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MULTIPLIED BLESSINGS ***EIGHTEEN SHORT READINGS***

BY THE LATE
REV. CANON HOARE
VICAR OF HOLY TRINITY, TUNBRIDGE WELLS

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PREFACE

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THESE short readings, now published for the first time, are extracts from the written sermons of the late Rev. E. Hoare, Vicar of Holy Trinity, Tunbridge Wells from 1853 to 1894, and Hon. Canon of Canterbury. They are taken, word for word, from his original MSS., and have been selected with a view to giving practical help in the Christian life. Many of them were written long ago, but the hindrances and difficulties that meet the Christian continue much the same, and it is hoped that the following pages may be used of God to bring before the reader the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour, Guide, and Helper.

K. A. H.

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MULTIPLIED BLESSINGS

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“Thou art my hiding-place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.

“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.”—Ps. xxxii. 7, 8.

WELL, indeed, may the Psalmist say, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,” for every blessing flows into the soul as the consequence of divine forgiveness. The word in the Hebrew rendered “Blessed” is in the plural number, to show that there is not one blessing only, but multiplied blessings and multiplied mercies, all springing from this one source, the forgiveness of sin. When David wrote these words he felt the truth of them. He spoke of a gift which he had himself experienced. He had found mercy, so he proclaimed its richness. We know how grievously he fell in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah, and we remember Nathan’s visit. It was after that visit that, according to the general belief, this Psalm was written. He had struggled with the agonies of unforgiven sin, till at length the message was delivered to him by the prophet, “The Lord, also, hath put away thy sin.” ^[5] No wonder, then, that he poured out his heart in this hymn of thanksgiving, commencing with the words, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”

But it is not merely a Psalm of thanksgiving, for according to the title it was a Maschil, a Psalm giving instruction. When David was pleading for mercy in Psalm li., he said that when he had found forgiveness himself, he would make it known for the good of others, “Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways.” ^[6] So now, having been forgiven, he wrote this Psalm of instruction for others.

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“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” These were the words with which David commenced his Psalm, and in these words he said that to which every forgiven soul will most heartily add, “Amen.”

What was the peculiar character of that blessedness? We learn from verses 3 and 4 the awful misery of sin unrepented and unforgiven. We find how David’s tears were dried up by the burning heat of a guilty conscience, and how the dreadful burden weighed day and night upon his soul. Then in the next verse we are taught the secret of the great transition from misery to peace. We find how he made up his mind to make no further efforts to conceal his guilt. He resolved to confess it before God, and no longer attempt to hide it from man. The result was a complete, assured, and most merciful forgiveness. “Thou forgavest,” he said, “the iniquity of my sin.” He was assured of the gift, but what was the unspeakable blessedness to which, when forgiven, he was admitted?

This we learn from the words of our text in which we find the peaceful intercourse of the forgiven soul with God. It is that peaceful intercourse which constitutes the real test of forgiveness,

Christ died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God: so those who are made partakers of that atoning work are actually brought to God and made what the Psalmist calls "a people near unto Him." [7] So it was in the case of David. There was nothing to keep him any longer at a distance, and in the full peace of complete reconciliation he enjoyed the unspeakable privilege of communion with God. The account of this communion is given us in the verses of our text, in the first of which we have the language of the forgiven sinner to God, in the second the reply from God Himself.

I. THE LANGUAGE OF THE FORGIVEN SOUL ADDRESSING GOD.

He that was afar off without any shelter from the rough storm of an accusing conscience, is now able to look up to the God who has forgiven him and say, "Thou art my hiding-place." He finds his shelter and his safety in the presence of that very God whose law he had broken. He does not say, "Thou hast provided a hiding-place," but "Thou *art* my hiding-place." He who had been exposed without protection to the sore buffetings of his own conscience, confirmed as it was by the just sentence of God's holy law, had been so completely restored that he had found in God Himself a hiding-place.

In that sacred hiding-place he realized two results, safety and praise. When hidden there he was safe, just as our own life is safe when hidden with Christ in God, and therefore he could say, "Thou shalt preserve me," and when hidden there he would live in the very atmosphere of thanksgiving, so he said, "Thou shalt compass me about (or surround me) with songs of deliverance." A song of deliverance is a song of praise from one that has been delivered. The Song of Moses was a song of deliverance when he stood on the shores of the Red Sea after he had seen the hosts of Egypt overwhelmed in the flood. [8a] David's was a song of deliverance when God had brought him up out of the horrible pit and established his goings, and had put a new song in his mouth. [8b] The song of the great multitude before the throne is a song of deliverance, when, brought out of great tribulation, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands, they sing, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." [8c]

Observe the connection between this safety and these songs of deliverance. The songs are not merely the consequence of the safety, but a part of it. Hidden in the Lord, we are compassed, or surrounded, by them. Whichever way we look, whether forward in hope, or backward in memory, or upwards in trust, there is in every direction something to call forth the praise, and the spirit of thanksgiving is in itself a protection against assault.

There is just the same connection between praise and safety in the description of the restored Zion: "Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise." [8d] Praise is there represented as part of the defence. The enemy cannot enter because the gateway is filled by praise. The song of deliverance is so hearty and so loud that the voice of the tempter is not heard. And thus it is that the forgiven man, hidden in Christ Jesus, praises God, because he has been saved, and confirms his safety by the very act of praising Him. Does not this teach us a lesson as to our own communion with God? Whatever it is that weighs on the heart and disturbs the spirit, whatever the storm be that beats upon us, whether it be care from without or conscience within, whether it be the pain of trouble or the still greater pain of the sense of sin, the forgiven man may go straight to Him and say, "I flee unto Thee to hide me." [9a] And if hidden in Him, can anything really hurt us? Is not His salvation a sufficient wall? Shall anything that can really hurt us enter in by those gates which He has closed with praise? In holy peace, then let the songs of deliverance rise before Him. Let the unspeakable blessedness of the divine safety call forth the notes of thanksgiving. If the sweet note of praise was heard by the prisoners from the inner dungeon at Philippi, [9b] shall it not be heard by the whole church of God from those who have found a hiding-place in their Lord?

II. THE LORD'S REPLY TO THE FORGIVEN MAN.

Such, then, was the language of the forgiven man to the God who had forgiven him. What reply did he receive? "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with Mine eye." You will observe that what is here promised is His own divine guidance and instruction, and you will see at once how appropriate such a promise was under the peculiar circumstances of the case. David had grievously fallen. He had been walking, in former times, in God's way, but had turned aside in a most awful manner. We do not know what was the preparatory process in his mind. Perhaps he had forgotten his weakness; perhaps he had grown self-confident and fell. But we see what God promised now that he was restored. He undertook in future to keep him Himself, by His own instruction and His own guidance. The Lord Himself undertook to guide him, and so keep him safe from the danger of another fall.

There are two points in this promise. It was *in* the way, not *about* the way, that God promised to guide him. When he was walking in the narrow way God under took to walk with him there, and to hold him fast in His own right hand till the journey should be complete, and the rest reached at the end. Let us all learn the lesson that God's teaching is only found in the path of God's commandments. If we choose to walk in some way of our own choosing, we must not expect the guidance of the Lord.

Observe also what I may term the delicacy of the promise and the intimacy of the relationship. God says, "I will guide thee with Mine eye."

When David was living in a state of impenitence, the strong hand of God was upon him day and night. But now a look is enough. No force is needed. The heart is tender, the ear is open, the eye is fixed on the Lord Jesus, and the least intimation of His will is sufficient. The passage seems to describe the eye of the Lord watching over His children, and the eyes of His children fixed on the Lord. When the Lord Jesus looked on Peter, Peter must have been looking on Him, and one look melted his heart. And so when the Lord is guiding us, there is no need of strong or violent discipline, of the wind, the storm, or the earthquake, for the still small voice is enough. What is needed is that we should be living looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, seeking to know His will, drinking in His word, watching the guidance of His providence, applying the principles of Scripture to common life, and so not waiting till conviction is forced upon us, but, with a tender heart and a ready mind, seeking hour by hour to do His will. It is in such an attitude of mind that we can realize the sacred promise, "I will guide thee with Mine eye."

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Such, then, was the intercourse of this forgiven man with God. How close, how intimate, how sacred, how blessed, the communion! And how complete must have been the forgiveness that prepared the way for it. It seems almost impossible to believe that this was the same man on whom God's hand had been heavy day and night, the same whose bones had waxed old through his roaring all the day long, now forgiven, now brought into happy intercourse with God. Does not the passage teach a wonderful lesson to every soul that has been mercifully forgiven in Christ Jesus? When we think of the precious blood of Christ, and how the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all, can we suppose for a moment that the forgiveness bestowed on us is less complete, or the restoration less perfect, than that of David? Since, then, in his case, the insuperable barrier of his guilt was so completely broken down that he was admitted to this sacred and intimate fellowship, why should any one of us remain at a distance? Why should not we, even we, go before the same Father to find in Him our hiding-place, and receive from Him the same blessed assurance, "I will guide thee with Mine eye"? May He accompany us through life with that loving guidance and watch over every step we take till, by His great grace, we are safe from danger.

THE SAVIOUR SEEKING THE SINNER

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"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?"—ST. LUKE XV. 4.

THERE are many amongst us truly and conscientiously seeking the Lord whose souls are ill at ease, and whose hearts are far from peace. They are feeling after Him, if haply they may find Him; but they are like blind men groping for the wall, for they have not found Him, and they have no firm resting-place for their faith. They have been reading many passages about seeking the Lord, and have endeavoured to seek Him, but they are sorely discouraged.

Let us, therefore, change the subject, and instead of considering how they are to seek the Lord, let us see how the Lord seeks them. Let us look at the Divine side of the transaction, and instead of being absorbed by the subject of the sinner seeking the Saviour, let us look at the boundless grace of God which is shown by the Saviour seeking the sinner.

It is the great subject of this chapter, which contains three illustrations of the one subject, and thus forms an illustrated comment on His words, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." [13] According to those words He came for the lost, and came not only to save them when they should succeed in finding Him, but to seek them in order that He may save. He does not save without seeking, nor does He seek without saving. Let us glean some lessons, from the combination of the three illustrations, as to the loss of the sinner, and the seeking of the Saviour.

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THE LOSS.

In all three cases the recovered one is said to have been lost. The sheep was lost. The coin was lost. The son was lost.

If we study the illustrations in detail we shall see that there are three ways described in the chapter in which this loss is brought about.

It is brought about, in the case of the lost sheep, through simple ignorance and the folly of pursuing each passing object of attraction. The wandering sheep has no particular intention of going wrong. It does not set off with a deliberate wish to run away; it is simply led on step by step by any attraction that lies beside its path. And is not this the case with thousands of those who have wandered from the Shepherd's care?

In the second parable the loss is occasioned by the neglect of others. The piece of money is lost through carelessness, without any fault of its own. The person who had the charge of it took no heed to be sure that it was safe. How many are there in exactly that position? They have been lost, humanly speaking, through want of care.

But the third character is quite distinct from both the others. The Prodigal Son was lost because he deliberately and determinately left his father's home. He was totally unlike the wandering sheep led on from step to step without a plan, for he had a plan, and he deliberately carried it out. This, then, is far the worst of the three. It represents one living in the midst of privileges, but deliberately casting away his faith. He has life and death brought before him, and he chooses death, or, at all events, he chooses that which leads to death. Oh! how marvellous is the boundless grace and mercy of our God, that He should go out of His way to seek and to save any one so unthankful and so guilty!

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THE SEEKING OF THE SAVIOUR.

He seeks by coming Himself as the Son of Man. The Shepherd leaving the fold and going forth into the wilderness to seek the wanderer, is a picture of the Son of God leaving the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, and visiting this fallen world as the Son of man, in order that He might seek, and, by His atoning blood, might save the sinner. We shall never understand His grace in seeking us if we do not realize that great act of His already complete. This great finished work of His is the foundation of all that follows, and if we want to understand the mystery of His love in seeking us we must begin with the two great facts, Incarnation and Atonement. Why did He become man? Why was He born at Bethlehem? Was it not because He came on a divine mission to seek the sinner? Why did He die? Why did He utter that bitter cry upon the cross? Was it not that He might remove the curse by bearing it, and having broken down every barrier, might have the joy of bringing the lost one to the Father's home? You, then, who are anxious about your souls, and whose earnest desire it is to be sought out and saved, remember what the Son of man has already done; fall back on the finished fact; and never forget that however doubtful you may be as to your own position, there is no doubt whatever as to the fact that the Son of God has come to seek the lost one and to save him by His blood.

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HE SEEKS THROUGH HUMAN AGENCY.

I cannot think that the woman lighting a candle and sweeping the house represents the Saviour. She is generally, and I think correctly, thought to represent the Church. If this be the case it may serve to teach how the whole Church of Christ ought to be entirely engaged in carrying out the sacred mission of our Blessed Lord. It is not the Spirit alone that is to say "Come," [15] but the Bride and all that hear the message. He has become man and died for us, but we are to light the candle, sweep the house, and seek diligently till we find the lost ones. We are to spare no effort for their recovery: we are to search them out; we are to let them know that there is a Christian friend anxious for their safety, and that there will not only be joy amongst the angels of God, but a hearty welcome amongst His people on earth for any poor lost one brought in lowly repentance to the feet of the Blessed Saviour, there to find pardon and recovery.

