

PSALM 1

Blessed is the Man

BY BROTHER ROBERT ROBERTS

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

“But his delight is the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

“The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

“Therefore, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

“For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

In presenting these words for consideration, we incline to say, in the words of the apocalypse, *“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith;”* for they are to be regarded as the infallible counsels of the Spirit to which the heart may surrender itself without reserve, and to which it may resort with great consolation in these days of darkness when, unaided, the limited judgment of the natural mind is apt to err in its estimate of the principles which should guide action.

“The counsel of the ungodly,” is meantime in the ascendant. The world is made up of the “ungodly”—not necessarily of thieves, liars, murderers, and so on, but of people who are not actuated by God’s ideas—whose heads, morally and intellectually, are crammed with “the wisdom of the world”—who, while not ignorant that there is a God, are unfamiliar with him and estranged from Him in all their notions—who are ignorant of His requirements, or having knowledge, are so inflated with the pride of the carnal mind, as to live in habitual disregard of them—people in fact, who are prompted solely by the paltry expedencies of the present in the various walks of life.

Thus, if we go into business circles, we find everything sub-ordinated to trade exigency—a tender conscience sneered at or commiserated, and a cardinal virtue recognised in ability to achieve your ends at all moral hazards. Unscrupulous craft, a blunt conscience, and a certain domineering wantonness of manner are essential to success in the great and commercial world; because it is a thoroughly ungodly world to the core. If you move in professional life, you are in a whirl of insensate levity, and must, to be popular, abjure the solemnities of existence, and turn insensible to domestic sanctities, and join a brainless herd in the pursuit of the unsatisfying gaieties and vicious pleasure, which fashion has pronounced legitimate.

If it is your misfortune to breathe in aristocratic spheres, your soul is roused by the utter abandonment of the silliest trifling to which beings of intelligence could descend. Finery and gossip, and sport—draper visitations, evening parties, balls, operas, and a host of other fashionable practices, absorb the attention and dissipate the energy which were given for nobler bestowal. “God is not in all their thoughts.” Very respectable, but very ungodly. And if we go among the unwashed swine, that grovel in the social mire—the unregenerate rabble, who merely live to vegetate as best they may, —the base residuum that lies at the bottom of the social system—it requires not a theological eye to perceive that “ungodliness” is written in all their ways.

Put these representative classes together, as making up the structure of modern social life, and you have *“the ungodly”* in whose counsels the spirit exhorts us not to walk. They may be very decent in common estimation; very useful in their respective spheres in relation to the ephemeral economy of the present, but they are emphatically ungodly. They are unacquainted with God, are insensible to the relations subsisting between Him and them, are practically uninfluenced by anything He proposes to do, are wholly taken up with the miserable trifles of a frittering present.

Now there is circulating in this great incomputable mass of ungodliness, a set of sentiments which pass current for wisdom, and which if we are not on our guard, will inevitably infect us, and cause us to commit the error eschewed by the “blessed” of the spirit, by “walking in the counsel of the ungodly.” “Everybody for themselves,” is one of the first principles of this system of wisdom, and accordingly you will be told “Look out for yourself.” This is ungodly counsel; shut your ears to it. What need is there for such an exhortation, when selfishness rankles in every bosom, with the life-vigour of a serpent?

Instinct is strong enough without being exalted to the dignity of an axiom. We are not likely to fail in the direction of self-interest, but we are likely to fail from excessive attention to it. Heed not this cursed counsel of the ungodly! Give ear to the Spirit's counsel.

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:4).

"All things whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, do ye even unto them,"

"Love ye your enemies, and do good and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful" (Luke 6:35-36).

Paul lamented—

"I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state; for all seek their own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2:20-21).

This is the state of affairs now, because the counsels of the ungodly prevail, even among those who profess to have "clean escaped from error." A practical recognition of the claims of Christ in the sphere of daily life is regarded as the freak of a lamentable enthusiasm; whole-hearted devotion to the cause of the truth, and the interests of Christ in his brethren is at least considered unwise. Prudence is prescribed. Very good in its place, but there is a danger of letting prudence kill faith and sap our spiritual energy. There is a danger altogether in letting the counsel of the ungodly get so much of the upper-hand as to make us selfishly bent on self-security as the object of our efforts, and a little insensible to the claims of benevolence and conscience.

