

## The Psalms

AS we are aware, brethren and sisters, the object of our assembly this morning is, that Christ should be brought to our remembrance. That remembrance, to be truly effectual, ought to comprehend all the aspects that scripturally appertain to it. Yet there is one aspect in particular that comes prominently into view in this breaking of bread—one that is brought before our notice in a Psalm quoted in one of the portions of Scripture read this morning: the personal experiences of the Lord in the days of his flesh. We have not much insight into this in what is called the Gospel narratives; these deal more particularly with the external relations of the Lord. We see him traversing the districts of Galilee and Judea, followed by crowds of people, speaking to them the Word of God, and working marvels which attracted their attention. Very occasionally we get a glimpse of the inner workings of his mind. We have the declaration that he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We see him frequently retire to mountain solitudes to pray. This is no doubt sufficient to tell us that in the days of his flesh the Lord, like ourselves, felt the cloud and the heaviness and the bitterness appertaining to this body of sin, and the circumstances to which it stands related in this present evil world. We naturally desire, however, more explicit revelations of the mental experience of Jesus—a closer view of the actual personal thoughts and feelings of that marvellous personage who was begotten of the Holy Spirit, born at Bethlehem, brought up in subjection to his parents at Nazareth, trained to manual occupation at a carpenter's bench, anointed with the visible descending of dovelike Spirit and manifested to Israel as the great power of God in their midst. If we had to think that he passed untouched through this vale of tears—that he felt none of our sadness, none of our weariness in waiting for the salvation of God—none of our yearnings for Divine consolation—by so much the less would his case be a comfort to us. We have to be thankful for a portion of the Word which gives us a living picture the very reverse of all this. I refer to the Psalms to which Jesus made allusion as "concerning" him. Here the sufferings of Christ are vividly manifest, as well as the glory that should follow. Those sufferings are not to be confined to the closing scene of his tribulation: the dreadful moment when he was in the hands of a scornful and brutal soldiery, and a spectacle on the cross to the jeering rabble. This was but the climax of his sorrows. We must consider how he felt and what he thought in relation to his whole surroundings. The opportunity of doing this is abundantly afforded in the Psalms, and more particularly in the Psalm to which Paul refers when he, says (Rom. 15:2), "*Christ pleased not himself, but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.*" This is written in the 69th Psalm.

Turning to that Psalm, we are presented with the inner and personal experience of Christ in a form not accessible in the Gospel narratives, and are able to perceive many points of resemblance to our common experience, with an effect which is encouraging. The primary reference is, of course, to David; but the Spirit in David, which was the Root of David, which called him from shepherding and made him king of Israel for a remote purpose of its own, frames David's utterances in a way that expresses the heart-breakings of David's Son and Lord while he was the despised and rejected of men. The Psalm begins: "*Save me, O my God.*" Jesus had to be saved. Here he prays that he may be so; and as Paul says (Heb. 5:7), "*he was heard in that he feared, when with strong crying and tears he made supplication to Him who was able to save him from death.*" The "*crying and tears*" spoken of by Paul

are mentioned in this Psalm. "*The waters are come in unto my soul.*" This shows the keenness with which his afflictions were felt: they went home—they pierced his soul—they overwhelmed him with sorrow. "*I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.*" Jesus "waited." He had his season of what we are now going through, and his "waiting" is here shown to have been of that dreary troublous, trying character that we find it to be. If we picture him in the aspect of a continual ecstasy or even a continual calm we make a mistake. He was a "*man of sorrows,*" and part of his sorrow was this "*waiting for God.*" We are tasting the affliction of this attitude. Our whole life is an act of waiting for God, waiting for the time promised, looking for, desiring, and living for the appointed day of the baring of His holy arm. While we wait, the world is busy with its own prosperous devices, jeering at our hopes and quietly pitying our infatuation. False brethren also discourage and weaken our hands, heartless and formal in their profession of faith, and tired of the dreariness of the waiting attitude. The situation is trying, but not more so than was that of the Lord in the day when he could say, "*Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty.*" Christ's enemies were his enemies without a cause in one sense, and with a cause in another. The actual cause Jesus explains in the words addressed to his own brothers after the flesh, as recorded in John 7:7: "*The world hateth me, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil.*" This was the actual cause of the enmity shown to Christ, yet not a justifiable cause, for in testifying against the world he bore witness to the truth, and bearing witness to the truth ought not, in reason, to create enemies. Therefore the man hated for such a reason, is hated without a cause. This has been the case with the brethren of Christ in all ages. Their whole life and conversation is a testimony against the world—a condemnation of the world after the type of Noah, who, by his faith and obedience, "*condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith*" (Heb. 11:7). This condemnation acts as an irritant on the world, which is pleased with itself, and which loves only those who speak well of it. Hence the hatred of which Jesus himself was an object. This hatred we must accept as part of the appointed tribulation which is to try and purify and make white for the time of the end. We need not aim to escape it. It still remains true, that from God there is "woe" to such as all men speak well of. Constituted as is the present evil world, it is impossible that all men can speak well of a man unless he be of the world himself—a man-pleaser; and for a man to be of this stamp is to be the subject of future "woe," one in whom God takes no delight. Hatred will be the portion of those who follow in the footsteps of the Lord. We need not seek this hatred. We are to live peaceably with all men as much as lieth in us. But when it does come, we are not to imagine some strange thing has happened. It is what happened to the Master of the household; and it is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his Master.

