

“NEVER DESPAIR”

The 22nd chapter of 2nd Samuel, which we have read, is the composition that appears in the book of Psalms as Psalm 18. Its occurrence in the historical connection of Samuel imparts to it a suggestiveness, perhaps, that we may not feel so readily in the reading of it in its detached form. It was written by David, we are informed *“in the day that Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul.”* It is, therefore, the expression of David’s individual feelings in the circumstances leading to its utterance which we can recognise without in the least detracting from its character as a writing *“given by inspiration of God,”* for when the spirit of God uses men as it used David, it uses their feelings as well as their words in the accomplishment of its own aims through them.

Our present purpose is to turn David’s words to practical account. For this purpose it will be profitable to take what we may call David’s side of them; that is, to consider them as the expression of David’s thoughts and feelings, without reference, for the moment, to the fact that they are the words of inspiration. Our safety and advantage in doing this lies in the fact that David was a model of the kind of man whom God esteems; and an example of how God deals with the men who are objects of His regard. First of all then, we have to note the strength and ardour of his sentiments towards God. The Psalm begins as with an outburst as it were:

“Yahweh is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer . . . my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high tower and my refuge, my saviour.”

We are familiar with these epithets as features of the Psalms of David. Let us try and get into the state of mind they express. They are figures, and figures of great boldness and strength, the feelings they figure must have been of corresponding intensity. Any one of them alone would express the strong idea that David had concerning God. *“My rock,”* for example, nothing could more graphically convey the sense of stability and confidence and safety, but he piles figure upon figure, *“my fortress, my shield, my high tower, my refuge,”* varied by the literal descriptions, *“my deliverer, my saviour.”* It seems as if David did not know how strongly enough or how extravagantly enough to give utterance to his admiration of God. The language suggests the idea of a man in a revel, in an abandon of enthusiasm with the subject before his mind.

God has vanished from polite literature or the talk of society, because He has vanished from faith. As a people striving to conform to Bible thought, we have to choose between the world fashion and Bible fashion in this matter. There can be no hesitation where the eyes are fully open and undimmed by the blowing dust of the world’s highway. *“The fashion of this world passeth away,”* as John says; the fashion of the Bible passeth not away. God was before the world, and will be after it, and the fashion originating with Him will “persist.” His ideas will dominate mankind when the present era and all its ways will be a forgotten memory; for His glory will fill the earth with a glorified remnant of the human race when the glory of man will have descended for ever into the open mouth of the Bible hell. The present evil world is but a transient episode in the history of God’s work on earth. It has no more of the elements of permanency in it than the antediluvian era. Who now knows or cares for what went on among the men that lived before the flood? We make the simple choice of wisdom when we choose to be on the side of David’s God, who is from everlasting to everlasting, who made the earth for His own uses, and of whom we read in this Psalm:

“Thou wilt save the afflicted people: but Thine eyes are upon the haughty that Thou mayest bring them down.”

The next thing to consider is the occasion of David’s jubilant outburst. It was deliverance from evil. He had seen dark and terrible times. He had been so low as often to despair. His language in this Psalm paints extremest agony of distress:

“The waves of death compassed me; the flood of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.”

The usefulness of looking at this lies here: we may often find ourselves in similar circumstances of extreme adversity when it seems impossible to hope, when the beauty of creation and the consolations of divine truth are veiled in a horror of great darkness; when we seem cut off from all good and the sword pierces to the very soul and marrow. The lesson of this Psalm is *“never despair.”*

"To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness."

"Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."

David was in greater trouble than we are ever likely to be. He was more than once overwhelmed in spirit, for the flesh is a weak thing and cannot easily penetrate beyond the aspect of the moment. But he came out of the storm and tempest, and entered at last the desired haven of rest and prosperity and peace and joy.

"In my distress," he says, *"I called upon the Lord and cried to my God."* If David did so, may not we? If David inspired and David anointed found it necessary to throw himself upon God in earnest supplication *"with strong crying and tears,"* can it be unnecessary for us who have not these special pledges of divine regard? Brethren and sisters, we may suffer from the chill that blights all spiritual life in our unbelieving age if we are not on our guard. It is a matter of command and the behest of reason, that we *"pray without ceasing,"* *"that in everything we give thanks and make our requests known unto God,"* that we *"cast all our care upon God who careth for us,"* and that we *"come boldly to the throne of grace to find help in time of need."*

David says,

"He heard my voice. He sent from above and took me: and drew me out of many waters."

Did God hear David, and will He turn a deaf ear to David's brethren? Is He, then, a respecter of persons? In no wise.

"Whosoever calleth on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

God Himself says:

"Offer unto God thanksgiving and pay thy vows unto the Most High, and call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me" (Psa. 50:14-15).

But you may say, "I have called upon Him in my distress, times without number, and there has been no answer." Well, David had sometimes to say this. We must not be premature in our conclusions. We must wait. God's ways are great, slow, and involved though He can deal short and decisive strokes Himself on the part of His children, and the work of preparing an effectual and appreciated deliverance for them, is a slow work. His deliverances are not instantaneously vouchsafed. He does not run at the instant like a mother to her baby's cry, that belongs to the lowest plane of things. He waits the full issue of things, and comes in at the ripe moment when His children have waited for Him. It was so with David. For a long time the tide was against him. He concluded it might be always so. He said,

"I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul."

But the deliverance came at last, and came in the most bountiful fulness. There came a time when *"his soul was delivered out of all distress,"* as he said to Bathsheba, when his enemies were no more, when he was surrounded with hosts of friends, when the wealth of the land was at his disposal, when the tribes of Israel were at his feet, and when even of the very heathen, in all the neighbouring countries, he was head.

