

Spurgeon on 2 Samuel

2 Samuel

Sermons, Exposition and Devotionals

by C H Spurgeon

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2 Samuel 3:39 Man's Weakness, and God's Anointing

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BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

“I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me.”— 2 Samuel 3:39.

You will remember that David was secretly anointed king over Israel by Samuel, but he waited many a weary year before the crown actually rested upon his head. For a long time he was an exile from the very country of which he was afterwards to be the sovereign. He was hunted about by the remorseless cruelty of Saul till he became like a partridge upon the mountains, and the feet of the wild roe were not more used to flight than those of David. A band of men gradually gathered round him, over whom he became the captain, and he lived the life of an adventurer, the leader of heroic soldiers, who at once protected their country from its foreign foes, and sheltered its disaffected subjects. At last Saul fell in battle upon Mount Gilboa, and Jonathan, the heir-at-law to the throne, fell also upon that dewless mountain. David was assured of the death of Saul by the fact that the head of the king was brought to him by an Amalakite, whose crime he punished with death, though he hoped to have been rewarded with abundance of treasure.

David's own kinsmen at once recognized him as the leader of their clan, and he, in Hebron began to reign over Judah and the south of the country; but still the mass of the nation had not yielded to him, and Abner, the commander-in-chief of Saul's standing army, fearful lest he might lose his influence and be supplanted by Joab, who naturally would become commander-in-chief under David, set up Ishbosheth as the successor of Saul, and so there became two kingdoms, — David, the acknowledged head of the one, and Ishbosheth, the master of the larger part of the territory Abner was playing king-maker, and he soon showed that he felt his power and meant to use it; for having engaged in a quarrel with Ishbosheth, on account of Abner's desire to take to wife a concubine of Saul, he at once resented the interference of Ishbosheth, and determined to put down the king whom he himself had put up. He came to David, therefore, and made terms with him, upon which he would give him up the kingdom, and Ishbosheth should cease to be his rival. Joab hears of this, and not wishing to be supplanted, and perhaps seriously believing that Abner was not honest, follows after him, entices him back, and just outside the walls of Hebron, the city of refuge, slays him in cool blood, — a most dastardly and treacherous murder! David had nothing to do with it; he did his best to exonerate himself from it, and pronounced an awful curse upon Joab the murderer, and upon all his posterity. He had not, however, the manly courage to summon Joab to the bar as a murderer. David was afraid of him; the man had all the army at his back: and instead of being, as in his youthful days, fearless of man, David became for awhile a time-server, and permitted the guilty to escape. He prepared a glorious funeral for Abner, and made Joab himself walk as mourner in the train, accompanied by his king, who sang a poetic and mournful dirge over the bleeding corpse. Then said David to his courtiers and friends, “I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me. The men who have been my bravest comrades, and stood by me in the darkest hour, have been too hard for me; they have compelled me to submit to an action which my soul detests; they are criminals whom I cannot punish. The sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me.”

It was necessary to state these historical particulars, in order to set my text in its connection, and now I wish to show how this passage in sacred history is but the transcript of what has occurred many and many a time in the history and experience of all the people of God.

I. The first remark I shall make will be this.

We may be anointed, and yet weak. Every believer is an anointed king. He was really anointed in the covenant of election before the world was. When Jesus Christ was set up from everlasting, his people were really set up in him. When he was proclaimed king,

and when his Father promised to him glorious honors as the result of what he should do, his people were really constituted a royal priesthood in the person of their representative and covenant head. Every child of God also was actually anointed when Jesus Christ ascended up on high, and led captivity captive and received gifts for men. When Jesus took his seat at the right hand of the Eternal Father, amidst the songs of angels and the shouts of cherubim, all his elect in him did virtually take their thrones. "For he hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." But in our souls, our anointing time comes in that hour when, being called by grace and washed from sin, we begin to reign over sin, self, the world, death and hell, by virtue of our union with Christ. Every believer is a king to-day. It may be that he does not wear his crown, but lives beneath his dignity; yet he is a king by right divine. He is of a kingly, nay, of a divine race: he is sprung from the loins of the King of kings, and he is soon to enter upon his full dominion; for when Jesus shall appear, then being like him, he shall reign with him for ever and ever.

The Christian is then to-day, in many more senses than I can now stay to enumerate, an anointed king, and yet it is quite possible that he may be groaning out, "I am weak;" for weakness and Divine Anointing may stand together. You may be the object of God's grandest purposes; and yet in yourself, you may be the meanest of men. "God may yet intend to accomplish by you the greatest marvels, and it may be needful that, as a prelude to these wonders, you who are God's anointed should be compelled to feel very deeply your utter weakness.

God's children are often very weak in faith: they stagger at the promise through unbelief. It is not always in their power to "set to their seal that God is true." They always have the seal of God on them, but they cannot always set their seal to God's promise. There are times when the strength of the flesh through sin has overcome the powers of the soul, — when we can get no further than to cry, "I would, but I cannot believe, I do not doubt his love to his people, but it is a grave question with me, whether I am one of his people at all." Christians have ebbs of faith as well as floods; they have winters as well as summers, they have times of drought, and years of famine. Sometimes they are diminished and brought low through oppression, affliction and sorrow; the eye of their faith grows dim, and the light of God's countenance being withdrawn from them, it is a woeful day for them, and they sigh, and cry, and groan, and scarce can call their lives their own. "Oh!" cries one, "that is my condition, but I thought I could not be a child of God, for I said, 'If it be so, why am I thus?'" Oh! this is a common failing with the Lord's people. Think not that thy name is cut out of the register because of the weakness of thy faith; for there be many in heaven whose names on earth were Little-Faith, and Ready-to-Halt, and Despondency, and Much-Afraid. You may be an anointed king, and yet exceedingly weak in your faith.

The weakness of a Christian's faith may also affect all his other graces. It must do so; for when faith is strong, every other grace is strong; when that is weak, all things else decline. It may be to day that your hope has become very dim; you are in bondage through fear of death, and see not the mansions in the skies. You have forgotten that you are in Christ, and now you no more look for his appearing. Your hope declines, and all your comfort dies. All this is possible, and yet you may be an anointed king. Pluck up heart, my brother; when thou canst not read thy title, the inheritance is just as sure, when thou canst not feel thy union with Christ, the union is none the less a fact; and when thou darest not hope, even then, if thou art Christ's, thy soul is in his hand, and thou shalt never perish, neither shall any pluck thee from him. Let me add again, that when the Christian grows weak in his faith and hope, it is no wonder that he is feeble in all his efforts to serve his master. "Oh," says one, "I preach now, but have no power in preaching; I pray, but it is not prayer; I totter on the knees which should be strong. I, who could once prevail and bid defiance to earth and hell now tremble like Peter before a little maid, and am down-cast and abashed by the smallest threat or calumny from the lips of my meanest foe." Oh, but Christian, all this is possible too, and yet you may be an anointed king; for there is a sad difference between the estate of God's people now and their glory by-and-bye, ay, and a wondrous difference now between the privileges to which they have a right, and the privileges to which they have the power to attain. Sure, if they were what they might be, and what they should be, they would be on earth well nigh as happy as in heaven. God hath given them power to tread on serpents and to defy the violence of flames; he hath girded them with a majesty unrivalled and unequalled; he hath put a crown of pure gold on their heads, even now, he hath shod them with badgers' skins, and clothed them with blue and purple and fine linen; he hath made them kings and priests unto God, even this day, and they dwell in the curtains of Solomon; they have his providence for their provision; they have his angels for their servitors; they have his heaven for their last resting place, and his bosom for their reposing place to day; and yet are they often weak, and often cast down by reason of sore trouble and the strength of the flesh and the perversity of their corrupt hearse. "I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me."

My dear brethren, let me remark that David at this special time felt his weakness, more particularly because he was in a new position. David had been an adventurer in the cave, so long that he had grown used to it, and you never find him saying when he hid himself in Engedi, "I am this day weak." No; after the first season of bitterness I believe he came to love Adullam's dreary grot; and the bleak mountains were dear to him; but he has come into a new place — nations are at his feet — men bow before him; it is a new position, and he says "I am this day weak, though anointed king." Whenever you make a change in life; whenever God calls you to another set of duties, you will surely find out what perhaps you do not now believe — that you are weak, though anointed king.

Here, too, David had come into new temptations. The arrows had been shot at him before, from one direction alone, now the storm ceases on one side, and begins on the other. If men knew that the storm would always come to one side of the house they would repair and strengthen it, and then they would not fear the blast; but if on a sudden it whirled round and took the other corner, how would they be prepared for that? Take care, Christian men and women, how you change your position; for often it is a remove for the worse; the arrows may not fly on the right, but they will meet you on the left, and perhaps that may be your weakest side, and there will you be smitten in the tenderest part. David had now no more the temptations which beset a venturer, but those which cluster thick around the throne; for where there is the honey of royalty, there will surely be the wasps of temptations. High places and God's praise do seldom well agree; a full cup is not easily carried without spilling, and he that stands on a pinnacle needs a clear head and much grace.

And then further, David had now come into new duties. It was his duty to have taken Joab and have made him suffer the full penalty of the law for having killed Abner. A king must defend the oppressed and avenge the murdered, but David fails to perform the new duty, for he feels that he is too weak.

Brothers and sisters, I shall leave this point when I have only conjured you to remember that whether you know it or not, whether new circumstances shall have discovered it to you or not, you are this day weak, though anointed kings. You are never more mistaken than when you think yourselves strong. You are never nearer the truth than when you have the very lowest views of your self. When you are stripped, and emptied, and poured from vessel to vessel, it is then that you are where you ought to be; when you can say "I can do nothing apart from Him," and yet can feel that you can do everything with him: then you are on the safety, you are on the eve of triumph and honor. God is with you, and will greatly bless you so long as you know where your great strength lieth.

II. The second head.

It was but little wonderful that David's kingdom was weak, for it was but newly gained; and it is but little marvel if we also are very weak in the beginning of our spiritual life. When a king has had time to set himself down upon his throne, and to sweep away before him this party and that, either by politics or by the power of the sword, and so to put down every rival, then his throne becomes confirmed. But here is David, a man who is not descended from the royal race, — and who, apart from the divine anointing, which the sons of Belial would never recognize, had no right to the throne whatever; and it is not much wonder that the house of Saul should be troublesome to him, and that his old comrades, taking too much upon themselves because of their past services, should be too strong for him to manage. Young Christian, it is no wonder that you are weak, when the good work has only lately begun with you. See the lambs in the fold: it is well that they have been shorn in good weather, for what would become of the shorn lamb in the untempered wind? Shall we suppose that the young sapling shall stand as firmly as the oak with its gnarled roots and its hoary branches, which have been twisted together by many a storm? What! Shall a babe fight a battle? Shall a new-born infant go forth to war? Do you wonder because the new creature is weak? Wonder rather at its power than at its weakness. Does Satan triumph over you, and do you marvel that old Satan is more than a match for a young Christian? Does the old world sometimes oppress your heart, and are you astonished that an old world, with a thousand arts, should be too much for a babe like you? Does your old heart within — that old Adam of yours that is forty years old — seem too strong for that new Adam which is new created in you? Why, you need not marvel. The old man has had time to gather up his strength — time to learn the arts of war, and the new man is unaccustomed, as yet, to fight. It is true I have infant grace in the new creature heart more strong than Hercules, who strangled serpents in his cradle. We have seen the newly-converted sinner strangling his sins and conquering his lusts, but we cannot expect that he should always be the master of his fears, so as to overcome doubts, answer questions, and confound gainsayers. No, young Christian, trust thou in the Lord thy God, for thou shalt go from strength to strength, until in Zion thou shalt appear before God. I meet with many young Christians who are greatly troubled because they have not reached the attainments of older converts. Do you expect children to carry heavy burdens, or to be skillful in the arts, or learned in the sciences? No; we wait for riper years and greater maturity, and we expect but little from the boy at school; even so in babes in grace; it were an idle folly to look for the attainment of the perfect man in Christ Jesus. Some Christians, as the old Puritan says, are born with beards; some young Christians get experience very early, and God calls them to hard fights and great enterprises while they are yet but lambs: but our Master does not usually make captains of his drummer boys. No, no; he picks the man for the place. He will have his veterans for the front ranks, and put lads behind for a little while; yet sometimes they step forward, and like David bring down Goliath; and occasionally the babes and sucklings have accomplished greater works than the veteran saints; yet that is not the rule, nor must you sigh and cry if the young kingdom of grace in your soul is as yet apparently weak, and sometimes appears to tremble in the scales.

III. And now another parallel.

Let us remark that David was weak only in the flesh, and that the Christian truly is only weak there. Why was David weak? "Because," said he, "the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me. I cannot subdue them; I cannot keep them under; I cannot manage any kingdom whilst such turbulent spirits as these interfere and intermeddle with everything." Ah! David, and didst thou not know this before? How different is this from thy language when thou wast but a lad! Did not the Philistine say to thee, "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh to the fowls of heaven;" didst thou know thyself to be weak then? And yet thou saidst, "Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear, but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied" Ah! what a fall is there. David! oughtest thou not now to have said the same? "Joab, I come to thee in the name of the Lord God of hosts, and though all the hosts of Israel are at thy beck and command; I will do equal justice to strong and weak, and thy murderous spirit shall die, and suffer because of what thou hast done in this my kingdom." Oh, that David's virgin-throne should have been stained with the unavenged blood of a murdered man! Here was want of faith, you see. David had as strong a God as ever; but he was weak in the flesh; and that, my brethren, blessed be God, is the only weakness a Christian can know. We are never weak in our God, we are always weak in ourselves. Whenever you are in the midst of a difficulty, and you sit down and say, "I cannot do this," who ever thought you could? You ought to have known that you could do nothing. But if your difficulty be never so severe, and your position never so trying, is the everlasting arm too weak for your defense? Is the eternal eye unable to see through the difficulty? Or has eternal love failed you? "Oh, but I am so weak!" Of course thou art, and the weaker thou art the better. But Jehovah is not weak; the Eternal One fainteth not, neither is he weary; there is no searching of his understanding. David was weak, because he lived by sight; if he had lived as in the days of his youth, by faith in the covenant God who had anointed him, he never would have complained of weakness, but would have done his duty, even should heaven itself totter about his ears. Christian, have done to-day with talking of what you are and of what you are not; remember the Christian's standing-place is not on the shifting sand of creature weakness, but on the immovable rock of divine confidence. The reason why the Church of these days is such a poor trembling thing is because she always looks to man, and seldom looks to God. If the world is to be evangelized, we examine our funds, we look down the lists of our subscribers, we count our missionaries. Oh! if we counted and reckoned on our God, and looked to him first, and only, we might yet say to dead nations "Live," and the voice of faith should make them live, and means, apparently inadequate, should soon suffice, if once our faith sufficed to challenge, and to plead the promise of our God. I am sure of this, my brethren, that there are very few Christians on the face of the earth who live by faith as they should do; yea, we are all at times pestered with that leprosy of the flesh, that looking to means, to circumstances, to that which is before our eyes, instead of ever seeing that which is invisible, and resting on that mighty arm which, when we cannot see it, is still at work, and which, when we cannot feel it, still feels for us, and upholds all things by its power.

