason, "So did not I, because of the fear of God." Here, then, is Nehemiah's principle of action, both in what he did and in what he did not do. The fear of God. This was the one thing that kept him right and prevented his turning aside to the right or left. Of the unrighteous it is said, The fear of God is not before his eyes; of the righteous, The fear of God is before his eyes. This is the great feature of difference between the two. It was this that operated, and influenced all his proceedings, that molded his life. He was, as we say, a God-fearing man; and he showed this in what he did and in what he did not do. He was conscientious, not only as to actual duties, but as to responsibilities.

Here then we have true conscientiousness; not merely natural uprightness of character, but the desire to have a conscience void of offense towards God and man. It is conscientiousness arising from the sense of God's presence, the wish to please Him, the fear of offending Him, the desire to do all that is well-pleasing in His sight. As the love of Christ constrains, so the fear of God makes conscientious.

Are we thoroughly conscientious? Is our conscience constantly at work? Not in the spirit of bondage or terror, but in that child-like gentleness and tenderness of conscience that desires to have God's approbation in everything we do and every word we speak. What a regulator to our life and conscience would be this fear of God! Let us consider the different spheres and operations of conscience. There is,

1. THE RELIGIOUS CONSCIENCE.

By this I mean the conscience exercising itself in the things of religion, in religious belief and actions. In our dealings with God, in the service of God, in our testimony for God, let us be thoroughly conscientious, not formal, superficial, perfunctory, but conscientious. If I act religiously simply because others do so, or because it involves my good name, or

because of habit, I am not acting conscientiously. Let our religion mold our conscience, and let our conscience penetrate and pervade our religion. I do not merely mean that a religious man should be a conscientious man, but that he should carry his conscientiousness into all that concerns religion. He should be alive, not only to duty but to responsibility.

2. THE SECULAR CONSCIENCE.

Though not of the world, we are still in the world. We are coming into contact with the world in public and private every hour of our lives. Every movement of our daily life comes, more or less, into contact with the world; it may be collision, or it may be contact and mutual help in common things; in all these let us be thoroughly conscientious, in what we do or in what we abstain from doing. Never let the world say of us, in reference to either word or deed, There goes a religious man without a conscience. In all secular and social things let us manifest a conscientious spirit, and show to others that the fear of God is before our eyes. Let that fear regulate our daily interaction and walk. Let a sense of responsibility toward God and our fellow men be ever on edge.

3. THE COMMERCIAL CONSCIENCE.

By this I mean conscience throwing itself into all our business transactions, our buying or our selling, our giving or receiving, our bargains, our speculations, whether merchant, lawyer, banker, farmer, tradesman, mechanic, or whatever our worldly calling may be. Let us take counsel with conscience continually. Let the fear of God be before our eyes in the counting-house, the shop, the warehouse, the market, or wherever our calling may place us. Hard-driven bargains, advantage taken of men's necessities, grinding of the poor, over-charges, unjust measures, dishonest statements as to goods sold or purchased, these are not things into which conscience can enter. Let every man of business, on whatever scale, be out and out conscientious, having the fear of God before his eyes.

4. THE FAMILY CONSCIENCE.

Into each circle of life, outer and inner, conscience must enter. The fear of God must reign in the family. We must be conscientious in our family dealings, making each member of it feel that we are acting in the fear of God. Let us be conscientious in our family rules, at our family table, in our treatment of our children, and in their education. Be conscientious with them and before them. Never let them say that we do an

unconscientious deed. Conscience says to each father and mother, Train up your child in the way he should go. Oh, be conscientious with your children! They know what conscience is, how conscience operates and shows itself. Let the fear of God be stamped on all family arrangements. Servants, be conscientious to your masters, and masters, to your servants.

5. THE PRIVATE CONSCIENCE.

I must make conscience of all my individually private actions. I must be conscientious in all personal things, when alone, unheard, unseen. I must be conscientious in my closet as well as in my family. I must be conscientious about my solitary, hidden actions. The fear of God must fill every chamber of my heart. I must be upright before myself and before God.

6. THE LOCAL CONSCIENCE.

I must be conscientious everywhere, at home or abroad. I must carry my conscience with me when I travel, just as when I was at home. Ought not a Christian to carry his conscience into every place, and when tempted to do something abroad that he would not do at home, be able to say, "I did not do it, because of the fear of God."

Cultivate a tender conscience, an enlightened conscience, a conscience void of offense; not morbid, or diseased, or crooked, or one-sided, or censorious, or condescending, or proud. But simple, and bold, and sensitive. Beware of a blunted or seared conscience. Shun compromises where principle is concerned; they always leave a stain upon the conscience. Let the fear of God reign in you always and everywhere. Beware of the fear of man. Cultivate the fear of God. The gospel, as well as the law, makes demands on your conscience. Conscience speaks to you in the name of Jesus Christ as well as in that of God.

LESSON 36

THE SOUL TURNING FROM MAN TO GOD

"Behold now, I have ordered my cause; I know that I shall be justified. Who is he that will plead with me? for now, if I hold my tongue, I shall give up the ghost." – Job 13:18-19

THIS is the utterance of a justified man, and of one who knew that he was justified, and was prepared to defend his position as such against all accusers.

Job's declaration here may primarily be the assertion of his innocence against the accusations of his friends. But we may use it for something beyond this.

We do great injustice to the Old Testament saints and to their privileges, and no less so to the God who made them what they were, when we conceive of them as possessing an imperfect justification, or an imperfect and uncertain knowledge of their justification. Paul's declaration was explicit on this point: "I know whom I have believed"; and yet it was not a jot more explicit than that of Job: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." When Paul said, "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?" he was only speaking what Job had spoken ages before: "I know that I shall be justified. Who is he that will plead with me?"

In connection with the words of our text, let us note the following passages: Psa. 32:1; Psa. 32:5, Isa. 50:7-9; Isa. 51:12, Rom. 8:31; Rom. 8:34, 1 John 1:9. In all these we have the same truth, the same tone, the same confidence, the same assurance, and the same source or channel for the flowing of all these into the soul. The old and the new are alike. We cannot say either the old is better or the new is better; both are good, and both are the same. In both we have the utterance of the one creed of the church, and the voice of the one Spirit, the Spirit of adoption, through the one Redeemer.

In our text (along with the context on both sides), we have the expression of an old saint's feelings in reference to man and to God. He has no hope from man, but he has all hope from God. One would have expected the opposite. Imperfect man might be expected to bear with an imperfect fellow man; but can a perfect God be expected to do this? Yet it is on

God that he falls back; and the infinitely holy, all-searching God is felt to be a surer refuge for a sinner than unholy, sin-excusing man. Such must be the spirit of our dealings with God. His holiness and His omniscience are not only no discouragements, but the opposite. He knows the very worst of us, and He hates it; yet He pities us. We cannot tell Him worse of ourselves than He knows already. And is not this encouragement! Man's narrow heart makes us despair of him; God's infinite heart gives us hope. Have we not often been comforted with the thought that God knew us fully? Let us then mark the feelings or attitude of a saint towards God.

1. MISCONFIDENCE.

"I know that I shall be justified." It is no mere hope, or peradventure; it is a certainty. It is of this that Paul speaks, "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast." This was the attitude of Old Testament saints, much more that of New. It is the feeling of the child; it is simple trustfulness, for everything, beginning with pardon.

2. IT IS CONFIDENCE AS A SINNER.

Job speaks as a sinner, simply as such, not as a better man than others. He goes to God simply as such; and he trusts as such. He realizes this blessed truth that a man's evil is no reason for distrusting God. When Adam fled from God, he did not know this; he thought that his sin was a reason for distrusting and flying from God, till God taught him differently, and showed him what grace was.

3. IT IS CONFIDENCE ARISING FROM GOD'S CHARACTER ALONE.

He has looked into the face of God, and learned there that a sinner may trust Him, just because of what He is; indeed, that a sinner can only glorify Him by trusting Him because of what He is. It is not only because of His grace that He trusts; but because of His holiness and power; for these are no longer against the sinner; but on his side. Everything in God's character has by the cross of Christ been turned into a reason for trusting Him. The more man knows of Him the more he trusts. Trust is the natural and inseparable response of the soul to the divine revelation of the character of God. It is not what man sees in himself, of his good deeds or good feelings, of his graces, or his repentance, or his regeneration, or his faith; but what he sees in God, that calls out confidence.

4. IT IS CONFIDENCE OF PERSONAL JUSTIFICATION.

"I know that I shall be justified." It is no vague confidence in some unknown God; some sentimental trust in God's universal fatherhood, or mankind's universal sonship. It is of personal justification that he speaks; thus acknowledging personal condemnation in the first place; and then, as the result of a judicial act, personal justification. It is of this that the whole Bible speaks; it is this that the cross seals to us. This is not a state in which we are born; but into which we come by believing in Him who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. Do you know this? Is this the beginning of your religion, the starting-point of your heavenward course?