And what are we to say of the third parable, for we find no mention of the seeking there. But we find the divine act most remarkably represented, for there we may see how God Himself seeks the wanderer. We do not see the father doing it in the parable, but we do see how God Himself does it in fact. We there see the work both of His providence and of His Spirit. Of His providence, for the Father in heaven both sought and found him, just as He is doing with thousands now. He took from him one thing after another till all hope was gone, and he envied even the swine their meal. God was seeking him, so He broke him down and crushed him on purpose that He might save.

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But God did much more than bring him into trouble, for trouble very often does nothing but harden. But in this case the Spirit of God was seeking him, so that it was a trouble blessed by the Spirit, and he was led with a broken heart to say, "Father, I have sinned."

See how God Himself sought him and brought him to true repentance. He was far away from the hand of man. He was lost to his father's home. But he was never lost sight of by God. There was a loving eye watching him, and a loving care seeking him, so that though lost to man he was not lost to God, and his father with a full heart was able at length to say, "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

A DIVINE SALVATION

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"Salvation is of the Lord."—JONAH ii. 9.

"According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue."—2 ST. PETER i. 3.

No one can read his Bible without being convinced that it is full of practical exhortations as to human conduct and human effort. Those who are seeking the Lord Jesus Christ are exhorted to repent, to believe, to be converted, to seek, to come, and to follow on to know the Lord. Hence it follows that as we are very apt to see only one side of anything at a time, there is a great tendency to dwell exclusively on human action, and to exhort, and to persuade, as if everything

was in our own hands, so that we may do just what we please, and when we please, in the great matter of our soul's salvation. People are apt to write and speak about coming to Jesus as if it all rested with the sinner himself. But this, though deduced from a truth, is not the whole truth of Scripture. We find there beyond all doubt the warning, the offer and the invitation; but we find also the clear description of a divine salvation, the plan of divine wisdom, and the gift of divine grace. Accordingly in this passage when St. Peter ^[17] is addressing those who had obtained like precious faith with himself, he makes it perfectly clear at the very outset of his letter that they had obtained it, not by the power of their own energy, or the determination of their own will, but through the power of God, the gift of God, and the call of God, "whereby were given unto them exceeding great and precious promises." ^[18a]

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Let us, therefore, turn our attention to the divine side of the great transaction, and trace through four successive steps, the divine Saviour, the divine salvation, the divine revelation, and the divine application.

I. A DIVINE SAVIOUR.

It is not my business now to make any attempt to prove the divinity of our Blessed Redeemer, for I take it for granted that we all admit the great truths of Christianity. What I desire now to do is to point out that, if saved at all, we are saved by a Person, and that that Person is divine. The Lord Jesus Christ is a personal Saviour, and as a personal Saviour, saves us from the death of sin. It is as much a personal act as when a bold swimmer leaps into the ocean and saves a drowning man.

Now it is plain that everything depends on the nature and power of the person who saves us. If He be only man, then we can hope for nothing more than a man-made salvation. The salvation will not rise above the Saviour; but if He is divine, then we may rest on His divine omnipotence, and look for the power of God unto salvation. Thus the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ is a matter of life and death to us. The question is whether we are to save ourselves or be saved by our God. And this is the issue which He Himself raised when He said, "I give unto them eternal life." ^[18b] The statement of that passage is that He, as a Person, holds His people in His own hand, and holds them with omnipotent strength because He is divine, for He and the Father are one. There, then, is both the foundation and the keystone of our trust. We may see all kinds of difficulties; there may be confusion, perplexity, and the cry of distress in every direction, but according to His divine power God has provided a divine Saviour, and in that Saviour we may rest, for He is the Son of God.

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II. A DIVINE SALVATION.

The whole plan from first to last is divine. The world is full of human plans, some of which are successful and some total failures. One man contrives one thing and one another, but God alone planned the great salvation. It was not in the power of ruined nature to restore itself, so in boundless mercy and in His own divine omnipotence He provided a plan of restoration. Thus the purpose is divine, His own eternal purpose before the world was; the mode of reconciliation is divine, the release of the sinner through the imputation of sin to the sin-bearer. The propitiation was divine, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood." ^[20a] The imputation of righteousness is divine, "For God hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." ^[20b]

The work of sanctification is divine, "Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us . . . sanctification;" ^[20c] and the final gathering of God's elect will be divine for "all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth." ^[20d]

It is most important to bear this well in mind, for it places the subject beyond the sphere of human speculation. If a man starts a new system of philosophy, or if people advocate any particular system in politics, we are perfectly at liberty to criticise it. What one man does, another man may criticise. But it is a very different thing with the salvation of God. Once admit that it is a divine plan, arranged in divine wisdom and carried out in divine power, and it is then manifestly beyond the reach of human intellect. There may be things in it which seem to us very mysterious; but what else can we expect when the infinite and divine arrangements of God are subjected to the speculations of the finite mind of man? If the whole salvation were of such a character as to present no points of difficulty to the human inquirer, we might almost doubt its divinity, and believe that as it is within the range of man's mind, so it had its origin in man's ingenuity. But when we see it beyond the reach of man, then we are taught by our own inability to fathom it, to regard it as a plan above ourselves, for the simple reason that it is divine.

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III. DIVINE REVELATION.

But when we have acknowledged that the Saviour and the salvation are divine, there remains a further question of the utmost possible importance. It is this. In what way is this divine salvation made known to mankind? Is it known by human discovery or divine communication? Do we know it by thinking out the subject, or by receiving a revelation from God? Surely the answer to this question is obvious, that a divine salvation can only be known by a divine communication. The eternal purpose of God can only be known by divine communication from Himself. A

supernatural salvation requires in the very nature of things a supernatural communication from God. Thus an Apostle describes [21] the faith, not as having been *discovered by* the saints, but as having been *delivered to* the saints, delivered to them, that is, in God's own inspired Word. As God has planned a complete salvation, so He has given a complete revelation of that salvation. He has not left us to grope for it as blind men feeling for the wall; but has revealed His plan in His own word, and taught us to rest in the scripture of truth as His own revelation of His purpose of grace.

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IV. THE DIVINE APPLICATION.

To many this is the most difficult of the four points mentioned at the outset. They are perfectly satisfied as to the divine Saviour, the divine salvation, and the divine revelation in the Word of God, but have found no little difficulty in the application of it to themselves. They can see the chain with its three links hanging down from heaven over their heads, but it is just out of their own reach, and as a poor dying sailor once said to me, "I see the rope, but I cannot get hold of it." So they see the salvation, but cannot get hold of it as their own. If there are any anxious on the subject, and earnestly desiring "to get hold" on the great salvation, let them remember that what they really want is for *the Saviour to lay hold on them*, and this is what He practically does by the power of the Holy Ghost. It is the peculiar office of the Holy Ghost to take of the things of the Lord Jesus Christ and apply them unto us, and without that act of His we may struggle in vain to reach the blessing. It is not enough for us to be told that God has provided a perfect Saviour, that that Saviour has made a perfect propitiation, and that by virtue of that propitiation the great salvation is offered to us as a gift. We may be assured of all that and yet live on without it, for we want in addition that which the human heart cannot find in itself, the power to receive the gift and, receiving it, to live. It is by this mighty power that those who sleep are awakened; those far off are brought nigh; the bondsmen are set free; the dead made alive, and those who are strangers and outcasts are made heirs of God through the blood of Christ.

p. 22

There is no case too hopeless for the Lord's salvation. There are many who have been so utterly unsuccessful in their efforts to rise that they begin to think there is something peculiar in themselves which makes them an exception to the general offer of life and pardon. And there are others who are longing for the salvation of some stubborn, unbroken heart, but who have sought so long and so hopelessly that they almost begin to despair. Now whether your anxiety be for yourself or others, remember the divinity of the great salvation. If the whole is divine, why should it not be sufficient? You say you are dead, but cannot the divine power raise the dead? You say your sins are too great for pardon, but is not the divine propitiation sufficient for them all? You say you cannot produce even a good prayer, but does not the divine revelation assure you that the salvation is a free gift even for those who have nothing?

Give up, then, all thought of working yourself up to salvation, for that is a mere human process, and is certain to fail, but throw yourself *before you are saved* right away on the Saviour for His great gift of salvation. Remember that the whole thing from first to last is divine, and, because it is divine, as a little child trust it without the slightest qualification, trust the promise, accept the gift, and may God grant that you may be able to use as your own the words of the text, "According as His divine power hath given unto me all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who hath called *me* to glory and virtue."

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FEELINGS

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"Love, joy, peace."—GAL. v. 22.

FEELINGS clearly have their place in the things of God. Our Christianity is based on principles, but still it calls forth the feelings. Now there are two great extremes into which we are apt to fall with reference to Christian feeling.

There are some whose religion seems to consist in feeling only. They look for warm, bright emotions, they bring everything to the standard of their feelings, and if they feel as they wish to do they are satisfied. Their hearts are warmed by the things of God, and many a cold, phlegmatic theologian would be a different being if he could but catch something of their feeling.

But still we must put in a caution, for feelings, however bright, are not to be trusted unless they rise out of principle and end in practice. If you have feeling only—a feeling not based on solid acquaintance with Scriptural truth, it will rise like a bubble, and look as beautiful in its colours, but it will burst as easily as the bubble does, and even at its best estate can never bear the slightest pressure. Here, then, is one extreme—the religion of feeling, of emotion, of impression, taking the place of the religion of conviction, of principle, of faith.

But there is another extreme: I mean the religion without feeling. Some seem to think all emotion, or warmth, or fervour is enthusiasm, and settle down satisfied with a cold reception of Christian truth. They may be quite correct in their creed, and may really believe all the great truths of the Gospel, but their system is to give no expression to Christian emotion, and this has a wonderful power of chilling all around them.

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We must not rest satisfied with an unfeeling consent to Christian truth. We want to feel as well as to know, and to have the heart really warmed by the tender love of our gracious Saviour. But here I suspect that I shall be met by a great difficulty on the part of many of you, for this feeling is exactly that which many cannot find. You can understand, but you cannot feel. Your great trouble is, that there is such a dreadful apathy over your whole soul that nothing seems to rouse it. If this is the case consider—

I. THE FEELINGS, HOWEVER WARM, CAN NEVER JUSTIFY, AND THE WANT OF FEELING DOES NOT PREVENT JUSTIFICATION.

I have known persons who have long since given up all idea of being justified by *works*, who still have a secret clinging to some idea of being justified by *feelings*. If they could but feel more—more love, more repentance, more warmth—then they think they could trust Christ for their acceptance. They have learned, they think, to trust Him if they have the feelings, but they would not venture to do so without them.

Now, before they can be happy in Christ they will have to go a step deeper, and learn to trust Him when they have not the feelings as well as when they have. They must remember that our justification is entirely dependent on His atonement and His righteousness, and so it is His free gift, freely given to those that are dead in sin. Now a dead man has no feelings. If, therefore, we wait for our justification until we have the feelings we must wait till we are alive. But the language of Scripture is, “God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.” [26] Your only hope, therefore, is to trust Him as you are, without waiting till you are one atom warmer than you are at this present moment. With your heart as cold as you now feel it to be, you must throw yourself at once before His feet, and cry, “Lord, save me, I perish.”

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Closely connected with this suggestion is another, namely this—

II. IF YOU WANT TO BE MADE TO FEEL, YOU MUST LOSE NO TIME IN GOING NEAR TO A FATHER’S THRONE.

You will never feel warm while you stand shivering outside the city. You must go inside, even while you are cold, and there have your heart warmed by the Lord Himself. Remember that the great heart-warming subject is the tender love of God as displayed in Christ Jesus. If the love of Christ does not make you feel, nothing else will. Do not, therefore, stand afar off gazing on your own coldness, but turn at once to the Cross of Christ. Study Him in the garden bowed down under the heavy burden of sin; study Him on the cross forsaken even of the Father, and remember that all that was borne for you, even for you. Remember there was a personal connection between Him and you in the whole of that great transaction, and so abide, as it were, gazing on the Lord Jesus, on His life, on His meekness, on His burden, on His cry. Pray God that you may realize your part in the whole matter. Confess before Him your own cold, dead, lifeless condition. Trust Him, as He died for you, to save you from it; and so you may hope that, though you feel so cold as you approach Him, you may experience something of His love when you gaze on Him, and know something even of His joy when you go on your way justified through His grace.

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III. REMEMBER WELL THAT FEELING IS THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THAT YOU CANNOT WORK YOURSELF UP TO IT.

It is very clearly the work of the Holy Spirit to call forth feeling. He does not act on the head only, but on the heart also. He opens the understanding, but His great office is to make His people feel what they already know. Thus of the nine fruits of the Spirit [27a] the first three are all emotions. Their seat is neither in the head nor in the practice, but they are all feelings of the heart, “Love, joy, peace.” They all lead to practice, and all are founded on principle, but all three are sacred emotions implanted there by the Holy Ghost Himself.

If, therefore, your cold, unfeeling heart is a real sorrow to you; if the trouble of your heart is that your sins trouble you so little, and that you feel so coldly towards that Blessed Saviour who has felt for you so deeply, rest not content, but throw yourself before God that the Spirit of grace and of supplication may enable you to look upon Him whom you have pierced, that He may take of the things of Jesus and show them unto you; that He may call forth in your soul His own fruits of love, joy, and peace, and that so He may answer you the Apostle’s prayer—“The God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.” [27b]

A PEACEFUL DEATH-BED

p. 28

“Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word:

“For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.”—ST. LUKE ii. 29, 30.

