

Spurgeon on Habakkuk

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Habakkuk 1:8

C H Spurgeon

Morning and Evening

“Evening wolves.” Habakkuk 1:8

While preparing the present volume, this particular expression recurred to me so frequently, that in order to be rid of its constant importunity I determined to give a page to it. The evening wolf, infuriated by a day of hunger, was fiercer and more ravenous than he would have been in the morning. May not the furious creature represent our doubts and fears after a day of distraction of mind, losses in business, and perhaps ungenerous tauntings from our fellow men? How our thoughts howl in our ears, “Where is now thy God?” How voracious and greedy they are, swallowing up all suggestions of comfort, and remaining as hungry as before. Great Shepherd, slay these evening wolves, and bid thy sheep lie down in green pastures, undisturbed by insatiable unbelief. How like are the fiends of hell to evening wolves, for when the flock of Christ are in a cloudy and dark day, and their sun seems going down, they hasten to tear and to devour. They will scarcely attack the Christian in the daylight of faith, but in the gloom of soul conflict they fall upon him. O thou who hast laid down thy life for the sheep, preserve them from the fangs of the wolf.

False teachers who craftily and industriously hunt for the precious life, devouring men by their false-hoods, are as dangerous and detestable as evening wolves. Darkness is their element, deceit is their character, destruction is their end. We are most in danger from them when they wear the sheep’s skin. Blessed is he who is kept from them, for thousands are made the prey of grievous wolves that enter within the fold of the church.

What a wonder of grace it is when fierce persecutors are converted, for then the wolf dwells with the lamb, and men of cruel ungovernable dispositions become gentle and teachable. O Lord, convert many such: for such we will pray to-night.

Habakkuk 2:3

In God’s Time

Faith’s Checkbook

“For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”—Habakkuk 2:3

MERCY may seem slow, but it is sure. The Lord in unfailing wisdom has appointed a time for the outgoings of His gracious power, and God’s time is the best time. We are in a hurry; the vision of the blessing excites our desire and hastens our longings; but the Lord will keep His appointments. He never is before His time; He never is behind.

God’s word is here spoken of as a living thing which will speak and will come. It is never a dead letter, as we are tempted to fear when we have long watched for its fulfillment. The living word is on the way from the living God, and though it may seem to linger, it is not in reality doing so. God’s train is not behind time. It is only a matter of patience, and we shall soon see for ourselves the faithfulness of the Lord. No promise of His shall fail; “it will not lie.” No promise of His will be lost in silence; “it shall speak.” What comfort it will speak to the believing ear! No promise of His shall need to be renewed like a bill which could not be paid on the day in which it fell due: “it will not tarry.”

Come, my soul, canst thou not wait for thy God? Rest in Him, and be still in unutterable peacefulness.

Habakkuk 3:6

C H Spurgeon

Morning and Evening

“His ways are everlasting.” — Habakkuk 3:6

What he hath done at one time, he will do yet again. Man’s ways are variable, but God’s ways are everlasting. There are many reasons for this most comforting truth: among them are the following—the Lord’s ways are the result of wise deliberation; he ordereth all things according to the counsel of his own will. Human action is frequently the hasty result of passion, or fear, and is followed by regret and alteration; but nothing can take the Almighty by surprise, or happen otherwise than he has foreseen. His ways are the outgrowth of an immutable character, and in them the fixed and settled attributes of God are clearly to be seen. Unless the Eternal One himself can undergo change, his ways, which are himself in action, must remain for ever the same. Is he eternally just, gracious, faithful, wise, tender?—then his ways must ever be distinguished for the same excellences. Beings act according to their nature: when those natures change, their conduct varies also; but since God cannot know the shadow of a turning, his ways will abide everlastingly the same. Moreover there is no reason from without which could reverse the divine ways, since they are the embodiment of irresistible might. The earth is said, by the prophet, to be cleft with rivers, mountains tremble, the deep lifts up its hands, and sun and moon stand still, when Jehovah marches forth for the salvation of his people. Who can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? But it is not might alone which gives stability; God’s ways are the manifestation of the eternal principles of right, and therefore can never pass away. Wrong breeds decay and involves ruin, but the true and the good have about them a vitality which ages cannot diminish.