5. IT IS CONFIDENCE IN SPITE OF ALL ACCUSERS.

From verse 20 to verse 27 Job is pleading with God, confessing sin, and uttering confidence. In verse 28, and the next chapter, he turns to man as his accuser. Who is he? A man that shall die. What matter his accusations? Let the whole world condemn, what does it matter? Shall this shake a confidence resting on the word and name of God? Let Satan and conscience accuse; shall they shake a confidence which comes from above? Let their charges be all true, what of this? "Who is he that condemneth?" "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" We plead guilty to the accusations, but not with the less confidence do we claim an acquittal from the Judge, simply on the ground of what our Surety has done.

LESSON 37

MAN'S DISLIKE OF A PRESENT GOD

"They say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." – Job 21:14

THE men who speak this way are not atheists. They do not say there is no God. They may be scoffers, blasphemers, ungodly, but they are not atheists. They whom Job describes are worldly men. The world, with its riches, its possessions, its pleasures, its friendships, is their all. They have nothing beyond it, and they do not wish anything beyond it. They are satisfied. They love the world, and are resolved to make the best of it that they can. When anything comes in between it and them, or threatens to prevent their enjoying it, such as pain, or sickness, or death, they thrust it away. They do not ask, whether the intervention may not, after all, be true and important; it mars their enjoyment of the world, and so must not be for a moment entertained.

In our text we have worldliness versus God. For it is worldliness that is here speaking out. It is not man contending against man because of injury or encroachment, it is not man protesting against pain, or mortality, or life's brevity, it is man protesting against God. God seems to him as a dark shadow overclouding all his joy. How is this?

(1.) Not because God has injured him. He does not pretend that any wrong has been done or threatened to be done. He does not speak as an injured man, nor plead against God because of injustice.

(2.) Not because God hates him. He has no reason to conclude such a thing, either from what God has said or done. He cannot point to any mark of hatred.

(3.) Not because God has interfered with his prosperity. He is evidently a prosperous man, mighty in power, neither is the rod of God upon him (verses 7 and 9). It is not because of these things that he says to God, Depart from us. Indeed, he does not hide his reason altogether, "we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." He has no liking for God or his ways, he looks on him as an obstruction, an unpleasant visitor, a dark cloud, a spoiler of his pleasure.

But these worldly men in Job's time were but a specimen of the men of many ages, our own as well as others. In these different ages we find a

variation in the feeling and in its expression. Sometimes there is more of infidelity in it, or even direct atheism, sometimes less. But in all there is a desire to get rid of God, God personally, though perhaps not God abstractly; to thrust him into a corner of his universe, where he will least disturb the children of men. In the present day we find this state of feeling widely spread and working, not only in the world but in the church. Men who call themselves Christians lend themselves to the outcry, "Depart from us." At the bottom of all this feeling is the love of the world. It is this that prompts men to seek to get rid of God.

1. THEY TRY TO GET RID OF GOD.

They tolerate Him far off, but not near. They tolerate a religion of uncertainty, but not one of certainty, or fellowship, or conscious nearness. They would let Him alone, if He would let them alone; but if not, they raise the cry, "Depart." An abstraction, a creed, a system of theology, they bear with, because it does not interfere with their worldliness; but God Himself can only be tolerated as a shadowy, impalpable, far distant being. To anything else they say, "depart."

2. THEY TRY TO GET RID OF HIS CHRIST.

Some superhuman being, such as Paganism delighted in, they tolerate; but not the Christ of God, the Word made flesh. A Christ that will assist them in their great endeavor to keep God at a distance they will admire and sing of; but the Christ that brings God near, that makes His love a reality, and His favor and forgiveness a certainty, they cannot tolerate.

3. THEY TRY TO GET RID OF HIS SPIRIT.

They dislike the supernatural, and do not wish to hear of a world outside their own, from which influences and operations are continually coming to modify things here, or transform men, or protest against sin. The Holy Spirit, as the special expression and representative of the supernatural and divine, in connection with man's nature and soul, they either refuse to believe in, or treat him as a mere influence.

4. THEY TRY TO GET RID OF HIS BOOK.

The Bible is God's visible representative and commissioner here. It is the silent protest in every house in favor of God. Therefore it is set aside by many, or only read for its poetry, its morality, its antiquity. To believe as little of it as possible is the object of multitudes; to cast doubt upon its

authenticity; to reject its inspiration, to treat it as not a book for this advanced age, these are the ways in which men are seeking to get rid of God's book.

5. THEY TRY TO GET RID OF HIS LAW.

They say it was not for us but for the Jews; they tell us that the morality of Socrates was higher than that of Moses; they (in a more refined fashion) speak of it as buried in the grave of Christ; so that we have got rid of its exactions and sanctions. No Sabbath for us; the law is dead! No restraint on us; the law is dead!

Thus the age tries to get rid of God. It does so, because it dreads Him; it has no relish for Him; His presence is a gloomy shadow; His nearness would interfere with all worldly schemes and pleasures. Therefore men say, "Depart." The old Pagans never said to Jupiter, Depart; for they looked on him as in sympathy with their sins, and lusts, and pleasure. But to the living and true God men say, Depart, because they feel that they cannot have both Him and their sins. They cannot clothe Him with the robes of their own worldliness.

Yet He has not departed. In love He lingers, seeking to bless. He knows the blank His departure makes, and that nothing can fill it. Therefore He lingers; yearning over the sons of men; entreating them to take Him for their portion and all.

LESSON 38

TRUE AND FALSE CONSOLATION

"How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood?" – Job 21:34

MAN needs consolation, "man that is born to trouble;" especially a man in Job's condition; overwhelmed with calamity. Not one day's consolation, but many; indeed, constant; for, what between the little cares and the large sorrows of life, its ripples, and its waves, and its breakers, there is no day exempt from trouble. Life has many burdens, heavy or light. But much depends,

1. CONSOLATION DEPENDS...

(1.) On the state of mind in which the misfortune finds us, or produces in us. Where irritation, murmuring, rebellion, and unbelief prevail, it is idle to speak of consolation. We are not in a fit state to receive it. We repel the hand and the medicine of the physician.

(2.) On the persons who administer it. If they are not thoroughly trusted or respected; if they are suspected of selfishness, or insincerity, or unkindness, their words are useless, perhaps worse.

(3.) On the kind of consolation administered. Sometimes it is hastily and thoughtlessly poured in, or rather flung at us, as water is hastily snatched up and flung over a flame to extinguish it. Sometimes the most indiscriminate statements are made, and commonplace maxims uttered, as if anything would suit anybody, or everything would suit everybody.

Much depends on these three things; as much on the last as any. In regard to this let us mark what consolation is not; for man is skillful in administering false consolation.

2. WHAT CONSOLATION IS NOT.

(1.) Sentimental sayings are not consolation. These are often poured into the ears of sorrow; but they are not medicine; they are only the relief found in the intoxicating glass. Fine figures, poetical rhapsodies about the sorrows of life, these are dangerous things, they soothe for an hour, and that is all.

(2.) Appeals to natural self-love will not do. How commonly do we hear a professed comforter reminding a sufferer of the multitude of his sorrows in order to make him feel as a martyr. All that appeals to is pride, vanity, self, and is worse than vain.

(3.) Taking refuge in fatalism will not do. "We must submit," is the frequent language of the sufferer. This is not faith, but unbelief. It is man feeling himself overpowered by a hand stronger than his own; not falling back on love and wisdom.

(4.) Ascribing all to our own desert. Though there is truth in this, yet the way in which it is generally done is wrong. "If I had not deserved it, it would not have come." If we begin in this way, where shall we end? Our deservings! What is their measure? Hell! Let us be thankful that it is not according to our deservings that sorrow comes, but on a far higher principle. A sorrow may point to the kind of sin, or the seat of sin, but no sorrow of ours can measure the desert of sin; that is measured by the cross and sorrow of Christ alone.

(5.) Indulging one's self in pleasure will not do. This is the most wretched and perilous of opiates, it is "strong drink," "mixed wine," which ruins the soul while it makes us for a few hours forgetful of our sorrow. It is not in pleasure that we are to drown our grief.

There is a vast difference between real consolation and unreal; between the true and the vain. It is of this that Job speaks. He needed consolation; no man has ever needed it more. He was thirsting for it. His friends came to administer it; but they failed. How and why? Because "in their answers there was falsehood." It was not the truth which they administered. There can be no real consolation, then, which is not founded upon the truth. It is the truth that comforts. There can be no consolation in a falsehood. A lie may heal our hurt slightly, but not effectually. The water of truth from the cup of truth can alone refresh, and heal, and console. That cup of truth is ever full.

3. FOR REAL CONSOLATION TO TAKE PLACE

(1.) There must be the true interpretation of God's ways. We must see their meaning, and bearing on us; what it is in us that they point to; and what God's purpose is in sending the calamity. We have to deal honestly both with ourselves and with God, asking what, if anything, is God condemning in me? What sin might He be seeking to remove?

What truth to communicate? What scripture to illustrate?

(2.) There must be the true understanding and discrimination of our circumstances. We must know ourselves; and so apply well each dealing of the divine hand; tracing out the aim of each blow or each burden. The sinner must not take hold of words that suit only the saint. There are words for all. Let us apply wisely; else the consolation will be vain.

(3.) There must be the right knowledge of God's character. No "consolation" or "answer" can be of any use which is not made to spring out of this. God is wise, God is great, God is holy, God is love. We must keep these things in mind in every dispensation.