We are a little apt to lose faith in God's providential oversight, and to conform our actions to the spirit and policy of the ungodly world. *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly."* Reader! If thou art a professor of the faith of Christ, having faith in God for the supply of food and raiment, be not distracted from the higher duties by fear of poverty! Strong is the consciousness of God's existence and supervision, pay supreme deference to the voice of conscience and the dictates of benevolence in all matters. A life of obedient endurance, "as seeing him who is invisible," will prepare thee for coming serenities and exaltitudes for which thou wouldest altogether be unfitted by a cold and selfish and faithless policy of life.

A strong feature of the ungodly's counsel as developed in the present century is the exaltation of natural morality and religious sentimentality over God's scheme of salvation. Men are everywhere in love with themselves and enamoured of their own "systems" which they consider the offspring of "enlightenment" and the outgrowth of an enlarged and superior liberality. God's arrangements in Christ are at a discount among them.

They think them "narrow" "sectarian" "unsuited to the spirit of the times," and are in good many and increasing number of instances, disposed to consider them the invention of superstitious and theological past. The sciences, moral ethics, political and social economy, anything coming within the range of human wisdom, is considered much more worthy of study, far more dignifying to the student, and unquestionably more profitable in a spiritual point of view than the study of the Bible.

Now if there is one element in *"the counsel of the ungodly"* more calculated than another to inflame the indignation and arouse the detestation of a righteous man, it is this. The sentiment in the first place, is so pleasing to the flesh and so dishonouring to God. It is delightful to be at liberty, under the sanction of a philosophical judgment, (O, so sweet!) to fraternise with the great and fascinating religious world of culture and fashion that flaunts its beauties in the sun of Gentile greatness. It is pleasant to the soul to think the world so full of "good people," and to look upon the denominations as so many regiments marching under the same eternal banner, and the churches and chapels as so many gates of the same eternal salvation. O, it is so refreshing to let out the gushing streams of your pent up charity, and relieve the mind of the unpopular and inconvenient disfranchising limitations of God's word, which make one so offensive to "genteel" society, so boorish to religious people, so disturbing to the general peace; and not only so, but it is so profitable to get rid of a temporal disqualification which so thoroughly stands in the way of the "connection" so essential to worldly success. The sentiment is therefore dangerous from its seductiveness.

In the second place, it is a damning falsehood, though sanctioned by the names and influence of all the "great" intellects of the age. Nothing will more effectually blast a man's spiritual prospects than the holding of this heresy. It will infallibly keep him out of the pale of salvation. *"It hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching (the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ) to save them that believe (2 Cor. 1:21). 'There is none other name given under heaven whereby men must be saved'"* (Acts 4:12).

A connection with Christ, established in God's appointed way, is the only condition under which human salvation is possible; and if we think to make ourselves secure by a conformity to moral requirements, we are like the

Jews of whom Paul wrote, *“who being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness had not submitted to the righteousness of God”* (Romans 10:3). *“Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”* (Matt. 7:14).

These are the words of Christ, and just as true today as when they were uttered. The way of God’s exact teaching and ordinances, the pride of the human mind does not like to submit to. Few find the way because everybody looks at every other body’s example and concluding that the majority must be somewhere about right, they cast in their lot with the promenaders of the broad way of destruction and leave a few to the unpopular and trying ordeal of walking in the obscure way that leads to life. Let those few be thankful and be on their guard against the seducing “counsels of the ungodly.”

And let them *“stand not in the ways of sinners.”* It is bad policy to needlessly go in the way of evil influences. The assembly of sinners is always to be eschewed. The theatrical concourse, which is the aggregate of the vilest atoms of society assembled to have their gossiping senses bathed in a sea of prurient and unhealthy excitement, is not the place for the sons of God; still less should they be found in the place where the people are convoked to hear the word of God avowedly traduced and blasphemed. *“Sit not in the seat of the scornful.”* Why should your finer instincts be outraged by such an association? Why should you give the sanction of your presence to their execrable proceedings? *“Cease my son, to hearken to the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge”* (Prov. 19:27). *“Lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race set before us”* (Heb. 12:1). Walk with God, like Enoch (Gen. 5:24).

