

THAT WE SHALL WALK IN INTEGRITY

The study of the Apostolic writings has made us acquainted with the fact that the Psalms of David are the voice of the Spirit of God in him. This fact is at variance with the common view. The Psalms are commonly regarded as the effusions of David as a national writer—the patriotic songs of the Jewish nation. At first sight this may seem a reasonable view; but when we get hold of the subject by the right end, we see it in a different light. The New Testament end may be considered the right end of the subject. Both Jesus and the apostles attribute the Psalms to inspiration; and David himself made the claim direct.

“The Spirit of God spake by me and His Word was on my tongue.”

The view thus strongly commended to us is confirmed by the internal character of the Psalms. They are not written as men write. Their thoughts are not the thoughts common to men. Their ruling spirit is totally different from that which animates the human race universally—Jew or Gentile, ancient or modern, as expressed in every way it can be expressed. The Psalms are full of God. They are steeped with the sentiments of Him. They are luminous with His praise, and clouded with sorrows attributed to the hiding of His face. It is this that makes them unpalatable reading to the vast mass of men—who are naturally interested in the things that pertain to men, and naturally are not interested in those that pertain to God or to man in his relation to God.

We who are here assembled this morning are not of those who take the human view of the Psalms. We have adopted and profess the view that Jesus took of them and that Paul took of them. We accept them as illustrating one of the *“divers manners”* in which God spoke in time past by the prophets among whom David was prominent. We read them as part of the *“whatsoever things written aforetime for our learning.”* The strong mark they bear of David’s personality is no barrier to our acceptance of them in this character. The Spirit of God has no limits as to the form it takes in the communication of its ideas. All these are its property; and it can use them as it sees fit. It may give us its ideas direct, as a *“Thus saith the Lord.”*

It may give us them indirect in the spirit-generated thoughts of a David, or even a Balaam; or it may give us them in the apparently casual sentences of a spirit-used Paul or Peter. Wisdom is justified of all her children; and the heirs of the Kingdom receive its instruction as little children, as Jesus says.

We must read the Psalms in the right way to read them beneficially. It would be a mistake to read them from what we might call the merely historic point of view. That is, we must not think of them as merely the utterances of David or Christ. They are the utterances of both, but they are manifestly written for a wider purpose than merely to record their utterances. This was no advantage to David or to Christ. They were written for the generations of the children of God to come after. But in what way? To serve what purpose? This is where we must exercise discrimination. It was not merely to let us know what David thought or how Christ felt, but to give us a form of exercise by which we may both try and develop ourselves. They furnish to ourselves a test and a standard as to where we are in true spiritual life—a kind of mould into which we can fit ourselves to see if we correspond to the shape. David was a man after God’s own heart; Jesus was the Father’s well-beloved Son. Here in the Psalms, then, we have the sentiments and the forms of speech acceptable to God. Let us read them as if they were our own. Can we speak in their language? Can we utter their thoughts? Are we at home in their feelings and sentiments? Here is where they are useful to us—not only informing us as to David’s state of mind and his Greater Son, but giving a lesson in the etiquette of heaven, by which we may learn how acceptably to comport ourselves in our approaches to the majesty of heaven and earth, and how to walk before Him

in our daily ways, so as to be well-pleasing to Him. Let us consider the three Psalms we have read this morning from this point of view.

“Judge me, O God, for I have walked in mine integrity; I have trusted also in the Lord. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart, for Thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes, and I have walked in Thy Truth.”

Are we prepared to testify these things of ourselves? And to make these requests? Do we walk in the right way? Are we anxious to be divinely inspected and exhibited? While it is Pharisaical to be boastful, and while a broken and contrite heart is the reasonable state for the best of mortal men, yet there must be a measure of what Paul calls *“the answer of a good conscience.”* We must be able to declare integrity the rule of our action and the truth of Yahweh the way of our path. We must not be in the case of the Church of England confessors who always say, *“We have done those things we ought not to have done, and we have left undone those things that we ought to have done.”* Those of whom this is true are without hope; for while it is true that

“there liveth not a man upon earth that sinneth not,”

and that our hope is in the Lord’s mercy, it is also true that that mercy is reserved for

“such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them” (Psalm 103:18).

As Jesus says;

“Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

We rest on justification, or the forgiveness of our sins for Christ’s sake because of our faith. At the same time, we have to *“walk worthy”* of this position: and if we do so, we are not *“miserable sinners,”* but children of the Highest, walking in love and holiness.

“If we walk after the flesh, we shall die, but if we, through the spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live” (Rom. 8:13).

Our approaches to God in worship must be something else than a confession of iniquity and imploration for mercy. There must be thank offering and praise and supplication for guidance. The service of the tabernacle will teach us a lesson here. There were trespass offerings, but more frequently and more acceptably were peace-offerings, thank-offerings, offerings of firstfruits, and other expressions of gratitude and praise. The worship offered by the four apocalyptic living symbols of the saints is the final and glorious service of the saints:

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who art, and was, and art to come. Thou art worthy O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power, for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.”