IV. I said that we were weak only in the flesh, and now I want you to observe in the fourth place, that it is where the flesh is strong that we are weak.

Why was not David strong? Why, because of the sons of Zeruiah, yet these sons of Zeruiah were his greatest strength. What could he have done without Joab and Abishai — Joab the man who smote the garrison of Jebus, and Abishai who slew three hundred men in single-handed fight: What could he do without these? These were David's mighty men, those who always led the van, and with a tremendous shout dashed among the Philistines, and scattered the uncircumcised. These were David's glory. Often, I do not doubt, as he walked in the midst of his companions in Engedi, he would look on Joab and Abishai, And say, "What noble helpers! What men! How trained in the daring deeds of war! With feet leaping from crag to crag like the wild roe; with eyes piercing through the cloud of the battle; with arms whose crash is as the tempest, with faces terrible as lions making the stout-hearted tremble!" These were David's pride, his glory, his strength, ay, and they were his weakness. So is it with us. Whatever is our strength in the flesh is sure to be our weakness in the spirit. Let me give you an instance. Jacob was a man whose strength was in his cunning. He was a wise business man; he was a shrewd calculator; he was wise as the children of this generation. Yes, but that cunning was Jacob's weakness. It was that which always brought him into trouble. He is cunning first of all with his poor old father Isaac. Instead of leaving the matter to God he must needs deceive his father with a lie, and as the result of it, he is driven from the house of which otherwise he would doubtless, by the divine will, have become a peaceful possessor. He goes to Laban. Here no doubt he looked well to himself in the bargain about Rachel, and as he did not trust his father-in-law, his father-in-law did not trust him, and he finds Leah instead of the beloved one. Then it comes to the point of wages, and Jacob is very wise there. Laban is hard with him, and then he is very crafty with Laban. Laban first says he shall have the ring-streaked sheep, and then those rods in the drinking-trough show what a wise man Jacob was. His visages are changed, and changed, and changed again, but Jacob outwits Laban. The whole history of that good man is of one strong in his wits, but weak in his faith; always a supplanter and therefore being always supplanted. Thus the wisdom of man is rather an impediment than an assistant to the purpose of God. Whenever we are raised up by God to do any work for him, we must not sit down and say,

"Well I think I am qualified for the work, because I have such and such gifts." It is just these very things which you possess which will be the heavy hindrances and not the successful assistants of your labor. Remember that your sons of Zeruiah will be hard to manage. They will be too strong for you. Our Welsh brethren are the best men in the world for preachers, qualified by God for it by

their fiery spirit, and yet if you were to mark the career of many a minister with a fiery spirit, it is just that which causes him to make shipwreck of his church by quarrels and divisions. A Scotch brother is qualified for theological studies by the coolness of his temperament, and yet it will often happen that that very coolness often temperament palsies his life and cripples him as a minister of the Word. I believe the strength of God's ministers generally lies in the points where they are the weakest, and their weakness usually lies in their strength. That is to say, natural strength will be toned down by a spiritual weakness, and a natural weakness will be exalted and be made the vehicle and channel for spiritual strength. It has often been so. The very physical appearance of Paul, his personal presence which was said to be weak and contemptible, becomes to him the subject of glorying. He glories in his infirmity, for it is the means of giving honor to God.

"This is strange logic," says one. It is, sir; God's logic is strange. Gideon fears the Midianites because of the slender number of his soldiers, but the Lord says, "the people are yet too many for me." The king of Judah on another occasion hires for himself with so many hundred thousand talents a number of mercenary troops from the king of Israel. "Now," says he, "I shall win the battle?" but before the battle begins, the prophet bids him send these men back. God can do better without means than he can with means that are audacious enough to think themselves necessary. The Lord will always throw the sword away from his hand when that sword begins to boast itself. Assyria is his axe to cut down the cedars, but if the axe glories the axe itself must be cast away; and so will it be with you if you set down any good thing you have ever done to yourself, God will bring you down. Learn instead thereof to be wise, and if you have any excellency or any power pour contempt upon it; and if you have any weakness and any infirmity, glory in it because the power of God shall rest upon you.

V. And now one other remark, and may God bless the Word to the comfort of all his people.

It is this. We are anointed kings and yet we are weak; but our weakness shall not prevent our reigning by-and-by. David's kingdom did not shake, even when his heart failed him; and it would have stood just as fast if he had knocked away Joab and Abishai who seemed to be the props that supported it. God had sworn that David should sit upon the throne: David's strength lay in God's truthfulness, not in Joab's valor. It was David's business to believe that come what may God's purpose must stand, and God will do all his pleasure. It is just the same with you, Christian, to-day. However weak you may be, and whatever means may have failed you, remember God hath said it — you shall be saved; he has promised that you shall be glorified with Christ; and so you must be, come fair, come foul. Whatever betide, God must be as good as his word. There are some professed Christians who believe that God's people may fall away and perish everlastingly. I don't know whether they think it is the weak Christian or the strong; but they believe that there are some who, though they serve God for years, may yet in a dark and evil hour forsake the Lord their God, and may ultimately be cast away. Brethren, we reject, renounce, and abhor that doctrine, as being not the truth of God, but an insinuation of Satan. We believe that every child of God, from the least to the greatest; every man who has put his trust in Jesus, is as safe now from finally perishing as though he were in glory. We do uphold and teach, and it is our joy to believe, that all who have given themselves to Christ, and who have been saved by his love, shall be kept safely in the hour of temptation, and presented at last without spot or wrinkle or any such thing before his Father's face. It is on this doctrine I am about to dwell a minute, while I say that we shall reign. Weak as we are, we shall reign in heaven by-and-by, and I shall attempt to show you why. For, in the first place, if we do not, God's attributes will every one of them suffer an eclipse. Where is the power of God, if he cannot keep the people whom he has bought with his blood, and whom he has called by his Spirit? Is the power of sin greater than the power of God? And is man's free will to be omnipotent, and God's purpose to fail, because men will not let God succeed? I say that God's omnipotence would be blotted and blurred if he suffered the very meanest of his chosen ones to fall away and perish. Or where was his love? If Christ can keep his spouse and does not, where is his affection? If Jesus can save his people and will not where is his love, and what is its vaunted value? It is either in God's power to keep a man from going down to hell, or it is not: if it is not, then God is not omnipotent, if it be in his power, but not in his love, his love — I say it with reverence to his name — is not the everlasting love of which Scripture saith so much. And then, his wisdom, too, would not that suffer? If his anointed sons shall not reign, why did he anoint them? Why doth a wise God begin a work he doth not carry on? Has God purposed anything which he finds to be an error, and therefore forbears to execute it? God forbid we should indulge such blasphemy. And where, my brethren, where is divine truth? What truth would there be in a passage like this, — "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hands." If one of them should perish, that passage were not true. And again, those words of the apostle Paul, — "if when we were enemies we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, how much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life;" where would be the reasoning there? Where is the truth of God in those statements, if his people are not saved by Jesus' life? And then the apostle Paul was deceived when he said, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Then God did not mean it when he said, "The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed, but the covenant of my love shall not be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy upon thee." Where is the meaning of that divine assurance, — "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee?" I say,

beloved, that the Bible is like the husks of the winepress, when the generous juice has been pressed therefrom, if you take the doctrine of final perseverance out of it. If God can change, if his purpose can fail, if his love can be taken away from one on whom it was ever set, I am not a Christian, nor would I think it my boast and my honor to serve God, if he were such a faithless one as this free-will theology makes him to be.

But further than this, if every one for whom Jesus shed his blood, and every one who believeth on God through Jesus be not saved, then God's Son is dishonored. He is a head, 'but he is the head of a mangled body; he is a king, but he is like the King of Naples, a king without a territory; he is a husband, but he is a husband without a spouse, or with a spouse that is only half there, half his and half the devil's. And then again, if God's people be not saved, and if his Davids do not reign, then you have to accept the blasphemous alternative that God is defeated by man. Here it is. God wills to save me; but I am told that my free will may master God. Out on your free will! Is free will to be God? If it be a God fall down and worship it, and be an idolater as base as the worshippers of Baal. But I know that God is master of man, and that man's will shall never match with God, but God will have his way. I ask now, in the name of reason and of Scripture, what there is that can hinder God from saving the man whom he has promised to save. Why, his hard heart can hinder him! Yes, but he had that hard heart when God began with him, and God overcame that bad heart, and can he not overcome it to the end? Oh! but the man may not be willing! Yes, and he was not willing at the first; but God made him willing, and he that mastered his will then may master it still. Oh, but Satan may overcome him! And is Satan to make the purpose of God of more effect? And is a child of God to be a child of hell to-morrow — alive to day, dead to-morrow, and then alive again. O miserable doctrine. Where is now our strong consolation if this be our portion!

In presenting such as the everlasting gospel I feel confidence, because it is worth your having. Trust your souls with Christ to day and you are saved, "He that believeth on Christ Jesus shall be saved."

"No," say our antagonists, "he shall not; he may be or he may not be; he may believe on Christ, but whether he is saved or not depends upon his own will." Sir, thou liest against God and Scripture. "He that believeth shall be saved," come what may. "Yes, if he keeps on believing." Sir, it says no such thing, it says "He that believeth shall be saved:" He shall, he must, keep on believing. Where God begins the work he will carry it on. Let me quote again that passage — "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hands." "Ah," said a foolish minister once, "but they may pluck themselves out." A pretty idea! "No man shall pluck them out of his hands," and they may pluck themselves out as if they were not men. Or, says another, they may slip between his fingers. But then what becomes of that passage, "They shall never perish?" If one of his sheep shall ever perish, that word of God is either false or else had no meaning in it. I was riding lately with a good brother in Christ who did not believe in final perseverance. He said, "I don't believe that many Christians ever fall away; I don't think one in a thousand does, perhaps not one in a million but it is possible, just possible, and I think we ought to say it is." "But," I said, "one in a million does not improve your case at all; because, if one in a million, why not you? why not me? why not the rest? why not all? If some for whom Christ died may perish, why not all? and then a Christian may die, and never 'see of the travail of his soul.' If some that believe may fall away and perish, why not all? Then how shall the promise stand if they believe and yet were not saved. If Christ may lose a part of his Church why may he not lose all? and then he may come to heaven without a church. Besides," I said, "I should feel that if one child of God may fall, certainly it must be me. But why should one fall more than another?" "Because one is more wicked than another?" "What is this but the old covenant of works? Their standing depends not on themselves, but on God. How shall they be prevented falling?" "By God's grace, I suppose." "Well, then, if God's grace can keep one, it can keep another; and if it cannot keep one Christian from going into sin, how am I to hope it will keep another? And if some Christians persevere and come to heaven, why may not others? What is the reason why?" "Because some are better than others." "Then off with the crown from Jesus' head, and put it on the head of the law, and sing 'Hallelujah!' to our good works after all." No, my brother; when your soul is given up to Christ, it is Christ's business to save it, not yours. When you have committed yourself into Jesus' hands,

"His honor is engaged to save

The meanest of his sheep;

All that his heavenly Father gave,

His hand securely keeps.

Nor death nor hell shall e'er divide

His darlings from his breast;

In the dear bosom of his love

They must for ever rest."

Fly into his bosom, sinner; fly now; and thou shalt rest there for ever; and neither sin, nor Satan, nor self, shall ever pluck thee

thence; for he that believeth is saved. He that believeth in Christ, "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The water which he shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. God grant you the blessing of perseverance, for Jesus' sake!

2 Samuel 7:27 Prayer Found in the Heart

Sermon Notes by C H Spurgeon

For thou, O Lord of Hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. — 2 Samuel 7:27

How often God does for his servants what they desire to do for him! David desired to build the Lord a house, and the Lord built him a house. When God's servants are not accepted one way, they are another. Neither do they take it ill that the Lord puts them off from the work upon which they had set their desires; but they learn his will, bow before it, and praise him for it. David went in and sat before the Lord, and offered prayer, for he felt moved in heart, so that he could not do otherwise. When the Lord promises, we should supplicate: his giving times should create for us special asking times.

I. HOW DID HE COME BY HIS PRAYER? He "found in his heart to pray this prayer."

He found it, which is a sign he looked for it. Those who pray at random will never be accepted: we must carefully seek out our prayers (Job 13:4).

In his heart-not in a book, nor in his memory, nor in his head, nor in his imagination, nor only on his tongue (Ps. 84:2).

It is proof that he had a heart, knew where it was, could look into it, and did often search it (Ps. 77:6).

It must have been a living heart, or a living prayer would not have been within it.

It must have been a believing heart, or he would not have found "this prayer" in it.

It must have been a serious heart, not flippant, forgetful, cold, indifferent, or he would have found a thousand vanities in it, but no prayer. Question: Would prayer be found in your heart at this time (Hosea 7:11)?

It must have been a humble heart, for such was the prayer.

Is this the way you pray? Do you answer, "I never pray"? God grant you may yet find it in your heart to do so.

Is this the way you pray? Do you answer, "I say my prayers"? How can prayers which do not come from your heart ever reach God's heart?

