

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 64

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The Psalm we have read together this morning (the 46th Psalm) is peculiarly beautiful and instructive. In two points, it has a very practical application to all of us, even now. The former is in the first verse:

“God is our refuge and our strength; a very present help in trouble. Therefore, will not we fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

This lesson belongs to our present life. There are times, no doubt, when it is more applicable than others; and, probably, its greatest application will be when the world, in its present constitution, is being torn to pieces by the destroying judgments of the coming time of trouble. Still, it belongs, in its breadth, to the troubled life we now live in the flesh.

Every man that truly learns the truth, learns to feel in his inmost breast, a confidence in God that reaches below the ordinary and proximate occupations of his mind. This confidence is the backbone of the new man, the central pillar of the house, preserving and sustaining when other things would fail. It is a confidence resting on knowledge: it is not a matter of temperament or craniology. The best temperament and organization may lack it; the poorest may possess it; though, doubtless, the best soil brings forth the best harvest in this as in all respects. Our knowledge in the case is derived from the Word. In this matter there is no good thing apart from the Word, and no wise life apart from the daily reading of it. Constant feeding on the knowledge of God contained in the Word, will produce this confidence which rests in God amid all the changeable circumstances of the present evil world.

Under this process, our very troubles we take from God; they cease to frighten or distract; we take them as a needed correction from the hand of Him who doth not willingly afflict the children of men; for is it not written in the enlightening Word that—

“Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.”

If this was ever true of any of the children of God, it is true of all. If true in the days of Paul, it is not untrue in ours. True, we have no persecutors such as were common then; but we stand related to many sources of trouble, and God knows how to manipulate these so as to put us through the discipline required. He knows what our cases require and will adapt our troubles accordingly. But in the midst of all—the very severest, the most threatening, the most calamitous, yea, even to the verge of death and unto death itself—it is a standing consolation that God reigns, though He appears not to do so, and that all things work together for good to those who live Him, who are the called according to His purpose. This consolation leads us to join with a hearty “Amen,” in the opening of this psalm:

“God is our refuge and our strength: therefore will we not be afraid.”

The consolation applies even to matters that are not matters of calamity, but of care only. We can understand what Jesus means when he says,

“Take no thought (Grk.merimnao—care, worrying, anxiety) for tomorrow.”

We can respond to this intelligently and thankfully in faith. We remember that he said, “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of,” and that if we seek first the kingdom of God, these things will be provided, even as they were for all the fathers now sleeping. Believing this, we can rest, obeying that other exhortation which says,

“Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.”

This is a great protection from the feverish care of temporal things that consumes the soul of those who have not set God before them: it is a constant solace in the midst of a generation that is bent on providing a reserve of the wherewithal to eat, drink, and be clothed.

In a particular sense is this confidence in God a privilege in the day in which we live. It is a day of much threatened trouble. Whether we look at the growing combinations of labour against capital; the steady organization of democracy in its demands against the privileged classes; the enormous development of armies on the Continent, the embittered conflict between priestcraft and modern free thought now assuming threatening shape, the political troubles springing out of the claims of the Pope to be obeyed in all the realms of Europe or at the vexed questions, east and west, which are with difficulty prevented from breaking out into a devouring flame, we can see the elements of commotion and public disaster gathering in thick and ominous clouds on every hand. The spectacle causes uneasiness in thoughtful minds. The uneasiness easily deepens into terror when the situation is thoughtfully surveyed in all its completeness and details. Apart from the truth, we could not help sharing the apprehension that prevails wherever there is intelligence enough to realise what is going on. But how different is the frame of mind created by the truth. So far from being afraid, we rejoice at the manifest tokens of the approaching day of God. We sing in our hearts,

“God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, will not we fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.”

But our right to rejoice in this comfort depends upon our relation to the second point. Let us look at this. It comes out of what is said in the 10th verse:

“Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen. I will be exalted in the earth.”

In this verse we have the whole policy of the divine operations in the earth condensed into a sentence as it were.

“I will be exalted.”

Look at what phase of the divine work we will, we shall find this is the result aimed at. Why did God afflict Egypt with great plagues, and drown Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea? Was it merely to deliver the enslaved Israelites? No.

“For this cause have I raised thee (Pharaoh) up, to show in thee my power, that my name may be declared in all the earth.”

Why has God driven the children of Israel out of their land, and scattered them as wanderers among the nations? Because they forgot His name and His praise, casting away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despising the word of the Holy One of Israel. Why does He purpose their restoration from all the countries whither He has scattered them? That His name may be honoured in all the earth. He tells them,

“Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel—(Ezek. 36:32), but for mine holy name’s sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went.”—(v. 22.)

Why are the hordes of the northern Gog to be smitten on the mountains of Israel? That Israel may be delivered? Nay,

“I will bring thee against my land that the heathen may know me when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes.”—(Ezek. 38:16.)

And why, lastly, in our salvation has God adopted a procedure which stops every mouth, and makes all the world guilty before Him? That God may be glorified in the manifestation of favour, and that no flesh may glory in His presence. This is Paul’s answer who spoke of these things in words which the Holy Spirit teaches.

The great aim in the whole plan is to exalt God to the supreme place of honour in the recognitions and affections of men. Some shallow minds among unbelievers perceiving this, have called the God of the Bible a selfish tyrant. The suggestion is as essentially unreasonable as it is daringly blasphemous. The supremacy of God means the well-being of men. There can be no peace on earth till there is glory to God in the highest. The highest well-being of man is in the holiest service of God. This is the case even now: how much more evident will it be when godly men are made immortal? God is the fountain of all power, life and faculty. He exists of himself and by himself from eternity. Estranged from Him or unsubject to Him, man must from his very constitution fail of well-being. When this is realised we shall mightily appreciate the wisdom and the goodness of God in aiming at His own exaltation in all His dealings with men.