It is the amount of truth we speak that is the measure of the consolation imparted. It is not strong language nor soothing words that will do. Hence, in the day of trouble we should deal much with Scripture and its words. Then we are on sure ground. God's words are mighty for consolation; for he is the God of all consolation. The exhibition of Christ and his fullness is true consolation. The presentation of the Spirit as the Comforter, the Spirit and the Spirit's love, holy love, this is true consolation. At all times administer only truth, not error; but especially in the day of sorrow. Falsehood is not consolation; it is not peace; it is not medicine, but poison. Truth, the truth of God, that is consolation and strength.

LESSON 39

GAIN AND LOSS FOR ETERNITY

"For that is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul." – Job 27:8

THE word "hypocrite" means properly the "ungodly," and corresponds to the "wicked" and "unrighteous" of whom Job was speaking. To this passage, probably, our Lord refers when he asks, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his soul?" Job asks, What becomes of the vain hope of the ungodly when this life is done? Whatever they may have of gain here, all is loss hereafter. This may be their "time to get," but that shall be their "time to lose." And their loss is not for a day, but forever.

It is not all gain with the godly here. Paul says, "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things." He who casts in his lot with the people of God must prepare for loss as well as gain. He must count the cost beforehand, and be ready to pay it when the day comes for payment. There is the taking up of our cross and the denying of self, and forsaking all. He loses, (1.) This world: whatever may be in it of pleasure, or satisfaction, or pomp, or fun, he loses; for he cannot have both worlds; (2.) his name: perhaps he stood high in reputation with the men of this world, and had a name for many things; this he loses, for his name is cast out as evil; (3.) his religion: for the likelihood is that he had a sort of religion or religiousness like Saul of Tarsus; all this past religion of his must be left behind, it will serve him no more; (4.) his possessions: this may not always be demanded to the full extent, as in days of persecution; but still he must be prepared to part with everything; counting it no more his own.

But his "hope" is never lost. He is "saved by hope"; his eye is on the "things hoped for"; "he abounds in hope." This well never runs dry. This treasure-house is never exhausted. Whatever of darkness there may rest on his present, his future brightens with "hope"; and that hope "maketh not ashamed"; it contains the incorruptible and everlasting. And even now he has abundant compensation for loss and trial.

Not so the "ungodly." He has indeed a "hope," a hope of being saved, or, at least, of not being lost; a hope of going to heaven, or, at least, of not going to hell. But his hope is not "the good hope through grace." It is a self-originated hope; an unscriptural hope; a groundless and unreasonable

hope; a fallacious hope; a hope that will not be sickness proof, nor deathbed proof; or if it is, it perishes at death; it is wrapped up in his shroud, and buried in his grave; for in it there is no resurrection.

Thus the one thing which seemed gain to him, leaves him at death; and all is loss, utter, infinite, irreparable, eternal loss! For him there is no morning, but only night; night without a star. His losses cannot be enumerated or estimated; they are so many and so terrible. He loses such things as the following:

1. HIS SOUL.

I might say his body too; for if the man is lost, then soul and body are gone. But it is the soul that is the special and supreme loss. The loss of that which molders in the grave is after all subordinate, but the loss of that which cannot die is great beyond measure. He who has lost his soul is poor indeed. Yet in the case of the ungodly man that fearful loss is incurred. He loses his soul. Not that the soul perishes or is annihilated. That would be some relief to the poor doomed victim of sin. The soul is lost, but cannot die. The loss of the soul consists in eternal condemnation and ruin. All is gone for which the soul existed. It exists now only for woe. Life is no longer life, for the soul cannot enjoy it. All that constituted life, true life, in time or eternity, is gone. Life is now become worse than death, for the soul is lost; lost in darkness, woe, anguish, and an endless hell; lost from God, and goodness, and blessedness, and from all holy beings forever and ever.

2. HEAVEN.

The future state and place of blessedness has many names: a kingdom, an inheritance, a city, a new heaven. All of these are names of joy. "Heaven" is a noble and glorious name, embodying in it all that is excellent, and divine, and perfect. Its joy is perfect, its light is perfect, its holiness is perfect. Its songs are perfect, its service is perfect. It is day without night, it is the blessing without the curse. All this is lost to the ungodly. What a loss must a lost heaven be! To be shut out from such a kingdom, dispossessed of such an inheritance, indeed, made the heir of such sorrow and darkness, how infinitely woeful! Think, O man, amid all your losses, past or future, what a lost heaven must be! A lost kingdom, a lost city, a lost inheritance! Who can measure such a loss?

3. CHRIST.

Yes, Christ is lost, and this is the heaviest loss of all. None like it, so infinite and so irreparable. This is the loss of losses, the woe of woes. A lost Christ! What can equal that! This is the loss of the ungodly. This loss is great, (1.) Because of what Christ is in himself, the glorious Immanuel; (2.) Because of what he has done on the cross; (3.) Because of his love; (4.) Because of his sympathy, and fellowship, and consolation; (5.) Because of his reward. This loss is indeed unutterable. Men do not see this, or think of it. Yet it shall one day be felt. In hell it shall be realized as the loss of losses, that which makes the place of woe so unutterably woeful. "I might have had Christ," will the lost sinner say, "but I would not have him, and now he is gone forever; I cannot have him now. Instead of Christ, I have Satan; instead of heaven, hell."

Consider your losses, those who have not yet come to Christ! They are unspeakable and eternal. Look at them now, and prevent them. There is some little compensation now for such losses, in the world's pleasure, or lust, or wealth. There shall be no compensation then. It will be unmingled woe, a cup of undiluted, unsweetened gall and wormwood.

What a disappointment to you who have been hoping and hoping! To lie down with a false hope, and go up to the Judge expecting to be received! How dreadful the agony of such a disappointment!

It is not too late. Your soul is not lost, heaven is not yet lost, Christ is not yet lost. All may yet be won! The gate stands wide open; go in, go in! God's record stands still true concerning his Son; believe it and be saved.

LESSON 40

MAN'S MISCONSTRUCTION OF THE WORKS OF GOD

"By them judgeth he the people." – Job 36:31

THIS verse suggests Acts 14:17, "He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Both passages call on us to listen to the voice of God speaking to us through what are called "natural phenomena." By "judging" we understand more than inflicting judgment, more than sitting as judge, or sentencer, or executioner. It means "ruling" as well, wielding the scepter and governing. By people we specifically understand the gentile or idolatrous nations of the earth; or generally the inhabitants of earth. Two things are declared here; first, that God judges the nations; secondly, that he does so by the changes and occurrences of nature.

1. HE JUDGES THE PEOPLES (OR NATIONS).

This judging is not a thing of the past, or merely of the future; but of the present. He has been, and he is now "judging." Creation is past, the new creation is future, but governing is now. All are equally sure and true; and they who deny the present governing or the future interposition in the great day, might as well deny creation. God's connection with earth is as close and as direct now as ever.

Not so obvious or so visible, but quite as real. A thing does not need to be visible, or audible, or palpable in order to be direct and real. Many things are the latter which are not the former. The power of the silent and distant moon over the sea; of the atmosphere over all life; of the soul over the body in every movement: these are instances in point. Only God's connection with earth is more real and direct than these; for in Him we live and move and have our being. His purpose comes in contact with earth and its dwellers; not generally and by means of laws, but directly and minutely. His will, his voice, his hand, his arm, all come into contact with this world, as well as with all other worlds, the creation of his power. He has not left them alone. He sustains and rules as truly as he creates. Not for a moment does he let go his hold. He is the governor among the nations. He rules by his power forever; his eyes behold the nations. He doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven and

among the inhabitants of the earth. It is with no distant, unheeding God that we connect with; but with that God who fixes the bounds of our habitation, who counts our hairs, who feeds the ravens, notes a sparrow's death, clothes the lilies of the field. He is nearer to us than the nearest earthly object or being; more closely in contact with us than we are with one another. All other links are as nothing compared with this; they are threads, this is an unending chain.

2. HE JUDGES THE PEOPLE BY MEANS OF THE CHANGES OF NATURE.

We use "nature" for lack of a better word: we mean earth and sky with all their motions, and alternations, and transformations, great and small, all "natural phenomena" as they are called. These phenomena, or appearances, appear to us common things; by some ascribed to chance, by others to "laws of nature." Here they are ascribed directly to God. They are His voice by which He speaks to us, His finger by which He touches us, His rod by which He corrects us; His sword, by which He smites us. It seems to be the thought of many that in none of these can we or ought we to recognize, directly and specifically, the interposition of God; that it is fanaticism to interpret them so as to make them special messengers of God to us. But the words before us are very explicit, "by them judgeth he the people." The things by which He is here said to judge the people, are the common things of the day and year, the rain, the clouds, the lightning, and such. He uses these as His voice in warning, or commanding, or chastising, or comforting. These common things do not come by chance, or at random, or by dead law, but go out from God as his messengers. Thus everything has a divine meaning and a heavenly voice. Let us listen and interpret and understand. Summer speaks to us with its green fields and fragrant gardens; winter speaks to us with its ice and snow and frost. By these God judges the people. The pestilence, the famine, the earthquake, the lightning, the storm, the shipwreck, the overthrow of kingdoms and kings. Each of these has a special message to the nations, and to each of us. Let us see God drawing near to us in them; showing His care and love, manifesting an unwearied concern for our welfare. Woe to us if we either misinterpret them, or refuse to interpret them at all. The common daily changes of personal or family life, all speak in the same way. Not only the sweeping calamity that carries off its hundreds, but the sickness, the pain, or the gentle indisposition, these have a voice to us. He that hath an ear, let him hear!