OUR thoughts are often directed to the blessed prospect of our Lord's return, and there cannot be a doubt that His personal coming is the crowning hope of the Church of God. At the same time, it is most important for us to be, if I may so express it, familiar with the thought of the present heaven. The youngest amongst us may be cut down at any moment, and the old amongst us must be convinced that our time is short, and that our places must soon be filled by others. We ought, therefore, to know where we are going, and what it is that awaits us when "the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved." [28a]

The words of our text, so often chanted in our churches, express a sentiment to which, I fear, many who chant them are entire strangers, for they express the peaceful readiness with which Simeon was looking forward to his death. It had been "revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ." [28b] He had, therefore, spent his latter days waiting and watching for the promised Christ, and at length, when the Child was presented in the Temple, he saw in that Child the Messiah for whom he had been waiting, and then it was that, his hope being fulfilled, he could bless God and say, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace."

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There are three subjects suggested by his words.

I. THE VIEW WHICH IS HERE GIVEN OF DEATH.

He does not speak of it as annihilation, destruction, or stupefaction, but as a departure or removal from one place to another. If a person were to depart from this place and go elsewhere, he would simply change his home. Until he departs his home is here, but when he departs his home is elsewhere.

Is it not exactly the same when the spirit departs from its present home and removes to the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens? In this case, as in an earthly removal, departure implies the continuance of life. Thus I rejoice in the many passages in which death is spoken of as a departure. It was clearly the idea in the mind of St. Paul, as when he said, "having a desire to depart," [29a] and again, "The time of my departure is at hand." [29b] When those we love are in far distant lands we see them not, but they are there; our eyes cannot behold them, nor our ears hear their pleasant voices, for they are far away, but that does not lead us to doubt either their life, their intelligence, or their affection. Just so it is with those that are gone. We no longer hear the voice, or look on the loved countenance, but we are fully persuaded that, as spirits, they are living elsewhere, that separation is not destruction, and that removal does not involve the diminution of the intelligent powers of the living mind.

But if death is thus a departure, where is the place to which the spirit goes? Over this point there is a veil thrown in Scripture. If we were to know all about it there would be nothing in the knowledge to affect our practical conduct, so there is no knowledge given. Nor do we require it, for one thing is told us, and that one thing is enough. If assured of that one thing we want no more. What, then, is that one thing so clearly revealed to us in God's holy Word? Where shall we find an account of it? Let us turn to the language of the Apostle Paul: "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ." [30a] He knew, therefore, that in his departure he should depart to be with Christ, in the conscious enjoyment of His perceptible and never-ceasing love.

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II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THE BELIEVER MAY DIE.

This is described in the words of Simeon, "Let thy servant depart in peace." Simeon could look forward to his dying hour in a tranquil spirit of calm, resting peace. How often is there care on the heart of the dying believer. A father may be leaving his wife and family, who have been dependent on him for support; or a mother her children, with the strong conviction that there is no substitute for a mother's love. Let no one suppose that there is no trial of faith in such a separation, and that it is not, in many cases, very hard to trust. But in Christ Jesus there may be peace even in such a parting, and the dying mother, if she knows her Saviour, may trust her all into His loving hands, and say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him." [30b] She has committed her children into His care. They are her deposit with God, and she may be at perfect peace in the assurance that, though *she* is departing, *He* is remaining, and will remain a faithful Saviour till every one of those dear children is presented safe before His throne.

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Let no one suppose that it is not a very solemn thing to die, to be suddenly cut off from everything of which we have ever had any experience, and to launch out alone into an invisible world. It cannot, therefore, be an easy thing to die in peace. But, thanks be to God, we believe that the departing spirit passes at once into the loving presence of our Redeemer, and why should there not be peace? I believe it is the forgetfulness of this personal entrance into the personal presence of a personal Saviour that sometimes seems to darken the dying hour. People forget those few words, "Thou art with me," [31a] and then they are afraid. But when we rest on those words, and combine them with our assured hope, knowing that He is now with us invisibly, and that we are going to be with Him visibly, then we shall be able to say, as Simeon did, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace."

III. THE GREAT FOUNDATION OF SIMEON'S PEACEFUL TRUST.

His eyes had seen the salvation of God. What he had really seen was the promised Messiah, that is, the Lord's Christ. The little child was the promised Saviour, and to him the Saviour was salvation. The Person and the Gift were so bound together that they were as one. He could not know the Person without the Gift, or enjoy the Gift except through the Person. Thus our Lord, more than thirty years afterwards, spoke of Himself as "the Salvation," [31b] when He said, as He entered into the house of Zacchæus, "This day is salvation come to this house." Simeon had what we cannot have, something material that he could handle and look upon. His hand could handle and his eye could see the little child; and there cannot be a doubt that there is in the human mind a craving after something visible, tangible, and material. But we have nothing of the kind; we cannot hold our salvation in our hands. Neither do we want it there. It is safer in the hands of our Lord Himself. But though we cannot say, "Mine eyes have seen," we can say, thanks be to God, "Mine heart hath seen," and we can understand the words, "Whom having not seen, ye love." [32a] There is exactly the same union in that passage between the Saviour and the salvation. Receiving Him we receive salvation, and beholding Him with the eye of faith we behold, as it were, our names written in the Book of Life.

p. 32

To behold the Saviour is a very personal matter. It is not merely to behold Him like a monument on a distant hill, which we can admire, but never enter; or as a harbour of refuge which we cannot reach. It must not be with us as it was with Balaam when he said, "I shall behold Him, but not nigh," [32b] for the invitation to us is to draw near, and our privilege is in our inmost soul to pour out our heart before Him, as before One who knows all its secrets, and through His own most precious blood has blotted out all its guilt. This has thrown a gleam of sacred light into many a death-chamber. May God grant that it may be the same with each of us. Let none of us rest until we can say, "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation," till we not merely know that there is a Saviour, but can rest assured that He has saved us, and has made us—even us—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Himself in His kingdom.

A PEACEFUL LIFE

p. 33

"To me to live is Christ."—PHIL. i. 21.

WE have studied the subject of a peaceful death-bed and I hope we learned how to die. Let us now turn our thoughts to a peaceful life and endeavour to learn how to live. The two things are bound fast together.

Let us study what St. Paul meant when he said, "To me to live is Christ." When there is any one object, for which, and in which, a person lives, it is not an uncommon thing to say it is his life. To a certain extent this explains the expression, "To me to live is Christ," for the Lord Jesus Christ was the one absorbing object of St. Paul's whole life. He thought of Him; he leaned on Him; he trusted in Him; he loved Him, and he lived for Him. He could not do without Him. If we look at the subject more in detail we find three things very clearly taught us in Scripture. Our life is hidden *with* Him, dependent *on* Him, and devoted *to* Him.

HIDDEN WITH HIM

In this stormy world we perpetually need a hiding-place, a shelter from the storm, and a covert from the blast. And so in the great prophecy of our Lord and Saviour revealed in Isaiah, we read of Him, "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind." [34a] But three centuries before Isaiah uttered that prophecy David had learnt to hide under His care, and said of Him, "Thou art my hiding-place." [34b] The trouble from which he was hiding was deep conviction of sin. In consequence of his sin the hand of God had been heavy upon him day and night. But at length the guilt of his great sin had been blotted out, and as a forgiven man he could find shelter in the very God against whom he had transgressed. He could hide himself in the love of Him against whom he had sinned, and instead of finding the Lord's hand heavy upon him, he could rejoice in the thought that there was a wall of praise around him. Now just in the same way our life is said to be hidden with Christ. "Your life is hid with Christ in God." [34c] It is not exposed to the rude shocks of the outer world, but is hidden with Him. As *He* is unseen, so *it* is unseen; but as *He* is safe at the right hand of the Father, so is *it* safe, being laid up in perfect safety as a sure deposit in the everlasting fidelity of God. It is on the safety of this deposit that our whole life depends. If there were the slightest doubt about it we should be like ships drifting on the wide ocean without either chart, compass, or anchorage. But now we are safe because indissolubly bound up with the Saviour, and so completely is our life identified with Him that in the next verse He is described as "Christ our life." He holds our life in His right hand. He is the source, the fountain, and the main spring of it all, so that we can well understand the words of St. John, "He that hath the Son hath life." [34d]

p. 34

DEPENDENT ON HIM

p. 35

There is a struggle in the human heart for independence. The tendency of the day is to throw off all dependence, and, with it, all submission. "I will," "I choose," "I think," "I determine," "I am

resolved," is the self-sufficient language of these latter days. Now such an one can never say, "To me to live is Christ." If he say anything it should be, "To me to live is self!" But see what a contrast there is in the life of the believer. Turn only to one passage in Galatians. There you find the "I" crucified; "I am crucified with Christ." [35] But though the "I" is crucified, there is a life that remains for "Nevertheless I live." And now what is the character of this abiding life? The latter part of the verse describes it, "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." These words tell of a life of habitual dependence. It all depends on the in-dwelling Saviour. His in-dwelling, that is life, that is the secret of everything. But how is this indwelling realized? How is it appropriated or experienced? It is clear that it cannot be known by the senses. We cannot see, hear, or handle Him. We must not look for anything material. Nor is it connected here with anything Sacramental; but it is described as the unspeakable blessing of an abiding faith, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

We must not leave the passage without remarking two facts respecting that love.

(1) It was shown in propitiation. St. Paul did not merely say, "Who loved me," but adds, "Who gave Himself for me." There are many proofs of His love, but the crowning act of all is propitiation. It is the ransom paid in full that is the one hope for the captive, and the supreme evidence of the Redeemer's love.

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(2) The love was not merely for all, but according to that passage, "for *me*." One individual is a mere unit in a crowd, no more than a grain of sand in an Egyptian desert; so that it seems a very easy thing for any one person to be lost in the multitude. But it is the office of God the Holy Ghost to apply the work wrought out for *all* to the special need of *each one*.

DEVOTED TO HIM

St. Paul could say, "To me to live is Christ," for he could also say without hesitation that the one thought of his life was his Saviour's glory. He lived for one object, and that one object is described as his life. Now we hear a great deal of consecration in these days, and we cannot hear too much, if only it is kept in its right place, for there is far too little consecration to God amongst us. Consecration is the surrender of the whole life to the Lord. It is the setting the Lord always before us in all that He calls us to do. We have been loved by Him, redeemed by Him, called by Him, and saved by Him; so now we are His. We belong to Him altogether. Our powers are no longer our own, but our Lord's; our lives should be no longer occupied for ourselves, but for our Lord; so that in us may be carried out the purpose of redeeming love as described by St. Paul. "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." [37]

p. 37

Shall we live for ourselves or for His glory? For the gratification of self, or for the happy, holy, sacred service of Him to whom we owe all that we have, and all that we hope for, our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

p. 38

"Ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."—ST. JOHN xiv. 17.

IN this verse our Blessed Lord spoke of the knowledge enjoyed by His people. He spoke of the present, and the future; of that which they had then at the time that He was with them, and of that which they were about to enjoy after the Day of Pentecost, when He would be taken away from them. With reference to the present He says "He dwelleth" (or, is dwelling) with you, or amongst you; with reference to the future He says "He shall be in you." There are clearly, therefore, two great subjects to be considered, the knowledge enjoyed by the disciples when the Lord Jesus was still upon earth, and the knowledge enjoyed by all His people ever since the Day of Pentecost.

I. WHEN HE WAS ON EARTH.

"Ye know Him for He dwelleth with you."

The expression does not describe an internal union within the soul, but an external companionship. The meaning is the same as when St. John said, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not." [38] There they were, a little company of disciples, and amongst them in the midst of their society, in the room where they were assembled, was abiding, or dwelling, the Spirit of Truth.

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Now what was the meaning of this declaration? Was it not this? That the Holy Spirit was at that time dwelling amongst them as embodied and manifested in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of Him it was said by John the Baptist "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him." [39a] So it was said by St. Paul, "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." [39b] And by St. Peter we are taught that He was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and God was with Him. [39c]

Consider, then, the Lord Jesus Christ as God manifest in the flesh, as the human manifestation of the mind and power of the Holy Ghost, and you will see in a moment that while He was on earth the Spirit of Truth was dwelling amongst the disciples. Where the Lord Jesus was, there was the Spirit; where He dwelt, there the Spirit dwelt; and when He and those twelve disciples sat together at the Last Supper, He could say of the Spirit of Truth, "Ye know Him for He dwelleth with, or among, you."

II. THE KNOWLEDGE ENJOYED BY ALL HIS PEOPLE AFTER HIS DEPARTURE.

It was to be very different afterwards. There is an immense change when our Lord speaks of what should take place after His departure. It is no longer "with," but "in." He would be not merely present in their company, but abiding in their souls.

In this promise, there are three things requiring our careful notice.

(1) The promise applies not to a company, to a society, to a Church, or to any body of men, but *to each individual*. The Holy Spirit will not be merely in the midst of a congregation, but a sacred guest in each soul. You see this very clearly in the history of the Day of Pentecost. [40] The Holy Spirit came on the company, on the Church, for He filled all the house where they were sitting. But besides that there was a separate personal gift to each person present, for "it sat upon each of them and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

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(2) The sacred gift is no longer localized or specially enjoyed in one place. So long as the Lord Jesus was amongst them where He was, there was the Gift. But now, wherever the believer is, there is the Gift. See the unspeakable blessedness of this sacred promise. The gift of the Spirit is not confined to this place or that. It is the inestimable privilege of each individual believer wherever he is, and in whatever position it may please God to cast his lot. You may be cut off from the means of grace in which you have delighted, but wherever you are, you are not cut off from the Spirit of Truth, from the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, for He is not limited to time, or place, or circumstance, and wherever you go at the Lord's command, there you will carry His presence with you.