II. HOW DID HIS PRAYER COME TO BE IN HIS HEART?.

Through the Lord's being there, and putting it there.

1. The Lord's own Spirit instructed him how to pray.

By giving him a sense of need. Great blessings teach us our necessity, as in David's case.

By giving him faith in God. When sure that God will keep his promise we are moved to plead it.

By bringing before his mind the appropriate promise. "Thou hast revealed; therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee."

2. The Lord inclined him to pray.

It has been said that an absolute promise would render prayer needless; whereas the first influence of such a promise is to suggest prayer. The Lord inclined David's heart:

By warming his heart. Prayer does not grow in an ice-well.

By gladdening him with bright prospects. Prayer comes flying in by the open window of hope.

By communing with him. When God speaks to us we are moved to speak to him.

3. The Lord encouraged him to pray, by means of:

A promise spoken. "I will build thee an house."

A promise sealed home to the heart."Thou hast revealed to thy servant."

His covenant is ordained on purpose to excite prayer. "I will yet for this be enquired of" (Ezek. 36:37).

His former great mercy, his previous answers to our petitions, his immutable goodness, his undiminished power, and his unquestioned faithfulness, all lead us to pray.

His Son Jesus is an Intercessor who is always pleading with success, and this puts it into our heart to pray.

His Holy Spirit has undertaken to help our infirmity in prayer, and this again suggests prayer.

III. HOW MAY YOU FIND PRAYER IN YOUR HEARTS?

Look into your heart, and make diligent search.

Think of your own need, and this will suggest petitions.

Think of your ill-desert, and you will humbly cry to the Lord.

Think of the promises, the precepts, and the doctrines of truth, and each one of these will summon you to your knees.

Have Christ in your heart, and prayer will follow (Acts 9:11).

Live near to God, and then you will often speak to him.

Do you find prayers and other holy things in your heart? Or is it full of vanity, worldliness, ambition, and ungodliness?

Remember that you are what your heart is (Prov. 23:7).

Things to the Point

In prayer the lips ne'er act the winning part,
Without the sweet concurrence of the heart.

—R. Herrick

On the cover of his "Kyrie Eleison," the great musician Beethoven wrote, "From the heart it has come to the heart it shall penetrate."

The Asiatic Russians say that it is only upon the Baikal—an exceedingly dangerous lake in Siberia—in autumn, that a man learns to pray from his heart.

"A great part of my time," said M'Cheyne, "is spent in getting my heart in tune for prayer."

It is not the gilded paper and good writing of a petition that prevails with a king, but the moving sense of it. And to that King who discerns the heart, heart-sense is the sense of all, and that which he only regards; he listens to hear what that speaks, and takes all as nothing where that is silent. All other' excellence in prayer is but the outside and fashion of it; this is the life of it. —Leighton

I asked a young friend, "Did you pray before conversion?" She answered that she did after a sort. I then enquired, "What is the difference between your present prayers and those before you knew the Lord?" Her answer was, "Then I said my prayers, but now I mean them. Then I said the prayers which other people taught me, but now I find them in my heart."

There is good reason to cry "Eureka!" when we find prayer in our heart. Holy Bradford would never cease praying or praising till he found his heart thoroughly engaged in the holy exercise. If it be not in my heart to pray, I must pray till it is. But oh, the delight of pleading with God when the heart casts forth mighty jets of supplication, like a geyser in full action! How mighty is supplication when the whole soul becomes one living, hungering, expecting desire!

Remember, God respecteth not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they are; nor the rhetoric of our prayers, how long they are; nor the music of our prayers, how methodical they are; but the divinity of our prayers, how heart-sprung they are. Not gifts, but graces, prevail in prayer. —Trapp

2 Samuel 12:13, 14 The Safeguards of Forgiveness

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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“And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David. The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit...” — 2 Samuel 12:13, 14

“Howbeit.” There was a qualification to the pardon granted to David. There is no need for me to enter into any of the details of his enormous sin. To make any excuse for it, would be to become a partner in it. It was without excuse; and if David himself were with us here, there is no one present who would so bitterly condemn him as he would condemn himself. He would be roused to the utmost indignation by any attempt to offer an apology for the great transgression into which he fell, surrounded, as it was, by so many circumstances which tended to make it even worse than it otherwise might have been.

In reading this narrative, one cannot help being struck with the fact that, when Nathan had brought home the sin to David, and the conscience of the monarch, which had been sleeping for some months, was aroused to a true sense of his guilt, pardon was at once granted to the sorrowing penitent. As soon as he said, “I have sinned against the Lord,” the same prophet who had, by God’s grace, brought him to conviction of sin, gave to him the assurance of absolution: “The Lord also hath put away thy sins; thou shalt not die,” Truly, —

“Wonders of grace to God belong.”

The pardoning of great sin is wonderful; but the pardoning of great sin so rapidly — the forgiveness immediately following the confession, — is amongst the things to be set down as worthy of special gratitude in the heart, and special praise with the lip.

One fears, however, lest, by the preaching up of the abounding mercy of God in suddenly putting away great sin, any should be led to think lightly of sin. It has been often raised as an objection to the full proclamation of the grace of God that it tends to make men think that the escape from sin is very easy, and, consequently, to cause them to imagine that sin itself is a less deadly thing than it really is.

Now, I will not deny that **Antinomianism** is natural to the human heart, and that, as there have been, in the past, men who have turned the grace of God into licentiousness, so there will be, in the future, men who will make even out of God’s mercy an argument in favor of their sin. Those who act, thus are among the very worst of sinners, “whose damnation is just,” as Paul wrote concerning those who said, “Let us do evil, that good may come.”

I have read that a spider will extract poison from, the flower from which the bee extracts honey; so, surely, from; that very truth from which a renewed heart extracts reasons for holiness, unregenerate men have been known to extract excuses for sin. If they do so, I can only say that they are “without excuse.”

Some have actually caused the precious blood of Jesus Christ himself to be to them a saviour of death unto death by using the doctrine of the atonement as an excuse for their transgressions. If they do so, however, it certainly is not the fault of the truth, nor the fault of the infinite wisdom and prudence of God, for He has, in many remarkable ways, taken care to put safeguards round about His free mercy. He does forgive, and He will forgive, blessed be His holy name; and however men may pervert His mercy, He will not cease to bestow that mercy upon sinners; He will still continue His lovingkindness, yet He has put safeguards round about the doctrine of forgiveness, and of the safeguards I am now going to speak.

And, first, I shall speak of the safeguards which were provided in David’s case, and then, secondly, of those which are provided in our own case. This will lend us to notice, in the third place, God’s grand aim with us, and what other great endeavor should be in connection with that aim.

I. First, then, let us notice The Safeguards That Were Put Around David’s Case, lest David, or anyone else, should think that, because sin was readily forgiven, it was in itself a little thing.

For, notice, first, that David is made to see his sin in its true light before it was forgiven. Nathan did not go to him, and say, “David, you have committed a much greater wrong than you have supposed. You have disgraced your character, and you have brought dishonor upon the God you love; but you are forgiven.” No, he uttered a parable, which set David’s own character before him as being of the very basest and meanest kind. The description of the traveler who came to the rich man, who then went and took the one ewe lamb from the poor man with which to make a feast for the traveler, was well conceived. It was a trap in which David was cleverly caught, and made to see himself, though he had not the slightest idea, at the moment, that he was seeing himself at all. But when Nathan said to him, “Thou art the man,” he was made to feel that he was a mean wretch, who deserved to be condemned to death. His indignation was aroused against himself, and against his own actions; and thus the Lord took care that David should not receive pardon till he had realized the greatness of his sin, and this would be a strong check to him in the future, keeping him from ever falling into that sin again.

Moreover, he was made to condemn himself. Before Nathan said to David, "Thou shalt not die," the king had pronounced sentence; upon himself, for he had said, concerning the man described in the parable, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die," not knowing that it was himself whom he was condemning; but he pronounced his own sentence, and after that he was forgiven. Now, dear friends, this is just what the Lord does with sinners before he pardons them; first, he makes them see their sin. Some of us remember well when that terrible spectacle haunted us day and night. We had long known that we had sinned, but we had no idea that sin was such a monstrous, horrible thing as we then saw it to be. We had read of strange monsters of the deep, hideous and terrible creatures; but when we saw sin, we beheld something more frightful and loathsome than our worst dreams had ever brought before our minds. Then we condemned ourselves. Well do I remember when I signed my own death-warrant; had the Lord then threatened to strike me dead upon the spot, I could not, even if he had given me leave to plead with him, have urged any reason why he should not destroy me. I have a thousand times wondered that my soul was not sent to hell; at night, I have feared that I should be there before the morning light; and, in the daytime, I have often trembled lest, ere the night should come, I should find myself in hell. Having thus condemned myself, then it was that God forgave me; and I do not believe that any sinner is ever forgiven until he consents, in his soul, to the justice of God if he never should be forgiven. He must know that he is a sinner, and that sin is an exceedingly evil and bitter thing, for which he deserves to be sent to hell; and when he reaches that point, then pardon will come to him. O dear brothers and sister, do you not see what a blessed check this is upon that man? Now, when he receives forgiveness, he receives it as one who knows what that forgiveness covers, and who also knows the condemnation from which that pardon has delivered him.

There was, in David's case, the further safeguard that he was made to feel the majesty of the divine Word. When Nathan came to David, as God's representative, he spoke to him a simple parable, to which a child might listen with interest; but there was great majesty in it, for it unveiled the secrets of the guilty monarch's heart. It made him get his as he appeared in the clear, translucent light of heaven, and not as he might have represented himself in a more favorable light. Read the whole page, and note how Nathan made the truth lash him to the quick: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight. Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife." Nathan does not spare him; every word is like a sharp sword piercing him to the heart. David is made to feel that the Word of God can search out his most secret things, and make him see himself in his true character, disguise himself as he may. And then, when he had confessed his sin, the same stern prophet, who had spoken so severely, said to him, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." Oh, how welcome that message must have been to David! How soft and sweet whose sounds must have been to his ear after the harsher notes to which he had listened, just as we have sometimes heard the martial music that has thrilled and startled us, and then there has come a soft strain of gentle music, or else a brief season of welcome silence, by which our ears have been rested and refreshed. So was it when Nathan turned from condemnation to comfort, and said to David, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." This would henceforth always be a check to David, for he would feel that, if he sinned, that Word of God would again find him out; — that Word which had first stricken him to the dust by its severity, and then had won his heart's love by its tenderness.

A fourth safeguard was this, — David was made to see the greatness of his sin, by the effect which it produced upon others. Nathan said to David, "By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." As you read some of his Psalms, you can see that David knew that the Lord's enemies did blaspheme because of his sin. The party that loved the Lord was strong at court just then, and the king was the patron and head of that party; but there were men of Belial, who were the ungodly party in the land; and when they caught the king himself tripping thus, I warrant you that they talked of it at every street corner. It was a sad topic for the faithful ones to speak of; and the saints of God, when they met together, must have wept, for they could make no excuse for the king's crime, and they must have felt that a very deadly stab had been given to the cause of truth and righteousness. David was made to realize all that, and it must have helped to keep him from sinning again in such a fashion, because he loved the cause of God, and the house of God, and the servants of God; and there had been a period, in his past life, when he would not have believed that it was possible for him to be the means of breaking down the walls of Zion. When he had been forgiven, his first anxiety was that God would undo the mischief which his sin had wrought, and therefore he prayed to the Lord, "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

In addition to these safeguards, there is that "howbeit" which I have included in our text. I call the serious attention of every carelessly-walking Christian here to that "howbeit." How many times my eyes have rested upon that word, and it has chastened my sins, and driven me to my God. David was forgiven, but from that day the sword never departed from his house. God let him know that, although he was pardoned, some of the results of his sin still remained. The guilt of it was gone, as Nathan said, "The Lord hath put away thy sin;" but the evil effect of it was still manifest, and that must be dealt with by the Lord's chastising rod. What a

sad change came over David's life from this time! Recall the name of Tamar, Amnon, and Absalom, and think how degraded his own family had become. Then, one and another rebelled against him; enemies within his kingdom and without sought to overthrow him; and, after his sin in numbering the people, God's own angel was sent to smite the nation with a terrible pestilence. The earlier part of David's life was full of music and dancing; the latter part had far more of mourning and lamentation in it. After his great fall, he had to go softly all the rest of his days, and his dying testimony, though full of faith, was marred by the regret, "although my house be not so with God." He was a man so highly favored of God, and so much after God's own heart in many ways, that, if he could have been without the rod, God would have spared him. If this sin of his could have been winked at, and he could have been delivered from its consequences without chastisement, God would have delivered him; but it was not possible. God does not give such exemption as that to any of his children, and he did not give it to David. That warm heart of his, which, in many respects, was so excellent, was apt, from its very fervor of affection, to crave too much of the love of the creature; so David had to be smitten again and again. God did not afflict him willingly; he did it because it was for his good. This folly in the heart of his child could not be driven out by anything but the rod, and therefore the rod he must have. He was a grand man, one in whom the grace of God shone very conspicuously, but he was a man of like passions with ourselves, and we have reason to thank God that he was, because his experience becomes all the more instructive to us from the fact that, while it teaches us that God can and will forgive us if we repent of even our great and gross sins, yet it also teaches us that sin is an evil and a bitter thing, and that, though the guilt of it may be removed, the evil consequences of it will cling to us, and be a subject of sorrow to us, till God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.

II. Now, secondly, I want to point out to you The Safeguards In Our Own Case.

I cannot say that the safeguards are the same in every case, because the experience of God's children vary very considerably.

