

THE SONG TO BE SUNG IN CHRIST'S DAY

We have recently had special occasion to recognise the comforting fact that in the Holy Scriptures it is God, and not man, that speaks to us in all the “*divers manners*” of their authorship. The writer is human: but the Power using the writer is divine. The fact comes continually before us in our readings. Today, we have Paul in the Hebrews (for Paul undoubtedly was the writer) citing the prophetic Scriptures as the “*witness*” of “*the Holy Spirit*” (Heb. 10:15). “*Whereof,*” says he “*the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us,*” and he then quotes from Jeremiah. It is this quality of the Old Testament Scriptures that gives them their superlative value. It is this that gives us the comfortable feeling of safety and security which we experience in “*the reading of the Old Testament.*” It is this that makes us hang on the words as words of truth on which we can build, and to which we can surrender without any of the reservation with which all human writing has to be received.

With this comfortable feeling, let us go to the portion read from Isaiah (Chap. 26) and extract from it some of the edification it is calculated to afford. In this portion we are informed of a song to be sung at a certain time and place. “*In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah.*” When we find what “*day*” this is, we find the matter in hand is one to which we have become personally related by the Truth. It is not difficult to find the day. The part going before makes it known very plainly. It is a day long-looked for—a day in which expectation long cherished is realised in joy unspeakable.

“It shall be said in that day, Lo this is our God, we have waited for Him . . . we shall be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Chap. 25:9).

Such a day must be neither more nor less than the day of salvation. One more look makes it quite certain:

“He (the Lord of Hosts) shall swallow up death in victory: and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall he take away from off the earth.”

If there could be any doubt, that this is the day of the manifestation of the sons of God and return of Christ from heaven, such doubt is set for ever at rest by Paul’s declaration in 1Cor. 15, concerning the day of the last trump and the resurrection of the dead: “*then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up of victory,*” a saying written in this 25th chapter of Isaiah, and in this chapter alone.

Now, from the Scriptures of truth, we have learnt several things concerning this day of Christ, the remembrance of which will help us to rightly understand this song to be sung “*in the day . . . in the land of Judah.*” It is a day in which the oracle contained in Psalm 110 will be fulfilled:

“The Lord shall send the rod of thy (Messiah’s) strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies . . . The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of wrath.”

It is a day in which the vision shown to John of things “*to come to pass hereafter*” will be fulfilled when “*the kings of the earth and their armies will gather together to make war against the Lamb,*” and when “*the Lamb shall overcome them.*” It is a day when a specific league of Gentile powers, found in the land under Gog, at the coming of Christ, will be broken up and expelled like chaff before the wind.

“The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters, but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee afar off”—(Isa. 17:13).

It is a day when the power of man in all the earth shall be in the process of receiving that irretrievable overthrow symbolised by the breaking of Nebuchadnezzar’s image to pieces by the little stone destined to grow to a great mountain, filling the whole earth.

Now such a day will necessarily be a day of great gladness for those who shall be gathered around the Lord in friendship and glory. The gladness will have pointed reasons in the current situation. Their gladness finds expression in the declaration of these reasons. Let us imagine all these events accomplished, or in process of accomplishment, and let us imagine ourselves by their side and in their ranks in the land of promise, and we shall then be able to enter into the exultation and catch the spirit of this song:

“We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.”

The glorified immortal throng will stand in need of no walls and bulwarks. No city was ever so strong as theirs. “Salvation,” upon which they have just entered will be their walls and bulwarks. Salvation is no sentimental affair, but a very physical reality. Shot and shell will be powerless against a company covered and penetrated by the Spirit of God. Walls and bulwarks would be a clumsy defence for those who are protected by the primal energy of the universe, thrown over them by the will of Him in whose Word all things subsist; and from whose Spirit-clad presence shot and shell would recoil more helplessly than cork missiles from an ironclad fort. Their exultation in the power of salvation is no extravagance. Bible salvation is something very different from the salvation said to be “got” at Salvation Army meetings.

“Open ye the gates,” shout this Spirit-panoplied congregation, “that the righteous nation that keepeth the Truth may enter in.” Ay, and the gates will be opened. The gates have been long closed, but the time has come for them to be thrown wide open—the gates of heaven, the gates of honour, the gates of wealth, the gates of the Kingdom, --the gates of glory, honour and immortality. The summons will not be unheeded. The summons will be obeyed. The gates will be opened—to whom?

