

Refreshment.

We come together again as thirsty travellers on a journey, to find refreshment at the inexhaustible well of living water provided for the pilgrims of God. And we come together not in vain. The water is cold and of a crystal clearness, cooling the parched mouth and restoring vigour to the failing limbs; and partaking thereof, the pilgrims renew their journey with revived strength, hope and courage. We need these periodical refreshments. The journey is long and toilsome; the way is hard and our strength is small. Waiting for the promises of God in a day like ours, when there is no open vision, and when the Divine economy is in the dust and the power of the Gentile triumphs over all, is a trying situation for flesh and blood. We walk by faith and not by sight. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, and faith cometh by hearing the Word of God. Whatever strengthens faith helps the victory. We have nothing in our day to strengthen faith except the written Word and the communion with God in prayer which that Word engenders. We are here to-day to attend on both in that appointed assembly of the saints in which both have their highest power developed.

Let us look at what we have brought forward in the portions read this morning—Psalm lxxii. and Luke xxiv. There is a certain connection between both, though so far apart as regards their place in the Bible and the time at which they were written. The conversation recorded in the latter tells us by the mouth of Jesus, that all things that are written in the Psalms concerning him must be accomplished. Hence there are things in the Psalms concerning Christ. That the 72nd Psalm presents us with some of those things is abundantly evident in a variety of ways. True, it is written at the head of the Psalm that it is a psalm "*for, of, or concerning Solomon*"; but this does not exclude its application to Jesus, even if written there by the hand of David. We know that there is such a thing in the savings of the Spirit as a double application. Two meanings are hit off in the same expression, the one covering the other so to speak. This is illustrated in the case of the covenant made with David by the hand of Nathan concerning Christ, which David in his last words declared to have been "*all his salvation and all his desire*," though unrealised at the time of writing. Both David and Solomon applied this covenant to Solomon. Yet we know by the Spirit in the prophets and in the apostles, that the Spirit intended a further and final application to another Son of David who will be Lord of David as well as his Son. David himself so applies it in several of the Psalms agreeably with the declaration of Peter, that David being a prophet knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins according to the flesh, he should raise up Christ to sit on his throne, and that he seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ (Acts ii. 29). The prophets, long after Solomon's death, tell us that the days will come when God will perform that good thing which He hath promised to the house of Israel, that He will raise to David a righteous branch (offspring) who as a king should reign and prosper, and execute justice and judgment in the earth. That this is Jesus is for ever settled by the words of the angel to Mary concerning him: "*The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever and ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end*" (Luke i. 33).

This idea of a double application at first sight seems bewildering; but the embarrassment disappears as we grow acquainted with the Divine scheme and understand the principles upon which it is founded. One of these, particularly useful in this matter, is the duality that runs through the whole of it, that is, a first and a second—the one as a preparation for the other. At the very beginning, we see the accepted burnt offering of Abel to be followed by the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. We see the first covenant made with Israel; and we read, "*The days come that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel*." As Paul says, "*He taketh away the first that He may establish the second*." There is the first deliverance of Israel from Egypt but a pre-figuring of their restoration from "all the lands" whither they have been driven. There is the establishment of the nation under Moses, and the coming establishment under Christ. Now, we are instructed by the Spirit in the apostles that the first and imperfect in all these arrangements was a shadow, type, or prefigurement of the second and perfect. Hence it is that even the literal history of the house of Israel is a type or foreshadowing of that which is to come. Who would have supposed, had not Paul told us, that the

dismissal of Hagar and her son from the household of Abraham was an "allegory"? (Gal. iv. 24). Many other types besides that are to be found in Israel's history, and among others, the reign of Solomon, pointing to the greater than Solomon, who though having appeared, is yet to come. Hence it is that the 72nd Psalm, though probably suggested to David by the elevation and prospects of Solomon, outlines to us a reign as far excelling Solomon's as the sun exceeds the light of an oil lamp.