"*Then I restored that I took not away.*" This is an illustration of Christ's own precept: "*If a man sue thee at the law and take away thy cloak, let him have thy coat also.*" Doubtless, if we could know the history of Christ's private life at Nazareth, we would find many instances answering to these words of the Psalm. When accused by neighbours of having taken from others things that actually belonged to himself, he would give place unto wrath, and restore that he took not away, comporting himself with a meekness for which a man in our day would be considered a fool. A

wider application is found in the fact that he restored friendship and life while we were enemies in our minds, alienated by wicked works; but the lesson of meekness is the same.

*"O Lord, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from thee."* The application of this to Christ is only intelligible on the principle that he partook of the common nature of our uncleanness—flesh of Adamic stock, in which, as Paul says, *"there dwelleth no good thing;"* a nature the burdensomeness of which arises from its native tendencies to foolishness and sin. This burden is felt in proportion as higher things are appreciated. Christ knew, as no man can know, the gloriousness and spotlessness and spontaneous holiness of the Spirit nature. The indwelling of the Father by the Spirit would make him sensible of this. Hence he could feel the more keenly the earthward tendencies of the earthy nature—the tendencies to foolishness and sin, which are the characteristics of sinful flesh, not that the tendency was stronger in him than in others, but that his spiritual affinities and perceptions were higher, and that, therefore, he would be more conscious of the burden which all the saints of God feel, more or less, causing them to exclaim, *"O wretched man that I am!"* True, Christ sustained the burden; he carried the load without stumbling. He kept the body under; he held it in subjection to the will of the Father in all things, and thus, by obedience, obtained the approbation of the Father, who was in him. Still, the burden was there; and his consciousness of it finds expression in the words under consideration. Paul's consolation must be ours when we are grieved by a similar cleaving of the soul to the dust: *"It is no more I, but sin that dwelleth in me."* The new man delights in the law of God after the inward man; the floundering of a sluggish inefficient nature belong to the list of innocent calamities from which we shall be delivered in the day when beauty shall be exchanged for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

*"Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel."* This is specially applicable to David and Jesus. Calamities befell them; and they were concerned lest those who were faithful in Israel should be disturbed in their trust in God on account of these calamities. When a man believed to be the loved of God is apparently forsaken, the weak of the flock are liable to stagger. In the case of David, his banishment from the presence of Saul, and his life as an outcast on the mountains; in the case of Jesus, his delivery into the hands of evil men, gave reasonable ground of anxiety to those who were looking to them with confidence, and might be shaken in God on account of their adversities. That this result might be averted—that God, while smiting the shepherd, might turn His hand upon the little ones, is the object of this petition. The lesson of it is, that we ought never to allow confidence in God to be moved by the most untoward occurrence—even the apparent desertion of a righteous man, but hold fast to the persuasion which the end will justify at last—that God is just, and will bring His purposes to pass, sometimes even by the very things which appear to frustrate them.

*"Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. I am become a stranger to my brethren, and an alien to my mother's children. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee have fallen upon me."* The application of this to Jesus is obvious: its application

to his brethren will become manifest to everyone who acts a faithful part. The effect of the truth, when accepted and appreciated in its breadth and fulness (as involving that complete change of principle, affection, and aim which is signified by the creation of the new man within), is to separate a man from his kindred and friends in the flesh. There is an end to the union which formerly united him to them. Two cannot walk together except they be agreed; and when disagreement turns upon so large and vital a question as duty towards God and the future objects to be aimed at in the present life, alienation is inevitable, if the truth is held with any earnestness. When it is not held with earnestness, its effects are not worth considering one way or other, for they will be of no value to the professor. The essentiality of earnestness—enthusiastic earnestness—is manifest from the case of Christ, to whom the words in question particularly apply: "*The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*" This expresses no mild degree of earnestness. To be eaten up is to be absorbed, engrossed, taken up very much. This was Christ's mental relation to the things of the Father, and it is the standard at which we must aim, reaching which the other result will come. The reproaches of them that reproached God will fall on us. God is reproached in His servants; they are the objects of the derision which men feel for divine thing in general: and it will be directed more particularly against those who are most identified with these things. The lukewarm and half-hearted keep their respectability and suffer none of the reproach. Reproach is a bitter thing to bear, but when suffered for the name of Christ, it has promise of great sweetness for the day that is even now at the door.