We separate God from creation, and so see nothing in it of divine life and power. We separate God from the changes of creation, and so find no

meaning in these. We separate God from the beautiful or the terrible, and so realize nothing in them that overawes, or attracts, or purifies, or comforts. We have so learned to separate between God and the works of God that we seem to imagine that they contradict each other. The fair sky, and the clear stream, and the green hills, all speak of divine goodness, and bring to us a gospel which can hardly be mistaken. But we have learned to deny the gracious meaning, and to say that all this beauty means nothing, and contains no message from God, and embodies no glad tidings of great joy.

This separation of God from His works is one of the awful features of human unbelief. How much more of Him should we know, were we to interpret His works aright, and hear His voice in each, whether in love or discipline. These skies of His are not bent over us in beauty without a meaning. These seas of His do not roll for nothing. These flowers of His are not fragrant and fair for nothing. They do not say to us, God is your enemy, He hates you; but God is your friend, He pities you, yearns over you, and wishes to make you happy. How full a gospel does creation preach to us, according to its kind and measure!

The separation of the works of God from His Word is another sad feature of human unbelief. Creation and inspiration are in harmony. The Bible does not contradict the works of God. It means what they mean; and they mean what it means. Each little part of both speaks out most intelligibly. God wishes to be understood in both. Men would misinterpret both; they try to discover as little of God as they can in both. Yet both preach the same gospel. In both we see the goodness of God leading to repentance; in both we discern the loving-kindness of the Lord. The fact that we sinners are out of hell is one gospel; that we who should have been in hell are dwellers on a fair and fruitful earth, is another; God in these ways showing that He has no pleasure in our death or misery, but in our life and joy.

LESSON 41

THE TWO CRIES AND THE TWO ANSWERS

"There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." – Psalms 4:6

THERE are two cries here – the cry of the sons of men, and the cry of the sons of God. They are very unlike. Yet they are both persistent. They go up unceasingly. Earth is full of them. Wherever you go, you hear either the one or the other. They are the cries of men like us; of men who have souls to fill; who know what sorrow is, and what joy is. The men who utter them are made by the same God; placed in the same world; heirs of a common mortality; moving on to one eternity. We find them often side by side; in one city, one village, one family. Not the Hindu using one cry, and the European the other; but intermingled; the two cries constantly going up from the same places.

1. THE CRY OF THE SONS OF MEN.

"Who will show us good." Let us mark what it is, and what it means.

(1.) It is the cry of emptiness. These sons of men feel that there is something lacking. They were not made for this perpetual hunger and thirst. They are empty, and therefore they cry. They are poor and needy; but find no supply.

(2.) It is the cry of weariness. They who utter it are seeking rest, but finding none; they labor and are heavy laden. They would prefer rest, but know not how or where. UNREST! This is their portion. Unrest here; sad prelude of the eternal unrest, the never-ending weariness.

(3.) It is the cry of darkness. All is darkness and blindness. They grope about, not knowing which way to look, or to turn; and they cry, show us, Show us something; for our eyes are blind; we have tried in vain to see.

(4.) It is the cry of helplessness. They have tried many expedients; tried to create good for themselves, or to get it from others; but in vain. They find themselves helpless.

(5.) It is the cry of earnestness. It comes forth often amid bitter tears and groans. Men are bent on being happy; they would do or give anything for happiness. They are mistaken, yet in earnest. They would take any good, if they could get it.

(6.) It is the cry of despair. Who, who, who? They have tried every one, everything. All in vain. They are emptier, hungrier, thirstier, sadder than at first.

(7.) It is a loud and universal cry. Many. Yes, the whole world. It is Esau's loud and bitter cry reverberating through the earth. It is the cry of the many, not of the few. The world is unhappy. It has no rest. It is thirsty, and knows not where to drink; it is hungry, and knows not where to find bread. It weeps, and knows not how to get its tears dried! Every man walks in a vain show; going about asking, Who will show me any good?

2. THE CRY OF THE SONS OF GOD.

Very different in all respects. They know what is written, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good."

(1.) It is the cry of the few, not of the many. For the sons of God are a little flock. One here, and another there; not like fields of grain, nor gardens full of flowers, but plants in a desert, a few scattered ones here and there.

(2.) It is a certain and definite cry. They know what they want, and how to get their want supplied. They do not grope about on all sides; they go straight to the source.

(3.) It is a cry to God. It is God alone in whom their hope is. They go straight to Him. Whom have I in heaven but thee? He is their portion and their all.

(4.) It is a cry for light. They have some light already, but they want more. We have a sun, but we need it daily; more and more sunshine!

(5.) It is a cry for light from the face of God. Light! Light from God! Light from the face of God. The light of God's countenance! This means that God was to gladden them with His favor and love, of which the kind smile of the countenance was the expression. Lift up the light of thy countenance on me, is our lifelong prayer!

(6.) It is a cry which will be answered. The cry of the sons of men goes up in vain. They speak to the rocks, and get merely the echo of their own voice. But this cry is heard; daily, constantly. Light streams down and into them. God's countenance is their sun. There is health in it, "healing in His beams." What a contrast between the two cries and the two answers!

O you sons of men, how long will you love vanity? How long will you dote upon this vain world, and worship it as your idol? How long will you treat its broken cisterns as if they were the fountains of living water? Oh, love not the world!

What will its good things profit in the day of the Lord? Will its pleasures cheer a death-bed, or brighten the gloom of the grave? What can the music and measure of the dance do for you when sickness comes, or the last trumpet sounds? Will that fancy dress of yours do for a shroud? Or will it suffice instead of "the fine linen which is the righteousness of the saints? How will these "revelings and banquetings" appear to you in the retrospect of time, still more in the retrospect of eternity? What will you think of your "idle words," your "foolish talking and jesting," your "filthy communication," your riotous laughter, your luxurious feasting, when you stand confronted with the last enemy, or before the Judge of all? You have gone from scene to scene, from gaiety to gaiety, from party to party, from vanity to vanity, from novel to novel, in the dreary emptiness of your poor aching hearts, crying, "Who will show us any good?" and when the end comes, what is your gain? Is it heaven, or is it hell? Is it joy, or is it woe?

LESSON 42

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S NAME

"They that know thy name will put their trust in Thee." – Psalms 9:10

THERE are three things here which sum up this passage, the name; the knowledge; the trust.

1. THE NAME.

A name is that which marks one man out from another, by which one man addresses another; and, in eastern lands and early days, which expresses the character or circumstances of the man to whom it belongs. Thus God's name marks him out; by it we address Him; it embodies His character. Thus He himself gives it, "God, God Elohim, merciful and gracious." It is this name that is written all over the Bible, but specifically exhibited in Christ Jesus, who came to declare to us the Father's name. It is a name

(1.) Of Greatness. God, God, Creator, El-Shaddai; all expressive of majesty and power and glory. The Lord God omnipotent.

(2.) Of Grace. It is the declaration of free love. "Merciful and gracious." He to whom it belongs must be the fountain-head of love. "God is love." In him is infinity of compassion and longsuffering.

(3.) Of Forgiveness. He pardons iniquity, transgression, and sin; all sin, great and small; there is forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared; forgiveness to the uttermost.

(4.) Of righteousness and holiness. It is holy love that is to be found in Him; righteous grace to the unrighteous; righteous pardon to the guilty. God's pity to the sinner is holy pity. It is as the Holy One that he loves, and pities, and blesses. It is a name revealing all that a sinner needs; unfolding the mind and heart of God; gathering into one glorious sun the light scattered over the universe, diffused throughout the Bible. It is the name of names; in it music, light, medicine, peace, assurance forever. The great and gracious character of God, thus embodied in a name, brought to a point, is made much more accessible, placed more within our reach and comprehension; pledged to us by the very fact that it has been deposited in a name. No man likes to dishonor his good name, to act inconsistently with his own

name, or the family name. And shall God not act consistently with His name? Shall He treat us in a way that shall contradict the name that He has taken to himself? When we plead that name and appeal to it, will He not immediately and cordially respond?

2. THE KNOWLEDGE.

For a thing like this to be of any use to us, we must know it. So long as it remains unknown, it is useless; as good as non-existent. The sun is of no use to me if I am shut out from its light.