So it will be with us—other conditions being equal. These conditions refer to David's conduct while in adversity. He did not, like Saul, impatiently diverge from the ways of God. On the contrary, as he says in this Psalm:

"I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God: for all His judgments were before me, and as for His statutes, I did not depart from them . . . Therefore the Lord hath recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in His eyesight."—

And then he proceeds to lay down the very rule of judgment defined by Christ when he said—

"With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

David's words are,

"With the merciful, Thou wilt show Thyself merciful: with the upright man, Thou wilt show Thyself upright; with the pure, Thou wilt show Thyself pure, and with the froward, Thou wilt show Thyself unsavoury."

It is therefore a condition of acceptable petition that we submit ourselves obediently to God in all His commandments while enduring the evils from which we pray to be delivered. If the evils are very sore, we may be sure they are sorely needed; and it is part of obedient children to say with Christ,

“The cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?”

Here, a sense of discouragement is apt to set in. We see the brightness of David’s confidence, the fervour of his devotedness, the thoroughness of his submission, and we are apt to say to ourselves, “We come so far short of David in all respects that we cannot hope to share his deliverance. We cannot pray with his ardour, or serve with his completeness. Therefore we cannot hope to stand with him in the experience of divine favour.”—In this line of sentiment it is possible to go too far, and afflict ourselves too much. The Word provides an antidote. It is a rule of God’s dealings with men that,

“To whom much is given, of them shall much be required.”

The reverse of this is, “To whom little is given, of them less will be required.” David had the privilege of direct communication with God. All his life long, the Spirit of God was upon him, and he could ask how and what to do in all the emergencies of life. He could “*enquire of the Lord*,” and receive answer “*by Urim and by Thummim*” (e.g. “*Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them?*” “*Pursue, for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.*”) Under such circumstances, it was natural for David to take God into account as a reality, as it is for us to take British authority or the midday sun into account. Both his prayers and his praises and his obediences were, in a sense, easy because of this. With us it is different, it is our lot to live in a day when there has been a suspension of visible divine manifestation for many centuries, and when we can only get into touch with God through His written Word. It is not so easy for human nature to see God through a book, and through its correspondences and fulfilments in the affairs of men now and for ages past, as it is when He is “a factor” in the current situation, a living intervening intelligence, as actual as the reigning sovereign. If, therefore, our apprehensions of God are less realistic and less powerful than David’s, there is a reason to which the divine compassion that was evinced to the sleeping disciples in Gethsemane will not be insensible.

“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Merciful is the Father to all who love Him in sincerity and in truth. We may have many reverences, many aspirations, many sorrows of a godly sort, deep desires towards God to which we cannot give articulate expression. God knows and notes them all, and interprets them for us. This appears to be Paul’s meaning in Romans 8:26:

“Likewise also the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

By this I understand that the state of our inner man is so reflected to the Father by the spirit that we are “*naked and open*” to Him even when we cannot express ourselves, and that our unutterable groanings are, as you might say, telephoned and interpreted to Him, through Christ our living representative and high priest, and accepted as the basis of that forgiveness and favour and blessing without which no mortal man can prosper.

How important in this aspect of the case becomes what we may call “*the preparation of the heart*.” We may not be able to express ourselves or even to formulate our own spiritual thoughts to ourselves; but if we can present ourselves before God and say, with Peter, “*Lord, thou knowest that I love thee*,” or with David, “*Search me and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*,” we may rest in the assurance of His favour. It is evident that before we can do this, we must “*prepare our hearts before Him*.” That is, we must subject ourselves to such studies and influences as will put our minds into harmony with His. There is only one class of study that can have this effect. The Word of God has been given us for this very purpose. Let that Word, says Paul, “ *dwell in you richly*.” Our endeavour ought to be directed to furnish the mind with all knowledge of what God has done, what He purposes to do, what He aims at therein, and what He requires of us. If we line the inner walls of this earthly house thus, with pictures derived from His own Word, so to speak, we shall become temples in which He will delight to dwell at last. Some people hang up their own pictures in their houses, a curious taste, which is a little unintelligible to enlightened reason. Does it gratify you much when you see this? Now, suppose God, who knows what is in a man’s heart, see the man’s own picture hung on the inner walls, is that a furnishing in which He can delight? But suppose He sees His own portrait, as we might say, hung up on the inner walls of the

mind, will He not be pleased to take up His abode? Now, there is nothing that will place God's picture on the walls of the temple of the inner man but the reading of the Bible. In the Bible He is revealed in His character, in His work with Israel, in His purpose with man, and a thousand other things. The daily and affectionate reading of the Bible will transfer the Bible revelation of God to the walls of the mind: and we are then in a position, even in hours of infirmity, to just submit ourselves to God as the work of His own hands, asking Him to delight in His own image and to forgive our blemishes and shortcomings. But if, instead of thus furnishing the inner man with the knowledge of God, we stuff it with the frivolous and shallow thoughts of man, as embodied in the ephemeral literature of the stalls, or the daily babble of the foolish millions, our minds will be no fit place for God to look into. Our business then will be like the business of Josiah: Cleanse the temple, pull down the idols, burn the groves, cast out the rubbish and the defilements, and then offer to God the sacrifice of a broken heart; with such a sacrifice, God is well pleased, and in due time, He will enter the temple in His glory, to dwell for evermore, and heal the sorrows of His people with His own everlasting joy.

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