

GOD NOW SILENT, BUT NOT FOR EVER

“How precious are Thy thoughts, O, Yahweh.”

So David exclaims. So we learn more and more clearly to discern. But what are Yahweh's thoughts, and where shall we find them? It is written,

“Yahweh knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vain.”

We know where they are. They are with us and around us—felt and whispered and shouted in a thousand forms—in private, in public, in conversation, by pulpit, press and platform, and we know they are vain; that is, they are futile. They come to nothing in the long run of things. They are shallow, incorrect and ephemeral. How different are the thoughts of God. He tells us,

“My thoughts are not as your thoughts.”

They are deep and high and true and lasting.

The thoughts of God are not accessible to us in our age except in the writings of God, which the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures undoubtedly are. They have been given “by inspiration of God” for this very purpose, that the thoughts of God may be known. The things contained in them “came not by the will of man, but by the movement of the Holy Spirit,” as Peter declares in 2Peter 1:21. It was necessarily so. How else could the thoughts of God be revealed?

“The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11).

It was, therefore, needful that God should reveal them by the Spirit, and that, too,

“not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth” (1Cor. 2:13).

The result is a true Spirit-writing, which is “able to make us wise” in the instruction it imparts concerning God.

The Psalms of David are no exception. It is expressly testified that the Spirit of God was with him (1 Sam. 16:13; 2 Sam. 23:2) and Jesus and the apostles both of them identify his Psalms as the voice of the Spirit (Matt. 22:43; Acts 4:25). Consequently it is the voice of God that addresses us in the 50th Psalm, which has been read in our hearing at this time. Let us spend a few moments in the contemplation of what it declares.

“The mighty God, even Yahweh, hath spoken.”

This is the one glorious fact of human history. Where should we be without it? In darkness. We might have escaped the fool's conclusion. We might have discerned and accepted the manifest truth that heaven and earth must have originated in power and wisdom adequate to their production, and that God possessing these must be one; but where would have been the practical value of this theoretical conclusion without a revelation? How could we have known the relation of our own life to God? How could we have known whether there was any purpose in earth's history, or any goal to earth's strife, or any meaning to earth's sorrow? How could we have known whether God regarded individual man; whether He had any wish or will with regard to individual action, or any futurity for individual life? We must have been without knowledge, and without even the power of inference. To have known that God existed without knowing these things would have been to know a terror, a mystery, a mockery. It was necessary that God should reveal Himself. It was necessary that He should speak. And He has spoken. The fact that He has spoken is manifest to observant intelligence. There are monuments and mementos of the fact on every hand. Our meeting this morning is one of them, for it is very certain we should never have been thus assembled if Jesus had not appeared and wrought and suffered and risen and said “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” The chain of causation running away behind our present meeting into the past, ends only in the fact that God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake unto the fathers by the

prophets, spoke in Israel's last days by His Son. The Bible, from which we have been reading, is a greater monument, for it occupies the most commanding position in all literature, both as regards antiquity, constitution, authenticated authorship, style, and contents. It is a literary phenomenon that cannot be rationally accounted for on any principle but its own, namely, that it is true, and that it was given by inspiration of God to 40 different writers in widely-separated ages, in all stations of life. The existence and dispersion and sufferings of the Jews is another monument, for not otherwise is their extraordinary position to be accounted for but on the principle that the Bible, which tells of their origin and their sins and their predicted scattering, is the true and divine document it claims to be. European history, in Church and State, is another monument, for not otherwise is this to be understood than that the apostolic work 1,800 years ago was a historical reality, and that the Book which foretold the course of human affairs in that connection is a divine Book.

We have, therefore, every cause to rest and rejoice in the fact that God hath spoken; because the certainty of that fact in its historic aspect means that it will be carried to its completion. For it is not yet finished. It will not be finished till the whole earth listens and is enlightened. The Psalm says,

"He hath called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same,"—

that is, He hath called the attention of the earth, the whole earth, universally. The purpose is universal in its bearing—

"The whole earth shall be filled with My glory," "All families of the earth shall be blessed."