Food is of no use to me if I do not know of its existence. So all the love of God is useless to the sinner, unless he knows it. The knowledge of it is that which introduces its blessings to the needy soul. Nothing more is needed, nothing less will do. This knowledge is not a price which we pay, nor a qualification by which we are fitted for blessing, nor a recommendation which invites God to bless us. It is simply the natural way of letting in the blessing, as opening our windows is the natural way of letting in the light. The child's knowledge that his father loves him makes him happy. The father's knowledge that his child has recovered from a deadly sickness, brings immediate relief. The criminal's knowledge that his sovereign has pardoned him, removes his burden. In all these cases, and those like it, it is the simple knowledge of what is good and pleasing that does the work, and we never think of puzzling ourselves with asking, But is my knowledge of a right kind? Is it of the quality and quantity that will secure blessing for me? As if our getting the benefit of good news depended upon a certain peculiar way of knowing them, on which peculiarity turned the whole virtue of the thing known. That is not how we deal with earthly love! It is not in this way that we conjure up difficulties and distinctions, and metaphysical questions, which can never be properly adjusted, and which, if they were adjusted, would leave us just where we were. For say what we like, knowledge is just knowledge, and not something else; knowing the love of a person is just knowing it, and not some mysterious act or feeling or combination of emotions which the poor man cannot fathom, and about which philosophers have wrangled for ages.

3. THE TRUST.

Such is God's name that it cannot be known without evoking trust; and the trust arising from this simple knowledge is the truest and most blessed of all. God's character is of such a kind as to call up confidence as soon as it is known by a sinner; and he who has no confidence in God, does not

yet know him or his name. If he knew it, he could not help trusting him. When we come into contact with a loveable object, we cannot help loving; when we come into contact with a trustworthy object, we cannot help trusting, unless we are persuaded that it is a false report which we have heard concerning this loveableness or this trustworthiness. The knowledge of the name of God is that which leads to trust. Hence we preach that name, that name of grace and love, of mercy and of truth! We bring true tidings concerning it; and we give evidence, in the death and resurrection of the Son of God, that these tidings are quite as true and as good as they profess to be. It is on the basis of "infallible proofs" that we rest our gospel. Our tidings are as sure as they are blessed.

LESSON 43

DELIVERANCE FROM DEEP WATERS

"He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters." –
Psalms 18:16

WE take these words as the expression, (1.) of David's experience; (2.) of Christ's experience; (3.) of every Christian's experience.

In all these we learn much of God; David's God; the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; our own God. For it is His character that is unfolded to us. He is the God of all grace; indeed, God is love; in Him there is help, and with Him is plenteous redemption; He it is that redeems Israel out of all his troubles. It is He who is above; it is He who sends from above; it is He who takes (lays hold of); it is He who draws, and that out of many waters. Such is the God with whom we have the pleasure to be in a relationship with! He is infinite in power and grace. To know Him is life eternal; to rest upon His love and power is the true strength and comfort of the soul! The knowledge of ourselves troubles and casts down; the knowledge of this God relieves and lifts up. The great use of knowing ourselves is, not that we may be qualified for receiving and being received by Him, but that we may become more and more dissatisfied with self, and more and more drawn to Him who is altogether unlike self, more and more emptied of everything; so that as empty vessels we may be in a state for containing Him and His fullness. For it is our emptiness that attracts and makes us suitable for His fullness; and it is in knowing self that we are: emptied of self. We decrease, He increases.

1. DAVID'S EXPERIENCE.

This whole psalm refers to this subject; and his whole life is an exemplification of the text. He was constantly in the deep and many waters, from the day that Samuel anointed him king. First Saul, then the Philistines, then Absalom, threatened to overwhelm him. They compassed him about; they raged against him; they poured their billows over him; till he seemed sinking in the waters; not once nor twice, but: many times. In each successive peril God drew near to save; He sent from above, He laid hold of him, He drew him out of many waters. God's love and power never failed. Low as David went down, they went down lower still. Whether as the young shepherd of Bethlehem he was exposed to any danger save that of the lion and the bear, we do not know; but no sooner is he named king than enemies arise; the floods assail him. That which we

should have expected to be the termination of trouble and danger, stirred these up, introduced him into conflict; raised the storm; drew the rage of enemies around. What could David have done, had it not been for God his God! His arm, His shield, His sword, they were his protection and deliverance.

2. MESSIAH'S EXPERIENCE.

These psalms of David are the psalms of the Son of David; and this psalm is especially His resurrection psalm. All His life He was exposed to foes. He was made to feel the wrath of God, as the bearer of our sins, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves, all thy waves and billows have gone over me." It was so during His life, as when He said, "Now is my soul troubled;" it was so in Gethsemane, when He said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;" it was so on the cross, when He cried, "My God;" it was so when He lay under the power of death. But "God sent from above, He took Him, He drew Him out of many waters." He "delivered Him because He delighted in Him." As our sin-bearer, our curse-bearer, our death-bearer, He had God's wrath poured upon Him. This was the depth out of which he was plucked by the Father's hand; and His deliverance is ours. It was as our Surety, our Substitute, that He was drawn out of many waters.

3. THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE.

By nature he is in these many waters, though at first he does not know it. "Under wrath" is the description of his condition; "the wrath of God abideth upon him." He is not alive to this. His eyes and ears are closed. He does not see, he does not hear the roaring waves of wrath. Like Jonah, he is asleep in the storm. When the Holy Spirit shows him where he is, and what he is, terrors seize him. He is overwhelmed, and does not know how to help himself. All help is vain. He looks upward, and sees him who was drawn out of many waters, and Him who drew Him. He remembers the words, Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. He appeals to that name; and the help comes down, and he is delivered, and hereafter his song of grateful joy is, "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters." So in after conflicts; so in daily troubles; so in times of sorrow; so on his bed of death; and so in the day when his body shall be delivered from death and the grave.

Accordingly he ascribes all to God, from first to last; the sending, the taking, the drawing; all are of God. Salvation is of the Lord. Of Him, and to Him, and through Him are all things. Yes, God saves! He does not help

us to save ourselves; He SAVES! However far down we may be; however deep the waters; however near the perishing, He can rescue! His arm is not shortened that it cannot save; nor waxed feeble that it should fail to grasp us or to draw us up. His is salvation to the uttermost; deliverance from the lowest hell.

All true religion must begin with salvation. God's hand must lay hold on us and lift us up. Untrue religion may begin in any way; and can go on without salvation, without pardon, without reconciliation, without any putting forth of the mighty power of God. But the true, the real, the divine, must begin with this conscious rescue, this plucking from the waves of wrath; and must, though perhaps with feeble voice, sing Messiah's song, "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters."

LESSON 44

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE DIVINE LOVING-KINDNESS

"How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." – Psalms 36:7

THERE are two special things, fitting in the one to the other, (1.) Divine loving-kindness; (2.) Human trust.

1. DIVINE LOVING-KINDNESS.

"How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God!" David speaks as one who had known it, who had tasted that the Lord is gracious. He is here telling his experience to God himself, but in the hearing of man, that he may know it too. He speaks because he believed and felt. His history had been throughout an exhibition of the loving-kindness of the Lord, as indeed is the history of each of us. And this loving-kindness is genuine, and true, and deep. There is no pretense about it. It is as true as God himself. "God is love," "God is rich in mercy," "God so loved the world." There is nothing more real than the love of God. But it is not of its reality that David here speaks. He takes that for granted. No one who knows God could doubt it. But it is of its excellence that he speaks. God's love is such an "excellent and glorious thing"! It is "precious" beyond all gems or gold, for that is the meaning of the word. It is the most costly and rare of all things. It is beyond all price and all excellence of earth. What can equal in costliness the love of God! Its preciousness is measured by the gift it gave, and by the innumerable gifts contained in that one, life, pardon, salvation, peace, the glory to be revealed. In this love there are unsearchable riches, exceeding riches of grace. There are no riches to be compared to this great love of God. Having it we are rich indeed. Without it we are poor, life is blank, eternity is dark.

2. HUMAN TRUST.

It is of Adam's sons that David speaks. "Therefore shall the children of men put their trust in the shadow of thy wing;" that is, betake themselves to thee as their refuge. God's character is then the basis of human confidence. That character is the attraction to the sinner, for it is just such a character as suits him, irrespective of his being anything but a man and a sinner.

This love which so suits the sinner and calls forth his confidence is that which is exhibited in the cross of Christ. That cross is the revelation of God's love as a righteous thing; and thus appeals both to man's heart and his conscience. The love furnishes the ground for trust, and the cross removes every reason for distrust.

Let us here note such points as the following:

(1.) Man's ignorance of God. With the Bible in his hand he yet knows not God, he worships an unknown God. "They know not me," is God's testimony against man. Ignorance of God is a sin of no common heinousness.

(2.) Man's mistakes as to God. He imagines Him to be such a one as himself. He entertains a bad opinion of Him. He thinks of him as a God yet to be propitiated by work, or prayer, or sacrifice. He mistakes His character, His words, and His gospel.

(3.) Man's distance from God. Departure from God is the sinner's own act. He has fled from God, and he prefers this state of distance. He dislikes the idea of nearness. To get as far from God as possible is his object. And not only does he depart from God, but he says to God, Depart from me.

(4.) Man's distrust of God. He does not merely mistake God, but he thoroughly distrusts Him. He cannot imagine God to be anything but his enemy. He has no confidence in Him. He cannot feel himself safe in the hands of God. To be simply at the mercy of God, without claim, or merit, or recommendation, is a hateful as well as dreadful thought.

Let us mark God's remedy for all these. It is a double one, subjective and objective.