But let us look at the practical application of this great and wide-reaching fact to our present individual cases. If God says *“I will be exalted in the earth”*—if this is the object of His past dealings with nations—is it not obvious that we must realise this result as individuals before we can be acceptable before Him? Of what value at last will be our technical enlightenment in the truth if it fail in inducing the one great result aimed at in all its operations—the enshrining of the Deity in our hearts as the highest reverence, the strongest affection and the great moving power of our lives? Wise men and women will see the answer for themselves. Jesus has placed this as *“THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT:”*

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy strength and with all thy soul and all thy mind.”

And since it is only those who *“do his commandments”* that will *“enter through the gates into the city,”* we may be quite certain that no man will pass through those gates who lacks in the obedience of *“the first and great commandment.”* The favoured multitude who pass those portals have *“the name of the Father written on their foreheads:”* what is this but the symbolic representation of that knowledge and love of God, which dwelling richly in the mind, enable their possessor to obey *“the first and great commandment?”*

Therefore, brethren, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of faith towards God and repentance from dead works. There is a liability to rest satisfied with the apprehension—the intellectual apprehension—of first principles. In our own day particularly, we are in great danger of stopping short at the understanding of the promises in their relation to popular fallacies and superstitions, and to be taken up with the agitation and demonstration of these things as propositions that can be successfully maintained, Bible in hand, against the delusions of the so-called orthodox world. We are in danger of remaining outside the holiness of the truth, contented with an intellectual assent to its elementary principles while uncontrolled by the law of God, uninfluenced by His love; untouched by His zeal; unennobled by His greatness. Forewarned is forearmed. The daily studious, prayerful reading of the Scriptures is the only way of coming within range of their spiritualising influences. The *“sincere milk of the word”* is the one element under heaven that will nutrify the babes in Christ, and cause them to grow into young men and fathers—healthy and strong.

The psalm also introduces us to a time—now at the door, when it will be of the very first consequence to have successfully attained to this thorough furnishing in every good work.

“The heathen raged; the kingdoms were moved. He uttered his voice, the earth melted.”

What is this but the time of the end and the change that comes with it, compressed into a sentence. The picture drawn we partly see before our eyes. Political commotion of every sort prevails everywhere among the “kingdoms:” the “heathen” rage. Doubtless, they will do so more violently when Christ arrives to begin his work of “*destroying those who destroy the earth;*” but the preliminary irritations and upheavings are in full progress. We but wait the “*uttering of the voice*” referred to. Before that voice, which stilled the storm on the sea of Galilee, the tempest descending will cease, and the earth, or present order of things, melt away, but not until judgment has run its appointed course, and spent its full fury on the head of the wicked:

“The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return until He have done it, and until He have performed the intents of His heart; in the latter days ye shall consider it.”—(Jer. 30:24.)

The execution of this fierce anger is referred to in this psalm.

*“Come, Behold, the works of the Lord, **what desolations He hath made in the earth.** He maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth.”*

War will be abolished by war, even the war of the great day of God Almighty, in which the power of man will be broken, and the arm of divine authority established in all the earth.

For the beginning of this mighty work we are waiting and longing. It will not begin till the Lord has set His own house in order in the judgment of His people. Therefore, we wait “*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him.*” This is the supreme event for us. The work to be done among the nations afterwards is nothing to us if we are not accepted; nay, worse than nothing; it will be to us terror and calamity; for the rejected are sentenced to “*depart*” to share in the fiery judgments that destroy the devil and his angels, or the world in its sin-constitution. Therefore, our whole interest and anxiety are concentrated on the personal arrival of the Lord; and this reacts powerfully on the present time, for our status at that time is determined by what we are now. The judgment seat will add nothing new to our case. It may declare the forgiveness of our shortcomings, but it will not proclaim a faithfulness that does not now exist; it will be but a manifestation of our present selves as we appear in the light of the divine scrutiny. Our whole attention, therefore, ought to be given to our present walk and conversation. Our aim ought to be to walk as before God, giving diligence, as Peter exhorts, to make our calling and election sure. The judgment of man will go for nothing on that occasion. Human approbation will be worthless if the divine approval is withheld: human condemnation will turn to great honour if the Lord be pleased with our work. Our wisdom is to make the Word (daily read) the man of our counsel and the guide of our steps.

The Lord comes in a time of trouble. We see this time of trouble widespread throughout the world now, slowly coming on, as it has been for twenty years past. Still, we shall see worse times than these, and it would not be inconsistent with former works of God if we were permitted to feel the bite of it strongly just before deliverance. Joseph “*made himself strange*” to his brethren, even to the point of contriving the sharpest agony for them before making himself known. Israel’s affliction in Egypt grew more bitter as the time of release

drew near. The whole congregation were shaken over the pit of destruction, as it were, just before Pharaoh's overthrow in the Red Sea. The darkest moment of the disciples' experience was just before the glorious resurrection of Christ. So it may be that his latter day brethren will in divine ways, feel the iron in their souls immediately prior to the arrival of the Friend of Friends to their deliverance. They are made to feel it now; but let them not be downcast if the heavens become blacker and the road rougher. The Lord is at hand. Our afflictions at the heaviest are light, and in the hand of divine wisdom, they are made to work out for us "*a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*"

(Sunday Morning No. 64 Pages 165-169 By Bro. Robert Roberts)