It may be said there is nothing like this visible yet but the reverse:

"darkness covereth the earth," "the whole creation groaning and travailing together in pain."

Yes—as yet. There is a time for everything. Affliction before deliverance. What we have to note is deliverance begun. The process commenced when God spoke, and His speaking has been coeval with the presence of man upon the earth. He spoke in Eden at the beginning; He speaks in Eden at the finish when the last Adam is manifest in His glory. This Psalm, as an oracle of God, treats the matter comprehensively. It looks back, so to speak, from the point of view of the accomplished future, and speaks historically. God speaks, and glory is the result. It is an extended process, and it is connected with locality.

"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined."

This is the whole matter stated historically, as it will be at the finish. It is "out of Zion" all the way along. Zion is the centre of operations. It is needful there should be a centre in the orderly evolution of things. God does not operate over all the earth at once. He could do so if He pleased, but His method is much more interesting than this. He chooses a central point from which He gradually operates on the whole.

He hath chosen Zion: He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it" (Psa. 132:13-14).

"The law shall go forth from Zion,"

as the prophets tell us concerning the final effectuation of the work—Zion

"the perfection of beauty."

The force of this expression will be manifest in the Age to come. Zion in her degradation, cannot give us the illustration.

God shall comfort Zion."

Then shall we see the applicability of the description, as regards both situation and condition and architectural garnishing and the living accessories of divine glory and of joyful and illustrious citizens, and the perfect beauty and beneficence of the influences for the whole earth, of which she shall be the centre. It will be a lawful theme of gladness boast—

“Out of Zion the perfection of beauty God hath shined.”

The future bearing of the fact is made plain in the next statement.

“Our God shall come and shall not keep silence.”

This implies absence and silence in the meantime, and these are indeed the great and painful features of the present dispensation.

“Where is thy God?”

is the taunting question that has been thrown in the teeth of the children of God in all ages—even in David’s. God’s absence from the situation, so far as manifestation goes, is the great desolation of the age of sin, causing the famished experience described by David:

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night while they continually say unto me, where is thy God?” (Psa. 42:1-3).

This absence of God and silence of God is no accidental or inscrutable thing. It is stated and foretold and recognized and explained in the Bible.

“Your iniquities have separated between you and your God.” “I will hide My face.” “I will hold My peace.” “There shall be no answer from God.”

It is all very painful but quite intelligible. The learned in their pride will not accept the explanation, but there is no other. God is silent because the attitude and condition of mankind are not such as to admit of communion.

But He is not inattentive or forgetful. He proposes to break the silence, and to break it with astounding effect, as we learn, going back to the Psalm:

“A fire shall devour before Him: it shall be very tempestuous round about.”

By another prophet, He says:

“For a long time I have holden My peace: but now will I cry out and devour at once.”

By another:

“Yahweh shall roar from on high; He shall give a shout as they that tread the grapes against all the inhabitants of the earth.”

What all this literally means we learn from the apostolic testimony for Christ. God, who spoke in Israel’s last days, by His Son, will speak again by him in the day of his second appearing.

“The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with flaming fire taking vengeance on those that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power when he shall come to be glorified with his saints, and admired in all them that believe.”

When this happens, there shall be a time of trouble such as the earth has never witnessed. Part of the trouble will consist of the waking of men from the dead to judgment; for

“God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.”

Men will then awake to the terrible bearing of their actions, to which now they are insensible—“asleep.” Let us not sleep as do others. There is mention made of these things in the Psalm:

“Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother, thou slanderest thine own mother’s son. These things hast thou done and I have kept silence.”

This is at the root of most of the ill-doing that goes on.

“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is full set in them to do evil” (Ecc. 8:11).