This morning let us go to our heavenly Father with confidence, remembering that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and in him the Lord is ever gracious to his people.

Habakkuk 3:17-18

C H Spurgeon

Daily Help

It was a divine song which Habakkuk sang when in the night he said,

Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. (Hab. 3:17–18)

No man can make a song in the night of himself. He may attempt it, but he will find that a song in the night must be divinely inspired. Oh, Chief Musician, let us not remain without song because affliction is upon us; tune our lips to the melody of thanksgiving.

Habakkuk 3:19

Faith’s Checkbook

Surefootedness

“The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hind’s feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.”—Habakkuk 3:19

THIS confidence of the man of God is tantamount to promise, for that which faith is persuaded of is the purpose of God. The prophet had to traverse the deep places of poverty and famine, but he went downhill without slipping, for the Lord gave him standing. By and by, he was called to the high places of the hills of conflict; and he was no more afraid to go up than to go down.

See! the Lord lent him strength. Nay, Jehovah Himself was his strength. Think of that: the Almighty God Himself becomes our strength!

Note, that the Lord also gave him sure-footedness. The hinds leap over rock and crag, never missing their foothold. Our Lord will give us grace to follow the most difficult paths of duty without a stumble. He can fit our foot for the crags, so that we shall be at home where apart from God we should perish.

One of these days we shall be called to higher places still. Up yonder we shall climb, even to the mount of God, the high places where the shining ones are gathered. Oh, what feet are the feet of faith, by which, following the Hind of the Morning, we shall ascend into the hill of the Lord!

Sermon Notes:

Habakkuk 2:1-4 Watching, Waiting, Writing

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved. (2) And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon the tables, that he may run that read-eth it. (3) For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. (4) Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith. — Habakkuk 2:1-4

THE promise of God tarried, and the ungodly triumphed.

Here was the old problem of David in another form.

"Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously?" (Hab. 1:13) is but a repetition of "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps. 73:3).

This same problem occurs to ourselves, and this text may help us. Observe with understanding—

I. THE SENSE IN WHICH THERE IS A DELAY IN THE PROMISE.

It is not every apparent delay which is real. Our time and God's time are not measured upon the same dial.

1. Each promise will bide its due season for fulfillment: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time."
2. Each promise in the end will prove true: "At the end it shall speak, and not lie."
3. Each promise will repay our waiting: "Though it tarry, wait for it."
4. Each promise will really be punctual to its hour: "It will surely come, it will not tarry)"

The word of the Lord is as true to the time as to the thing.

To him its time of ripening is short: only to us is it long.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF A BELIEVER WHILE THE PROMISE DELAYS.

We should watch for the appearing of the Lord in fulfillment of his promise, and should be prepared to receive reproof as well as blessing.

The prophet took up—

1. A determined and thoughtful attitude: "I will stand, and set me."
2. An attentive attitude: "and will watch to see what he will say unto me." He is engrossed in this one pursuit: he only desires to be taught of the Lord.
3. A patient attitude: "I will set me upon the tower." It is as if he had been set as a sentinel, and would remain at his post.
4. A solitary position if need be. He speaks of himself alone.
5. A humble and submissive frame of mind: "what I shall answer when I am reproved."

In all respects the man of God is ready for his Lord.

The delay is evidently a blessing to him.

The blessing will be the greater when it comes.

III. THE WORK OF THE LORD'S SERVANT WHILE THE PROMISE DELAYS

1. By faith set the vision. Realize the fulfillment of the divine word in your own soul. "Watch to see what he will say."
2. Declare it as certain: record it in black and white, as a fact not to be questioned. "Write the vision upon tables."
3. Declare it plainly, so that the runner may read it.
4. Declare it practically, so that he that readeth may run in consequence of it.