But independently of this reason for applying the Psalm to Christ, there are statements in the Psalm that were not realised in Solomon, such as men *"shall be blessed in him."* Israel, doubtless, experienced benefit from the earlier part of his reign, but not in the form or to the extent that will be realised when *"all the families of the earth"* will be blessed in Abraham and his seed, the Christ. It was not the result of Solomon's reign to bring about the state of things described in the following words: *"They shall fear Thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations."* *"In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace as long as the moon endureth."* In no sense could the following have been prophetically affirmed of Solomon: *"His name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as the sun. Men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed."*

To Christ, doubtless, in the fullest sense the Psalm applies; to him for whom we wait this morning, who having been in the earth once is withdrawn for a time till the appointed season of his re-appearance (now at hand) to develop the glorious scene depicted in this sunlit Psalm. With this confidence let us look at it and be comforted. What do we see? A king who, in the possession of universal dominion and power, *"saves the children of the needy and break in pieces the oppressor"*; a king, who, though surrounded with all the circumstances of regal splendour, and receiving the homage of *"all kings falling down before and all nations serving him,"* looks after the poor and attends to the cry of the needy. *"He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also and him that hath no helper."* Such a king as this the world has never seen before. The poor have no chance under any form of government. If they can obtain the good offices of some influential personage—if they can enlist the mediation of a Member of Parliament, or some official person near head-quarters, possibly they may receive attention, but *"the poor that hath no helper"* is in a helpless case indeed. This is the inevitable result of the fact that man reigns. Many things make it impossible for a mortal ruler to dispense a full and merciful justice to all. Being fallible, he is liable to be deceived by the cunning misrepresentations of the sinister. Therefore he is obliged to adopt a system which, while it keeps off the impostor, keeps the true also at a distance. His physical energy is not equal to the demands of a full administration of justice in the multitude of cases that arise. Therefore, he has to depute the work to representatives, who, mortal, like himself, have to administer the law by roundabout rules, which unprincipled cleverness can manipulate to the advantage of the evil and the hurt of the innocent. The result is, "justice" is a clumsy and blundering machine worked without sympathy or discrimination, mangling the innocent both in what it does and what it prevents being done, and leaving wickedness to flourish in society like a green bay tree.

But this king will be hampered by none of these difficulties. *"He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes nor reprove after the hearing of his ears"* (Isaiah xi. 4). The Spirit of Jehovah resting upon him, he discerns the secrets of the heart, and goes straight to the root of the matter, dispensing with the prolix and expensive processes at law to which men are obliged to resort. Then he *"stands and feeds in the strength of the Lord his God"* (Micah v. 4). Human weakness and weariness are alike unknown to him. Like the Creator of the ends of the earth, who tabernacles in him in the fulness of Spirit-power, *"he faints not, neither is weary, and there is no searching of his understanding."* Consequently, the dispensation of justice will be as unhindered by fatigue as unmarred by error.

There is another reason why the government of this Son of David is able to deal thoroughly and minutely with the wants of mankind. The reason is not apparent in the Psalm, but we learn it from many other portions of the writings of the Spirit; he is assisted in the work of ruling the world by a body of kings like himself—immortal and infallible. His brethren having *"suffered with him,"* *"reign with him."* They are *"kings and priests unto God and reign with him a thousand years."* The beauty

and necessity of this arrangement will be seen on a moment's reflection. A single king, however endowed, could not deal with the teeming millions of the earth. A single king is wanted as the common head—the director and controller of universal power, but for the administration of his authority in detail, many co-operators are required. But if this co-operation were entrusted to the hands of sinners, the beneficence of Christ's government would be as effectually frustrated as the good designs of good rulers always have been in the hands of evil instruments. The government of an immortal and infallible king must needs be in the hands of immortal and infallible associates. Herein lies the perfection of the kingdom of God. Christ will be represented in every part of the globe by a fellow-heir as free from error and weakness as himself, and as compassionate of the people as the Great Head, from whose judgment there will be no appeal.