Then the Psalm proceeds to say what David has not done, as well as to declare his positive righteousness. There is a righteousness that consists in not doing.

“I have not sat with vain persons; I will not go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked.”

This defines one of the most difficult duties of saintship—the one that brings the most odium and entails the most desolation meantime—this standing apart from those who do not make God their portion. It is the very first declaration of all the Psalms:

“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.”

As the whole world is made up of such at present, it makes the course of righteousness a dreary one. We are all made to be sociable and to find pleasure in mutual honour and commendation. It is therefore a trying ordeal to

“Come out from among them, and be separate.”

We must not forget, however, that it is permitted us to be kind, and to do good to all as we have opportunity. The practice of this kindness in the capacity of saints, and the remembrance of what is the upshot of it all in the final fulfilment of the promise, *"I will receive you and ye shall be My sons and daughters,"* will enable us to endure the mortifications of the high calling. These mortifications are only for a season. That Jesus should say *"Ye are not of this world"* is embarrassing for the present time, but how completely will that embarrassment be gone when *"this world"* will no longer be *"this world,"* but will have given place to that world to come in which the friends of God will be at home everywhere. Considering what the present world is, we need not be sorry that Christ and his brethren are not of it. On the contrary, it is a joyful fact that they do not belong to a world so thoroughly unsatisfactory on all points. The present world is a transient panorama of clouded and unsatisfactory objects and conditions. Its pleasures are empty; its prizes are cheats; its favour is uncertain as the wind; its honours are short-lived; its very best state is altogether vanity and vexation of spirit. The world that the saints belong to is a world of light and reason and goodness, and joy and life everlasting. It is worth waiting for and worth sacrificing for. It is God's righteous arrangement that we suffer now in order *"that we may be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God"* when it comes. It is hard for flesh and blood; but faith can submit, and without faith, no good can be done either in this world or that which is to come.

"I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord, that I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Thy wondrous works."

Pilate washed his hands, but not innocently, for he lent himself to the unrighteousness about to be done. Our separations from wickedness must be real; ceremonial holiness merely is an abomination. God abhors worship offered with a wicked mind (Prov. 15:8; 28:9). Loud praying and bawlings and even a *"multitude of sacrifices,"* are no pleasure to God (Isa. 1:11). The modern application would be to what is called *"the externals"* of religion—chapel-going, church building, almsgiving. We might even apply it to more scriptural things—the visible institution of the Truth. Christ is our altar, whether in the dedicatory act of baptism into his death, or the commemorative participation of his broken body and shed blood in the breaking of bread. To be like David we must compass the altar in innocency in order to be acceptable in our approaches. Must it not be so? How could God, who knows the heart, take any pleasure in the worshipful deferences of a man whose life and mind were out of harmony with his requirements? But as regards the other class, we are informed *"the prayer of the upright is his delight."*

"Lord I have loved the habitation of Thine house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth."

This also we shall be able to say if we are of the same mind expressed in the Psalm. It may not be with just the same application, but the sentiments will be entirely the same. Looking back we shall feel our sympathies entirely engaged by the tabernacle, by the temple, and by the Lord Jesus, the living temple of the Father's presence. The same mind will take us forward with strong desire to the day of the still greater temple—the *"latter house"* of Ezekiel's visions, filled with glory, and forward still to the day of the proclamation: *"The tabernacle of God is with men."* Our interest in these things will arise from our interest in God Himself. The reason why the ordinary run of men—interested only in natural things—are not interested in temple things is because they are not interested in God. They have no knowledge or faith in Him. A man must love God before he can say, *"I have loved the habitation of Thine house"*, and then he can say it with strong emphasis. His whole being vibrates in joyful response to every idea of association with God. He can say with David, *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."* Association with God means at the last, peace, holiness, security, life and gladness for ever. Adam had this

association before he fell. The redeemed of Adam's race will have it again in the day of the complete restoration. The prospect of it is the joy of faith; and from this arises the sweetness of all present relations of that kind. In the present dark day of our probation, it is connected with the Scriptures, the assembling for the breaking of bread, meetings for the proclamation of the Truth, and all connections of the purpose of God with the fortunes of the land, and nation of Israel, and the affairs of the nations. Wherever the honour of God is involved, the hearts of His sons rise in sympathy; weary and downcast, forlorn and depressed, they may be as they pass through the great and terrible wilderness of the present experience; but their desires are unquenchable towards God and His holiness and His love. The very darkness gives intensity to their longings for the day of light and honour and gladness for which they are being prepared in the furnace of present affliction.

It follows that they pray with David, *"Gather not my soul with sinners nor my life with bloody men."* They cannot yoke with men of no scruple, who succeed in this life, with the requisite amount of talent; men with whom God is merely a hypothesis (if so much as that), and questions of principle, points of weakness. Association is not possible to any hearty purpose even now, and as for association when God's purpose on earth is finished, as well think of Pharaoh and Moses, Cain and Abel, standing in the presence of the Lamb. Dishonour, destruction and oblivion await the wicked; and though God for a season permit them free enjoyment of His bounteous goodness, it is only because His purpose otherwise requires their toleration. David calls them

"Yahweh's sword" His "hand"—"men of the world who have their portion in this life—whose belly Thou fillest with hid treasure; they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes" (Psa. 17:14).