5. Declare it permanently: write down the matter for a record to be referred to: engrave it on tablets for perpetuity.

Sham faith prudently declines to mention her expectations.

It is deemed presumptuous, fanatical, and imprudent to be positive that God will keep his promise; and still more to say so.

The real believer thinks not so, but acts with the Lord's promises as he would deal with engagements made in business by honest men: he treats them as real, and would have others do the like.

IV. THE DIFFERENCE SEEN IN MEN WHEN THE DELAY OF THE PROMISE TESTS THEM.

1. The graceless man is too proud to wait on God as the Lord's servant will do. "His soul is not upright in him."

He is himself dishonest, and so suspects his God.

This prevents his finding comfort in the promise.

2. The just man believes the word of a holy God.

He waits serenely, in full assurance; and

He lives in the highest sense by his faith.

"My soul, wait thou only upon God" (Ps. 62:5).

What can he do who has no faith in his Maker? (Heb. 11:6)

From Our Tablets

It was a custom among the Romans for the public affairs of every year to be committed to writing by the pontifex maximus, or high priest, and published on a table. They were thus exposed to public view, so that the people might have an opportunity of being acquainted with them. It was also usual to hang up laws approved and recorded on tables of brass in their market-places, and in their temples, that they might be seen and read (Tacitus). In like manner, the Jewish prophets used to write, and expose their prophecies publicly on tables, either in their own houses, or in the temple, that every one that passed by might go in and read them.

— Burder

And though it linger till the night,

And round again till morn,

My heart shall ne'er mistrust thy might,

Nor count itself forlorn.

Do thus, O ye of Israel's seed.

'Ye of the Spirit born indeed;

Wait for your God's appearing!— Martin Luther

Good old Spurstow says that some of the promises are like the almond tree — they blossom hastily in the very earliest spring; but," saith he, "there are others which resemble the mulberry tree — they are very slow in putting forth their leaves." Then what is a man to do, if he has a mulberry-tree promise, which is late in blossoming? Why, he is to wait till it does blossom; since it is not in his power to hasten it. If the vision tarry, exercise the precious grace called patience, and the appointed time shall surely bring you a rich reward. — C. H. S.

God's promises are dated, but with a mysterious character; and, for want of skill in God's chronology, we are prone to think God forgets us; when, indeed, we forget ourselves in being so bold as to set God a time of our own, and in being angry that he comes not just then to us. — Gurnall

If we were more humble, we should be more patient. A beggar, who is worn with hunger, will wait at the rich man's gate for many an hour with the hope of getting broken victuals; but my lord, who is in no need, will soon be gone if the door does not open to his knock. We have kept the Lord waiting long enough, and we need not wonder if he tries our faith and patience by apparent delays. In any case, let us settle this in our hearts, that he must and will fulfill his promises. Our text shows us a punctual God, a patient waiter, and a published confidence; but it finishes up with a proud unbeliever. Or, if you will, it is man uttering a brave resolve, and the Lord answering to his faith; reasons presented to patient faith, and rebukes to impatient pride.

Spurgeon's Sermon Notes

Habakkuk 2:4. Pride the Destroyer

Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith. — Habakkuk 2:4

DELAY of deliverance is a weighing of men. Suspense is very trying, and constitutes a searching test.

This divides men into two classes by bringing out their real character.

The proud and the just stand out in relief: the uplifted and the upright are far as the poles asunder; and the result of trial in the two cases is as different as death from life.

The tarrying of the promise—

I. REVEALS A GREAT FAULT. "his soul which is lifted up."

The man is impatient, and will not endure to wait. This is pride full-blown, for it quarrels with the Lord, and dares to dictate to him.

1. It is very natural to us to be proud. So fell our first father, and we inherit his fault.
2. Pride takes many shapes, and among the rest this vainglorious habit of thinking that we ought to be waited on at once.
3. In all cases pride is unreasonable. Who are we that God should make himself our servant, and take his time from our watch?
4. In every case pride is displeasing to God, and specially when it interferes with the sovereign liberty of his own grace. Shall he be dictated to in the matter of his own love? "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" (Rom. 9:20).