In the case of some of us, when God's forgiveness came to us, we could not think lightly of sin, because, for a long time before we found mercy, we had been under a terrible sense of guilt. I am not speaking of all Christians; but there are some of us who were for weeks, or months, or even years, waiting in outer darkness before the gate of mercy was opened to us. I will not deny that it was our unbelief in Christ that kept us there; but, at the same time, I see how God, in his wise providence, overruled even that to make us ever afterwards hate sin as burnt children dread the fire. Oh, what burns of that sort I had! They seemed as if they would never heal, — the fire had gone so deep. I felt that I could sympathize with Job when he said, "My soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my Life," for I feared that no mercy could ever come to me. I have blessed God a thousand times that I was so long in finding Christ, because, through that very experience, I have been the better qualified to speak to others who are in a similar condition. John Bunyan was for years tossed about with inward tumults through a deep sense of sin; and when, at last, at the sight of the cross, the great burden rolled off his back, and disappeared in the sepulcher of Christ, he did not think sin a little thing. It had been such a dreadful burden to him for so many years that he ever afterwards abhorred it, and adored the wondrous love which had for ever delivered him from its power. With some persons, there is a check, which operates throughout the rest of their lives, as the result of that long period of depression of spirit and despair of soul which preceded the hour of light and joy. God kept us out in the cold so long in order that, ever afterwards, we might know what it was like, and not want to go outside again. He made us feel the aching of the hungry belly, that we might not again wander into the far country, and long to feed from the sinner's trough. After our past experience there, our Father's arms about our neck became all the more precious to us, and there was the less likelihood that we should ever go back to that state of sin and sorrow from which we had escaped.

I say again that this is true only of some; it is not necessary for all, and it is only a few of God's servants who have passed through such an experience as that; but I think I may say that all who receive God's mercy have this safeguard, that, for a greater or less period, they have been made to feel the death-swoon of sin. It may last but a few minutes; but, before divine mercy comes to the heart, there is usually a striking of the soul with the chill horror of self-despair, and there is also a driving into the very marrow of the soul that sharp two-edged sword of God which kills all carnal confidence. In the case of persons who are suddenly brought into the life and light of full salvation, their sight of sin in its horror is but momentary. They hang over the precipice, and feel as if they were gone; but, at that very instant, the divine hand is stretched out to remove them. The sentence of death must be passed upon all men, because all have sinned; we have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we may learn not to trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead. That glimpse of the open jaws of hell, though it be but for an instant, — that sight of the descending axe of divine vengeance, and of our own neck laid upon the block, — is enough to make us, even in a moment, pass through a process which divorces us for ever from the love of sin, makes us feel that it is a deadly and damning thing, and causes us to cry unto God to deliver us from it. That sense of sin is, I take it, a part of the safeguard which God provides for each forgiven man to prevent him from drawing inferences of licentiousness from God's abundant mercy to him.

But there is a better safeguard than that. The fact that Jesus Christ is our sacrifice and Savior, ought to prevent us from ever going into sin again. You may have heard of the king who made a law that any person committing a certain crime, in his country, should have both his eyes plucked out. It happened that the very first criminal brought before him, under that law, was his own son, whose

guilt was clearly brought home to him. His father was the judge, and there remained nothing for him to do but to pronounce upon his son the sentence that he should have both his eyes torn out; but, rigid as he was as a law-giver, such was the father's tenderness of heart that he bade the officer first pluck out one of his son's eyes, and then take out one of his own. I should think that that father's empty eyesocket would always remind his son of the crime which he had committed, and eventually prevent him from ever offending in that way again. Surely, that crime could never be pleasant to him after it had been so painful to his father. Believer, look at your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and say to him, "What are these wounds in thy hands, dear Lord? What are those scars in my feet, and what is that deep gash in thy side, which leads to thy very heart?" "These," saith he, "are the wounds caused by thy sin, for I was wounded for thy transgressions, I was bruised for thine iniquities, the chastisement of thy peace was upon me, and with my stripes thou art healed." O my brother, the next time you are tempted to sin, let the open wounds of Jesus appeal to you, and cause you to say, "I cannot crucify my Lord afresh, and put him to open shame, by again sinning against him." This will help to hold you back when the tempter draws near you; the "cords of a man" and the "bands of love will draw you the other way much more forcibly, and you will say, with Joseph, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? "You may also say, "It is true that sin has not slain me, but it has slain my Substitute. It is true that sin has not cast me into hell, yet it brought hell upon my Substitute. It is true that the wrath of God passed by me, but it fell upon my Well-beloved, the Bridegroom of my heart, who, in infinite mercy, bore it all for my sake." The remembrance of this fact will be a most blessed safeguard to hold you back from sin; — pardon is free to you, but it cost him his all; and, because of what it cost him, you feel that you must not sin again.

Remember also that, great as the grace of God is in pardoning sin, he gives, with pardon, other mercies which are equally great, namely, repentance and renewal of heart. Wherever the forgiveness of sin comes, there comes with it a turning from sin, a leaving of sin, a fresh view of sin, a different estimate of it; and the heart, that once had sought its own pleasure, now seeks God's pleasure; and the man, who formerly loved carnal delights, is moved to long after heavenly delights from the very moment of his forgiveness. I speak advisedly when I say that the doctrine of "believe and live" would be a very dangerous one if it were not accompanied by the doctrine of regeneration; if God did not change the nature of the forgiven sinner, it would be a dangerous thing to give him free forgiveness; but when the two things go together, they counteract any evil which might have sprung out of either the one or the other by itself, and all good and no evil can come from them when they are preached in their due connection. "Believe and live," is true; but "Ye must be born again," is equally true. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," is apostolic doctrine, but so is this, "Repent ye therefore, and to convert, that your sins may be blotted out." Change of heart accompanies the forgiveness of sin; and wherever that change of heart is given, there springs up in the renewed soul a deep sense of gratitude to God. "How much I owe!" says the renewed man. "How graciously the love of God has been manifested in my case! What great sin he has forgiven! What enormous transgressions he has blotted out Now I cannot help loving him; oh, that I loved him even more! "And this gratitude becomes in itself a very powerful means of checking the soul in any impulse that it has towards sin, and an equally forceful incentive in driving it onward towards righteousness, "for the love of Christ constraineth us." It does constrain us; we do not say that it ought to do so, as some do when they misquote the text. Its constraining power draws us onward and upward towards our Lord.

These things put together, by the power of God's most blessed Spirit, lead the renewed man into a holy cautiousness and great watchfulness of soul. I wish I could say that I see as much of this spirit in all professors as I should like to see; but, alas, brethren, I do not! Sin, the very smallest sin, — if there can be a small sin, — is a great evil, and we ought to be deeply and solemnly anxious that even the least deviation from the righteousness of God should not be found in us. If any of you were told that there were in your house serpents, which had escaped from their den, and were hiding somewhere in your house, — perhaps near your bed, or in a cupboard or bookcase, I knew that, when you reached your house tonight, you would look very carefully on the doorstep, and in the hall, to see whether there was a young viper there. You would turn up the door-mats, in case there might be one concealed there! and you would not be satisfied until you had thoroughly searched the house, from the top to the bottom, in order that those deadly snakes might all be captured and destroyed. This is just what you ought to do with yourselves, brethren, for the snakes are there. In every part of your nature, these venomous creatures have been hatched, and they have multiplied beyond all calculation. Sins of all shapes and sizes lurk within you; and if God's grace does not keep you watchful, or ever you are aware you may be painfully conscious of their deadly power.

There is this fact that you must have often noticed, I feel sure, that, whether you are aware of the sin itself, or not, you will soon have to be aware of the consequences of it. You cannot fall into any sin without losing, in some measure, the sweetness of your fellowship with God. I do not need to look out of my window in order to know that there are clouds across the sky; I can tell that the clouds have come, for there is a diminution of light in the room where I am reading. So, I may not be conscious that I have fallen into sin, but the very diminution of the light of God's presence becomes the indicator to my soul that it is so. Perhaps you have had a prosperous day in business, and the friends you have met with have all been very kind and cheerful, and nothing has happened during the day to distress you; yet, when you get home, you feel heavy and dull, and you say to yourself, "Why is this? "It is simply that God has been causing you to see that the sweetness of the creature cannot make up for the lack of the presence of the Creator. If God were to give you all earthly good, and yet took away from you his presence, — which he will do if sin is within you, and unrepented of, — the loss of his presence would be a greater loss than the loss of the whole world, or even of heaven itself. If

you are in the habit of walking with God, — and I trust that many of you are, — you will take note of the least stain of sin. You have, perhaps, seen a handkerchief that looked perfectly white; but if there has been a fall of snow, and you have laid that handkerchief down upon the snow, you have seen its defilement in contrast with the whiteness of the snow; so, if you live near to God, you will have a very high standard of what you ought to be, and you will see a great deal more sin in yourself than you ever used to see. The fact of your living near to God will never lead you into presumption, nor cause you to think lightly of sin; but it will make what you used to call little things to assume hideous proportions, and you will say to yourself, “What a sin it was that I, who have spoken face to face with God, should make that silly remark to my neighbor, a remark that could not minister edification to anybody; — that I, who have had power with God in prayer, should be put out of temper by a poor silly maid, or be made to forget myself altogether by some trivial temptation, which I ought to have been able to master, and could have mastered if I had given it the least thought!” “You may rest quite certain that, if God honors any man in public, he takes him aside privately, and flogs him well, otherwise he would get elevated and proud, and God will not have that; he will not have big self to serve him, he will take him down from his high pinnacle, and grind him to powder, so as to get all the pride out of him”

III. The last point, on which I can only speak briefly, is this. All This Indicates What God’s Great Aim Is, And What Ours Ought To Be.

God’s aim is, not merely to forgive us, and to free us from the penalty of sin, but to take sin out of us, and get rid of it altogether. The Lord might have forgiven David, and yet not have used the rod upon him as he did. That child might not have died, but might have grown up to be David’s comfort and joy; and Absalom might not have burned out such a scapegrace, but might have been his father’s best helper. God might have arranged matters so, but he did not see fit to do it. He seems to say, “My dear child David, I love you so well that, while I fully forgive you, I will take such measures with you as will effectually prevent you from ever falling into that sin again; I will so deal with you that, should you ever have such a temptation as this again, your tendency to that sin shall be very decidedly checked.” Long before his sin with Bathsheba, there were various indications as to David’s special liability to temptation. That sin only threw out upon the surface the evil that was always within him; and now God, having is him see that the deadly cancer is there, begins to use the knife to cut it out of him. God’s business with you, if you are his child, is to get rid of the sin that is within you; — to purge you, not merely with blood and with hyssop, but with fire, till he has made your nature very different from what it now is.

Our aim should be in conformity with God’s aim; that is, to seek to get rid of sin altogether. You have first be realize what your sin really is. It may be that, this day, you have lived a blameless life so far as it can be seen of men, but what about your thoughts? You have never committed adultery as David did; but how many adulteries have you committed in your heart? You never were actually a murderer; God forbid that you ever should be! But when your evil passions have risen, how many times have you been a murderer in the sight of God! We are not merely to imagine that, if we bring our outward moral conduct into conformity with the will of God, we are all right; we are also to look within. Every thought of evil is sin. A photographer will tell you that the object presented to the camera leaves an impression upon it even though the exposure of the sensitive place was only for the fraction of a moment. Notice, brethren, whenever sin is brought before your mind even in imagination, whether it is attractive to you or not. I hope that you catch yourself saying, “O my God, how is it that I can think of such a thing with any degree of tolerance?” You feel that you would not commit that sin, you would rather die than commit it; yet you are not as displeased as you ought to be at even the thought of it. Perhaps you almost wish that you might do this evil thing. If so, that shows which way your nature still inclines, the old nature which is so corrupt that it stinks; and when it stinks most in your nostrils, it is, perhaps, best for you, for then it drives you away from being proud of it, and takes you to that dear Savior in whom alone your life can ever be found.

Brothers and sisters, in all your spiritual engagements, note how far your heart is really in them. Do not be content if you can say, “I went to the Tabernacle last Thursday night.” Did you really worship there in spirit and in truth? Did you profit by the Word read and preached? Do not be satisfied if you can say, “I read a chapter in the Bible, and offered prayer to God this morning.” What avails all this if your heart was not in the exercise? “Rend your hearts, and not your garments,” is a message which would sometimes be appropriate to you. What we have to look at is, how near the soul gets to God, and how far it gains the mastery over sin. If it is a question of the forgiveness of our sin for the sake of him who did hang upon the cross, blessed be his name, we have that, and we have it perfectly in him. If it is a question of our righteousness in the sight of God, so far as the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is concerned, that also is ours, as everything else that is his is ours. But as to the cleansing of the heart, the purging of all secret places, the driving out of every lurking sin, and the getting rid of every imagination, and with, and desire that is contrary to God; this has to be battled for, through faith in Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Eternal Spirit; and the complete victory has yet to be gained. We must still continue to cry with Paul, “Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But with him also we can say, “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are not to shut our eye, and fancy that the war is over, that all our spiritual enemies are slain; but we are to press onward to the end. Perhaps, even at the very end, we may have a stern fight with fierce temptations, as John Knox and many others have had; but, in the name of the Lord, we will destroy them. In any case, we must not give way to sin; we dare not let sin have dominion over us. We must strive and

struggle against it; and we shall do so, for he who has pardoned us will also sanctify us. He who hath delivered us from death by sin will also deliver us from the death of sin, and will present us to himself “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.”

Brothers and sisters, do not let me, for a moment, take away from you the joy of perfect pardon which is already yours if you have believed in Jesus Christ. Your sins, which were many, are all forgiven. Let no doubt upon that point come into your mind. Poor troubled sinner, do not to distressed as though you could not find immediate pardon through Jesus Christ, for you can. If you believe in him, your sins are forgiven you for his sake. But I am sure that, if you are in a right state of heart, you do not want to have pardon, and yet to be allowed to live in sin. You could not be content, even if the Lord were to forgive you all your sins, if he did not also change your nature, and deliver you from, the power of sin. That these two things are to be had in Jesus Christ, let us firmly believe; and for the realization of these two things, let us earnestly pray and thrive; and may God graciously give them to us all, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

2 Samuel 23:4 Royal Emblems for Loyal Subjects

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“And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.”-2 Samuel 23:4.