“The righteous nation that keepeth the Truth.”

What nation is this? There is no room for doubt. Jesus told the Pharisees in his day—speaking in the very same locality where this song is to be sung—

“The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”

Speaking to the disciples as constituents of this nation, he said to them,

“Fear not, little flock; it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”

And afterwards, Peter addressing other members of the same body, said,

“Ye are a holy nation, a peculiar people.”

The connection between this nation and “*the Truth*” is also equally manifest. Jesus said, “*I am the Truth*,” and also, “*everyone that is of the Truth heareth my voice*,” and also John, “*The Truth dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever*.”

The community to be glorified with Christ at his coming, being a “*righteous nation that keepeth the Truth*,” it follows that we cannot hope to be among them if we follow unrighteousness or if we are destitute of “*the Truth*,” for no one can “*keep the Truth*” who

has it not. This is worth the attention, in passing, of those who either *“hold the Truth in unrighteousness”* or who trust for salvation to their own righteousness apart from the Truth. By our profession as brethren, and by our assembly this morning at the breaking of bread in remembrance of Christ as appointed, we belong to neither one class nor the other. We belong rather to those who are seeking admission into the ranks of the righteous nation that keepeth the Truth. As such, we may dwell with consolation on the picture before us. To have and to keep the Truth is not only accounted a very small thing just now; it is worse than small in the estimation of this enlightened generation. It is derogatory to manhood and culture and good sense. It is a disqualification for every kind of worldly advancement. Well, this is no accident. It is appointed. It is part of the *“light affliction which is but for a moment”* and which, as Paul says *“worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”* Consider what a change it will be when the righteous keeping of the Truth will be the only passport to power, respectability and life. The gates of honour and distinction are all shut now to those who keep the Truth—who are considered a species of monomaniacs by those who love the present world. But the cry will go abroad yet, *“open ye the gates! open ye the gates!”* *“Bow the knee! Bow the knee!”* The time has come for the exaltation of the Lord’s faithful people.

“This is the day which the Lord hath made. We will be glad and rejoice in it.”
“Lo, this is our God! We have waited for Him: we shall be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”

The song proceeds—*“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.”* When the singers sing these words, they have in view the peace that has come to them, and that lies before them in the happy day commenced for Jerusalem. This peace is promised.

“Great shall be the peace of thy children” (Isa. 54:13), and again, “Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream” (Isa. 66:12).

We are asked to pray for it. *“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”* It is a peace not reached till the Prince of Peace *“speaks peace to the heathen.”* There is a peace that comes now to those who trust in God, but this not the *“perfect peace”* which the song celebrates. Often the reverse of peace is the lot of those who do the will of God. Jesus and Paul may be taken as examples. Jesus, the *“man of sorrows;”* Paul, *“distressed, perplexed, persecuted, cast down,”* did not experience the *“perfect peace”* which will belong to the righteous nation that keepeth the Truth in the day of this song in the land of Judah. But this peace awaits them, even on the very occasion depicted in this joyful chapter. There never has been an occasion on earth in which the human mind will be so much stayed on God as the mind of that exultant assembly will be stayed on Him; never such powerful trust as will be reposed by them. We, too, naturally assume that the need for trust and mental stay on God will have passed when the day of triumph has come. The reverse state of facts will be found to be true when that happy day arrives. Mortal men cannot in the nature of things stay on God and trust in Him as those will stay and trust, whose iron heart will have been opened to God with the change from the earth-cleaving nature of present experience to a nature instinct with divine sympathies and affinities. Those who experience this change will be able to apostrophise each other in the exultant adoration of this song:

“Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Yahweh is everlasting strength.”

They will be able to feel the reality of God with a strength and ardour impossible in the mere day of faith. They will be able to realise practically their dependence upon His everlasting strength. Now, it is a matter of faith merely; then it will be self-manifest knowledge and experience. Now, the acknowledgement is liable to die on the lips of weary faith, or degenerate to cant through human weakness; then, it will be a vivid sensation whose fervent expression will be highest satisfaction.

“For He bringeth down them that dwell on high: the lofty city, He layeth it low: He layeth it low, even to the ground: He bringeth it even to the dust.”