(1.) Subjective. The subjective is the moral or spiritual rectification of nature and character by the power of the Holy Spirit. "Ye must be born again." It is the re-begetting, the transforming the whole man, enabling him to love what he hated, and to hate what he loved. It is the renewal of every part of the man's soul and being, creating him in Christ unto good works, for we are his workmanship, we are the clay and he is the potter.

(2.) Objective. This is the representation given of Himself in His

revelation. He shows himself to the sinner in an aspect at once gracious and glorious. He makes Himself be seen as the sinner's friend and not his enemy. He unveils and unfolds his whole character as the God of all grace, the Lord God merciful and gracious, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin.

It is to the overshadowing, protecting wings of God that David here points us, those wings of which the Lord spoke as stretched out to shelter Jerusalem, those wings under which Israel encamped or marched through the desert. He stretches out His wings and calls. He tells us of a sure and sufficient shelter, and bids us at once take refuge there. These wings are broad, and large, and strong, fitted to shelter all the sons of Adam. And thus stretched out they themselves invite us. They contain their own invitation. They say, Come and be safe, come and be blest, come and be sheltered from present wrath and from the wrath to come. Come, for all things are ready; the love is ready, the deliverance is ready, the protection is ready. Oh, well with them who have taken shelter beneath the shadow of the everlasting wing.

To those who see no danger and desire no security, these expanded wings may be nothing; for what is a Savior to a sinner that does not know his peril. But to those who know what wrath is and what sin is, what condemnation is and what the judgment is to come, who know that God is a consuming fire, and that the day of vengeance is coming, and that an unpardoned, unreconciled sinner must then have to face an angry God, that wing, that hiding-place, that covert, that Savior, are of infinite preciousness. And seeing in that outstretched wing the loving-kindness of the Lord, they run eagerly to its shelter, and as "the children of men," the "sons of Adam," the sinners of humanity, they put their trust beneath its shadow.

LESSON 45

THE SICKNESS, THE HEALER, AND THE HEALING

'I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee.' – Psalms 41:4

THIS is the cry of the needy; of him who has no helper; of him who in the time of trouble finds that there is no refuge but in God. It is the cry from the soul's sickbed, more terrible than the sickbed of the body, to the divine Physician, for the application of his heavenly skill and medicine. It tells us

1. SIN IS THE SOUL'S SICKNESS.

It is an infinite evil; the evil of evils, in comparison with which mere pain is nothing. The end of all bodily sickness, if allowed to run its course, would be death temporal; so the end of all sin, if unarrested, would be death eternal. It is infinitely varied in its nature, though comprehended under some general descriptions, and capable of being classified under certain heads. All the diseases, or shades of disease, of the body, are but types of the awful varieties of sin. Palsy, leprosy, fever, blindness, and the like, are symbols of sin. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. There is the disease of unbelief, of impenitence, of lust, of enmity to God, of pride, of worldliness. All these have penetrated our spiritual system, and destroyed our spiritual health. Not that sin is mere disease or misfortune, to be got rid of gradually by a healthy regimen, or diet, or medicine; to be wrought out of the constitution by human skill and effort. It is guilt as well as sickness, to be dealt with by the Judge as much as the physician; indeed, by the Judge first, before the physician can touch it, for as the order of the evil was first, the guilt and then the disease following thereafter, so the order of the remedy is first the pardon and then the health.

2. GOD IS THE SOUL'S HEALER.

Whether we look at sin as disease or as guilt, or as both together, we find that in regard to it we must deal with God alone. The medicine, the skill, the pardon, the deliverance, are in His hands. With no other must we transact in the matter of sin's removal; not with self, or man, or the flesh, or the church, or a creed, or a priest, but with God himself; and that

directly, face to face, alone, without any medium or intervention. All others are physicians of no value. They heal not at all, or they heal slightly, or they increase and irritate the disease. Health is with God alone. He heals effectually and eternally. He who is the soul's life is also the soul's health. Whatever be the sickness, deep or slight, of long or brief standing, connected with the eye, the ear, the hand, the feet, the head, or the whole spiritual being, the counsel which must be given to the sick soul is, Go straight to God; deal with Him, and let Him deal with you.

3. GOD DESIRES THE SOUL TO BE HEALED.

He has no pleasure in our sickness or death; His desire is that we should live and be in health. Our sickness is not of Him, but of ourselves, just as truly as our health is not of ourselves, but of Him. Yet He loves not the evil of His creatures; He desires their good, not their evil. Why, then, does He allow sickness and death? For infinitely wise reasons, of which you and I know nothing, but which will be known sooner or later. Yet our present ignorance should not lead us to deny the sincerity of God's desire for our welfare. The two things will be found perfectly reconcilable, and both equally true. Let us not take up with one-sided truth, but let us receive both sides, according to the divine revelation, whatever our perplexed minds may argue.

4. GOD HAS MADE PROVISION FOR THE SOUL'S HEALING.

The disease was so thoroughly beyond human skill that none but God could undertake the cure. He has undertaken it; He has provided the means, He has sent the physician. The medicine is the cross. There is forgiveness which is indispensable as the commencement of the cure; righteous forgiveness through the death of the Surety. At and with the cross the cure begins, and begins by the pardon of the sinner. But pardon is not the whole. There is fear, trouble, disquietude, weariness, darkness, and similar things. For these also the cross provides. And with the medicine there is the Physician Himself, Christ Jesus; or rather there is Christ and the Holy Spirit, Christ dispensing the Spirit, and the Spirit revealing Christ. The power and the skill are in their hands. They apply the divine provision. So that everything pertaining to the healing of the soul is truly divine. Hear the Lord's own declaration regarding this, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up." We ask then,

(1.) Have you been healed? If so, give God the glory. Assuredly the

health came not from man, but from the love and power of God, from the cross of Christ, from the hand of the Holy Spirit.

(2.) Will you be made whole? Perhaps you are still unhealed? The cross is here for healing; look and be cured, look and be saved, look and be forgiven. It is not working, or buying, or deserving, but simply looking. The sight of the cross is pardon, and health, and life. The leaves of this tree are for the healing of the nations.

(3.) Can you do without healing? Is your wound so slight, your disease so trivial, that you can do without the cross, and that you can heal yourself? Or though unhealed do you think you can go on as you are, well enough, without health? Suppose you could in this world, what of the world to come? Tossed upon an eternal sick-bed, think of that! Eternal disease pervading body and soul, think of that! Oh, look and be healed! Make at once the application of our text, "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee."

LESSON 46

THE CONSECRATION OF EARTH'S GOD AND SILVER

"And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favor." – Psalms 45:12

THIS is a latter-day scene; for the whole psalm is resplendent with latter-day glory; the glory of Christ the King; the glory of the Church the bride; the glory of the palace, the throne, the retinue, the kingdom. All here is glory, gladness, righteousness. It is the time of the restitution of all things. We ask,

1. WHO IS THIS DAUGHTER OF TYRE?

She is the old Phoenician city, lying on the sea coast at the foot of Lebanon; the representative of the old world's commerce.

(1.) What she was. The great merchant-city of the old world, the representative of ancient commerce, and splendor, and wealth; the center of magnificent villas, extending for miles north and south, down to the water's edge and up the slopes of Lebanon.

(2.) What she is. Desolate; the old city swept away; the new one, a small sea-port; hardly more than a fishing village.

(3.) What she is to be. More than one prophecy foretells the resuscitation of Tyre in the latter day. (Isa. 23:18.) Though the old city shall "not be found," yet there shall be a representative of it, the same great merchant-city, only "holy."

2. TO WHOM DOES SHE COME?

It is to Christ and his church that she comes. She seeks them out and bows before them. For the position of all things and parties is reversed in that day. The Church is on the throne; the world seeks her out and does homage. What a contrast to the condition of things during these ages past! The church no longer dishonored, trodden on, persecuted, despised; but honored and set on high; sought unto by all the earth, even its greatest; "the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it." The saints, along with their Lord, receive the tribute of earthly homage. The Bride of

Christ shares his dignity and glory.

3. WHAT SHE BRINGS.

It is here simply called "a gift;" but in that how much is comprehended. As the wise men from the east brought their peculiar gifts, so is it with the daughter of Tyre. She comes and lays her merchandise, her wealth, her splendor at Immanuel's feet. In Ezekiel we have the full enumeration of her articles of value and beauty. All luxuries, all necessities, all precious metals, all gems, apparel, everything that the world admires, gathered from every region. What a gift! Unsought by the church. Tyre brings her gift, hastening to do homage to the glorious King, and adorning her with all that is beautiful, and precious, and perfect.

4. WHAT SHE TEACHES US.

To lay our all at Christ's feet, nationally and individually. That shall be the day of full consecration to God, the acknowledgment of Christ's right to the ownership of everything. As yet we have no true idea of consecration, the consecration of ourselves, all that we have, things common or precious, to God and His Christ. But we shall know it then, and see it as it has never been seen before. And what a consecration shall there be in the latter day, even were it only of Tyre. How much more when it is of far greater cities and kingdoms than Tyre, our own for instance, to which Tyre is a mere village, or merchant depot. As Tyre was the great commercial metropolis of the old world, so is the United States, with its mighty New York, the great commercial metropolis of the modern earth. All that made Tyre great and glorious is to be found ten times magnified and multiplied in her.