Their prosperity is great and impressive; ostentatiously borne by them and oppressively felt by the friends of God, but it is only for a time. David was painfully exercised concerning them—

"The ungodly, who prosper in the world: they increase in riches," "until," says he "I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image."

In this matter, David says, the thoughts of God are "very deep" they are far reaching and go below the appearance of things.

"A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this: when the wicked spring as the grass and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed forever...Lo, Thine enemies, O Lord be scattered. But my horn shalt Thou exalt. I shall be anointed with fresh oil. Mine eyes shall see my desire upon mine enemies; mine ears shall hear the desire of the wicked that rise up against me. The righteous shall flourish as the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God."

These are powerful considerations. They lead to the resolve of verse 11 of the psalm we are considering (Psa. 26).

"I will walk in mine integrity."

Such a resolve requires incentive. It would die in the absence of the assurance that it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked (Isa. 3:10-11). Philosophers talk of virtue being its own reward, and of the hope of good being ignoble. Their talk is fictitious. It is not according to the constitution of things. It is not according to God's communications to us; it is not according to the mental habit of the philosophers themselves. We are made to act by incentive, and the so acting is not ignoble if the incentive be high enough. The incentive could not be higher. The hope of seeing God recognised and exalted on earth; our own

natures redeemed from all weakness and pollution; wicked and unreasonable and useless and hurtful men exterminated, and the earth cleared for joyous and beautiful and everlasting life. It is with truest reason that David exclaims in the next Psalm

"I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

We all should utterly faint and fail without this conviction. This conviction is a source of great strength and patience, and even joy, in the midst of the present evil. It is not a fantasy, or even a probable opinion. It is a matter of certainty, as all conviction is that is established on sound reason.

"We have not followed cunningly devised fables."

It is an expectation based upon great and palpable events that cannot be blotted out from the history of the world, and whose monumental memorials are inwrought in the very structure of human affairs upon earth at the present moment. The gospel of a risen Christ announces to us and pledges to us a day when "the goodness of the Lord" will be revealed in the land of the living in a form that none can mistake or gainsay. Christ himself again among men, the righteous of past ages awakened to life and taking a practical and a powerful part in earth's affairs; the friends of God in multitudes (after lives of suffering and darkness), manifested as the irresistible and capable heads and rulers of men, endowed with health and memory such as never was the lot of Adam's sons; all old abuses gone, all grievances redressed, all "questions" ended—a perfectly regulated civilization prevalent everywhere in which the rejoicing millions of Adam's race will for the first time experience the delight of liberty, combined with obedience; mirth mingled with awe; plenty allied with sacrifice to the glory of God and the good of neighbours—the conviction that such a good time will come is a powerful cordial to the faintness of heart that springs within us in the presence of the hopeless welter of helpless humanity in the great slough of impotence and confusion and despondency that covers the earth in the absence of the Kingdom of God.

Well may we say with David,

"I will walk in my integrity;"

"I will not sit with the wicked...in whose hand is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes."

The ways of wickedness are ways of darkness and death, however pleasant and helpful for the time being. The ways of righteousness are ways of light and life, however inconvenient or even painful they may be while they last.

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

"Therefore," says David, "wait on the Lord; be of good courage; wait, I say, on the Lord."

But we may feel we are not worthy of so great a salvation. In a sense, we are not and cannot be; in a sense we must be. We must yield to God what He requires of us—faith in what He has promised, and obedience to what He has commanded—this is worthiness. But as for a perfect righteousness that shall entitle us to salvation, this has long been settled as an impossibility.

"The whole world is become guilty before God" (Rom.3: 19-20).

"The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe" (Gal. 3:22).

What is wanted is a joyful faith, a loving conformity to the commandments of the Lord, and a humble and contrite frame of mind in all our ways—on the basis of enlightenment in the Truth.

All this is consistent with the resolve that we shall walk in integrity because of the joy set before us. Nevertheless, it admits of our participation in the prayer which David links with his resolve:

“redeem me and be merciful unto me...”Hear me when I cry with my voice; have mercy also upon me and answer me. Hide not Thy face from me; put not Thy servant away in anger; Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.”

None of us can feel otherwise than unworthy in ourselves of the great goodness that God has promised. If our faith is counted for righteousness, this is His mercy through Christ; it is nothing upon which we can take our stand in the spirit of claim. To the last, we shall be short-coming, while at the last we may be loving and faithful. To the last we shall have need to cry

“Be merciful to me, O God. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions, according to Thy mercy remember Thou me.”

And at the last we may hope to shout with David,

“Blessed be the Lord because He hath heard the voice of my supplications. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him and I am helped; Therefore, my heart greatly rejoiceth and with my song will I praise Him.”

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