Eastern despots fleece their subjects to an enormous extent. Even at the present day, one would hardly wish to be subjected to the demands of an Oriental government; but, in David’s time, a bad king was a continual pestilence, plague, and famine, — a bane to the lives of his subjects, who were under his caprice; and spoliation to their fields, which he perpetually swept clean to enrich himself with the produce thereof. Hence, a good king was a rara avis in those days, and could never be too highly prized. So soon as he mounted the throne, his subjects began to feel the beneficent influence of his sway. He was to them “as when the sun riseth.” The confusion which had existed under weak governors gave place to settled order, while the rapacity which had continually emptied the coffers of the rich, and filched the earnings of the poor, gave place to a regular system of assessment, and men knew how to go about their business with some degree of certainty. It, was to them “a morning without clouds.” Forthwith, trade began to flourish; persons who had emigrated to avoid the exactions of the tyrant came back again; fields which had fallen out of tillage, because they would not pay the farmer to cultivate them, began to be sown; and the new ruler was to the land as “clear shining after rain,” which makes the tender grass spring up out of the earth.

I fear we do, not value, as we should, the constitutional government, which it is our privilege as Britons to enjoy. Let us look where we may, — we need not say to the East only, but to the West, also, — we would not wish to change the government under which we live so happily. Let us gratefully acknowledge to God his tender mercy, and his goodness, in sparing us alike from the refractory elements of a republic, and then prodigious exactions of a despotism, and for giving us to dwell in a quiet and peaceable kingdom, wherein we can sit “every man under his own vine and under his, own fig-tree, none making him afraid.” We may say, I am sure, of Her Majesty who is set over us in the order of providence, that she has been “as the sun when he riseth, as a morning without clouds.” Under her generous sway our country has been verdant. As “the earth by clear shining after rain” bringeth forth the green herb, so have our institutions fostered our trade and commerce, by the goodwill and gracious providence of God.

But it is not my object, at present, to enlarge upon the secular benefits that have fallen to our lot, though I should not think it unworthy of the Christian ministry to pursue a theme which calls for so much gratitude to God, and might foster so much good feeling among ourselves. We might, make one another feel that there are vast mercies we enjoy which would be more esteemed if better known. Just as we speak of Christ’s unknown sufferings, so many of the bounties that we daily enjoy have, become so common that we are oblivious of them; and, therefore, I might call them our unknown men cries. It well becomes us to lift up our voices and hearts to heaven, and thank God for the happy land, and for the happy age, in which the lines have fallen to us. Still, I take it that David was not so much speaking of mere political rulers as of Christ Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, whose sway is always gracious and full of goodwill. May his kingdom come! “Surely, I come quickly,” he crieth from heaven. ‘Even so’, come, Lord Jesus,” respond those whose love inspires their worship. His kingdom is “as when the sun riseth even a morning without clouds” and when it shall have been perfectly established upon the earth, all men shall know that, the Son of David, whom once they rejected, is he by whom God would make all generations to be blessed for ever and ever. May we, who have waited and watched for his glorious advent, live when he standeth in the latter day upon the earth, and may we constitute a part, of that glorious harvest, the fruit whereof shall shake like the; cedars of Lebanon! Thus we look for the day wherein the Lord shall come in the clouds of heaven.

I. David says of Christ He Shall Be As The Light Of The Morning, When The Sun Riseth.

This he is as King, already, in his Church, and as the rightful Monarch in the individual heart of the believer. Wherever Christ comes into a soul, it is “as the light of the morning when the sun riseth.”

The light of the morning is joyous. Then all the birds begin to sing, and the earth, which is silent at night, save when its stillness is disturbed by stormy winds, or by wild beasts, or by riotous drunken people, becometh vocal with songs from many mouths; so, when Christ cometh into the heart, the tuneful notes of the singing birds are heard, and the voice of the turtle welcomes the gladsome season. Where darkness had brooded before, the sunlight Christ bringeth mirth and blessed rejoicing. Oh, what streamers there are in the town of Mansoul when Prince Emmanuel rideth through! Happy day, happy day, when Jesus comes into the heart! Save the day when we shall be with him where he is, I suppose there is no day that is comparable to the first one, when we behold Christ all see him as our Savior and our King.

The rising of the sun is joyous, and, besides that, it is comforting and consoling to those who have been suffering from ills which night aggravates. “Would God ’twere morning!” has been the cry of many a languishing one tossing upon his couch. “Would God ’twere morning!” may be the cry of many a heart that is troubled exceedingly with the guilt of sin. Ah, let the morning come; let the watchman say, “The morning cometh;” let the day dawn, and the day-star appear in our hearts, and there is “the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Joy to cheer and comfort the disconsolate Christ bringeth, for he is as the rising of the sun.

And, how glorious is the sun when from his pavilion he looks forth at morn! Job describes the sunrise as being the stamping of the earth with a seal; as if, when in darkness, the earth were like a lump of clay that is pervious; then, as it is turned to the light, it beginneth to receive the impress of divine wisdom; mountain and vale all stream with it, till impressed on its surface we begin to perceive the glorious works of God. So, when Christ riseth upon the heart, what a glorious transformation is wrought! Where there has been no love, no faith, no peace, no joy, none of the blessed fruits of the Spirit, no sooner doth Christ come than we perceive all the graces in blossom; yea, they soon become fragrant and blooming, for we are made complete in him. The advent of Christ bringeth to the heart celestial beauty; faith in him decketh us with ornaments, and clothes us as with royal apparel. Better garments than Dives had, though he wore scarlet and fine linen, doth Christ give to his people when he cometh to them; and better fare than Dives had, though he fared sumptuously every day, does Jesus bestow upon his saints when he shineth into their hearts. Oh, the glory of the sunrise of the Savior on the darkness of the human soul! If a man might rise every morning of the year to look at the rising sun, and yet never be tired of it, because of the sublimity of the spectacle, methinks a man might consider his own conversion every hour in the day, and every day of his life, and yet never be wearied with the thrice-heavenly spectacle of Christ arising over the mountains of his guilt, to banish the dense darkness of his despair.

As the sunrising is thus joyous, and comforting, and glorious, let us remember how unparalleled it is, — unparalleled because divine. By no method of illumination can we manufacture such a light as the sun exhibits by his simple rising. O ye priests, ye come, with your incantations and mysteries, to make light in men’s hearts, and sometimes ye strike a spark that doth but show the darkness; it dieth too soon to be called “the light.” And ye pile your deeds to heaven, — your faggots of good works, — ye bring your van-load of superstitious observances, and vainly try to make an illumination; but ere it beginneth to blaze it dieth out, and a handful of ashes alone remains to disappoint the expectant ones. But Christ ariseth, and with what boundless majesty he looks abroad! The joy, the peace, the comfort, the confidence, the full assurance, the blissful- hope, which one ray of Christ’s light gives to the heart of man, is not to be equalled; nay, scarcely to be compared with anything else. It is a joy that God only giveth us, and, thank God, a joy which none, can take away.

And, as this sunrise of Christ in our heart is divine, so likewise it is irresistible. No curtains can conceal the sun from, the world when he willeth to rise. No tyrant, by any law, can prevent the sun’s beams from gilding the cottage of the poor. Shine he must, and will. Like a giant, he cometh out, of his chamber, and where is he that shall wrestle with him? Where art thou, O man, who can take the bridle of the sun, and bid his coursers stay their race? Until they have climbed to heaven, and then gone down again to bathe their burning fetlocks in the Western Sera, they must, they will pursue, their onward course, for none can stay them, or say to their mighty driver, “What doest thou?” So, when Jesus comes into the heart, — avaunt, thou fiend! Thy time of flight is come! Away despair and doubt, and aught that can prevent the soul from having joy and peace! Thus the eternal mandate runs, “Let that man go free!” Thus saith Jehovah to Pharaoh, “Let my people go;” and go they must and shall, for the time of their light and their liberty is come. Like the rising of the sun, when he springs forth “as a giant strong, and as a bridegroom gay,” even so is Christ Jesus; when he riseth in the human heart.

The sunrise, moreover, is very much like the coming of Christ because of that which it involveth. Those rays of light, which first forced the darkness from the sky with golden prophecy of day, tell of flowers that shall open their cups to drink in the sunlight; they

tell of streams that shall sparkle as they flow; they tell of the virgins that shall make merry, and the young men that shall rejoice, because the sun shineth on them, and the darkness of night is fled. And so, the coming of Christ into the heart is a prophecy of years of sweet enjoyment, — a prophecy of God's goodness and longsuffering, let night reign, elsewhere, as it may; — yea, and it is a prophecy of the fullness of the river of God, for ever and ever, before the throne of God in heaven. Hast thou Christ poor soul? Christ is to thee the promise of eternal happiness. Thou canst not to dark again if Christ hath once shone on thee. No night shall follow this blessed day; it is a day that lasts for ever.

“Doth Jesus owe upon thee thine,

Then Jesus it for ever thine.”

Hath Christ appeared to thee? Dost thou trust him now? Art thou reposing only upon his finished work? Then the sun hath risen upon thee, and it shall go down no more for ever. The everlasting Joshua biddeth the sun stand still, and to-day, and to-morrow, though the whole world revolve, that Sun of Righteousness abideth still to thine on thee with healing in his wings.

II. We must proceed to notice that the psalmist uses another figure: “Even A Morning Without Clouds.”

Brethren, there are no clouds in Christ when he ariseth in a sinner's heart. The clouds that mostly cover our sky come from Sinai, from the law, and from our own legal propensities, for we are always wishing to do something by which we may inherit eternal life: but there are none of these clouds in Christ.

There is, in Christ, no cloud of angry rebuke for the past. When Jesus receiveth the sinner, he chideth not. “Neither do, I condemn thee,” is all that he hath to say. I thought, when I came tremblingly to him, that he would at least bring all my sins before me, and chide before he sealed my pardon with the kiss of mercy; but it was Not so. The Father received the prodigal without a single word of rebuke. He did but say, “Take off his rags;” he did but command them to kill the fatted calf that they might make merry, not a word did he speak of his hungry look, or his filth, or of the far country, or even of the harlots with whom he had spent his substance. Christ receiveth the soul without rebuke for he is “as a morning without clouds.”

And, as there is no cloud of anger, so there is no cloud of exacting demand. He doth not ask the sinner to be anything, or to do anything. That were a cloud, indeed, if he did. A sinner by nature can do nothing, and can be nothing, except as grace shall make him be and do. If Christ did ask anything of you or me, if he did but ask repentance of us, unless he gave us that repentance, his salvation would be of no avail to us. But he asketh nothing; all he bids us do is to take him as everything, and be nothing ourselves. So, to the empty-handed sinner, he is such a full Christ that we may well say, “He is a morning without clouds.”

And, as he is without cloud of demand, so he is without cloud of falsehood. I know that some say Christ may reject those who have put, their trust in him, — that, after they are saved, they may yet fall from grace and perish. Surely, that would not be a morning without clouds. I should see, in the distance, the tempest gathering that might ultimately destroy my spirit; but, no, if thou trustest Christ he will surely save thee, even to the end. If thou puttest thy soul into his hand, there is no fear that he will be false to the sacred charge; he will undertake to be Surety for thy soul; he will bring thee to his father's face without hindrance, when the fullness of time is come. Trouble not yourselves, O ye anxious ones, concerning the future! Does faith reach only to the present? Do ye trust Christ only to save you to-day? I pray you take a larger sweep of confidence, and trust him to save you to the end. If you do so, he will be better to you than your fears would suggest, or than your faith can conceive; to the end he will love you, and in the end he will bring you to be like him and to be with him where he is. Happy is that man who seeth Christ “as a morning without clouds.” They who see any clouds in him make the clouds. The clouds are only in their vision; they are not in his person. The spots and defects are in themselves; they are not in his person, nor in his work. If thou wilt only trust him fully, simply, without any admixture of thine own merit or confidence, thou shalt find him to be equal to the brightest description, — a morning without a single cloud.

III. But, now, to the last figure. Upon this we intend to dwell at somewhat greater length.

David says of Christ the King, that his sway is like Clear Shining After Rain, whereby the tender grass is made to spring out of the earth.

We all understand the metaphor. We have often seen how, after a very heavy shower of rain, and sometimes after a continued rainy season, when the sun shines, there is a delightful clearness and freshness in the air that we seldom perceive at other times. Perhaps, the brightest weather is just when the wind has driven away the clouds, and the rain has ceased, and the sun peers forth from his chambers to look down upon the glad earth. Well, now, Christ is to his people just like that, — exceedingly clear-shining when the rain is over.

Sorrow and sadness do not last for ever. After the rain, there is to come the clear shining. Tried believer, after all thy afflictions there remains a rest for the people of God; and if, just now, thou art tried and vexed by some extraordinary trial, there is a clear shining coming to thy soul when all this rain is over. Look to Christ and thou shalt find where that clear shining is. The quiet contemplation thou shalt have of him, when this time of rebuke is over, shall then be to thee as the earth when the tempest has sobbed itself to sleep, when the clouds have rent themselves to rags, and the sun peers out, shooting forth virtue with its lustrous rays.

And while sorrows, like the floating clouds, last not for ever, they do work together with the bliss, that, as the clear sunshine, followeth afterwards, to produce good. It is not in the sorrow alone, perhaps, to bring forth good, any more than the rain might, by itself, bring forth the spring blade; but when the sorrow and the joy, when the affliction and the consolation, come together, then the joy of the heart is indeed benign. None bring forth much fruit for God but those who have been deeply ploughed with affliction, and deluged with grief; but even they do not bring forth much fruit till they have had the joy of Christ's presence after the affliction is over. Clear sinning after rain produces an atmosphere good for the herbs, and the joy of the soul in the presence of the Lord, after a time of sorrow, makes it able to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Thus, after times of great troubles, Christ becometh to his people more specially and delightfully sweet than he has ever been before. I notice this in many instances. It is manifest in conversion. What happy, happy days were our first, young days in the faith! I cannot forget mine, - I never shall. When talking with those who come to tell me what God has done for their souls, I notice the freshness upon their memory of every separate event on the day of their new birth; they can tell how Christ appeared unto them, and how they looked unto him, and were lightened. "I can never forget that, sir, till I die," says one; "I have a very bad memory, and I forget almost everything that, is good; but that I shall never forget, for it was such a joyous season." I know that many of you have had good days, but they have been like pieces of money that you received when children, very bright once; but they have been passed about, and worn in circulation, until they have lost the image and superscription which were once so bright to your eyes. Not so the day of your new birth; it has been like a coin, as fresh as when you laid it aside; and when you take it out again, it is as fresh as the mint delivered it, and you can read it still, and read the image of Christ which it bears. I think there is scarcely such a day on earth to be had in Christian experience as that first day when we came to Christ and knew him as our Savior.