This is an allusion to events just accomplished—the work of power and judgment by which the high-borns and mighty of the earth will have been brought down—brought down by God and not by man at all. This will be the characteristic of the epoch—that human pride and power will be levelled and the Lord alone exalted, as it was when Israel crossed the Red Sea. So it is testified:

“The lofty looks of man shall be humbled and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.”

Realise then that at the epoch of this song, the glory of London, of Paris, of Berlin, of St. Petersburg, of Constantinople is brought to the dust, their armies overthrown, their power wrecked; the arrogance of man everywhere smitten and lowered by disaster; his power dissolved in spoliation and blood—the lofty city of human power everywhere laid low.

There is a companion picture: *“The foot shall tread it down,”* What foot? *“Even the feet of the poor and the steps of the needy!”* This is God’s decree. This is *“what is written”*—and the Scripture cannot be broken. The poor and needy, who are condemned with ineffable scorn by the opulent classes, are the destined heirs of all their power and glory. No more odious dispensation could be contrived for the rich sinners of the present evil world. But in what way will the Lord be exalted by the substitution of the poor for the rich in the possession of earth’s goodness? It is no ordinary class of poor whose stewardship of the riches of God would be more grateful to Him than the occupancy of the rich. The ordinary poor are as godless as the rich, and lacking in their elegance and culture. A dreadful exchange would this be. No: it is no ordinary poor. It is God’s poor: the poor of whom Christ is the prototype. He was a “poor and needy man,” but he was rich in faith and did always those things that were pleasing to the Father. This is the class of poor, the God-believing the God-loving and God-serving poor, gathered from every age, made alive with vigour and power of an immortal nature, whose righteous feet will tread down the lofty city of human power and pride now uplifted in all the earth. This will be more galling to the sons of pride than even a pure democratic insurrection. They might reconcile themselves to an upheaval of the working classes as a calamity they might at least regulate—as a movement having something of human principles in it which they might turn to account—as a disaster from which recovery might at least be hoped. But there will be no mitigating circumstances in a revolution which places them in the power of a godliness bred in poverty, and now enforced with divine aims by a government men cannot understand or resist or baffle.

The song justifies the changed by reference to the past course of those now promoted *“The way of the just is uprightness: Thou most upright dost weigh the oath of the just.”* We must remember this, now, in these days of darkness. It is written,

“Though a sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged, yet I know it shall be well with them that fear God.”

The time for developing and trying this class is our mortal lifetime. During this time, it seems as if God took no notice, and as if righteousness were a mistake. The events contemplated in

this song will yield a very different verdict from this. They knew what this song says—that God “*weighs the path of the just.*” He watches, reckons, and estimates with a view to the day of recompense which this song celebrates. God is not unmindful—not forgetful—not unfaithful—He is not unjust. All these things are declared of Him. Therefore, when His servants speak or do or labour or suffer for His Name’s sake, though there is no sign, it is all recorded.

“A book of remembrance was written before Him.”

What then? A time comes for the book to be opened. Facts forgotten by man are brought to light, and every man receives according to his works.

The song proceeds to give a general description of their course and character looking back. It applies to all of them.

“In the way of Thy judgments have we waited for Thee. The desire of our soul is to the remembrance of Thy Name.”

The judgments of God, which men can keep in “*the way of*” are the ordinances or appointments of God. The word “*judgment*” is often used with this meaning. We see at a glance in what way this is applicable to the rejoicing utterers of this song in the land of Judah. It in fact describes their class in all ages. They are such as walk in the way of God’s appointments. These have differed with different ages; but the attitude required has been the same in every age—faith and obedience. Trusting to what God has promised, and doing what God has commanded, they have waited for the day of salvation, which is to make them glad with exceeding joy. There is instruction in this for those who despise what God has appointed, or who at least regard His appointments with indifference, and who yet hope that on some principle or other, though casting the Word of God behind their backs, they will receive His favour and enter into peace in the day of His accomplished purpose. We must sorrowfully recognise that all such hopes are unfounded, and that only those may hope to stand with the heirs of salvation in the land of Judah on the glad day of its attainments, who can say with them,

“In the way of Thy judgments have we awaited for Thee: the desire of our soul is to the remembrance of Thy name.”

We may look, upon another day, at the second half of this instructive and joy-inspiring song.

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