II. BETRAYS A SAD EVIL. "his soul is not upright in him."

1. He does not know the truth. His mind is out of the perpendicular, his knowledge is incorrect, and his judgment is mistaken. He puts "bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (Isa. 5:20).
2. He does not seek the light. His heart is not upright: the affections are perverted. He has a bias towards conceited views of self, and does not wish to be set right (Obad. 1:3).
3. His whole religion is warped by his false mood of heart and mind. The very soul of the man is put out of order by his vanity.
4. He will not endure the test of waiting; he will sin in his haste to be delivered; he will rush from God to other confidences; he will show by his life that his real self is not right with God.

III. DISCOVERS A SERIOUS OPPOSITION.

He grows tired of the gospel, which is the sum of the promises, and he becomes averse to the exercise of the faith which it requires.

His pride makes him reject salvation by grace through faith in Jesus.

1. He is too great to consider it.
2. He is too wise to believe it.
3. He is too good to need it.
4. He is too advanced in "culture" to endure it.

Most of the objections to revealed truth arise from a mind thrown out of balance by pride of intellect, or pride of purse, or pride of heart.

IV. DIRECTS US TO A PLEASING CONTRAST.

1. The man who is really just is truly humble. The text implies a contrast in this respect between the proud and the just.
2. Being humble, he does not dare to doubt his God, but yields to his word an implicit faith.
3. His faith keeps him alive under trial, and conducts him into the joys and privileges of spiritual life.

4. His life conquers the trial, and develops into life eternal.

The Believer has the blessing promised, and truly lives while he lives. The Unbeliever misses the blessing, and is dead while he lives.

What folly to refuse faith because of pride, and so to miss eternal life and all its felicities!

Quotations

"I think it is decidedly unscriptural to fix any time with God for his doing anything. The times and seasons the Father hath put in his own hand. The Man Christ Jesus has asked for the heathen, and he will get them, but he has waited eighteen hundred years already, and has told us that as Man he knows nothing of the 'when.' Pray on, and believe; you shall reap." — From a letter of Brownlow North to a Christian worker.

Strange that the mortal, who cannot believe in the healing power of the sparkling Jordan, will often willingly go down to the muddiest creek of Abana and Pharpar! — Edward Garrett

As the first step heavenward is humility, so the first step hellward is pride. Pride counts the gospel foolishness, but the gospel always shows pride to be so. Shall the sinner be proud who is going to hell? Shall the saint be proud who is newly saved from it? God had rather his people fared poorly than live proudly. — Mason

Poverty of spirit is the bag into which Christ puts the riches of his grace. — Rowland Hill

We must be emptied of self before we can be filled with grace; we must be stripped of our rags before we can be clothed with righteousness; we must be unclothed that we may be clothed; wounded, that we may be healed; killed, that we may be made alive; buried in disgrace, that we may rise in holy glory. These words, "Sown in corruption, that we may be raised in in corruption; sown in dishonor, that we may be raised in glory; sown in weakness, that we may be raised in power," are as true of the soul as of the body. To borrow an illustration from the surgeon's art: the bone that is set wrong must be broken again, in order that it may be set aright. I press this truth on your attention. It is certain that a soul filled with self has no room for God; and like the inn at Bethlehem, crowded with meaner guests, a heart pre-occupied by pride and her godless train, has no chamber within which Christ may be born in us "the hope of glory." — Guthrie

A heart full of pride is but a vessel full of air; this self-opinion must be blown out of us before saving knowledge be poured into us. Humility is the knees of the soul, and to that posture the Lamb will open the book; but pride stands upon tip-toes, as if she would snatch the book, and unclasp it herself. The first lesson of a Christian is humility; and he that hath not learned the first lesson is not fit to take out a new. — Thomas Adams