The like is true else, in its measure, after great and heavy affliction. You have been bereaved. A wife, a husband, a child has been removed from you; or, you have had a great lose in business, you were crossed in some expectation, and you were cast into the lowest depth of trouble. Friends failed you, consolation fled from you; but, after a time, you felt a sweet resignation; you could say, "My soul is even as a weaned child;" your troubles, somehow or other, grew sweet as honey, though before they had been bitter as gall. You saw the finger of a loving Lord in all those graving lines of affliction, which the chisel had made upon your brow; you saw the great Refiner sitting at the mouth of the furnace, watching your gold that it might not be destroyed, and rejoicing over your dross, because it melted away in the flame. Do you remember it? Why, I can look back to some of the happiest seasons of my life, and see them stand in juxtaposition with the blackest times of trial. Oh, it has been, sometimes, a glorious thing to be cast down by rebuke, and slander, and then go into one's chamber, and lay Rabshakeh's letter before the Lord, and then to go down, and feel more glad than a king of a hundred kingdoms, because we have been counted worthy to suffer reproach for Christ. At such a season, there is a calm within us more deep and profound than we felt before.

And, mark you, if it has been so with us individually, it has been no less so with the Church. Remember the clear shining after rain in the apostles' times. "Then had the churches rest, and walking in the fear of God, were multiplied." Those little seasons of hush and calm, between the great persecutions, have always been prolific of converts. I hope, in the midst, of successive controversies which darken the sky overhead, that, when the rain is over, and the noise and trouble it costs some tender spirits have ceased, and the powers of darkness have been hustled to sleep once more, we may have some clear shining after rain, and brotherly fellowship once again be renewed. The day cometh when the great battle of Armageddon shall be fought, when the powers of darkness shall be roused to frenzy's highest pitch, when hell shall be loosed, and the great dragoon shall be permitted to come upon the earth, trailing its chain along in the supremacy of its hour; — then, when dreadful war shall come upon the earth, when nations shall reel and stagger to and fro, the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the trump of the archangel and the voice of God, and there shall be clear shining after the rain. And then, when the flames shall have consumed this orb, when judgment, shall have been passed, when death and hell shall have been cast, into the lake of fire, when all the powers of evil shall have been utterly destroyed before the majesty of his coming who shall overturn them, that his kingdom may be established in heaven, everlasting hallelujahs, "For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth," shall bear witness that there is clear shining after the rain: for so it must be in the little as the great, in the experience of the individual as in that of the multitude; there must be a rain, and there must be the clear shining after it, and the two together shall bring forth a matchless harvest, to the praise and glory of his grace, who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.

Ask ye, now, why is it that God giveth to his people sweet seasons just after the bitter?

One reason is, to take the taste of the bitter out of their mouth. Even as to our little children, when they take their nauseous

medicine, we give some sweetmeat; so doth the Lord often, when he cometh to his little ones, give them such sweet honey of his grace that they forget their sufferings in the sweet nectar which he vouchsafeth them.

Another reason, no doubt, is lest they should be utterly destroyed by the terror of his judgment. "He tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb;" but, better than that, he taketh it to his bosom; and when it lieth there, little doth it know that but for the rain and the tempest it had not lain in his bosom, and been fondled there so tenderly. He put it there lest it should perish.

Then, again, he doth it as a sweet reward of faith. He seeth thee in trouble, bravely struggling with the tempest, and saith, "I will reward that man." He seeth thee following him in the garden, still clinging to him amidst all the darkness and temptation; and, therefore, he saith, "I will give to that soul such joy, by-and-by, that it shall be well rewarded for its faithfulness to me in the past."

Is it not also to prepare you for the future that, in looking back, you may say, "The last time I had trouble, there was clear shining after the rain, and so I feel it will be next time"? Ah, thou timid one, there is a trial coming; it looms over thy head. What! and didst thou behave valiantly for thy Master in former times, and wilt thou be a coward now? Ah, my brother, thinkest thou there is a time of ruin threatening thee, and thou sayest, "His mercy is clean gone for ever; he will be faithful to me no more." Oh, wherefore dost thou say that? Doth my Lord deserve it? Hath he been with thee in six troubles? Then, why should he forsake thee in the seventh? He that hath helped thee hitherto will surely help thee to the end. Wherefore hath he delivered thee in the tempest, if he means to let these sink at last? By the kindness of the past, the love experienced in former days, let thy faith put out its great sheet anchor, and outride the storm, for there shall again be "clear shining after rain."

And, surely, these changeful seasons of ours, and that constant ordinance of his, ought to make us sick of self, and fond of him. He putteth gall on the world, and he putteth honey on his own lips; so that we may eschew the one and love the other. We are so fond of this world that we must be drawn away from it: and when we are drawn away from it, and enticed to him, our foolish hearts come to know his value, and we yield ourselves up to him.

I cannot tell to whom this sermon is addressed. I am sure it has a mission to fulfill. O brothers and sisters, it may be that these words may be worth a mine of gold to some of you, as clear shining after rain! If they reach thy case, do thank my Master for it. He may have a harvest from thy soul yet. Be sure that thou givest him the firstfruits of the harvest. When there is clear shining after the rain, honor him more, serve him better, give more to his cause, pray more for his people, live more in his fear, commune more with him, and walk more closely to him. Let it, be true that, in thy case, as in that of this round world, the rain and the clear shining after it have brought forth their abundant fruit. When you and I shall get to heaven, we will talk on its green and flowery mounts of all the showers through which we, passed, and of the clear shining; and, in the sacred high eternal noon, which shall be our portion for ever, we shall, with transporting joys, recount the labors of the past, and sing of the clear shining after the rain.

How sad the thought that there is no "clear shining after rain" for some of you! There is a rain of troubles in reserve for you, — that you know; there will be more troubles yet in this life; there is heavy shower coming yet in death, and then it shall rain for ever, and there shall be a horrible tempest; — that is your portion. If ye believe not that Jesus is the Christ and trust not your souls to him, all the woe you have ever known is as nothing; it is but the first spattering of the drops on the pavement; it is nothing compared with the storm which shall beat upon your unsheltered head for ever and ever. But the refuge is before thee, man. The sky is dark, the tempest lowers; but the refuge is before thee. Run! in God's name, run! The storm comes hastening on, as if God were gathering up all his black artillery that he might discharge his dreadful thunders upon thee. Run!" But can I enter?" Yes, the door is open; run!" But may I enter?" Yes, he invites thee: "Come unto me, yea, come unto me, — come this night, — trust me," he says, "and I will save thy soul." "But I am unworthy." Well, see the tempest! Run! Let thine unworthiness put feathers to thy feet, and not stop thee in thy haste. Jesus calls thee from his throne in heaven; he invites thee: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come." Heaven and earth say, "Come." Sinner, wilt thou avoid the tempest? Wilt thou flee, and find shelter in Christ? God help thee to trust Christ now, and unto him shall be the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

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2 Samuel 5:17-25 — Exposition by C H Spurgeon

2 Samuel 5:17.

To thrust him down, and kill him if they could, and so put an end to his prosperous reign.

2 Samuel 5:17–20.

As a flood breaks forth, and carries all before it.

2 Samuel 5:20, 21.

The Philistines brought their gods with them, in the hope of being thereby defended; but “David and his men burned them.” That was the very best thing to do with them. What a pity they did not save them for aesthetic purposes! Thus do men with fine old works of art, like pictures of the Virgin Mary. No, no, burn them; for that is the very best thing to do with anything that ever has been worshipped of mortal man. If they have ever been set up in the place of God, they are cursed from that moment, let them be burned, or dashed in pieces, or in some way destroyed. “There they left their images, and David and his men burned them.”

2 Samuel 5:22–24.

Or be sharp up, and go at them.

2 Samuel 5:24, 25.

I hope that may be said of you and me all our lives long.

2 Samuel 5:25.

That is, he utterly overthrew them, and drove them away.

2 Samuel 7:1-22 Exposition

2 Samuel 7:1, 2.

He said no more, but his intention was very plain, namely, to build a house that should be a more suitable abode for the ark of the Lord.

2 Samuel 7:3.

He spoke too fast. Even prophets, who are inspired of God, must wait upon their Master for their message; and when they utter words which only come out of their own mouths, they say what they will have to unsay before long. It did look very clear that this was the proper thing for Nathan to say to David; but he had not a “Thus saith the Lord” for it.

2 Samuel 7:4, 5.

“You have already let him know what Nathan had to say about the matter; now go and tell him what Jehovah says:”

2 Samuel 7:5.

The conception was altogether too low. He has made all space, time is his creation, and the arch of heaven stands by his almighty power; shall he himself have a house in which he can dwell?

2 Samuel 7:6.

A structure to be set up, and taken down, and to be moved about wherever the people journeyed. That was sufficient to be a central shrine of worship, and God cared for nothing else.

2 Samuel 7:7

Did God ever put to the children of Israel such a question as this? No; and it is very remarkable that, from the time that the temple was built, you may date the decay of true religion in Israel; and the same thing has happened many times since; whenever religion is surrounded by elaborate ceremonies, and gorgeous architecture, it is almost certain to suffer loss of power and efficacy. The simplicity of worship may not be the life of it, but it has a very intimate connection with that life.

2 Samuel 7:8-11.

God has a way of returning men's generosity in kind. Since David wished to build God's house, God would build David's house.

2 Samuel 7:12-15.

Here is our warrant for believing in the final salvation of Solomon. Perhaps that Book of Ecclesiastes, the work of his old age, shows us by what rough and thorny ways God brought the wanderer back. He had tried to satisfy himself with the things of time and sense, but he was constrained at last to utter this verdict, "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity;" and he had to go back to his God, and God his comfort there.

2 Samuel 7:16-18.

Like one weighted down with a great load of mercy, too heavy for him to stand up under it, and therefore he must needs sit down, and consider, and meditate upon the wonderful words of God to him.

2 Samuel 7:18.

This was not the usual Oriental posture of prayer, but David was mingling meditation with his supplication, so that his attitude was not according to ordinary rules.

Why, you are David, the valiant man who slew Goliath! No, no, no; the man of God is nobody in his own esteem.

David desired to build a temple for God, and the prophet Nathan conceiving that such a design must be acceptable to the Most High, told the king to proceed with it, but God's mind was otherwise, and Nathan had to tell David that it was well that it was in his heart, but that God intended the temple to be built, not by him, but by his son Solomon. However, the Lord gave to David very large promises, and when he had received them, through Nathan, he was so overcome with gratitude that he went in, and "sat before the Lord." That was his posture in prayer on this occasion. Good men have been known to pray kneeling, which seems to be the most natural attitude. Some have prayed with their faces between their knees, as Elias did. Some have prayed standing, as the publican did. Some have prayed sitting, as David did. Probably, he was mingling prayer and meditation when he "sat before the Lord,"

How often has a similar feeling leaped into our heart! Why should the Lord have dealt so well with us?

"What was there in you that could merit esteem,

Or give the Creator delight?"

2 Samuel 7:18, 19.

No, it is not the manner of man in general, but it is the manner of the Man Christ Jesus.

"All that thou hast done for me, therefore, in overcoming my enemies, and making me king over this people, has seemed to be but a small thing to thee, for 'thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come.'" That astonished David, and therefore he asked, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" "Man gives stintedly (sparingly) after his own grudging fashion; but thou givest in a lordly, kingly, divine way." David's question may be rendered, "Is this the law of the Man? Am I to be the parent of that Man who shall be my Lord as well as my Son, who shall reign for ever and ever, and of whose kingdom there shall be no end?" David was spelling out the inner mystery hidden in the words of the Lord, reading between the lines, and discovering that the covenant which God had made with him was, at least in some respects, a repetition of that greater covenant made with Christ on his behalf.

2 Samuel 7:19

No man could not have been so kind as that. The love of Jesus surpasses the love of women, and the love of God surpasses all the kindness of men.

2 Samuel 7:20

He had not said much, but he could not say much under such circumstances. He was utterly overwhelmed, just as, when some wondrous kindness has been shown to us, we wish rather to sit still, in grateful silence, than to stand up, and speak acknowledgments, for our heart is too full for utterance.

2 Samuel 7:20-22.

God had said to David, in the message he sent by Nathan, "I have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great that

are in the earth;” and now David brings back the words to God, and says, “Thou art great, O Lord God; for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee.”

There is some sweet doctrine here. The Lord blesses David, not because of David’s virtue, or David’s merit, or David’s prowess, but for his own sake:

“For thy word’s sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them.” The reason why streams of love flow from God is just this, it is according to his nature.

He is a fountain, so the blessing must flow from him. He is a sun, so he must shine. It is not only because we need his love, but because “God is love,” that his love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us.

Now what is the inference from all this? Does David say, “Wherefore,

O Lord, I am great and honorable”? Oh, no! he has nothing to say in praise of himself; but he says, “Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.”

2 Samuel 7:21-25

That is a very short, but exceedingly pithy prayer: “Do as thou hast said.” You do not need any larger promises, brethren, than the Lord has already given to you: could he give you any larger ones?

“What more can he say than to you he hath said,

You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?”

What you have to do is to take the promises he has given, and spread them out before the mercy-seat, and then say to him, “Do as thou hast said.” What strength there is in this plea! Hath he said, and shall he not do it? “Will he break his promise, or shall his right hand fail to perform that which has gone forth from his lips? Far be it from us to think so, but let us say to him, “Do as thou hast said.” That is the very essence of prayer. Take care not to forget it.

2 Samuel 7:23-25

What a blessed prayer this is, “Do as thou hast said”! Get hold of a promise of the Lord, take it to the throne of grace, and then urge this plea, “Do as thou hast said.” It is a good argument to use with every upright man when we remind him of his promise, and ask him to keep his pledged word; and certainly we may use this plea with the thrice holy God: “Do as thou hast said.”