(3) He dwells *within* the soul.

There is this great difference between His presence and that of the most faithful and loving of friends. The friend can only judge by the outside; the anxious look, the tear in the eye, or the words of sorrow. But the Spirit of Truth is within, and He takes note of the inner secrets of the soul. He does not wait for any external evidence of what is passing. The hidden springs of thought are all open to His eye: the secret pain that is never breathed to any one; the hidden hope that smoulders in the heart; the subtle temptation that is beginning to grow up unperceived, and the yearning of soul after a higher life,—all these things are open to Him, and He, dwelling within and knowing all that is passing within, can check, can guide, can heal, can help, can supply any possible need "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." [41a]

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There is no telling, then, the unspeakable blessing of the Pentecostal gift, and we can perfectly understand why it was that our Lord said "It is expedient for you that I go away."

But do we all desire it? "Of course we do," say some. But it is not at all a matter of course. There was no room for Christ in the inn at Bethlehem, and there is no room for the Spirit of Truth in many hearts. If He dwells within your soul He will humble you and make you to "abhor yourself and repent in dust and ashes." [41b] Do you desire that? If He dwells within you, He will wean you from the world and teach you to live as one looking for the Kingdom. Do you desire that? If He dwells within you He will teach you to give up your own will. Do you desire that? Do you desire really to be led by the Spirit, taught by the Spirit to become a humble, gentle, and submissive child of God? I fear there are many who, when the whole subject is considered, are not prepared to give Him an unreserved welcome, and would be tempted to close the door of their hearts against His entrance. If the door is opened by them at all, it is only set ajar, and not thrown wide open that the King of Glory may enter in, in the fulness of His power, and turn out everything that is at variance with His will.

But I believe there are many who would hold nothing back and who long above all things that the Spirit of Truth may take full possession of their souls. Their difficulty is not that they do not wish it, but that they can scarcely believe it possible that He should ever dwell in such a heart as theirs. They find so much sin there that they can scarcely imagine it possible that the Holy Comforter should not be driven from them by all that He sees within. No doubt there is quite sufficient to drive Him grieved and displeased from His resting-place, and if it were not for the everlasting covenant of God, and the precious blood of Christ, I can perfectly understand the impossibility of His making such a heart His dwelling-place. But the atoning blood alters the whole case. The blood of Christ breaks down every barrier. It is a new and living way [42] by which not only may you enter boldly into the presence of God, but through which the Spirit of God may enter your heart and take full possession of it as His own abiding-place.

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If you are longing to be filled with the Spirit, you must look straight to that cross of Christ. You must remember the fulness of the pardon. You must trust to that Atonement as breaking down even the barrier raised by your own dark corruption, and, pleading that precious blood, must open every avenue of your soul to the Spirit of Truth, that He may enter in and there reign supreme.

“Behold, I have given Him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.”—ISA. lv. 4.

It is often said that a living head is essential to the well-being of a living Church. Nothing can be clearer than the teaching of Scripture that our Living Head is in heaven now, seated at the right hand of God.

It is as a Living Head that our Blessed Saviour is here predicted. Three rich promises are made by God to every hungry and thirsting heart—Life, a Covenant, and a living Head. Life, for He says, “Hear, and your soul shall live.” A covenant, for He says, “I will make an everlasting covenant with you;” and a Head, for He adds, in the words of our text, “Behold I have given Him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.”

The question may arise, “Who is it that is thus given for a witness? Who is the person that the people are to recognize as their leader and commander?” The prophecy says David. But David, we know, was a typical character. He was not merely a king, but a type; a type of Him who was to be both his son and his Lord. Accordingly we are taught that the name David was applied to the Lord Jesus, for we find the words applied by St. Paul to Christ and His resurrection. [44a] We are there taught that when God raised up Christ from the dead, He gave us the sure mercies of David. The Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, is the Witness, He is the Leader, and He the Commander of His people. In other words the risen Redeemer is our Living Head.

p. 44

The text, therefore, directs us to His present action, not to His death or even to His life before His death, but to His present Headship at the right hand of God. He is

A WITNESS

One who bears a true and faithful testimony. This He did in His life on earth, as we learn from His own words when He stood before Pilate. “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness into the truth.” [44b] And this same character He maintains in heaven, for at the opening of the Book of Revelation we are taught to look for grace and peace “from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.” [44c] It is clear that as the “first-begotten,” that is, as the risen Saviour, He now acts as a witness.

This is done in two ways. He is a witness to the world, bearing witness to God’s great plan of salvation. But more than that He witnesses to the heart of each of His own children, assuring them of His faithfulness, confirming them in His truth, and doing what David prayed Him to do, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.” [44d] There is an outer and an inner witness; an outer witness in the power of His Spirit accompanying His word, and an inner witness within the souls of His own people; hidden from the world and known only to those who enjoy it, that witness of which St. John spoke when he said, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.” [45a] And this may teach us an important lesson respecting the true nature of faith. It is faith when we receive the testimony of the Lord Jesus as an undoubted truth, and, without questioning, simply believe Him. There are difficult truths taught in His word, and some strangely at variance with human opinion; but true faith gives up all and trusts. It makes a complete surrender to Jesus Christ, the faithful witness.

p. 45

HE IS A LEADER

And when we speak of Him as a Leader, we must not connect His office merely with the idea of war, for it is the office of peace also. When our Lord compares Himself to the Shepherd He says He “leadeth them out.” [45b] Nor is His office of a leader given up even in the peaceful rest of Heaven. There is a leading Hand even there, for when St. John was permitted to look in and to see the great multitude before the Throne, the Angel referred him to words from the blessed promise in Isaiah. [45c] In heaven, therefore, the promise is both fulfilled and known. It is fulfilled, for there the saints of God are refreshed by the living waters; and it is known, for the Angel himself, while describing the joys of heaven, calls attention to the ancient prophecy, and shows how in the peaceful scene around him it was receiving its complete fulfilment.

p. 46

Now what is implied when we are taught that the Lord Jesus is a Leader for His people? It implies much more than teaching, and therefore the office of the leader is far beyond that of witness. It would be of but little use to explain to a blind man the windings of some narrow path. But it would be an act of great kindness to take him by the hand and lead him. And this is what our Leader does for us, for He says, “I will bring the blind by a way they knew not.” [46a]

Our proud hearts may dislike the dependent position of either the feeble or the blind; but, whether we like it or no, we are both blind and feeble, unable to trace our path amidst the perplexities of life, and equally unable to move safely alone even when the path may be discovered. It is, therefore, in mercy and in tender love that God has given Him to be a Leader, and our part is to accept the gift and trust Him. When we are brought into perplexity, into one of

those positions of life where two ways seem to meet, we may fall down before Him as our great Leader, and say, "For thy name's sake, lead me and guide me." [46b] When we find ourselves in slippery places and scarcely know how to stand, we may come into His presence and cry, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." [46c] When perplexing doctrine is presented to us, and false teaching abounds around us, we may spread out His word which contains His testimony, and say, "Shew me Thy ways, O Lord." [46d] And when we come to the valley of the shadow of death, when no human hand can help us, and no human sympathy reach our necessities, even then we may be perfectly sure that our great Leader will never leave us; but as we part from all friends here on earth, and as all earthly helps fade away, we may lean more simply and more heavily than ever on Him and say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me." [47a]

p. 47

So again for the Church of Christ. Our lot is cast in very perplexing times, and those who really care for the Church of God must often have their hearts filled with deep anxiety. It is a happy thing to know that God has given him to be a Leader of the people, and "Head over all things to the Church." [47b] We may trust Him, therefore, to take care of His own truth, and rest assured that amidst all the perplexities of these latter days He will guide His own people safe to the end, until every one of them appeareth before God.

HE IS A COMMANDER

We cannot say of this office, as we did of the last, that it belongs to peace, for it is one peculiar to war. The commander is for the battle-field, and still more for the well-arranged campaign. Thus our Lord is presented to us as a Commander in the book of Revelation. [47c] He then appears in His royal character, and at the same time heading His army. He encounters all the powers of the world, but he is surrounded by a little company of faithful followers, and He leads them on to victory.

The Church of God must be prepared for conflict. Till the Lord comes sin will give the Church no peace. Till Satan is trampled down under His feet, he will never rest in his deadly warfare against the Lord Jesus and His little flock. The soldier of Christ must be a man of war.

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The great Commander will have His own chosen and faithful followers—"they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful." [48a] They are marked from the world by a clear line of separation. They bear His name; they wear His uniform; they rally round His banner; they are not ashamed of His reproach; and wheresoever He goeth there it is their joy to follow Him. There is no service like His, no commander so perfect, no struggle so noble, no victory so certain and so glorious.

If we really be amongst the chosen band of faithful followers, our one standard in life must be the will of our great Commander. We must be watching each signal from Him, and owning no authority but His. From first to last our spirit must be that of Saul of Tarsus, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" [48b] This may sometimes imply a painful surrender, a surrender of ease, and inclination, and, hardest of all, of pride. But the soldier in the earthly army yields at once to his commanding officer, and how much more should we, when He has chosen us to be His people, blotted out our sins by His blood, called us into His own fellowship, sealed us with His seal, and made us heirs of His Kingdom?

FAITH AND EFFORT

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"Our God shall fight for us."—NEH. iv. 20.

I CAN imagine nothing better calculated to make a people calm, peaceful, and courageous, than to be able to say in faith, "Our God shall fight for us." If we can say this, we may think on our country and rest assured that, whatever happens, all is safe. If we can say this, we may look upon God's people struggling for His truth, sometimes sorely pressed and sometimes quite disheartened; but when we look on Him whom God has given to be a Leader and Commander of the people, we may take courage that all will be well, for He is our God, and He will fight for us. Or, we may look at our own personal difficulties, at the temptation without by which we are surrounded, and the proneness to yield within, which renders us perpetually liable to its power; and sometimes we may be ready to ask the question, Can such as we are ever gain the victory? But, if we can but say in faith, "Our God shall fight for us," then, weak as we are, we may look forward to a triumph, and say even beforehand, "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory."

But there are few cases in which this language of faith was more appropriate than when originally spoken by Nehemiah. Nehemiah was one of the most beautiful characters to be met with in all history. I know of no one in whom there was a greater combination of practical, business-like habits, with true, simple-minded, childlike faith. When acting as cup-bearer to the King of Babylon, he heard of the desolation of Jerusalem, and obtained permission to return thither in order to rebuild the walls and restore the city. The Jews at the time were so exceedingly feeble, that the onlookers laughed them to scorn. But, when once the work was

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begun, contempt was exchanged for indignation, and Sanballat with others “conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.” Then it was that Nehemiah used these words for the great encouragement of all who were working with him, and said, “Our God shall fight for us.”

But while he thus spoke with the full assurance of confiding faith, he was not led by that faith to negligence. True faith never leads to negligence. It always stimulates exertion and rouses men to hopeful energy. So it did in the case of Nehemiah, for the same verse which contains the assurance contains also the spirit of active preparation. We will study the conduct of Nehemiah as furnishing an illustration of the union of faith and effort, examining first his effort, then his faith.

I. THE EFFORT MADE.

It was made under very discouraging circumstances. The city was in ruins, the walls were in heaps, and there were only a few restored captives to labour for their restoration. Now, in what spirit did these feeble Jews rise to their work?

(1) They all worked together.

There was just such an united and harmonious action as we long to witness in the Church of God. It is an old proverb that “union is strength.” In this case the whole wall was portioned out and all classes united. First came the High Priest and his brethren, next the men of Jericho, soon followed by the carpenters, the goldsmiths, and the apothecaries. Then came the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, followed by Shallum and his daughters; further on we read of Baruch, who set an example to the whole company, for he *earnestly* repaired the portion entrusted to his care, till at length the circuit was complete.

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(2) They worked with a will.

There is such a thing as work without a will. There is the dull, lazy work of the idle man, and the mechanical work of those who take no interest in what they are about. Just as in religion, there is the languid performance of a routine as different as possible to the real wrestling with God in faith. There is no soul in it, and who can wonder if there is no result? In this case there was rapid result, and they built the wall, and the reason is given, “for the people had a mind to work.” [51] An important lesson this for every Christian effort.

(3) They made real sacrifices for their work. It must have been a sore inconvenience to these men to leave their own occupations and to labour on the wall; but they laboured night and day till the wall rose from its ruins. Oh, that we had more of this spirit in the Church of God! Would that we knew better how to give to Him so as to pinch ourselves; to give our time, our money, our painstaking, our real self-denying work, in order to glorify God, and show that we live not unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again.

II. THEIR FAITH.

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This showed itself in three ways.

(1) In prayer.

Nehemiah was a man of prayer. When any trouble arose, his heart turned as if by a holy instinct to God, and so, when Tobiah mocked their efforts, Nehemiah gave no rough answer, but he turned his heart upwards and said, “Hear, O our God, for we are despised.” [52a] How much bitter strife would be avoided in the world if men acted like Nehemiah, and, instead of retorting, spread out their provocations before God.