All things that God has made are precious, and meant to glorify him. Every creature of God is good. We are not to conclude that because gold, and silver, and gems have been abused for pride, and luxury, and vain glory, they ought to be despised by the Christian. They are all capable of consecration to God; all intended to glorify him. It is not easy to consecrate the splendid and the beautiful things of earth to his glory just now. There are so many evil influences at work, perverting them, degrading them, defiling them. They are, and have been so long, the ministers of creature pride; idols, vanities, follies. But still they are all capable of good and noble uses; and shall one day take their proper place in creation, like the stars above and the flowers below.

Meanwhile let us use all we have for God. The widowed church just now

does not need the gems of earth to adorn her; indeed, they would be incompatible with her widow's weeds. We can dispense with ornament and show God does not need these at present, though he will one day bring to light all the treasures hid in his storehouse of the beautiful and glorious; and they shall adorn the new Jerusalem, and the new earth, where dwells righteousness. But our substance, our money, let us consecrate to God, lay out our gains for him. He calls on our commercial nation thus to honor him, to use their gains not for themselves, but for him. He asks for honor and service from our commerce. Men of business, consecrate your gain to him. Jesus is worthy to receive all you have. Give it to him; grudge not. He will repay you a thousand fold.

LESSON 47

THE GIFTS OF THE ASCENDED ONE

"Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." – Psalms 68:18

THIS psalm is of and for Messiah. It is He whose name is Jah, the Lord God of Israel, He is addressed throughout this psalm as God. It is this psalm which the apostle quotes in Eph. 4:8, and interprets of Christ and His ascension. It is Christ that David here addresses, "Thou hast ascended on high."

1. THE ASCENSION.

This is the last point of Messiah's earthly history, and sums up the whole. But according to the interpretation of Paul, it includes all that went before, "what is but that He also descended! The ascent reminds us of a descent. He descended to Bethlehem; and then He descended to Joseph's tomb. After that all was ascension; and the expression of our text includes or rather expresses resurrection. He went down into the lower parts of the earth; he came up again; and then he went on high. This ascending was the completion of his work; the carrying out of His love; the Father's testimony of personal acceptance and delight; and His seal to the absolute perfection of the work for which He descended. It was a real ascension; a glorious one; a very exalted one; far above all principalities and powers; to the Father's throne. "We see Jesus crowned with glory and honor." All heaven is His; and He has entered into possession of His heavenly inheritance. All power is given to Him in heaven and in earth. He fills all things. The universe now is His.

2. THE TRIUMPH.

"Thou hast led captivity captive." Whether this refers to His leading forth His redeemed out of their captivity, or leading into captivity those who held them bound, the triumph is the same, and the words point to the same event, the same enemies, the same battle, the same victory. It is Messiah's triumph; over His enemies, the Father's, and ours. The warfare is that predicted in Paradise, between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. That warfare concerns us; it is for us. He who fights is the captain of our salvation. The battle went on during the ages before He came; it came to a head on the cross; it is not yet finished; and the full

consummation of the triumph is reserved for His second coming, when He binds Satan and casts him into the bottomless pit. Then shall He complete His triumph; and show that He is more than conqueror. Meanwhile His victory upon the cross is ours.

He has fought our battle, and won our victory. "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." What enemy can prevail? No weakness of ours can dismay us. We glory in our infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon us. Let us then fight the good fight. The foe is already routed by our Captain; it is only with his broken and scattered troops that we have to do.

3. THE RECOMPENSE.

"Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also." Thus the Father rewards His faithful service. Not only does He receive the Spirit without measure for Himself; but the gifts of the Spirit for others. This is the apt recompense of His self-emptying. He emptied Himself, therefore the Father has filled Him; filled Him with the Spirit; filled Him with the Spirit's mighty and manifold gifts. Much of the Spirit was given before He came; we read of the Spirit filling holy men; but much was reserved for His glorification, that the connection between Him and the gift of the Spirit might be manifested. When He was glorified, the pentecostal shower came down; the residue of the Spirit was given. This fullness of the Spirit was,

(1.) For men; not for angels, but men; not for heaven, but for earth. It was as the ascended God-man that He received the Spirit, for those whose nature He took. "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh;" not on the unfallen, but fallen sons of Adam.

(2.) For the rebellious. For those who stand farthest off; full of enmity and resistance. Not for the good, but the evil. As of the Son of man on earth, so of Him in heaven, we may say, "He came to seek that which was lost; not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Thus Christ has received the Spirit for sinners; as Egypt's corn was entrusted to Joseph for the hungry. Go to Him who has the seven spirits of God; deal with Him who freely dispenses this Spirit. Come to the waters. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.

4. THE FINAL RESULT.

"That the Lord God might dwell among them." God had been driven from earth, from among men. His object is to return; and all that He has done in and through Christ is to secure that return. He does this,

(1.) By incarnation. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. God thus tabernacled with men.

(2.) By the cross. It is the propitiation that makes it a righteous thing for God to dwell in this way. It is the blood that brings it about. No blood, no indwelling.

(3.) By the Holy Spirit. It is this that is referred to in our text. The Spirit purchased by the blood comes down and comes in.

He has been doing this in individual souls. They are the habitation of the Spirit; temples of the Holy Spirit. He is yet to do so more conspicuously when Jesus comes the second time. Then shall this prophecy be fulfilled. The tabernacle of God shall be with men; God shall be with them, their God. Earth shall be full of the Holy Spirit, and glorious with His gifts.

LESSON 48

THE SPEAKER, THE LISTENER, THE PEACE

*"I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly." –
Psalms 85:8*

LET us meditate on this verse under the following heads: (1.) The listener; (2.) the speaker; (3.) the message; (4.) the confidence; (5.) the issue.

1. THE LISTENER.

"I will hear," says the writer of this psalm. He speaks as a listener, as one whose ears are open. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." This is our true attitude, into which we came at conversion. God said, "Hear and your soul shall live"; he "opened our ear to hear as the learned," i.e., as "one who is under teaching." So we began to listen; and in listening found life. Such is to be our life; a life of listening; not to man, nor self, nor the world, but to God. As creatures, listening is our proper attitude, much more as sinners. Let the willing ear be ours. How much we lose by the closed ear!

2. THE SPEAKER.

God, the Lord; God, even God. Other speakers may win the ear of the multitude, but it is to God the Lord that the saint listens. His voice is powerful. Its tones are penetrating; its words attractive. God speaks as one entitled to be heard, expecting to be heard. He speaks with authority, waiting for our obedience to the heavenly voice. To less than such a speaker we do not feel constrained to listen, but to Him we must. He speaks, we cannot but hear.

3. THE MESSAGE.

He will speak peace to his people. It is peace that God speaks, for he is the God of peace; "he maketh peace in his high places." Peace is the substance of the message that has all along been carried to us; peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is nigh; peace in heaven; peace on earth; peace between man and God; the peace of pardon, the

peace of reconciliation, the peace that passes all understanding, peace through the blood of the cross, through Him who is our peace. It might have been wrath, indeed, ought to have been wrath; but it is not wrath, only peace; for He is long-suffering and slow to wrath; indeed, God is love.

4. THE CONFIDENCE.

The Psalmist knows what he is to expect from such a God. Before the peace comes, he knows that it is coming; for he knows the God to whom he is called upon to listen. This is the confidence which he has in Him. He does not listen uncertainly, as not knowing what will come forth. He has heard of this God before, of what He does and speaks and he opens his ear in happy confidence. He is sure that no wrath will come, only love, only peace. This God is the God of salvation, the God who gave his Son. Shall He not then speak peace?

5. THE ISSUE.

"Let them not return to folly;" or, and "they shall not return to folly." He does not say, Let them not turn to folly, and then he will speak peace to them; but he will speak peace first, and then they shall not return to folly. This is God's order; the true and divine order; the reverse of man's. It is not first holiness and then peace, but first peace and then holiness. The root of all holiness is peace with God. Till the clouds are rolled away, and the sun shines out, we cannot be warmed and enlightened. Till the frost is gone, and the ice dissolved, the river cannot flow on and water the fields. Christ did not say, Go, and sin no more, and I will not condemn thee; but, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more."

We are in rebellion. Our chief controversy with God is as to the gospel of peace. Our unbelief of this is our sin of sins, our master-sin, to which all others are subordinate. How can we abstain from the lesser sins so long as the master-sin remains; so long as there is no peace between us and God, but only rebellion and controversy? The first step to a holy life is being at peace with God.

In order to live a holy life God must come in and dwell in us. He cannot do this till he has brought us into peace with himself, till we have listened to and believed the tidings of peace which he has spoken. Reconciliation must be the beginning of all indwelling; and this reconciliation is the result of our believing His message of peace.

Nor indeed has the soul the ease to attend to good works or growth in holiness till the question of peace has been settled. That question must be foremost, engrossing us absolutely, and leaving neither time nor inclination for anything else. It is too momentous to be left in uncertainty; too vast to be taken up along with others. This great point between us and God once settled, we are free to devote our undivided energies to the work of progress; not till then.

A saint then is one who has listened to God; who has heard the words of peace from His lips; who has believed them; who has been reconciled; and who knows that he is so. Therefore He seeks to be holy. He hates his former folly. He does not return to it. He does not make his free pardon a reason for returning to it.