But for pride, the angels, who are in hell, should be in heaven (Jude 6); but for pride, Nebuchadnezzar, who is in the forest, should be in his palace (Dan. 4); but for pride, Pharaoh, who lies with the fishes, should be with his nobles (Exod. 14); no sin hath pulled so many down as this, which promised to set them up. Of all the children of pride, the Pope is the father, which sitteth in the temple of God, and is worshipped as God (2 Thess. 2:4) ... But for pride, the Pharisees would have received Christ as gently as his disciples; but for pride, Herod would have worshipped Christ as humbly as the shepherds; but for pride, our men would go like Abraham, and our women like Sarah, as they would be called their children; but for pride, noblemen would come to church as well as the people; but for pride, gentles would abide reproof as well as servants; but for pride, thou wouldst forgive thy brother, and the lawyers should have no work. — Henry Smith

Spurgeon's Sermon Notes:

Habakkuk 2:4 Faith: Life

Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but he just shall live by his faith. — Habakkuk 2:4

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. — Romans 1:17

But That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. — Galatians 3:11

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. — Hebrews 10:38

WHEN the Spirit of God frequently repeats himself, he thereby appeals for special attention.

A doctrine so often declared must be of the first importance. A doctrine, so often declared should be constantly preached.

A doctrine so often declared should be unhesitatingly received by each one of our hearers.

I. WE WILL TREAT THE FOUR TEXTS AS ONE. The teaching is clear. "The just shall live by his faith."

1. Life is received by the faith which makes a man just.

A man begins to live by a full acquittal from condemnation, and from penal death, so soon as he believes in Jesus.

A man begins to live as one raised out of spiritual death so soon as he has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

No form of works, or profession, or knowledge, or even of natural feelings, can prove him to be an absolved and quickened man; but faith does this.

2. Life is sustained by the faith which keeps a man just.

He who is forgiven and quickened lives ever afterwards as he began to live — namely, by faith. Neither his feelings, nor devotions, nor acquirements ever become his trust: he still looks out of himself to Jesus. He is nothing except so far as he is a believer.

He lives by faith as to all the forms of his life—

As a child, and as a servant;

As a pilgrim progressing, and as a warrior contending;

As a pensioner enjoying, and as an heir expecting.

He lives by faith in every condition—

In joy and in sorrow; in wealth and in poverty;

In strength and in weakness; in laboring and in languishing; in life and in death."

He lives best when faith is at its best, even though in other respects he may be sorely put to it. He lives the life of Christ most blessedly when most intensely he believes in Christ.

Hearty belief in God, his Son, his promises, his grace, is the soul's life, neither can anything take its place. "Believe and live" is a standing precept both for saint and sinner. "Now abideth faith" (1 Cor. 13:13).

II. WE WILL TREAT THE FOUR TEXTS SEPARATELY.

If we read with precision, we shall see that Scripture contains no repetitions. The context gives freshness of meaning to each apparent repetition.

1. Our first text (Hab. 2:4) exhibits faith as enabling a man to live on in peace and humility, while as yet the promise has not come to its maturity. While waiting, we live by faith, and not by sight.

We are thus able to bear up under the temporary triumphs of the wicked. See the first chapter of Habakkuk's prophecy.

We are thus preserved from proud impatience at delay.

We are thus filled with delight in confident expectation of good things to come.

2. Our second text (Rom. 1:17) exhibits faith as working salvation from the evil which is in the world through lust. The chapter in which it stands presents an awful view of human nature, and implies that only faith in the gospel can bring us life in the form of—

Mental enlightenment of life as to the true God (Rom. 1:19-23).

Moral purity of life (Rom. 1:24 ff.).

Spiritual life and communion with that which is divine and holy.

Naturally men are dead and corrupt. The law reveals our death (Rom. 3:10-20); but the gospel imparts spiritual life to those who receive it by faith.

3. Our third text (Gal. 3:11) exhibits faith as bringing to us that justification which saves us from the sentence of death.

Nothing can be plainer, more positive, more sweeping than this declaration that no man is justified before God except by faith. Both the negative and the positive are plain enough.