2 Samuel 7:26

Or, “be greatened”-be made great “for ever.” Notice the way David returns to God the words that were addressed to himself. The Lord said to him, “I have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great that are in the earth;” so David replies, “Let thy name be made great for ever. Thou, Jehovah of hosts, art God over Israel; if thou hast made me king, and if my throne shall be established, much more shall thine.”

2 Samuel 7:26,27

Notice how the name of the Lord seems to grow in this chapter until here it comes to its full force, and dignity, and majesty: “Thou, O Jehovah of hosts, God of Israel,”-

2 Samuel 7:26-29

You see how he clings to God’s promise: “Thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant.” If you get a promise from the Lord, and cling to it as you wrestle with the angel, you will surely prevail. You must win the blessing if you can plead, as David did, “Thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant.”

2 Samuel 7:27

That is the best place to find a prayer,-in your heart; no prayer comes up before God, with acceptance, but that which comes out of the very heart, which should be like the sacred ark of old, wherein were hidden Israel’s most precious things. God’s words had gone right down into David’s heart, and touched the secret springs of it, and now they welled up in this blessed prayer

2 Samuel 7:27

There is that grand pleading again: “Thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it.” If you can remind God of his own promise, you may have whatsoever you will of him; if he has said anything, his word shall surely be fulfilled.

2 Samuel 23:5

Exposition by C H Spurgeon

2 Samuel 23:5 Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.

What blessed words his last words were! His sorrow is turned into joy; his own house grieves him, but God's promise comforts him. I think we must read this verse again; perhaps there is some father here who is growing old, or some mother upon whom years are multiplying. May these last words of David be such as your last words may be! "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire."

DEVOTIONALS

C H Spurgeon

Morning and Evening

Faith's Checkbook

2 Samuel 1:26 (Morning and Evening)

"Thy love to me was wonderful." — 2 Samuel 1:26

Come, dear readers, let each one of us speak for himself of the wonderful love, not of Jonathan, but of Jesus. We will not relate what we have been told, but the things which we have tasted and handled—of the love of Christ. Thy love to me, O Jesus, was wonderful when I was a stranger wandering far from thee, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Thy love restrained me from committing the sin which is unto death, and withheld me from self-destruction. Thy love held back the axe when Justice said, "Cut it down! why cumbereth it the ground?" Thy love drew me into the wilderness, stripped me there, and made me feel the guilt of my sin, and the burden of mine iniquity. Thy love spake thus comfortably to me when, I was sore dismayed—"Come unto me, and I will give thee rest." Oh, how matchless thy love when, in a moment, thou didst wash my sins away, and make my polluted soul, which was crimson with the blood of my nativity, and black with the grime of my transgressions, to be white as the driven snow, and pure as the finest wool. How thou didst commend thy love when thou didst whisper in my ears, "I am thine and thou art mine." Kind were those accents when thou saidst, "The Father himself loveth you." And sweet the moments, passing sweet, when thou declaredst to me "the love of the Spirit." Never shall my soul forget those chambers of fellowship where thou has unveiled thyself to me. Had Moses his cleft in the rock, where he saw the train, the back parts of his God? We, too, have had our clefts in the rock, where we have seen the full splendours of the Godhead in the person of Christ. Did David remember the tracks of the wild goat, the land of Jordan and the Hermonites? We, too, can remember spots to memory dear, equal to these in blessedness. Precious Lord Jesus, give us a fresh draught of thy wondrous love to begin the month with. Amen.

2 Samuel 2:26 (Morning and Evening)

"Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" — 2 Samuel 2:26

If, O my reader! thou art merely a professor, and not a possessor of the faith that is in Christ Jesus, the following lines are a true ketch of thine end.

You are a respectable attendant at a place of worship; you go because others go, not because your heart is right with God. This is your beginning. I will suppose that for the next twenty or thirty years you will be spared to go on as you do now, professing religion by an outward attendance upon the means of grace, but having no heart in the matter. Tread softly, for I must show you the deathbed of such a one as yourself. Let us gaze upon him gently. A clammy sweat is on his brow, and he wakes up crying, "O God, it is hard to die. Did you send for my minister?" "Yes, he is coming." The minister comes. "Sir, I fear that I am dying!" "Have you any hope?" "I cannot say that I have. I fear to stand before my God; oh! pray for me." The prayer is offered for him with sincere earnestness, and the way of salvation is for the ten-thousandth time put before him, but before he has grasped the rope, I see him sink. I may put my finger upon those cold eyelids, for they will never see anything here again. But where is the man, and where are the man's true eyes? It is written, "In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment." Ah! why did he not lift up his eyes before? Because he was so accustomed to hear the gospel that his soul slept under it. Alas! if you should lift up your eyes there, how bitter will be your wailings. Let the Saviour's own words reveal the woe: "Father Abraham, send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." There is a frightful meaning in those words. May you never have to spell it out by the red light of Jehovah's wrath!

2 Samuel 3:39

David complained In II Samuel 3:39, "I am weak, though anointed king." David's God was as strong as ever, but he was weak in the flesh. And that, my brethren, is the only weakness a believer can know. We are never weak in God; we are always weak in ourselves. In the midst of trial or difficulty, you sit down and say, "I cannot do this." Well, whoever thought that YOU could? You ought to have known that without Him, we can do nothing! "O, but I am so weak." Of course you are, and the weaker the better. But our Lord is not weak. Actually, the more we realize our inability and weakness, the more we will look to Him, lean upon Him, and walk by faith instead of by sight. Then our weakness becomes strength, for "when I am weak, then am I strong. "

2 Samuel 5:23 (Morning and Evening)

"And David enquired of the Lord." — 2 Samuel 5:23

When David made this enquiry he had just fought the Philistines, and gained a signal victory. The Philistines came up in great hosts, but, by the help of God, David had easily put them to flight. Note, however, that when they came a second time, David did not go up to fight them without enquiring of the Lord. Once he had been victorious, and he might have said, as many have in other cases, "I shall be victorious again; I may rest quite sure that if I have conquered once I shall triumph yet again. Wherefore should I tarry to seek at the Lord's hands?" Not so, David. He had gained one battle by the strength of the Lord; he would not venture upon another until he had ensured the same. He enquired, "Shall I go up against them?" He waited until God's sign was given. Learn from David to take no step without God. Christian, if thou wouldst know the path of duty, take God for thy compass; if thou wouldst steer thy ship through the dark billows, put the tiller into the hand of the Almighty. Many a rock might be escaped, if we would let our Father take the helm; many a shoal or quicksand we might well avoid, if we would leave to his sovereign will to choose and to command. The Puritan said, "As sure as ever a Christian carves for himself, he'll cut his own fingers;" this is a great truth. Said another old divine, "He that goes before the cloud of God's providence goes on a fool's errand;" and so he does. We must mark God's providence leading us; and if providence tarries, tarry till providence comes. He who goes before providence, will be very glad to run back again. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go," is God's promise to his people. Let us, then, take all our perplexities to him, and say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Leave not thy chamber this morning without enquiring of the Lord.

2 Samuel 5:24 (Faith's Checkbook)

Listen for the Signal

"And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines." —2 Samuel 5:24

THERE are signs of the Lord's moving which should move us. The Spirit of God blows where He listeth, and we hear the sound thereof. Then is the time for us to be more than ever astir. We must seize the golden opportunity and make the most we can of it. It is ours to fight the Philistines at all times; but when the Lord Himself goes out before us, then we should be specially valiant in the war.

The breeze stirred the tops of the trees, and David and his men took this for the signal for an onslaught; and at their advance the Lord, Himself, smote the Philistines. Oh, that this day the Lord may give us an opening to speak for Him with many of our friends! Let us be on the watch to avail ourselves of the hopeful opening when it comes. Who knows but this may be a day of good tidings; a season of soul-winning. Let us keep our ear open to hear the rustle of the wind, and our minds ready to obey the signal. Is not this promise, "then shall the Lord go out before thee," a sufficient encouragement to play the man? Since the Lord goes before us, we dare not hold back.

2 Samuel 5:24 (Morning and Evening)

"When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then thou shalt bestir thyself." — 2 Samuel 5:24

The members of Christ's Church should be very prayerful, always seeking the unction of the Holy One to rest upon their hearts, that the kingdom of Christ may come, and that his "will be done on earth, even as it is in heaven;" but there are times when God seems especially to favour Zion, such seasons ought to be to them like "the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees." We ought then to be doubly prayerful, doubly earnest, wrestling more at the throne than we have been wont to do. Action should then be prompt and vigorous. The tide is flowing—now let us pull manfully for the shore. O for Pentecostal outpourings and Pentecostal labours. Christian, in yourself there are times "when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees." You have a peculiar power in prayer; the Spirit of God gives you joy and gladness; the Scripture is open to you; the promises are applied; you walk in the light of God's countenance; you have peculiar freedom and liberty in devotion, and more closeness of communion with Christ than was your wont. Now, at such joyous periods when you hear the "sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees," is the time to bestir yourself; now is the time to get rid of any evil habit, while God the Spirit helpeth your infirmities. Spread your sail; but remember what you sometimes sing—

"I can only spread the sail;
Thou! Thou! must breathe the auspicious gale."

Only be sure you have the sail up. Do not miss the gale for want of preparation for it. Seek help of God, that you may be more earnest in duty when made more strong in faith; that you may be more constant in prayer when you have more liberty at the throne; that you may be more holy in your conversation whilst you live more closely with Christ.

2 Samuel 6:22 "And I will yet be more vile than thus."

David would more and more abase himself before the Lord. He felt that whatever Michal's opinion of him might be, it could not be more humbling than his own view of himself. If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him, for you are worse than he thinks you to be. If he charges you falsely on some point, yet be satisfied, for if he knew you better he might change the accusation, and you would be no gainer by the correction. If you have your moral portrait painted and it is ugly, be satisfied, for it only needs a few blacker touches, and it would be still nearer the truth.

2 Samuel 7:25 (Morning and Evening)

"Do as thou hast said." — 2 Samuel 7:25

God's promises were never meant to be thrown aside as waste paper; he intended that they should be used. God's gold is not miser's money, but is minted to be traded with. Nothing pleases our Lord better than to see his promises put in circulation; he loves to see his children bring them up to him, and say, "Lord, do as thou hast said." We glorify God when we plead his promises. Do you think that God will be any the poorer for giving you the riches he has promised? Do you dream that he will be any the less holy for giving holiness to you? Do you imagine he will be any the less pure for washing you from your sins? He has said "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Faith lays hold upon the promise of pardon, and it does not delay, saying, "This is a precious promise, I wonder if it be true?" but it goes straight to the throne with it, and pleads, "Lord, here is the promise, 'Do as thou hast said.'" Our Lord replies, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." When a Christian grasps a promise, if he does not take it to God, he dishonours him; but when he hastens to the throne of grace, and cries, "Lord, I have nothing to recommend me but this, 'Thou hast said it,'" then his desire shall be granted. Our heavenly Banker delights to cash his own notes. Never let the promise rust. Draw the word of promise out of its scabbard, and use it with holy violence. Think not that God will be troubled by your importunately reminding him of his promises. He loves to hear the loud outcries of needy souls. It is his delight to bestow favours. He is more ready to hear than you are to ask. The sun is not weary of shining, nor the fountain of flowing. It is God's nature to keep his promises; therefore go at once to the throne with "Do as thou hast said."

2 Samuel 7:29 (Faith's Checkbook)

Plead His Own Promise

"Thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing, let the house of thy servant be blessed forever."—2 Samuel 7:29

THIS is a promise pleaded, and so it yields double instruction to us. Anything which the Lord God has spoken we should receive as surely true, and then plead it at the throne.

Oh, how sweet to quote what our own God has spoken! How precious to use a "therefore" which the promise suggests, as David does in this verse!

We do not pray because we doubt, but because we believe. To pray unbelievably is unbecoming in the Lord's children. No, Lord, we cannot doubt thee: we are persuaded that every word of thine is a sure foundation for the boldest expectation. We come to thee and say, "Do as thou hast said." Bless thy servant's house. Heal our sick; save our hesitating ones; restore those who wander; confirm those who live in thy fear. Lord, give us food and raiment according to thy word. Prosper our undertakings; especially succeed our endeavors to make known thy gospel in our neighborhoods. Make our servants thy servants, our children thy children. Let the blessing flow on to future generations; and as long as any of our race remains on earth, may they remain true to thee. O Lord God "let the house of thy servant be blessed."

2 Samuel 9:8 (Morning and Evening)

"What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?" — 2 Samuel 9:8

If Mephibosheth was thus humbled by David's kindness, what shall we be in the presence of our gracious Lord? The more grace we have, the less we shall think of ourselves, for grace, like light, reveals our impurity. Eminent saints have scarcely known to what to compare themselves, their sense of unworthiness has been so clear and keen. "I am," says holy Rutherford, "a dry and withered branch, a piece of dead carcass, dry bones, and not able to step over a straw." In another place he writes, "Except as to open outbreakings, I want nothing of what Judas and Cain had." The meanest objects in nature appear to the humbled mind to have a preference above itself, because they have never contracted sin: a dog may be greedy, fierce, or filthy, but it has no conscience to violate, no Holy Spirit to resist. A dog may be a worthless animal, and yet by a little kindness it is soon won to love its master, and is faithful unto death; but we forget the goodness of the Lord, and follow not at his call. The term "dead dog" is the most expressive of all terms of contempt, but it is none too strong to express the self- abhorrence of instructed believers. They do not affect mock modesty, they mean what they say, they have weighed themselves in the balances of the sanctuary, and found out the vanity of their nature. At best, we are but clay, animated dust, mere walking hillocks; but viewed as sinners, we are monsters indeed. Let it be published in heaven as a wonder, that the Lord Jesus should set his heart's love upon such as we are. Dust and ashes though we be, we must and will "magnify the exceeding greatness of his grace." Could not his heart find rest in heaven? Must he needs come to these tents of Kedar for a spouse, and choose a bride upon whom the sun had looked? O heavens and earth, break forth into a song, and give all glory to our sweet Lord Jesus.