But the conduct of the opponents soon turned from mockery to war, and there was a plan to attack the rising walls. But the attack was met just in the same way as the insult. In both cases he gave himself to prayer. I cannot imagine a better illustration of the praying believer than the words in verse 9, “Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night.” They heard of the conspiracy, and at once spread the intelligence before God; but, having done so, they did not consider that prayer superseded effort, but day and night they set their watch on the walls. Had they watched without praying, they would have been trusting to their own forethought; and had they prayed without watching, they would have tempted God to leave them. But they watched and they prayed, and they prayed and they watched, and so they acted in the spirit of the words in aftertimes spoken to us, “Watch and Pray.” [52b]

(2) Their faith showed itself also in the recognition of what God had done for them. Faith not only asks God’s help, but acknowledges it. It gives Him thanks for His action as well as asks Him to act; so when the danger was past we find Nehemiah ascribing it all to the good hand of God on his efforts. He did not say, “When we had defeated their plans,” but “When God had brought their counsel to nought.” [53]

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(3) Faith looks forward to the future. When the workmen were all at their posts; when the builders laboured, every one having his sword girded by his side; when the trumpeter stood by the chief, ready at any moment to sound the alarm; when the voice of prayer had been heard day and night all along the line of the rising walls; when all had been done that man could do—then

the heart rose high above all that man had done, and in calm, confident trust, Nehemiah assures the people, saying, "Our God shall fight for us." He had made preparation, but he trusted to God for victory. He was at the head of a feeble people, but he was the servant of the Most High God. He knew that the battle was not to the strong, nor the race to the swift; so he rested his hope on the strong hand of his God, and in simple faith he trusted Him to give the victory.

THE JOY OF THE LORD

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"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also."—ROM. v. 2, 3.

THE joy of the Lord is a subject that goes to the heart of many. Some are rejoicing in the Lord, while others are longing to be partakers of it; it is a gift after which their heart is yearning.

Let us consider the real foundation of true, solid, well-founded joy. In these two verses there is a description of the joy and its power. There is the joy, for "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God," and there is the power of that joy, for it rises above the troubles of life, and we rejoice "even in tribulation." There is, therefore, such a bright hope of the coming glory, that we may go on our way with a thankful heart, rejoicing in the Lord; and there is such a manifestation of the love of Christ in the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, that the distress of tribulation is overpowered, and even in the midst of sorrow there may be an abiding joyfulness in Christ Jesus the Lord.

Observe the foundation of this joy, and see how it is the consequence of our sure standing in Christ Jesus. When we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and rejoice even in tribulation, this joy is the consequence of a previous transaction, and the result of our occupying a new position. We have had access, or admission, and are now standing in His grace. It is the standing in that grace that is the foundation of the joy of hope. This leads us to the question, "What is the grace?"

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The word "grace" has different meanings in Scripture. Sometimes it means the inward work of God the Holy Ghost in the soul, as when it says, "Grow in grace." [55a] But this cannot be our standing-ground, for the simple reason that it is imperfect and variable. But this is not the only meaning of the word, or nearly so, for it is used for any great gift of love and mercy bestowed in God's free favour on His people. We have to consider what is the free gift or favour into which we have had access, and which is now our standing-ground. This question the context must decide; and it seems to me impossible to study that context, without coming to the conclusion that the grace here referred to is that which must ever be the real resting place for those who are convinced of sin, a righteousness imputed in the free grace of God. [55b]

This, then, is the grace in which we stand, the grace of imputation, the gracious gift of a righteousness reckoned, counted, or imputed to us when we do not deserve it; the marvellous mercy through which we are accounted righteous, accepted as righteous, beloved as righteous, and finally saved as righteous, although we are not really so in fact, and although we are conscious in our own hearts of matter for the most profound humiliation before God. Who can wonder that we rejoice in hope when we are placed in mercy on such a standing-ground as that?

This, you observe, is a work *for* us, and not *in* us, and therefore never varies. The work *in* us is perpetually changing. It is a progressive work, and its progress is sometimes much more rapid than at others. But the work *for* us does not go up and down with the work *in* us; it is unchangeable, like God Himself. The righteousness imputed is the righteousness of God, and therefore perfect and unchangeable. It changeth not for the simple reason that He changeth not, and therefore always, in cloud as well as sunshine, in dark days as well as bright, in the hour of tribulation as well as in the season of unmixed prosperity, in the times of deepest humiliation as well as in those of emotion and encouragement, the justified believer may rejoice in Him, and triumph in the God of his salvation. It is this that gives its security to hope, this that makes us sure of its never failing. If we were relying on all the varied changes of our own feelings, there might be joy one day and despair the next; but while we stand in the grace of imputed righteousness, our hope has a foundation that can never give way, and therefore we may accept the joy without a fear, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

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What is the great principle within the soul which constitutes our standing in this grace?

To this question we shall find an answer in the words of St. Paul, "Thou standest by faith." [56] And this is exactly what is taught us in this passage. In verse 1, we are taught that it is by faith that we are justified; and then, in verse 2, we learn that it is by faith that we have access into this grace wherein we stand. From first to last, therefore, it is a matter of faith. The whole secret of our standing, and of the joy that follows from it, is found in that one word "trust." Trust the Lord Jesus Christ as your finished Sacrifice and your living Lord, and you stand on the rock. Let your trust rest on anything else, on your feelings, your thoughts, your experience, your intentions, or your religious efforts, and you will be no better than men endeavouring to walk steadily on the waves of the sea. But trust Christ *as* you are, *where* you are, and that without putting even your own trust between you and Him, and you may go on your way rejoicing in Him, and need never

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THE WORK OF THE LORD

“Be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”—1 COR. XV. 58.

We have lately studied “the joy of the Lord,” and now I am anxious that our thoughts should be turned to another subject, which is much more intimately connected with it than many seem to suppose, that is, the work of the Lord. The joy of the Lord imparts strength for service, and the service of the Lord increases joy. There is action and reaction between the two.

WHAT IS MEANT BY THE WORK OF THE LORD?

It is *work*—work with all the self-denial that accompanies steady work.

It is work *for* the Lord. When we say that a father works for his family, or a servant for his master, it does not mean that such an one simply goes about his own business, but it does mean that he has a particular person in view, and that he is working for him. We are such poor, frail creatures that there is a constant tendency to admit by motives in our work. I know how hard it is to preserve a single eye to the glory of God. One’s own reputation and the great pleasure of one’s own success have a constant tendency to introduce false motives. What we want is to lose sight of self altogether, and to remember that if we are doing the work *of* the Lord, we are doing it *for* the Lord.

It is work *from* the Lord. It is the work to which the Lord has appointed each of us. When God called Barnabus and Paul, He said, “Separate them for the work whereunto I have called them.” [59a] Now we are not called to the Apostleship, but I believe there is not an individual amongst us who is not called by God to a certain work in His service. The Church of God is said to be “compacted by that which every joint supplieth.” [59b] There is not, therefore, a joint in the whole body that is not to supply something. All who are in Christ Jesus are the children of God, and all are called to work in His service, the strong man in the fulness of his strength, or the suffering invalid laid low with broken health.

This, then, being the character of the work of the Lord, let us turn to the encouragement which God has given, and the root from which it springs.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT.

There are some things in our Christian life which we think, some which we hope, and some which we know. We know some, for they are assured to us in God’s word, and we are fully persuaded that His word is true. Now here is one of the things we know, know as a matter of certainty without the possibility of doubt. We know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. It may often appear to us exceedingly feeble and defective: we may be ashamed and humbled at its multiplied shortcomings: we may look back upon it honeycombed, as it were, by mistakes: we may be conscious that we have left undone those things that we ought to have done, and we may be painfully aware that nothing has been done as it ought to have been done for God, but still we are assured that it will not be in vain. When Samuel was but a child, “the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground,” [60a] and we may be sure that He will not let one word spoken in His name fall to the ground now. If the Lord is with you, no one thing that you ever do for Him will be in vain. You may not see the fruit of it, or if you do it may be after years of waiting, but the Lord knows all about it. He sees exactly what you are doing, or saying, or giving, or praying, and the book of remembrance is written before Him. You yourself may be one of God’s hidden ones, and in the day when He makes up His jewels, [60b] you may meet then with others, hidden like yourself, to whom your labour, however feeble, has been blessed in His mercy. Cleave, then, to the work of the Lord without wavering. Let no discouragements dishearten you, hold steadily on your way, faint yet pursuing, being perfectly assured that what God has promised He is able also to perform, and that even your poor service will not be in vain in the Lord.

THE ROOT FROM WHICH ALL SUCH WORK MUST SPRING.

It is not all kinds of labour to which the promise is attached, for there is a great deal of labour that is altogether in vain. “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.” [60c] And the distinction is very clearly taught us here, for the work here spoken of is a labour “in the Lord.” It teaches how work is the consequence of union; that we do not do the work of the Lord in order that by doing it we may attain to union, but that the union comes first and the work of the Lord follows as its result. There will be no fruit on the branch if there is not first a union with the vine. There is no hope, therefore, of any man winning to himself a union with Christ by any amount of painstaking in work. If your heart is yearning for that union, you must accept it as a free gift because Christ Jesus, the Son of God, has redeemed you by His own most precious

blood, and you must do so just as you are, without waiting for even one more effort in His service. You must be “in the Lord” before you can “labour in the Lord,” and that union must be the free gift of His unmerited grace. You must be created in Him unto good works before you will do anything for His glory. [61]

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE IN THE CONFIRMATION OF FAITH

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“Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice.”—PSA. lxiii. 7.

I WISH to speak on the important use of Christian experience in the confirmation of faith. I say in the confirmation of faith, for there is the widest possible difference between confirmation and commencement. Experience may confirm the faith when it already exists, but the faith must obviously be there before there can be any experience of its result.

At the outset of our Christian course we have nothing to do but throw ourselves absolutely in naked trust on the sure promises of the covenant of God, and rest exclusively on what He has done and promised. We have nothing then to do with our own history, our own feelings, or our own progress, it is Christ and Christ alone on whom the soul must rest for life. And so, if we look to the real foundation of faith, it must be to the last day of our pilgrimage. It is a fatal-moment for us if we are led to look away for a single moment from Him. But at the same time we must remember that we are not always at the beginning of our Christian life. One who has trusted the Lord Jesus Christ and walked with Him for many years is not in the same position as one who is to-day seeking Him for the first time. He has had the experience of the loving-kindness of the Lord. He has never found Him to fail in any of the anxieties of his life, and if he could trust many years ago when he had nothing but the bare promise, how much more may he trust the Saviour now when the truth of His word has been tried and tested in all the varied experiences of life?

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The Lord Jesus Christ is described as “a sure foundation;” [63a] sure, because He is the foundation laid by God; sure, because of His own eternal Godhead; sure, therefore, as an object of simple trust before a person has had any experience of His grace. To the trembling sinner who has hitherto been a total stranger to Him, and has never known anything of His love, even to him He is a sure foundation, and though knowing Him only through the word, that trembling sinner may come to Him and trust. But according to that same verse He is also a tried foundation. He has been tried by the whole church of God for eighteen centuries and has never once been found to fail any one that has come to Him in faith. He has been tried by us who have known Him for the greater part of our lives, and we are not to ignore all He has done for us, but say, as St. John did, not merely that we have believed, but that “we have known and believed the love that God hath towards us.” [63b]

Now this is the principle of the text. The Psalm was written when David was in great trouble, having taken flight from Saul in the wilderness of Judah. He was there hidden in such caves as Adullam, and cut off from the sanctuary of God. But it is a very cheerful and thankful Psalm. He was not downhearted because of his troubles, but he had such an assurance of the loving-kindness of the Lord that his heart was full of praise. He could praise Him, and that with joyful lips, even in the wilderness. The reason was that he could trust Him, and though he was only a young man his trust had been confirmed by experience. He had been in difficulty almost the whole time since his call, but he had found a strong arm with him all the way, and therefore he said, “Because thou has been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice.” In this verse there are two things to be observed—

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I. THE THANKFUL RECOGNITION OF HELP ALREADY GIVEN.

The Lord had helped him through many difficulties and he thankfully recognized the help. We do not know to what particular act of help he referred. It may have been to his victory over Goliath, or to the escape from the javelin of Saul. Or it may be to the daily, hourly help given to his own soul in all the difficulties of his situation; to that help which finds no place in history, but which is the unceasing source of life and strength to the child of God. But whatever was the peculiar character of the help, it is perfectly clear that it was accepted and recognized. He asked for help, he found it, he acknowledged it, and he was thankful for it.

Let us learn the lesson that we should not be always praying for help, and fearing to acknowledge it when given. It is our privilege to ask for the gift, but it is also both our privilege and duty to acknowledge it.

II. THE JOYFUL ASSURANCE FOR THE FUTURE.

He knew that he believed in a God that changeth not, just as we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,” [64] and the result was the assurance that He who had helped him thus far would help him to the end. He knew that his God would not change,

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and therefore he was happy and confident though he was in "a dry and thirsty land." [65a] His joy did not depend on circumstances, but on God, and being confident in His unchanging grace he could be happy anywhere. He used to delight in the Sanctuary, and we read in verse 2 how he had there seen in his own soul God's power and glory. But the same Lord who had helped him in the Sanctuary would help him also in the cave, and therefore he was not an unhappy man even in the wilderness, but he said, "Because Thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee."