4. Our fourth text (Heb. 10:38) exhibits faith as the life of final perseverance.

There is need of faith while waiting for heaven (verses 32-36).

The absence of such faith would cause us to draw back (verse 38).

That drawing back would be a fatal sign.

That drawing back can never occur, for faith saves the soul from all hazards, keeping its face heavenwards even to the end.

What can you do who have no faith?

In what other way can you be accepted with God?

On what ground can you excuse your unbelief in your God?

Will you perish sooner than believe him?

Breviates

The Jews in the Talmud have the saying, "The whole law was given to Moses at Sinai, in six hundred and thirteen precepts." David, in the fifteenth Psalm, brings them all within the compass of eleven. Isaiah brings them to six (Isa. 33:15); Micah to three (Mic. 6:8); Isaiah, again, to two (Isa. 56); Habakkuk to this one, "The just shall live by his faith." — Lightfoot

The soul is the life of the body. Faith is the life of the soul. Christ is the life of faith. — Flavel

Inscribed upon the portal from afar
Conspicuous as the brightness of a star,
Legible only by the light they give
Stand the soul-quickening words —
BELIEVE AND LIVE. — Cowper

To believe God is not a little thing: it is the index of a heart reconciled to God, and the token of true spirituality of mind; it is the essence of true worship, and the root of sincere obedience. He who believes his God in spite of his sins, does him more honor than cherubim and seraphim in their continual adoration. A little thing faith! How is it then that unbelief is so great a crime that it is marked out for reprobation as the one damning evil which shuts men out of heaven? Despise not faith lest you despise God. Whatever else you put in the second place, give faith the lead; it is not a vain thing, for it is your life

Habakkuk 1:3 THE SIGHT OF INIQUITY

NO. 2711 INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY JANUARY 27TH, 1901, DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON, AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK, ON A THURSDAY EVENING, DURING THE WINTER OF 1858-9.

"Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?"—Habakkuk 1:3.

IN this discourse, it will be my endeavor to assign some reasons why God causes his people to see iniquity in themselves and in others

I. We will begin with the first class, and enquire, Why Does God Cause Us To See Iniquity In Ourselves?

What is the reason of the discoveries, which the Holy Spirit sometimes makes to us, of the evil of our hearts? It is well known, to all who love the Lord, that there are seasons when the Holy Spirit takes us into the darkest chambers of our being, and there reveals to us evils which, perhaps we had never suspected. "Son of man," saith he, "I will show thee what great abominations there are within thee." He lays bare the loathsome kennel of the human heart, and lets us look at, all our deformity and depravity; he takes us to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we were digged. He bids us look with horror upon our natural state, and see that awful and hideous corruption that still remaineth in our hearts, even though we have been regenerated by him. Why doth he do this? We will answer the question in several ways.

Sometimes, he does it to confirm us in the doctrines of grace. My brethren, Arminianism is the natural religion of us all. I think one of the surest ways in the world to put down all our self-sufficiency, and all our erroneous views of the gospel, is for God the Holy Spirit to show us our own depravity. A man may talk glibly concerning free will as long as he knows nothing about himself; but when the Lord has shown him what he is by-nature, he will say no more about that matter; or if he talks about it as a mere theory, he will not believe it in his inmost spirit. A man, untaught of the Spirit, says that sinners of their own free will, turn to God; he says that they do, by their own strength, at least to a great degree, though assisted by the Holy Spirit, keep themselves; and that, to some extent, their final perseverance is dependent on their own diligence, and is not left entirely in the hands of God. But I am sure that, if the Spirit takes him into the secret chambers of his heart, and lets him see his own iniquity, he may go in talking about his own free will, but he will come out singing of God's free grace; for he will say, "O Lord, if thou hadst not begun the good work in me it never could have originated in such a filthy pool as my heart; and if thou dost not carry on the work from first to last, it will soon come to a standstill. If I am not robed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, I must stand naked before thy bar; and if the work be not entirely thine own or if thou art to be turned away by any sin or sinfulness in the creature, then, O Lord, I know I must perish!" And this right view of the subject will drive him to believe in discriminating grace, in irresistible vocation, in omnipotent keeping, and in the infallible perseverance of all the Children of God.