“Delight in the law of the Lord” like David, Psa. 119:47. Meditate like Isaac at the eventide (Gen. 24:63), on the things which engage God’s thoughts, which excite God’s interest, which constitute God’s pleasure, and gradually will the sluggish mind be quickened with Divine impulse and assimilated to the divine standard. Slowly and surely will you become meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.”

A tree planted by a river is in a favourable situation for long-lasting and fertile development. Hence it is chosen as the symbol of those who, having made the word of God their delight in the present state of existence, will flourish on the banks of the river of eternal life in the future. They are represented in John’s Revelations, (that mighty book of symbol) as trees on the bank of a river flowing from the threshold of the symbolical temple. The river is the stream of God’s all-supporting life-power. Hence says the prophet speaking of this time, *“There the glorious Lord shall be unto us a place of BROAD RIVERS AND STREAMS”* (Isaiah 33:21); and Jesus alluding to the bubbling of the same life influence, says—

“Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water; this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive (John 7:58-59).

Eternal life itself is spoken of as living water to the woman at Jacob’s well, and his parting salutation to mankind was couched in these words, *“whosoever will, let him drink of the water of life freely.”* From which considerations it is apparent, that the promise in this 1st Psalm of David points to nothing more nor less than perpetual juvenescence under the shadow of the Eternal Spirit. In fact, it is a promise of eternal (aeonian) life in a resurrected body to those who take refuge in the word of the Almighty and order their goings in accordance therewith. What an inducement to become a Bible student! Especially when contrasted with the portion of the ungodly.

“The ungodly are not so but are like chaff which the wind driveth away.” This does not refer to their present position; because instead of being driven away as compared with the righteous, they are apparent fixtures, and cannot be uprooted. *“In great power, spreading like a green bay tree”* (Psalm 37:35), is David’s description of them.

He says in Psalm 73—

“I was envious when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

“For there are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm.

“They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.

“Therefore, pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.

“Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.

“They are corrupt and speak wickedly (concerning) oppression: they speak loftily.

“They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth” (Psalm 73:4-9).

The Spirit in David does not in the 1st Psalm give us a description of the present order of things but of the ultimate footing of the respective parties as determined by present procedure. Apart from this ultimate, the triumph of wickedness is to any thoughtful mind an enigma. It perplexed David: *“When I thought to know this, it was too painful*

for me, *UNTIL I WENT INTO THE SANCTUARY OF GOD, THEN UNDERSTOOD I THEIR END,*” and in contemplation of that “end,” he says—

“Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou wakest, thou shalt despise their image” (Psalm 73:18-20).

“Their end is destruction” says Paul, (1 Thess.) and the words of the prophet are to the same purport—

“Yea they shall not be planted, yea shall not be sown; yea their stock shall not take root in the earth. He shall blow upon them and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble” (Isaiah 40:24).

God purposes a mighty dispersion of the power of the ungodly. Politically, their vast systems which overspread the earth with rebellion and every evil work, will be shattered to pieces by the little stone (the stone which the builders rejected), when it descends from heaven at the appointed time; and individually, they will disappear under the onward tread of God’s everlasting purposes. *“All the workers of iniquity shall perish,”* while the *“righteous shall shine forth in the Kingdom of their father for ever and ever.”*

“The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” They present a brazen front in the meantime, and shame the meek out of countenance, but “the dreadful acts” of God in the consummation determined will dissipate their ungodly hauteur, and striking terror into every fibre, will impel them to call upon the mountains to cover them from *“the great day of wrath of the Lamb.”* They carry themselves now as if they were Lords of creation, and behave as if things would always be as they are; but when God enters into judgment with the nations of the earth, they shall not stand, but will miserably quail before His confounding wrath; and from the triumphant congregation of the righteous who will raise aloud their hallelujahs with the voice of many thunders, they will be driven far away, to perish in the distant gloom of outer darkness. Well may those that *“fear the Lord and do his commandments,”* *“wait on him; and keep his way for he shall exalt them to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off they shall see it.”*

“The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD {shall be} as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away”
(Psalm 37:18-20). —Ambassador, 1864