Brethren, be consistent! Beware of sin, folly, unholiness of every kind. Be Christians out and out. Show that the peace you have received is a holy peace.

LESSON 49

THE BELIEVING MAN'S CONFIDENT APPEAL

"Preserve my soul, for I am holy." – Psalms 86:2

SOME mountain-heights, whether of the Alps or Grampians, look very formidable and inaccessible, so that a traveler turns away from them in despair, perhaps in fear. But at length he learns that on one side there is a slope and pathway which make the ascent quite pleasant. So it is with this text; from which many turn away as terrible and repulsive, till they learn what it really means. Just as it was with Luther and the texts relating to "the righteousness of God." Let me show that our text has really no terror in it; that it is just such as any believing man when coming to God should use; not David only, nor the Son of David, but all who own Him.

It is the word "holy" that makes many shrink. They say, I am not holy, I cannot use it. How then, I ask, could David use it, when he had to say, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity;" and in this psalm once and again casts himself on the God of mercy as a sinner. But this word has no reference to spiritual perfection or even any approach to it. It does not mean "free from sin." It means one on whom God's favor rests, or, as in the margin, "one whom thou favorest." The question then is, who are they on whom God's favor rests, and how do we enter into this favor.

There are some who have never been out of favor; the angels above. There are some who once were in favor, but have lost and shall never regain it nor taste it again, Satan and his angels. There is only one on whom that favor rests in infinite measure, the Son of God, "this is my beloved Son." But there are some who though they have lost it may regain it, and such are we. God has provided a way for this, for complete restoration to his favor, and that forevermore.

This restoration is not for the least depraved, but for the chief; not for those who have some strength left, but for those who have none. Nor is it on account of or in proportion to our freedom from sin. It is entirely through another, and on account of Him in whom God is well pleased; and in proportion to His good pleasure or satisfaction in Him and in His work. God's infinite favor towards and delight in Him is the foundation of his favor towards and delight in us. Our belief of God's testimony to his being well-pleased in his Son brings us into the state of being well-

pleasing to him.

Respecting this well-beloved Son, God has recorded a testimony; and in connection with it he has given a promise that whosoever receives the testimony is immediately brought into favor with himself. It is not a testimony without a promise, nor a promise without a testimony. It is a promise based upon a testimony; and so connected with it that we are to consider ourselves assured of the favor as soon as we receive the testimony. The moment then that we believe we enter into favor, and may use the cry of our text, "Preserve my soul, for I am one whom thou favorest;" and this without hesitation and without presumption. So long as I do not credit the divine testimony and confide in the divine promise, I am not in favor; indeed, the wrath of God abides upon me; but as soon as I thus credit and thus confide, I am in favor, and I ought to know and rejoice in this.

There are, properly speaking, just two states in which a man can be before God, wrath or favor, according as he rejects or receives the testimony; and in one of these two he must come to God. Such is the alternative. He must either come saying, "Preserve my soul, for I am under wrath;" or with David, "Preserve my soul, for I am under favor."

Men have framed for themselves other states, less decided than these. There is:

1. WRATH.

This is when there is an open and decided rejection of God's testimony. Then it is acknowledged that there is wrath.

2. SEMI-WRATH.

This is when the open rejection has ceased, and there is what is called a wish to believe or a trying to believe. Then men hold that there is a modification of the wrath, only half wrath; and with this they pacify their consciences.

3. SEMI-FAVOR.

This is supposed to be when the sinner has taken some good steps in the right direction, made some advances to God, though he has not fully believed the testimony, or believed it in the right way, with the requisite quantity of feeling. He is reckoned as making progress in the way to

favor.

4. FAVOR.

This is supposed to be when the sinner has summed up his evidences and ascertained the excellent quality of his faith. Then looking to that quality of his faith he can count on God's favor, not because he has ascertained that "it is a faithful saying," but that his faith is of sufficient substance and excellence.

5. UNCERTAINTY.

This is the general state of things. Men, professing to believe the gospel, do not know what they are, nor who they are, nor where they are. They are uncertain as to wrath; they speak as if there was such a thing as semi-wrath, or semi-favor. Indeed, they rather glory in this uncertainty, as being true humility and genuine Christianity; whereas it is certainty that makes us humble and holy.

But all this is in contradiction to the Bible. In all this there is no right comprehension of either law or gospel. There is no approach to David's posture or David's cry, "Preserve my soul, for I am one whom thou favorest."

Ah, surely a believed gospel was meant to do more for this. It brings us at once out of wrath into favor; as such we live, speak, feel, and pray. We find that in His favor is life.

LESSON 50

THE LOVE AND THE DELIVERANCE

"Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him." –
Psalms 91:14

THIS is one of the psalms of Messiah; and Satan's quotation of the eleventh verse shows that it was accepted as such by the Jews, and by Jesus Himself. (Matt. 4:6.) Yet it is not (one verse excepted) spoken by but to Messiah. It contains the Father's proclamation to Him, and to men regarding Him; and still more, the Father's assurance to Him of fellowship and protection while dwelling in the land of strangers and enemies. It contains some of the words poured into his ear morning by morning, when he wakened his ear to hear as one that is taught (Isa. 50:4). For as man he was counseled, comforted, strengthened, cheered, taught of God.

The first and second verses are the introduction or key to the whole. In the first the Father, as the Son is about to enter on his mission on earth, amid all the diseases, troubles, hatreds, strife, conspiracies of this fallen state of danger and sorrow, proclaims, "He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty;" i.e., he that "enters into the chambers" (Isa. 26:20), or takes up his abode with God in his "pavilion" (Psa. 27:5), shall be under the protection of the Almighty. Or rather we may say that the Father pours these words of cheer into the ears of the Son, making known the secret, the one secret of the security of creaturehood. In the second verse the Son, in words of happy confidence, replies, "I will say of God, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in him will I trust." Then the Father, from the third to the fourteenth verse, pours into the filial ear words of blessed assurance. Deliverance, security, protection, victory over enemies and dangers, power over evil, angelic ministry, these are the assurances given by the Father to the Son in entering on his awful work in this fallen world. "Be of good cheer, for I am with you, and there shall not a hair of your head perish," is the substance of the assurance thus so fully given. And if ever such assurance was needed it was then, when the thirty-three year battle was to be fought with sin and hell.

Then at the fourteenth verse the Father proclaims to the whole world, to men and angels, the grand principle of His dealings with His Son; what He did for him, and why He did it, that we may know why and what he does for us. Deliverance and exaltation are the two special blessings

promised; the reason of these is (1.) he set his love upon me; (2.) he knew my name.

Let us inquire, 1st, into the deliverance; 2nd, into the love.

1. THE DELIVERANCE.

Messiah was always in danger, and always crying for deliverance. "Deliver me, O my God." How often that word was on His lips! See Psalms 22, and 40, and 69. Enemies surrounded Him, as Saul did David, and sought His life. Death took hold on Him. Our iniquities (he calls them mine!) took hold on him. The snares of hell took hold on Him. The grave took hold on Him. Innumerable evils compassed Him about. But when He was sinking in deep waters, God sent and drew Him out. When sore pressed on every side, God fought for Him, and put His enemies to flight. He, the poor and needy one, was delivered!

2. THE REASON FOR IT.

"Because he set his love on me." God would not suffer one who loved Him so much to be overpowered. Love like his must be honored! Love like his must not go down before his enemies. God's desire is to be loved, for He is infinitely loveable! He never found one before that loved him as Christ did, and could do. For Christ loved him with a divine strength! Oh how gloriously was the commandment fulfilled in Christ, when he loved him with the whole of the divine strength, that infinite capacity for loving which belonged to him. God honors Christ's love by granting him continual deliverance. He loved, and he was delivered for his love! Learn,

(1.) That God wants to be loved. He desires the love of all humankind. He made us to love him, and he cannot be satisfied without our love. You shall love the Lord with all thy heart, is not merely a command, but a thing of earnest desire. God is not indifferent as to our love, nor heedless of our coldness. He asks love, and he feels the refusal of it. "Love me" is his message to us; "give me thy heart." He gave us his heart when he gave his Son, and now he asks ours in return.

(2.) He is infinitely worthy of it. He is the infinitely loveable and glorious one; just such a being as to command our entire affection, and fill our souls. The only question would seem to be, Are we permitted to love such a glorious being? For if so, then let us pour out the whole fullness of our hearts upon him. Who are we that we should be allowed to love him; indeed, commanded; even punished for not

loving?

(3.) He blesses and rewards them that love Him. The crown of life hereafter is to them that love him; and the present blessings of deliverance, support, defense, comfort, is to those that set their love on him. No good thing will he withhold from them that love and fear him. He is their light, their joy, their staff, their shield, their tower, their arm, their strength; he compasses them about with songs of deliverance.

Let us learn to love him. For what he is in himself; for what he has done, and has promised to do for us. Let us love him for his love and for his loveableness. We love him because he first loved us. He has set his love on us, let us set our love on him. God's love to us, and our love to him, Is not this the essence of true faith? What poor, empty, shriveled things are these hearts of ours unless filled with the love of God? What a poor thing is life, if not consecrated, gladdened, brightened with this glorious love!