And this was no new principle in his mind, for we find him acting on it when he was quite a youth. It was the principle that carried him into the conflict with Goliath, for when Saul dissuaded him from the attempt, he said, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." [65b] Thus the recognition of past help ought to lead to confident trust. If we have found help actually given, if we have reason to believe that God is helping now, we may boldly look forward into the future, and be perfectly confident that He will help to the end.

THE COMING OF THE LORD

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THE PRACTICAL EFFECT OF THIS BLESSED HOPE ON THE LIFE AND CHARACTER

"Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."—ST. JAMES V. 8.

THE hope of the near approach of the Lord's coming should lead us to sit light to the world and the things of it. There is no greater temptation besetting our path than that of becoming entangled in the things of the world. We are for ever spinning cobwebs for our own bondage, and being then caught in our own web. Hence the importance of the weaning power of the blessed hope of the near coming of our Lord and Saviour. This applies in sorrow.

There were sorrows in the days of St. Paul, just as there are now, and he never taught us not to weep. What he did teach was that we "should not sorrow as those that have no hope." The character of the sorrow may be changed. And what was the power that should thus change the character of grief? The next verse supplies the answer. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." [66] We may look forward, therefore, to His speedy return, when the graves of those who are in Christ shall open, and when all sorrow will be lost for eternity in the blessed privilege of being "ever with the lord." [67a] Is not such a hope enough to change the character of grief?

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This blessed hope changes also the character of our joy.

Just as it gives a tone to sorrow, so also it does to joy. It makes it sober and solid. It gives it a quiet, peaceful, abiding character. Turn to the words of St. Paul. "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice." [67b] And observe the verse that follows: "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." Let your joy be the sober joy of men who believe that the coming of the Lord is at hand; the calm, well-assured, abiding joy of those who, being in the Lord, are persuaded that they will be with the Lord for ever.

And the same effect will follow with reference to all our possessions.

Let no one suppose we are not to prize those precious gifts which God has given us. Ought we to think lightly of money, time, influence, power? By no means; but if we believe that the coming of the Lord is near we must sit light to it all, for it will all soon give place to the glories of His kingdom. Remember St. Paul's thrilling words: "The time is short," [67c] and the exhortation that follows to "use this world, as not abusing it."

If we believe that the Lord's coming is near we must wake up and trim our lamps.

We must never forget that real, true believers may grow cold, and dull, and sleepy. Thus even the wise virgins were asleep when the Bridegroom came. But they were thoroughly prepared, so they were up in a moment when they heard the cry, and, having trimmed their lamps, were ready. Now, the thought of His appearing should have this effect on ourselves. Who is there amongst us that does not want to be quickened; to be aroused to fresh energy for God; to have the soul filled with a holy fervour, and the whole heart glowing with the love of Christ? Who is there that should not desire to respond with every faculty he possesses to the stirring appeal of St. Paul: "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand." [68a] Shall we sleep on as if the old world were going on for ever? Do we really believe that "the Bridegroom cometh," [68b] and shall we not trim our lamps without one moment's delay in order that when He comes He may find them burning brightly to His glory?

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If we are looking for the speedy coming of the Lord, it should lead to a calm, happy, peaceful hope in the midst of the turmoils of the latter days.

There is nothing to lead us to expect a calm termination to the present state of things. Our Lord when He comes will come riding, as it were, on the whirlwind and the storm. It is a very common thing to find a bar with heavy breakers on it at the mouth of the finest harbours, and so we must be prepared for a stormy sea as we enter the haven of rest. Our Lord taught this very clearly when He said, "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring." [68c] And now observe the effect of these events on different characters. Through the world at large they produce what may be called a panic—"Men's hearts failing them for fear." [69a] But how is it to be with the people of God? Are their hearts to fail them for fear? No, for we read, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads." [69b] They are not to be bowed down, but to hold their head erect, and with a confident spirit to look up full of hope. And why? What is it that is to make so vast a difference between the two characters? How can we explain the contrast? It is all explained in the latter part of that verse—"For your redemption draweth nigh." It is perfectly clear that by redemption is here meant the final deliverance, for in the previous verse [69c] we read of the final coming of the Deliverer. That calm peace, therefore, is the blessed result of a blessed hope. God's people will know that the Deliverer is at hand, and therefore will not be afraid. They will believe God's Holy Word, and therefore what alarms others will cheer them. The same storm which sinks the great ironclads outside will bring their little bark into harbour. They will know what it all means, and, with God's Word in their hand, they will know who is reigning, and will see in all that is frightening others the predicted signs of His near approach.

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ONE WORD IN CONCLUSION.

The word "redemption" has a double sense in common use. It is sometimes used for atonement or propitiation simply, and sometimes for the great deliverance which is the consequence of the great propitiation. It is clear that in this passage it is used for deliverance. But another thing is equally clear, namely, this—that we shall never be able to rest in the hope of the deliverance unless we are first taught to rest for forgiveness on the completed propitiation. Redemption by power is the consequence of redemption by blood. It is the redemption by power of which the Lord said "He draweth nigh;" but we shall never be able to lift up our heads, and look up in joy to the prospect, unless we first know in our own souls the unspeakable blessing of that redemption by blood which has long since been completed for ever. It is only when we know Jesus Christ and Him crucified that we can look up in calm, peaceful confidence to Jesus Christ and Him glorified.

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"WITH" AND "BY"

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"And when they were come, and had gathered the Church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith onto the Gentiles."—ACTS xiv. 27.

THERE are few institutions of greater antiquity than the missionary meeting. It is truly apostolic in its origin. The first such meeting of which we read was held at Antioch after the return of St. Paul from his first missionary journey. It was from Antioch he set off, having been commended by the brethren to the grace of God; and it was at Antioch, after his return, that he gathered together the Church and rehearsed to them all that God had done with them in his journey. This is the great subject of his address, and will suggest three subjects of inquiry for ourselves.

I. WHAT HAD BEEN DONE?

In the first place, the door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles. Surely by "the door of faith" we must understand that "new and living way" of which we read in Hebrews. [71] And what is that way? Is not this explained by the previous verse, "Having, therefore, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." It is the free access to the throne of Grace through the finished, final propitiation, there described as "the blood of Jesus." When He died, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the mercy-seat was laid open to the sinner drawing near in faith, and the invitation was proclaimed to all. The throne of righteousness became the throne of mercy, and the throne of judgment became approachable even to the sinner, for it was transformed into a throne of grace.

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This is the door of faith that had been opened to the Gentiles, and it is very difficult for us to realize all that was involved in such a fact. There was a middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile which kept them as wide asunder as if there had been no common Saviour. But now St. Paul reported that the middle wall had been broken down. [72a] Every stone of it had been swept away, and, according to the covenant of God, all were invited as one flock around one Shepherd.

But this was not all that had been done. The great work of that missionary journey was the turning of the hearts of both Jews and Gentiles to enter in by that open door. It is one thing to set a door open before a person, but often a much more difficult thing to induce him to enter in. Now the great result of this journey was that many precious souls were brought in through the

open door, and in Christ Jesus were saved. This was the work of which St. Paul gave an account on his return to Antioch. If he mentioned individuals he doubtless told them of Sergius Paulus, the Roman pro-consul at Paphos, that "prudent man," [72b] one of the first converts given to the Apostle. Then, again, he doubtless told them of the great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks in Iconium who believed. [72c] And if he were asked as to the reality of the work in their souls, he doubtless told them of the beautiful character of the Christians in the other Antioch, Antioch of Pisidia, of whom it is said, "the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost." [73]

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They had, indeed, entered in by the open door. They had tasted the joy of the living way, they had been brought under the shadow of the mercy-seat. They had sat down under His shadow with great delight, and had found the fruit sweet to their taste. So marvellous had been the change that the very men who before this memorable journey had been living, some in Jewish hostility, and some in heathen abomination, were now happy, holy, thankful believers, and were actually filled with the Holy Ghost. We see, then, what had been done. The next question is—

II. WHO WAS THE DOER?

St. Paul and St. Barnabas were the principal agents, and of these St. Paul was the chief speaker, but it was not he who changed the hearts or filled the disciples with joy and with the Holy Ghost. So he did not tell what *he* had done, but what God had done. The drawing of the sinner, whether Jew or Gentile, into the new or living way was a Divine act. To open the heart required a Divine power as much as to open the door. It is important for us clearly to bear in mind this principle, that the power to enter in is of itself the gift of God—that we must trust Him not only to save us when we have entered in, but to enable us to enter in; not only to show mercy on us when we have come near to Him, but to draw us near by His own Spirit.

III. IN WHAT WAY DID THE LORD MAKE USE OF HUMAN AGENCY?

There are two expressions employed which throw great light on the subject. In this verse we read of the things which God had done *with* them, and the same expression occurs in Acts xv. 4. But if we pass on to Acts xv., we find it stated that "God had wrought upon the Gentiles *by* them." [74a] The one expression implies companionship, the other instrumentality. Consider them separately.

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(1) "With."

The idea is that throughout the journey our Lord was literally fulfilling His promise. "I am with you alway." [74b] They went out to preach in His name and He went with them, as their constant, never-failing, though invisible, companion and friend. Thus, while they were acting, He was acting also. The two were acting together, and so fulfilling the one purpose of God. The action of the Lord was giving effect to the action of the preacher, though in some cases it was quite independent of it. Take the case of Lydia as an illustration. [74c] St. Paul preached to that little company assembled at the place of prayer by the riverside at Phillipi. There was the action of the preacher. But now look at the action of the Lord working with him. By His fore-seeing providence He had brought Lydia from her home at Thyatira, and by His guiding Spirit had brought St. Paul from his work in Asia Minor. It was He that brought them both to the same spot on that Sabbath morning. Then, again, while St. Paul was preaching the Lord was acting, for He was acting with His servant, first by the preparatory leading of His providence, and afterwards by the heart-opening movement of the Holy Ghost

(2) And this leads me to the other expression, "*by*." This expresses something different to companionship, for it teaches that in thus drawing sinners to Himself He makes use of men as instruments. In the case of Lydia the Lord opened her heart, but the things which were spoken by St. Paul were the instrument which God employed to lead her to the faith. It was not without instrumentality, but by it, that God acted. It is important to bear this in mind—that human instrumentality is not in antagonism to faith. We must remember the "*by*" as well as the "*with*," and that when God has given means, we do not honour Him by neglecting or ignoring them. St. Paul was most anxious to urge on the Corinthians that it was God alone who gave the increase, but while he did so he was not deterred from adding that he had planted and Apollos watered. [75] We know that God is a Sovereign, and that He, if He pleased, could gather in the whole company of His elect without the use of any one man to work for Him; but we know also that "*by* us" the preaching is to be fully known, and we are fully persuaded that if we are to look for a harvest we must both plant and water.

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THE STIRRING OF THE SPIRIT

p. 76

"And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of Hosts, their God."—HAG. i. 14.

LET US consider this stirring of the will, and then the great need of it even amongst the faithful people of God.

I. We read a great deal in Scripture of a movement in the will, as we know in practical life, how we ourselves are moved, or aroused on many occasions. We know what it is to be like Peter, who was asleep in the prison till the Angel of the Lord "smote him on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly." [76a] We are often aroused to make an *effort* which we never thought of before, and our whole soul is on fire to be working with a holy enthusiasm for God.

Now this stirring of the spirit is the act of God Himself. I am quite aware that there are passages in which man is described as stirring himself, as for example, "There is none that calleth upon Thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee." [76b] But such an expression is the description of the outward effect, and not of the inward movement of the soul, as is proved by that very text, which gives us the reason for the absence of any such stirring, "Thou hast hid Thy face from us." It was because He had hidden His face that no one was stirred to lay hold on His grace. Thus St. Paul teaches us that it is God Himself who worketh on the will. He urges the little flock at Philippi to be more diligent in his absence than they were in his presence, [77a] and in the next verse he gives us the reason that "It is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." So in this passage, when Zerubbabel was aroused to a new action it was the Lord who stirred his spirit, and who produced such a strong, deep feeling in his soul that he could not rest without making a fresh effort for the Lord. This stirring was the blessed result of the Holy Spirit's action. Oh, that we had more of it amongst ourselves!

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But while it is the work of the Holy Spirit, we shall find that, as a general rule, He makes use of means. Of course, if He pleases, He may Himself speak to the soul in the way of direct personal communication, and so arouse the heart and conscience without the aid of any human instrumentality. But in most cases He makes use of means.

Sometimes men are stirred by the sight of evil, as St. Paul was stirred in spirit by the sight of the idolatry at Athens. [77b] And it does seem strange that God's faithful people can sit so still as they do, and look on so quietly on the sin that abounds around them. How is it that the whole soul does not burn within us with a longing desire to be at work for God?

Sometimes it is through the power of the ministry. It was so with Zerubbabel, of whom it is said that the Lord stirred his spirit. The means employed in his case was the preaching of the two prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Sometimes God raises up great preachers whose office it seems to be to awaken nations. Such were Whitfield and the Wesleys. Such was Luther at the time of the Reformation, and such were Haggai and Zechariah after the return of the captives from Babylon. It was through them that the fire was lighted in the soul of Zerubbabel. Their burning words stirred his spirit, and he threw himself with a holy zeal into the service of the Lord.