When God no longer keeps silence, then men will see and fear and unavailingly lament their folly *“with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.”* But it is possible to see these things beforehand, to understand the reason of the present silence, to discern and submit to the divine voice that has already at sundry times and in divers manners spoken with such enlightening effect; and to be thus prepared with joy and gladness for that breaking of the silence that will strike terror into all the world.

The dread crisis has a special bearing on those who wait for God in the keeping of His commandments:

“He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth, that He may judge His people. Gather My saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.”

The day of judgment is emphatically a day for the gathering of the saints; for, though many will be gathered who are not saints—even the unjust and the disobedient who have known the way of God and refused it—yet the gathering of all others is a mere episode—a gathering for rejection, for scattering, for destruction. The gathering of the saints is for ever—for joy and glory and life everlasting. Who the saints are is defined:

“Those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”

This is their description in all ages, from the worshippers at the gate of Eden to the last sons and daughters called and justified in the time of the end. Only by sacrifice can sinners come back to God. It is the appointment of God, and no man can disannul it. At first in shadow, in the offering of animals, and then in the prefigured substance—the sacrifice of the last Adam. Men have from the beginning been invited to enter into covenant with God. The wisdom of this world spurns the invitation. They prefer to rest on human performance of some kind which they variously glorify by high-sounding terms of human invention—“morality,” “conscience,” “virtue,” etc. True reason would tell them that nothing can avail with God but what He Himself appoints. Mankind—all of them are already sinners and condemned. How can their “virtue,” even if it were a more respectable thing than it is, save them from their sins? They not only have no abiding portion in the universe, but the way is barred against their obtaining a title unless God make special consent and covenant. He offers this, but it is covenant by sacrifice. He presents the fact of the sacrifice, and all that is connected with it, as a subject for faith; and He asks identification with the sacrifice and ratification of the covenant in the way He has appointed—baptized into the death of His beloved Son, the appointed sacrifice whom He has *“delivered up for us all.”* If men refuse conformity with the divine requirement, they are outside the covenant and there is no hope. They may resent it but they cannot alter it.

“He that believeth not shall be condemned.”

Christ is the

“author of eternal life to all them that obey him.”

Being gathered, God will judge them. This is the affirmation of the Psalm and the testimony of all the Apostles. The Psalm says: *“God is judge himself.”* This is not in conflict with Christ’s statement that *“the Father judgeth no man,”* because he immediately adds, *“but hath committed all judgment into the hands of the Son.”* God judges by Christ and not directly. It is a judgment to which we may resign ourselves without fear, because a judgment true and unerring, and a judgment in which *“mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”* It is a judgment which decides whether forgiveness is to be granted, and not whether we have earned life by a spotless righteousness which Christ alone of mankind was able to evolve. Nevertheless, it is a judgment according to our works; for if our works are not such as commend themselves to the Judge our sins will not be declared forgiven, and we shall be undone.

The finish of the Psalms introduces other but not disconnected topics, yet topics that would require separate consideration. They relate to Israel's false idea that the offering of sacrifices to God was pleasing as presents might be pleasing to a man, or as sacrifices were supposed to be gratifying to the heathen deities.

"Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?"

enquires He.

"If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof."

What then?

"Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High, and call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

It is the mental attitude and its faithful carrying out in life that is well-pleasing to God. Sacrifice under the Law—baptism and the breaking of bread under Christ—are the appointed and appropriate expressions of our submission to God; but their employment, apart from the mental state which they are designed to express, is an odious mockery, as God plainly told Israel by Isaiah (1:13) and other prophets afterwards (Hosea 8:12,13). This is according to reason, and will be noted and acted on by everyone desirous of acceptance with God at the last.

"But unto the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or that thou shouldest take My covenant in thy mouth, seeing that thou hatest instruction, and castest My words behind thee."

This also, is according to true reason. What can be more nauseous than to see or hear a man handling scriptural things whose life is not in submission to the scriptural commandment? What further comment can there be than God's own words by Hosea,

"Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of Yahweh are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein."

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Pages 365-371