It is the preparation of this body of fellow kings and priests that explains the present "delay," as we inaccurately call it, in the consummation of the Divine purpose. But for this, the kingdom of God might have been set up 1,800 years ago. "*My wedding must be furnished with guests,*" is the parabolic announcement by which the Lord taught the necessity for sending an invitation to the Gentiles after the Jews had rejected it. But not only had the invitation to go forth; the people responding to the invitation had to be trained and fitted for the position to which they were called. This is Christ's present work; he is "*priest over his own house*"—bringing his house to God. It was this that made his departure necessary, as he told his disciples: "*I go to prepare a place for you.*" His present absence and his present work are necessary to the glorious consummation of "*his appearing and his kingdom.*" He is not idle or passive though unseen. He is at work in the preparation of his people. His messages to the seven ecclesias in Asia represent him as watchful and vigilant in the superintendence of the affairs of his house. His priesthood involves this; for mediation between God and men requires that he should know the affairs of men. Paul tells us that having suffered, being tempted, he (Jesus) is able to succour them that are tempted. This indicates the active superintendence referred to. He is still the shepherd of his sheep. From behind the veil, he tends them invisibly, but not the less really. "*As many as I love,*" he says, "*I rebuke and chasten*" (Rev. iii. 19). This is also what Paul says: "*When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world*" (1 Cor. xi. 32). It follows that, even now, we are under his guidance if we sincerely aim at the doing of his will, and that in the affairs of our common experience, his hand intervenes for that direction of our steps which will be to our profit. What if those affairs are chequered and trying? What if trouble harass and evil afflict? Shall we say he regards us not? This would be a very illogical as well as a very unhappy conclusion. He himself has come through a time of trouble; he was, in the days of his flesh, a man of afflicted experience. Shall we say that God did not guide him because he suffered? Yea, rather his suffering was an evidence of his being guided. "*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things that he suffered.*" It is God's method of perfecting character and laying the foundation of lasting joy. We may be quite sure there is no mistake in it. We may be quite sure that God's way is the best. We may be quite sure that goodness will be all the sweeter and salvation all the more precious, and glory to God all the more fervent for the prelude of suffering and weariness and waiting that goes before. We know from experience that no one is ripe till he has known trouble. He may be good, but he is unsympathetic. He may be interesting, but he is not entirely disinterested. There is always a degree of refined selfishness (and sometimes not very refined) about those who have known only pleasure. Trouble, if there be the right stuff to work on, removes the dross of the character, subdues and purifies and refines and ennobles, and makes fit for the kingdom of God. Therefore it is that the community of the glorified saints, as a whole, are described in the Apocalypse as "*those who have come out of great tribulation.*" The tribulation "*tries and purifies and makes white, even to the time of the end*" (Dan. xi. 35). In our day we may not have it in the intense form in which the saints of the first century were subjected to it. Nevertheless, if we are true saints, we are not without our true share of purifying tribulation. We cannot be in the true "waiting" position without tasting tribulation in various ways. It is mild, perhaps, but slow and long-continued, and therefore burdensome to flesh and blood—perhaps more so than the tragic suffering to which first century believers were subjected. It is testified of the Lord Jesus that "*for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame.*" We must transfer this endurance to ourselves, though our suffering and our shame be less than his. We keep up under it and persevere, and not without a reason. There is "joy" ahead—great joy, such as has not entered into the heart of man to conceive. What nobler or

more desirable prospect could be set us than the prospect of being admitted to the multitudinous community of men made perfect through suffering, who will stand revealed from the dust by resurrection in the day of the Lord's manifestation from heaven with his mighty angels?— men redeemed from the weakness that environed them in the days of their flesh; men changed from the mortal to the immortal; men, once lowly and wayworn pilgrims, now surrounded by a vast and rejoicing congregation of their own class; men, once of no esteem and spoken against, suddenly elevated from the lowest situation to the high places of the earth, and surrounded with glory and honour at the hands of the choicest of mankind and the most honourable of angels; men who had once laboriously followed the ways of righteousness in obscurity and amid the embarrassments of poverty and lowly circumstances, now placed in circumstances of unspeakable affluence; men trodden down and despised in the days of their faith, now in the endless day of their "sight," wielding the iron rod of irresistible authority throughout the world; men strong, beautiful, glorious, wise, immortal, once disowned by the common herd of mankind, but now honoured with the recognition and fellowship of the Son of God? No wonder there rises from that wonderful assembly a song like the roar of many waters and mighty thunderings, ascribing praise and thanksgiving to him whose wisdom and patience have achieved so grand a climax through ages of suffering. Oh, what are the longest of our waitings, the severest of our trials, in the light of that glorious day! We can fervently join with Paul and say, "*The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.*" Patience, brethren, patience. The night will surely end; the morning will come at last.

It may sometimes be as it was with the children of Israel when Moses first demanded of Pharaoh to let them go. Their burdens were increased, and their afflictions at the hand of the taskmaster were so intensified as the result of Moses' interference, that when he comforted them with the prospect of release, "*they hearkened not unto him for anguish of spirit.*" The prospect of the Lord's coming has so long been a matter of faith and hope, and has yet done nothing for us so far as material results are concerned but embarrass our temporal relations, that we may, in anguish of spirit, refuse the comfort of the promise, and say with Israel, "*Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians.*" Let us beware of this propensity. "*Though the vision tarry,*" saith the Spirit, "*wait for it. It will surely come. At the end it will speak and not lie.*" He that endureth to the end the same shall be saved. Blessed are those servants whom their Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching. The moment will come when our watching will be over, and when the announcement will ring through all ecclesias, penetrating even to the sleeping dust and waking a multitude of the dead, "*Christ has come at last.*"

(Taken from "Seasons of Comfort" Volume 1, pages 23-28 by Bro. Robert Roberts.)