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Sometimes it is by the example and influence of others, as "iron sharpeneth iron." [78a] There is nothing more infectious than character. There is a certain atmosphere surrounding each of us, and it has its influence on all who come near us. The idle man makes others idle, the corrupt man makes others corrupt; so the holy man wins others to holiness, and the man of Christian enthusiasm will warm up those who come in contact with him.

Sometimes He does it by stirring our nest. This is what He did for Israel in Egypt. They had begun to settle down content with their captivity. They had their flesh-pots, their melons, and their cucumbers, and they did not care to be unsettled; so God stirred them up by oppression. This is the process described in Moses' song, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest." [78b] The young eagles, being comfortable in their nest, have no desire to launch forth into the untried experiment of flight. So the parent bird stirs up the nest, and by means of that stirring compels them to a move. Is it not often just the same with us? We are so fond of our nests, so apt to settle down quietly, forgetful of that which is to come. So God in mercy stirs the nest. The heart is saddened, but the very stirring may be God's appointed instrument for waking up a new hope, a new longing for the second advent, and a dependence never known before on His own grace, and love, and perfect sufficiency.

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By whatever means the Lord does it, we must never forget that it is His own divine act of mercy and grace. No sight of evil, no preaching, no example, no chastening can produce the result. It is God the Holy Ghost that stirs the spirit.

II. Consider the need of this stirring amongst the faithful people of God.

It might be supposed that the true and faithful people of God would not require it, and that they would be irresistibly drawn on by the constraining power of the love of Christ. But this is not the teaching of Scripture, and I am sure it is not the conclusion from experience. We must never forget that the wise virgins went to sleep. Nor must we even lose sight of those thrilling words addressed by St. Paul to those in Rome whom he describes as "beloved of God, and called to be saints," [79a] when in the prospect of the second Advent he said to them, "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep." [79b] Had they not, you may say, been already aroused from sleep? Had they not been awakened from the sleep of death, and brought into a new life in Christ Jesus? How, then, should it be high time for them to awake out of sleep? Were they not already the "beloved of God"?

Now, this brings us exactly to the point; to the great need of Divine stirring, even for those who

have already been awakened into a new life in Christ Jesus. Turn to the Song of Solomon, and you will find the whole thing explained. In ch. v. the Bridegroom is described as returning home at night, and, knocking at the door of his home, calls to the Bride within, and says, "Open to me."

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[80] Now what is her state of mind when she hears His knock and listens to His voice? "I sleep, but my heart waketh." Have we not there the exact description of very common Christian life? How many are there still sleeping, though they hear the knock and their heart waketh? They are neither fully asleep nor fully awake. They are awake enough to hear the voice, but too sleepy to act on it. But we cannot be satisfied with this half and half condition. The Bride in the Song of Solomon was so long in arousing herself, that when at length she did so, it was too late. In ver. 6 she tells her sad, sad story. "I opened to my Beloved, but my Beloved had withdrawn Himself and was gone." Should not such a description arouse us all? Most truly may it be said that He is standing at our own doors both knocking and calling. Sin is raging, error is spreading, misery is abounding, hell is filling; but, thanks be to God, Christ Jesus is saving, and shall His own chosen people be sleeping quietly, seeking their own ease, and sitting down content if only they can entertain a well-grounded hope that the heavy burden of their own sin has been blotted out through His most precious blood. "Stir up, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the wills of Thy faithful people."

A WILLING SERVICE

p. 81

"Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?"—1 CHRON. xxix. 5.

THE occasion was a very solemn one. It was the last act of David's reign. He had long desired to build a temple for the glory of God, but he was not allowed to carry out his wish. So he collected the necessary materials, and at length, when he had decided to abdicate in favour of Solomon, he called an assembly and declared Solomon, who was still young and tender, to be his successor, then handed over to him the plans which he had prepared for the Temple, and concluded with a solemn charge. [81]

Having thus ended what may be termed the official business of his life, the aged king proceeded to address the congregation. Let us study four things in that address; his question, his thanksgiving, his prayer, and his final appeal.

HIS QUESTION

He told them how he was passing away, and how the work was great, so he asked them a question which may be well put to every congregation in every age, "Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?"

Now, we hear a great deal in these days of consecration. The idea of consecration is not a new thing in the Church of God, and I am sure that we want more of the true spirit of it in our own hearts. There is such a thing as consecration of heart, and consecration of service. The consecration of heart is the surrender of the whole man with the affections, the powers, and the strong will to the Lord. The consecration of service is the dedication of all our active powers to his work. When David said, "I am thine," [82a] it was the consecration of heart, and when Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me," [82b] it was the consecration of service. Now, it was the consecration of service for which David appealed, and it is this practical consecration of service on which we are dependent for the work in a parish. Who is willing to consecrate his service? I cannot see into the secrets of the hearts, but I know who ought to be willing—all those who believe in the words of our Blessed Saviour, "For their sakes I consecrate Myself." [82c] Did He, the spotless Son of God, consecrate Himself to be the atoning sacrifice for us? And if we believe that, can we doubt for one moment who it is that should be willing to consecrate his service to Him? Redeemed sinner, is it not you? Pardoned believer, is it not you? Are you ready to fall at His feet and say, "Here am I; let me be Thine. Here is my skill: use it. Here is my intellect: use it. Here is my power of speech: use it. Here is my money: use it. Here is all, all I have and all I am: let it all be Thine own, and help me to employ it for Thy glory"?

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HIS PRAISE

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David's question fell on willing hearts, and there was a wonderful response to his appeal. Gold, silver, and precious stones were poured into the treasury, and the willing heart with which all was done was beautiful. It was not done grudgingly or of necessity, but with a happy, joyous, thankful spirit, so that the old man's heart was gladdened, and "David the King rejoiced with great joy." [83a] It was this joyous spirit that called forth his praise. When he saw the blessed result of his appeal he did not lay it down to his personal influence, or to his own persuasive power, but he stood up and blessed the Lord. He was too old for government, but he was not too old for praise. His last words from the throne were those of praise and prayer. His joy ran straight into thanksgiving, and in this thanksgiving two principles were conspicuous, he gave all the glory to God, and he acknowledged himself and his people to be utterly unworthy of the

sacred privilege of this happy service. This is the true view of service and of gifts. When God calls us to work for Him, or to give for Him, we should not regard it as a burden laid upon us, but as an honour to which we are invited, an honour that angels themselves might covet. This was the spirit of David when he said "What am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee." [83b] And this should be our own spirit in all service and all gifts for such a Lord. We do not want to regard it as a yoke, a necessity, a heavy task imposed on us by God; but as an honour, a privilege, a happy, loving service of the King of kings, for which the best amongst us is utterly unworthy.

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HIS PRAYER

After a time his praise ran into prayer. This is just as it ought to be, for praise should encourage prayer, as prayer should always lead to praise. Thus the loving heart should pass backwards and forwards from one to the other, and the two should be so blended that when we are engaged by the one the other should never be out of sight.

Observe the prayer in ver. 18, and remember the circumstances. It was a moment of wonderful national enthusiasm at the commencement of a great national work. Their hearts were filled with joy and they were ready for anything. Now, what was the danger? What would be the danger to ourselves in our own day? Would it not be decay, a gradual dying off of our first zeal, a chill in the first love as there was at Ephesus? [84] What David prayed for, therefore, was continuance, or perseverance. In short he prayed against declension from their first love, for look at his words in ver. 18. For "prepare" the marginal reading is "stablish." And now you see the point of the prayer, "Keep this *for ever* in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people, and *establish* their heart unto Thee." What an insight it gives both as to our danger and our hope. How it shows us our need of being kept alive in our first love, and teaches us that we must not be trusting to the privileges of past experience, or the fact of past consecration, but that we need the perpetual action of the Holy Spirit in keeping His grace for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart.

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And where are we to look for this preservation? Do we not learn that our hearts are like leaky vessels, and the brightest, holiest and most joyous of believers requires the daily power of the Holy Spirit, not merely to stop the leak, but to fill the vessel?

THE FINAL APPEAL

The old man finished his prayer. In it he spoke alone. He was, as it were, the mouthpiece of his people. But that was not enough. It was not sufficient that he should speak on their behalf, but they must praise God for themselves. So having been into the very presence chamber of God in prayer, he came out, as it were to the assembled multitude, and said to the vast throng, "Now bless the Lord your God." Praise was the climax of the transaction, and praise the last act of David's reign.

Now may there be the spirit of that remarkable day amongst ourselves. Trace it all the way through, remember the consecration, the liberality, the joy, the praise, the prayer, and the final outburst of congregational worship. May God breathe on us the same spirit. May there be the same consecration of service, the same willing offerings, the same joyous praise, and the same thankful prayer for a holy perseverance unto the end. And, in conclusion, may I not say to you what David said to the congregation, "Now bless the Lord your God."

FEAR NOT

p. 86

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee: yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."—ISA. xli. 10.

WHEN we observe how frequently God says to us "Fear not," we may be quite sure that there is a great deal in common life to occasion fear. The frequent recurrence of the exhortation in all parts of Scripture teaches us, that through the whole range of Scriptural history there had been that all around God's people which, without the Lord's help, must have been sure to make the heart afraid.

You will observe in our text that He does not bid us fear not because He undertakes to remove all danger. What He says is, that when things arise that may justly alarm us, we need not fear. "Fear not, *for* I am with thee," (observe the "*for*"). If fear is to be really overcome, it must be by the eye being kept fixed on God and His promises.

This verse contains two assurances and three promises; assurances of what He is to us now, and promises of what He undertakes to do for us.

THE ASSURANCES

"I am with thee." "I am thy God." It is interesting to observe how the different portions of Scripture correspond with one another. They are all inspired by one Spirit, and all speak one truth. So when I turn to the concluding description of the blessedness of the Heavenly inheritance, I find just the same assurance, "God Himself shall be with them and be their God."

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[87] He does not promise to be nearer to His people, even in the heavenly rest, than He declares Himself to be now, when we are in the midst of our struggle upon earth. He promises *then* to be with us and to be our God, and He assures us in the text that He is just the same *now*.

The words of the assurance, "I am with thee," imply both reconciliation and companionship. Reconciliation, for He is not against us, but with us. Not separated by the barrier of unforgiven sin, but so completely reconciled, the law being satisfied that every barrier is broken down for ever, and He is altogether on our side.

Companionship, for as a reconciled and loving Father He never for a moment leaves His child, by night or by day, in joy or in sorrow; in active work, or in quiet submission; in the ministry at home or in the distant work of missions. Wherever His people are, and in whatever circumstances, there is He with them as their Father, their Friend, their Companion, their Helper, their God.

For He also says, "I am thy God." He is not merely with us, but with us in all the omnipotence of Godhead. An earthly friend may fail in helping us; but when He is with us as our God He will never fail. When He says, "I am thy God," He clearly means that He has chosen us to be His people, a peculiar people unto Himself; and that, having done so, He acts as God, on our behalf, governing, guiding, preserving, saving, and finally gathering to His own presence in His kingdom.

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THE PROMISES

(1) "I will strengthen thee."

Into whatever position He places us, for that He undertakes to give us the needful strength. If He calls us to be still and suffer, He will give strength for suffering; if to go forth in His name and labour in His service, He will give strength for activity; and in the holy warfare which we are all called to wage with indwelling sin, strength to overcome. And you must notice that, when He promises to strengthen, He describes an imparted power. He does not speak of Himself as acting for you externally, as when He accounts you righteous; but within you, imparting power, and so enabling you to act for Him. The promise of God in Scripture is that He will strengthen us, or, in other words, that He will impart a power of action in His service.

(2) "I will help thee."

The same lesson respecting man's activity is taught when He promises to help. There is a great difference between strengthening and helping. To strengthen is an inward work, the gift of an inward power. To help is an external work. I may help a lame man to walk, though I cannot strengthen his limb. But help implies activity on the part of those who receive it. God does not help us to do nothing. He helps us to be patient, loving, gentle, sweet-tempered. He helps us to be diligent and active in His service; but He does not help us to sit still and be passive. Help implies exertion. If He strengthens us by the Holy Ghost in the inner man, and if He undertakes to help us in every struggle against sin, it is our privilege to accept His promise, and press on, assured of victory.

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(3) "I will uphold thee."

These words appear to convey the idea of danger. We are walking in slippery places, and with fearful falls on every hand, so that we require not merely a clear eye to guide us, but a strong hand to hold us. In every step of our way we require to be upheld. In every moment of our lives we require to be held up by one who sees all our danger, who knows the path perfectly well, who can hold us with so strong a grasp that nothing can pluck us out of His hand, and who, according to the language of St. Jude, is "able to keep us from falling." [89a]

It is this perpetual and final preservation that is secured to us in the third promise; and I would have you most particularly observe that it is not with the right hand of His mercy, or the right hand of His love, or of His compassion, or even of His power, but the right hand of His righteousness. And why is this? Because this grace is the result of the covenant. By that covenant His people are given to the Lord Jesus that they may be saved. In fulfilling that covenant He has shed His own most precious blood for us, to make atonement for our sin. And the result is, that as, according to St. John, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," [89b] so, also, is He faithful and just to uphold us against a fall.