2 Samuel 9:13 (Morning and Evening)

"So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet." — 2 Samuel 9:13

Mephibosheth was no great ornament to a royal table, yet he had a continual place at David's board, because the king could see in his face the features of the beloved Jonathan. Like Mephibosheth, we may cry unto the King of Glory, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I am?" but still the Lord indulges us with most familiar intercourse with himself, because he sees in our countenances the remembrance of his dearly-beloved Jesus. The Lord's people are dear for another's sake. Such is the love which the Father bears to his only begotten, that for his sake he raises his lowly brethren from poverty and banishment, to courtly companionship, noble rank, and royal provision. Their deformity shall not rob them of their privileges. Lameness is no bar to sonship; the cripple is as much the heir as if he could run like Asahel. Our right does not limp, though our might may. A king's table is a noble hiding-place for lame legs, and at the gospel feast we learn to glory in infirmities, because the power of Christ resteth upon us. Yet grievous disability may mar the persons of the best-loved saints. Here is one feasted by David, and yet so lame in both his feet that he could not go up with the king when he fled from the city, and was therefore maligned and injured by his servant Ziba. Saints whose faith is weak, and whose knowledge is slender, are great losers; they are exposed to many enemies, and cannot follow the king whithersoever he goeth. This disease frequently arises from falls. Bad nursing in their spiritual infancy often causes converts to fall into a despondency from which they never recover, and sin in other cases brings broken bones. Lord, help the lame to leap like an hart, and satisfy all thy people with the bread of thy table!

2 Samuel 11:2 (Morning and Evening)

“And it came to pass in an evening tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house.” — 2 Samuel 11:2

At that hour David saw Bathsheba. We are never out of the reach of temptation. Both at home and abroad we are liable to meet with allurements to evil; the morning opens with peril, and the shades of evening find us still in jeopardy. They are well kept whom God keeps, but woe unto those who go forth into the world, or even dare to walk their own house unarmed. Those who think themselves secure are more exposed to danger than any others. The armour-bearer of Sin is Self-confidence.

David should have been engaged in fighting the Lord’s battles, instead of which he tarried at Jerusalem, and gave himself up to luxurious repose, for he arose from his bed at eventide. Idleness and luxury are the devil’s jackals, and find him abundant prey. In stagnant waters noxious creatures swarm, and neglected soil soon yields a dense tangle of weeds and briars. Oh for the constraining love of Jesus to keep us active and useful! When I see the King of Israel sluggishly leaving his couch at the close of the day, and falling at once into temptation, let me take warning, and set holy watchfulness to guard the door.

Is it possible that the king had mounted his housetop for retirement and devotion? If so, what a caution is given us to count no place, however secret, a sanctuary from sin! While our hearts are so like a tinder-box, and sparks so plentiful, we had need use all diligence in all places to prevent a blaze. Satan can climb housetops, and enter closets, and even if we could shut out that foul fiend, our own corruptions are enough to work our ruin unless grace prevent. Reader, beware of evening temptations. Be not secure. The sun is down but sin is up. We need a watchman for the night as well as a guardian for the day. O blessed Spirit, keep us from all evil this night. Amen.

2 Samuel 12:23

The most important part of human life is not its end but its beginning. Our death day is the child of the past, but our opening years are the sires of the future. At the last hour men summon to their bedside a solemnity of thought which arrives too late for any practical result. The hush and awe and faraway look, so frequent in departing moments, should have come much sooner. Commend us to the example of the Hebrew king who fasted and wore sackcloth while the child was yet alive. Wisely did he foresee the uselessness of lamenting when the scene should close. “Can I bring him back again?” (2 Samuel 12:23) is one of the most serious of questions. (Daily Help)

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Where did David expect to go? Why, to heaven, surely. Then his child must have been there, for he said, "I shall go to him." I do not hear him say the same of Absalom. He did not stand over his corpse and say, "I shall go to him." He had no hope for that rebellious son. Over this child it was not, "O my son! Would to God I had died for you!" No, he could let this babe go with perfect confidence, for he said, "I shall go to him."

2 Samuel 15:23 (Morning and Evening)

“The king also himself passed over the brook Kidron.” — 2 Samuel 15:23

David passed that gloomy brook when flying with his mourning company from his traitor son. The man after God's own heart was not exempt from trouble, nay, his life was full of it. He was both the Lord's Anointed, and the Lord's Afflicted. Why then should we expect to escape? At sorrow's gates the noblest of our race have waited with ashes on their heads, wherefore then should we complain as though some strange thing had happened unto us?

The King of kings himself was not favoured with a more cheerful or royal road. He passed over the filthy ditch of Kidron, through which the filth of Jerusalem flowed. God had one Son without sin, but not a single child without the rod. It is a great joy to believe that Jesus has been tempted in all points like as we are. What is our Kidron this morning? Is it a faithless friend, a sad bereavement, a slanderous reproach, a dark foreboding? The King has passed over all these. Is it bodily pain, poverty, persecution, or contempt? Over each of these Kidrons the King has gone before us. “In all our afflictions he was afflicted.” The idea of strangeness in our trials must be banished at once and for ever, for he who is the Head of all saints, knows by experience the grief which we think so peculiar. All the citizens of Zion must be free of the Honourable Company of Mourners, of which the Prince Immanuel is Head and Captain.

Notwithstanding the abasement of David, he yet returned in triumph to his city, and David's Lord arose victorious from the grave; let us then be of good courage, for we also shall win the day. We shall yet with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation, though now for a season we have to pass by the noxious streams of sin and sorrow. Courage, soldiers of the Cross, the King himself triumphed after going over Kidron, and so shall you.

2 Samuel 18:23 (Morning and Evening)

“Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cushite.” — 2 Samuel 18:23

Running is not everything, there is much in the way which we select: a swift foot over hill and down dale will not keep pace with a slower traveller upon level ground. How is it with my spiritual journey, am I labouring up the hill of my own works and down into the ravines of my own humiliations and resolutions, or do I run by the plain way of “Believe and live”? How blessed is it to wait upon the Lord by faith! The soul runs without weariness, and walks without fainting, in the way of believing. Christ Jesus is the way of life, and he is a plain way, a pleasant way, a way suitable for the tottering feet and feeble knees of trembling sinners: am I found in this way, or am I hunting after another track such as priestcraft or metaphysics may promise me? I read of the way of holiness, that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein: have I been delivered from proud reason and been brought as a little child to rest in Jesus' love and blood? If so, by God's grace I shall outrun the strongest runner who chooses any other path. This truth I may remember to my profit in my daily cares and needs. It will be my wisest course to go at once to my God, and not to wander in a roundabout manner to this friend and that. He knows my wants and can relieve them, to whom should I repair but to himself by the direct appeal of prayer, and the plain argument of the promise. “Straightforward makes the best runner.” I will not parlay with the servants, but hasten to their master.

In reading this passage, it strikes me that if men vie with each other in common matters, and one outruns the other, I ought to be in solemn earnestness so to run that I may obtain. Lord, help me to gird up the loins of my mind, and may I press forward towards the mark for the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

2 Samuel 21:10 (Morning and Evening)

"And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night." — 2 Samuel 21:10

If the love of a woman to her slain sons could make her prolong her mournful vigil for so long a period, shall we weary of considering the sufferings of our blessed Lord? She drove away the birds of prey, and shall not we chase from our meditations those worldly and sinful thoughts which defile both our minds and the sacred themes upon which we are occupied? Away, ye birds of evil wing! Leave ye the sacrifice alone! She bore the heats of summer, the night dews and the rains, unsheltered and alone. Sleep was chased from her weeping eyes: her heart was too full for slumber. Behold how she loved her children! Shall Rizpah thus endure, and shall we start at the first little inconvenience or trial? Are we such cowards that we cannot bear to suffer with our Lord? She chased away even the wild beasts, with courage unusual in her sex, and will not we be ready to encounter every foe for Jesus' sake? These her children were slain by other hands than hers, and yet she wept and watched: what ought we to do who have by our sins crucified our Lord? Our obligations are boundless, our love should be fervent and our repentance thorough. To watch with Jesus should be our business, to protect his honour our occupation, to abide by his cross our solace. Those ghastly corpses might well have affrighted Rizpah, especially by night, but in our Lord, at whose cross-foot we are sitting, there is nothing revolting, but everything attractive. Never was living beauty so enchanting as a dying Saviour. Jesus, we will watch with thee yet awhile, and do thou graciously unveil thyself to us; then shall we not sit beneath sackcloth, but in a royal pavilion.

2 Samuel 22:29 (Faith's Checkbook)

Light in Darkness

"For thou art my lamp, O Lord: and the Lord will lighten my darkness."—2 Samuel 22:29

AM I in the light? Then thou, O Lord, art my lamp. Take thee away, and my joy would be gone; but as long as thou art with me, I can do without the torches of time and the candles of created comfort. What a light the presence of God casts on all things! We heard of a lighthouse which could be seen for twenty miles, but our Jehovah is not only a God at hand, but far off is He seen, even in the enemy's country. O Lord, I am as happy as an angel when thy love fills my heart. Thou art all my desire.

Am I in the dark? Then thou, O Lord, wilt lighten my darkness. Before long things will change. Affairs may grow more and more dreary, and cloud may be piled upon cloud; but if it grow so dark that I cannot see my own hand, still I shall see the hand of the Lord. When I cannot find a light within me, or among my friends, or in the whole world, the Lord—who said "Let there be light," and there was light—can say the same again. He will speak me into the sunshine yet. I shall not die but live. The day is already breaking. This sweet text shines like a morning star. I shall clap my hands for joy ere many hours are passed.

2 Samuel 22:36

We are so little that if God should manifest His greatness without condescension, we should be trampled under His feet. But God, who must stoop to view the skies and bow to see what angels do, turns His eye yet lower and looks to the lowly and contrite and makes them great.

"Thy gentleness hath made me great" (2 Samuel 22:36). How marvelous has been our experience of God's gentleness! How gentle have been His corrections! How gentle His teachings! How gentle His drawings! Meditate upon this theme, believer. Let gratitude be awakened; let humility be deepened; let love be quickened before this day closes. (Daily Help)

2 Samuel 23:1 (Morning and Evening)

"The sweet psalmist of Israel." — 2 Samuel 23:1

Among all the saints whose lives are recorded in Holy Writ, David possesses an experience of the most striking, varied, and instructive character. In his history we meet with trials and temptations not to be discovered, as a whole, in other saints of ancient times, and hence he is all the more suggestive a type of our Lord. David knew the trials of all ranks and conditions of men. Kings have their troubles, and David wore a crown: the peasant has his cares, and David handled a shepherd's crook: the wanderer has many hardships, and David abode in the caves of Engedi: the captain has his difficulties, and David found the sons of Zeruiah too hard for him. The psalmist was also tried in his friends, his counsellor Ahithophel forsook him, "He that eateth bread with me, hath lifted up his heel against me." His worst foes were they of his own household: his children were his greatest affliction. The temptations of poverty and wealth, of honour and reproach, of health and weakness, all tried their power upon him. He had temptations from without to disturb his peace, and from within to mar his joy. David no sooner escaped from one trial than he fell into another; no sooner emerged from one season of despondency and alarm, than he was again brought into the lowest depths, and all God's waves and billows rolled over him. It is probably from this cause that David's psalms are so universally the delight of experienced Christians. Whatever our frame of mind, whether ecstasy or depression, David has exactly described our emotions. He was an able master of the human heart, because he had been tutored in the best of all schools—the school of heart-felt, personal experience. As we are instructed in the same school, as we grow matured in grace and in years, we increasingly appreciate David's psalms, and find them to be "green pastures." My soul, let David's experience cheer and counsel thee this day.

2 Samuel 23:5 (Faith's Checkbook)

Solace, Security, Satisfaction

"Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow."—2 Samuel 23:5

THIS is not so much one promise as an aggregate of promises, a box of pearls. The covenant is the ark which contains all things.

These are the last words of David, but they may be mine today. Here is a sigh: things are not with me and mine as I could wish; there are trials, cares, and sins. These make the pillow hard.

Here is a solace: "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant." Jehovah has pledged Himself to me and sealed the compact with the blood of Jesus. I am bound to my God, and my God to me.

This brings into prominence a security, since this covenant is everlasting, well ordered and sure. There is nothing to fear from the lapse of time, the failure of some forgotten point, or the natural uncertainty of things. The covenant is a rocky foundation to build on for life or for death.

David feels satisfaction: he wants no more for salvation or delectation. He is delivered, and he is delighted. The covenant is all a man can desire.

O my soul, turn thou this day to thy Lord Jesus, whom the great Lord has given to be a covenant to the people. Take Him to be thine all in all.

2 Samuel 23:5 (Morning and Evening)

“Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant.” — 2 Samuel 23:5

This covenant is divine in its origin. “He hath made with me an everlasting covenant.” Oh that great word He! Stop, my soul. God, the everlasting Father, has positively made a covenant with thee; yes, that God who spake the world into existence by a word; he, stooping from his majesty, takes hold of thy hand and makes a covenant with thee. Is it not a deed, the stupendous condescension of which might ravish our hearts for ever if we could really understand it? “HE hath made with me a covenant.” A king has not made a covenant with me—that were somewhat; but the Prince of the kings of the earth, Shaddai, the Lord All-sufficient, the Jehovah of ages, the everlasting Elohim, “He hath made with me an everlasting covenant.” But notice, it is particular in its application. “Yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant.” Here lies the sweetness of it to each believer. It is nought for me that he made peace for the world; I want to know whether he made peace for me! It is little that he hath made a covenant, I want to know whether he has made a covenant with me. Blessed is the assurance that he hath made a covenant with me! If God the Holy Ghost gives me assurance of this, then his salvation is mine, his heart is mine, he himself is mine—he is my God.

This covenant is everlasting in its duration. An everlasting covenant means a covenant which had no beginning, and which shall never, never end. How sweet amidst all the uncertainties of life, to know that “the foundation of the Lord standeth sure,” and to have God’s own promise, “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.” Like dying David, I will sing of this, even though my house be not so with God as my heart desireth.