*"When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, THAT was to my reproach."* The ungodly are above sorrow themselves, except the sorrow that comes from the deprivation of some present creature advantage. They know nothing of the sorrow that springs from the ascendancy of evil in the general situation of mankind. This is the highest sorrow. David and Jesus experienced it intensely. Their brethren in all ages have felt it, and it is to their reproach. The world like to see men cheery. They are discomfited at refusal to take part in their hilarious mirth, which is the crackling of thorns under a pot. They make the sad sobriety of the truth a matter of scoff: "What dismal creatures you are! Why can you not be like other people?" This is a reproach not to be ashamed of. Saints do not mope on principle, or mope at all in the true sense of that term. They share the Master's sadness at the triumph of respectable ungodliness—the disregard of all divine things. Their hearts are weighed down by the mighty prevalence of wrong among men—the evils that are more extensive, penetrating, and common than the common intellect realizes. But their sorrow hath hope. It springs from a capacity to appreciate joyful things. It has its root in the knowledge of God, the love of His ways, the desire to see good among men on the foundation of His glory. To such Jesus says, "*Blessed are ye that mourn, for ye shall be comforted. Blessed are ye that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for ye shall be filled.*"

*"I made sackcloth my garment; I became a proverb unto them. They that sit in the gate (the men having authority) speak against me; I am the song of drunkards."* Fulfilled in Jesus, this will in a measure apply to all who follow in his steps. From verse 13 to 21 sets forth the earnest petitions of Jesus to the Father in the days of his flesh, and the severity with which he felt the troubles that befell him. From verse 22 to verse 28, we have a style of language which the majority of people have a difficulty in recognizing as the utterances of the Messiah—imprecation against his

enemies. *"Let their table become a snare: that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them."* The difficulty arises from confining the view to the day of his humiliation. The Christ-Spirit in David was not confined, but covered the whole breadth of the divine purpose. Now, though Christ in the days of his flesh suffered as a lamb led to the slaughter, yet the purpose of God was at last to pour wrath on his persecutors: and this purpose is foreshadowed in many of Christ's discourses. Christ was not only a sufferer, but the appointed avenger. There is a time to bless and forgive, and there is a time to execute judgment, even when he returns to the winepress of Jehovah's anger. This prayer of malediction has reference to that time. It is a prophetic intimation by the same Spirit in David that the expectation of the poor shall not always perish: that vile men shall not always be exalted: that meekness and righteousness shall not always be under the heel of the proud. For a season, for discipline, we are commanded to be under subjection to evil, as Jesus was; but it is with the distinct prospect that we shall be avenged by Him who hath said, *"Vengeance is mine: I will repay,"* and this prayer of Christ's shows it is lawful to make that purpose a subject of petition.

*"I am poor and sorrowful,"* continues the Spirit in David concerning Christ: *"let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high."* In this prayer, every saint can join. Nothing can set them up but the salvation of God. The best condition of mortal life—the highest honour men can bestow—has no power to satisfy the longing which the enlightened soul has continually to God and His glorious perfection. The salvation of God, which will constitute them actual partakers of the Divine nature, will indeed set them up and fill their mouths with songs: in view of which, and the present mercies that lead to it, they can as heartily join in the cheerful strain with which the Psalm concludes: *"I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than ox or bullock that hath horns or hoofs"*—intimating the contemplated end of the Mosaic ritual in Christ.

*"The humble also shall see this and be glad: your heart shall live that see God, for the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners."* The full force of this will not be manifest till the day when Christ is surrounded with the assembly of his glorified poor, whose gladness will find vent in singing. They will rejoice effectually in the salvation which shall be theirs in the day of the Lord's vengeance. The humble shall then see the glory of Jesus, and be glad when the scorner is made to lick the dust. The hearts that now seek God in humiliation and sorrow will then live and rejoice at the visible exemplification of the fact that the Lord heareth the poor and despiseth not His prisoners. Then shall heaven and earth praise Him, the seas, and everything that moveth therein. Saints can even now call upon all things thus to praise in anticipation of the fact declared in the concluding verses: *"For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah: that they may dwell there and have it in possession. The seed also of his servants shall inherit it: and they that love his name shall dwell therein."*

(Taken from "Seasons of Comfort" Volume 1, pages 245-250 by Bro. R. Roberts.)