But here, I know, a question will arise. This is God's promise, but is it ever realized? It is very beautiful in Scripture, but do we meet with it in practical life? Are these gifts of God really given? Is this presence of God really displayed? this upholding power really experienced? Let us consider these five points and see.

p. 90

"I am with thee." Has this been practically experienced? Look at the words of David in the prospect of his dying hour, "Thou art with me," [90a] and, again, "O God, Thou art my God." [90b]

"I will strengthen thee." Remember how Daniel realized its fulfilment when he said, "Let my Lord speak; for Thou hast strengthened me." [90c]

"I will help thee." Remember David's words, "My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped." [90d]

"I will uphold thee." But will He really uphold us through trials and temptations? Will He really keep us fast in the right hand of His righteousness, and that when our faith is weak? Turn to Asaph's experience. He says of himself, "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped." [90e] But now look at the upholding arm. "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand." [90f] So, then, this promise has been practically fulfilled. God has been true to His word, and men have found Him so. His truth has never failed, and will He fail us? Will he fail the weakest amongst us? Will He cease to uphold His people? Let us trust Him. We are not worthy to do so. If He had treated us as we have deserved, He would long since have cast us off. But He has not treated us as we have deserved. He has loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, so we may trust Him, and leave all in His care; and of this we may rest perfectly assured, that the strong arm will never give way.

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

p. 91

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."—Psa. xxiii. 5, 6.

It is a very delightful thing to be able to say "Surely" when we look forward. Now, this sureness for the future depends on our present relationship to God, and the confidence expressed in verse 6 is the blessed result of the unspeakably precious gifts described in the earlier verses of the Psalm. It depends on the connection between the present and the future, a connection resulting from the unchangeableness in the character of God. In order, therefore, to understand the last verse which relates to the future, let us study the one preceding it, which describes the present. We may thus combine the present and the future, and I think the result will be what our Church describes as a "sure and certain hope."

THE PRESENT

As I have just said, our confidence for the future depends on our present relationship to God; and, accordingly, the Psalm opens with the words, "The Lord is my Shepherd." The holy relationship between the Shepherd and the flock is described as being already established, and by both parties recognized, and all that follows is the result of that relationship. We have not time to study the whole Psalm; but look at the three results taught us in verse 5.

p. 92

I. ALL WANTS ARE SUPPLIED.

Even if there are enemies, they cannot interfere with the full and sure supply which God has provided for His servant. When he reaches the end of his journey, he will find that the Lord has prepared a place for his rest; and now that he is in the midst of it, he may rejoice in that the same most blessed Saviour has prepared a table for his daily supply.

This refers, doubtless, to our daily wants, and it describes His fulfilment of our supplication in the Lord's Prayer. We pray day by day, "Give us this day our daily bread;" and when we really enter into the spirit of this Psalm, we as much as say that the prayer is answered, the bread provided, and the table spread.

And may we not apply it still more to the bread of life? Is it not our sacred privilege, when the soul is hungered, to feed even on Him; when the soul is athirst, to drink of the pure river of the water of life? And are there not many amongst us who know, by their own experience, the truth of the promise, "They shall be abundantly satisfied?" [92]

II. THE SPIRIT IS REFRESHED.

This is taught in the words, "Thou anointest my head with oil." The words refer to the custom of anointing the weary man with ointment or oil. It was poured sometimes on the feet and sometimes on the head. The object in both cases was the same, namely, refreshment; and surely we must thankfully acknowledge that our Heavenly Father does not merely give us the bare necessities of existence, but softens, refreshes, and cheers the spirit. He prepares not the table only, but the joy. "He giveth us richly all things to enjoy." [93a]

p. 93

III. THE CUP OVERFLOWS.

The mercies are so rich, the grace so abundant, the loving-kindness so bountiful, the living fountain so free, that the little cup of human capacity cannot hold it all, and it runneth over. God describes His people as not merely satisfied, but abundantly satisfied; and speaks of the Holy Spirit as not merely bestowed, but as "shed on us abundantly." [93b] Why, then, are we content with a little water hardly perceptible at the bottom of our little cup? Stephen was "full of faith

and of the Holy Ghost," [93c] and we are told to be "filled with the Spirit;" [93d] why, then, rest content with only a few drops in our own soul while there is the deep, broad river of the water of life able to fill, to overflowing, every vessel that can be found to receive the free supply? Why do we not realize more the truth of the promise, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it"? [93e]

So much, then, for the present. A table prepared, a head anointed, a cup running over. These are present gifts—the present and indescribable privileges of those whose joy it is to be able to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

THE FUTURE

p. 94

Let us pass on to the future as taught in verse 6. We may observe two things—

I. THE ASSURANCE.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." The idea seems to be that, in the poetry of this beautiful Psalm, Goodness and Mercy are represented as two persons, just as we find first Mercy and Truth as two persons meeting each other in Christ Jesus, and then Righteousness and Peace, two other persons, kissing each other in Him. [94a] So here we have the two persons: Goodness, the bearer of every gift that can possibly be required, and Mercy dealing most graciously even with sin; the two following the servant of the Lord, and never leaving him all the way through. And you may observe they *follow* him, so that he does not always see them, and may not even know they are there. He may sometimes imagine that he is forsaken and alone, but he is strangely mistaken, for Goodness and Mercy are close behind, the one to supply his need, and the other to deal graciously even with his sin.

If we are in Christ Jesus, we may be as sure of the future as of the past. We may be perfectly certain of the truth of the words of the Good Shepherd, "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." [94b] That promise is so sure that it can never fail, that hand so strong that all the powers of hell cannot pluck the weakest little one from its grasp, that heart so true that we may be perfectly certain He will never abandon one whom He has called by the Holy Ghost into fellowship with Himself.

II. THE DETERMINATION.

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"I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." David delighted in the house of God; and clearly we must explain these words as referring to the holy worship of the sanctuary. But in order to enter into the full spirit of the passage, we must rise from the Church on earth to the sanctuary in heaven; to the heavenly home and the presence chamber of God. There, indeed, is the table spread, there is the anointing oil, there the cup runneth over; and now, through the rest of our pilgrimage, though the journey may possibly be through the Vale of Baca, [95a] though sometimes the soul may be bowed down, and that even when the heart is fixed, yet in the midst of it all, and through it all, we may live in a close intimacy with Him. We may quietly rest in His love, we may dwell in Him and He in us; and while He gives the gracious promise, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise *cast* out," [95b] we may resolve, God helping us, that we will never *go* out, and that, to the last day of our lives, we will hold fast by Him, till at length the veil shall be withdrawn, and the heavenly home open before us, and we realize what it is, in the highest possible sense, "to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

THE END

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FOOTNOTES

[5] 2 Sam. xii. 13.

[6] Psa. li. 13.

[7] Psa. cxlviii. 14.

[8a] Exod. xv. 1.

[8b] Psa. xl. 2, 3.

[8c] Rev. vii. 10, 14.

[8d] Isa. lx. 18.

[9a] Psa. cxliii. 9.

[\[9b\]](#) Acts xvi. 25, R.V.

[\[13\]](#) St. Luke xix. 10.

[\[15\]](#) Rev. xxii. 17.

[\[17\]](#) 2 Peter i. 3.

[\[18a\]](#) 2 Peter i. 3.

[\[18b\]](#) St. John x. 28.

[\[20a\]](#) Rom. iii. 25.

[\[20b\]](#) 2 Cor. v. 21.

[\[20c\]](#) 1 Cor. i. 30.

[\[20d\]](#) St. John v. 28.

[\[21\]](#) St. Jude 3.

[\[26\]](#) Eph. ii. 4, 5.

[\[27a\]](#) Gal. v. 22.

[\[27b\]](#) Rom. xv. 13.

[\[28a\]](#) 2 Cor. v. 1.

[\[28b\]](#) St. Luke ii. 26.

[\[29a\]](#) Phil. i. 23.

[\[29b\]](#) 2 Tim. iv. 6.

[\[30a\]](#) Phil. i. 23.

[\[30b\]](#) 2 Tim. i. 12.

[\[31a\]](#) Psa. xxiii. 4.

[\[31b\]](#) St. Luke xix. 9.

[\[32a\]](#) 1 Peter i. 8.

[\[32b\]](#) Num. xxiv. 17.

[\[34a\]](#) Isa. xxxii. 2.

[\[34b\]](#) Psa. xxxii. 7.

[\[34c\]](#) Col. iii. 3.

[\[34d\]](#) 1 John v. 12.

[\[35\]](#) Gal. ii. 20.

[\[37\]](#) 2 Cor. v. 15.

[\[38\]](#) St. John i. 26.

[\[39a\]](#) St. John iii. 34.

[\[39b\]](#) Col. ii. 9.

[\[39c\]](#) Acts x. 38.

[\[40\]](#) Acts ii, 3, 4.

[\[41a\]](#) Phil. iv. 19.

[\[41b\]](#) Job. xlii. 6.

[\[42\]](#) Heb. x. 20.

[\[44a\]](#) Acts xiii. 34.

[\[44b\]](#) St. John xviii. 37.

[\[44c\]](#) Rev. i. 5.

[\[44d\]](#) Psa. xxxv. 3.

[\[45a\]](#) 1 John v. 10.

[\[45b\]](#) St. John x. 3.

[\[45c\]](#) Isa. xliv. 10.

[\[46a\]](#) Isa. xlii. 16.

[\[46b\]](#) Psa. xxxi. 3.
[\[46c\]](#) Psa. cxix. 117.
[\[46d\]](#) Psa. xxv. 4.
[\[47a\]](#) Psa. xxiii 4.
[\[47b\]](#) Eph. i. 22.
[\[47c\]](#) Rev. xvii. 14.
[\[48a\]](#) Rev. xvii. 14.
[\[48b\]](#) Acts ix. 6.
[\[51\]](#) Neh. iv. 6.
[\[52a\]](#) Neh. iv. 4.
[\[52b\]](#) St. Matt. xxvi. 41.
[\[53\]](#) Neh. iv. 15.
[\[55a\]](#) 2 Pet. iii. 18.
[\[55b\]](#) Rom. iv. 24, 25.
[\[56\]](#) Rom. xi. 20.
[\[59a\]](#) Acts xiii. 2.
[\[59b\]](#) Eph. iv. 16.
[\[60a\]](#) 1 Sam. iii. 19.
[\[60b\]](#) Mal. iii. 17.
[\[60c\]](#) Ps. cxxvii. 1.
[\[61\]](#) Eph. ii. 10.
[\[63a\]](#) Isa. xxviii. 16.
[\[63b\]](#) 1 John iv. 16.
[\[64\]](#) Heb. xiii. 8.
[\[65a\]](#) Psa. lxiii. 1.
[\[65b\]](#) Sam. xvii. 37.
[\[66\]](#) 1 Thess. iv. 13, 14.
[\[67a\]](#) 1 Thess. iv. 17.
[\[67b\]](#) Phil. iv. 4, 5.
[\[67c\]](#) 1 Cor. vii. 29.
[\[68a\]](#) Rom. xiii. 11.
[\[68b\]](#) St. Matt. xxv. 6.
[\[68c\]](#) St. Luke xxi. 25.
[\[69a\]](#) St. Luke xxi. 26.
[\[69b\]](#) St. Luke xxi. 28.
[\[69c\]](#) St. Luke xxi. 27.
[\[71\]](#) Heb. x. 20.
[\[72a\]](#) Eph. ii. 14.
[\[72b\]](#) Acts xiii. 7.
[\[72c\]](#) Acts xiv. 1.
[\[73\]](#) Acts xiii. 52.
[\[74a\]](#) Acts xv. 4-12.
[\[74b\]](#) St. Matt. xxviii. 20.
[\[74c\]](#) Acts xvi. 14.
[\[75\]](#) 1 Cor. iii. 6.
[\[76a\]](#) Acts xii. 7.

[\[76b\]](#) Isa. lxiv. 7.
[\[77a\]](#) Phil. ii. 12.
[\[77b\]](#) Acts xvii. 16.
[\[78a\]](#) Prov. xxvii. 17.
[\[78b\]](#) Deut. xxxii. 11.
[\[79a\]](#) Rom. i. 7.
[\[79b\]](#) Rom. xiii. 11.
[\[80\]](#) Cant v. 2.
[\[81\]](#) 1 Chron. xxviii. 20.
[\[82a\]](#) Psa. cxix. 94.
[\[82b\]](#) Isa vi. 8.
[\[82c\]](#) St. John xvii. 19, R.V. Margin.
[\[83a\]](#) 1 Chron. xxix. 9.
[\[83b\]](#) 1 Chron. xxix. 14.
[\[84\]](#) Rev. ii. 4.
[\[87\]](#) Rev. xxi. 3.
[\[89a\]](#) St. Jude 24.
[\[89b\]](#) 1 John i. 9.
[\[90a\]](#) Psa. xxiii. 4.
[\[90b\]](#) Psa. lxiii. 1.
[\[90c\]](#) Dan. x. 19.
[\[90d\]](#) Psa. xxviii. 7.
[\[90e\]](#) Psa. lxxiii. 2.
[\[90f\]](#) Psa. lxxiii. 23.
[\[92\]](#) Psa. xxxvi. 8.
[\[93a\]](#) 1 Tim. vi. 17.
[\[93b\]](#) Titus iii. 6.
[\[93c\]](#) Acts vi. 5.
[\[93d\]](#) Eph. v. 18.
[\[93e\]](#) Psa. lxxxi. 10.
[\[94a\]](#) Psa. lxxxv. 10.
[\[94b\]](#) St. John x. 28.
[\[95a\]](#) Psa. lxxxiv. 6, Cp. R.V.
[\[95b\]](#) St. John vi. 37.

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