It is noteworthy how the belief of one of the doctrines of grace naturally leads to the belief of all the rest. The system of the gospel is so logical, its truths fit so well into one another, that you cannot get a right knowledge of one of them without, at once, or in a very short time, discovering the others. The Lord begins by teaching us this foundation truth of our utter depravity; he burns it into our conscience by bitter experience, and by terrible discoveries of our sinfulness; and he knows right well that the other doctrines will follow, and that, when this truth is really understood by us, we shall not be long before we have orthodox views of the whole covenant of grace, and the great system of the gospel of Jesus. This, I think, is one reason why the Lord gives his people revelations of their own iniquity and defilement, that they may be sound in the faith, and may believe nothing but the doctrines of grace.

Moreover, I believe that he does this to keep them humble. If our Master did not sometimes let us have a look at ourselves, we should be fearfully proud. The old Puritans used to say that God has given the peacock black feet, that he may not be proud of his bright feathers; and that, in like manner, he has allowed his people to have the black feet of their own sinfulness, that they may not glory in any of the graces which God the Holy Spirit has given them; but that, while they have those graces, so bright and beautiful, they may still look down on their own natural depravity, and humble themselves before God. We are all, by nature, as proud as Lucifer. If any man thinks himself to be incapable O! pride, he is very proud indeed. "Ah!" says one, "I know I never can be flattered." But, sir, you flatter yourself to an extraordinary degree when you say that Pride is natural to us all; it is woven into the warp and woof of our being; we shall never get rid of it, till the worm has eaten up our flesh; nothing will ever cover up our pride except our winding-sheets; and when our bodies are wrapped up in them, and our souls are caught up to dwell with God, then, but, not till then, shall pride be thoroughly cast out of us. Our communion with Christ our progress towards heaven, our increased knowledge, our good works, all these things have, through the evil heart of our unbelief, a tendency to puff us up, though, in truth, being all given to us by the Spirit, there is no legitimate cause for pride in any of us; and therefore, God, to keep his people in their right place, humbles them with discoveries of their own sinfulness. If their ships had all sail, and no ballast, they would soon be wrecked; so, when God fills his people with abundant revelations, he sends them also a thorn in the flesh; and the messenger of Satan is sent to buffet them, that they may walk humbly with God, and bow their heads in submission before him, knowing themselves to be still unclean, apart from the work of Christ Jesus their Lord, which he has wrought out for them.

Beloved, you can bear me witness that, when you have had sad discoveries of your own heinous guilt, you have been deeply humbled. Sometimes, your good works have been a great evil to you, because you have prided yourself upon them, and so brought yourself to the edge of the precipice of presumption. But manifestations of your guilt, brought home to your conscience by God's Spirit, have been of essential service to you, by teaching you not to be high-minded, but rather to fear, and to remember that your standing in grace is not of yourself, and: therefore you must not boast. That is another good reason, if there were no other, why we may bless God for showing us our own iniquity.

A third reason why God sometimes shows his people their own wickedness is, to make them submissive in the hour of trouble. A Pharisee, of all people in the world, would be the worst man to be in Job's position. If I must, be in a hospital, I would rather be there as a publican, than as a Pharisee. For a Pharisee, nothing would be, good enough; he would think his pangs and miseries great indeed for so righteous a man to have to endure; he would think he had no right to suffer. But the poor publican would say, "I am a great sinner, and these miseries are not a millionth part of what I deserve to suffer; these aches and pains are nothing compared with what I merit at the hand of God; therefore I will bear them all with submission. Why should a living man complain? I am still out of hall, and therefore I must not murmur." Ah! brethren, we have a great difficulty to keep murmuring down. There is very much meaning in that old English word murmur; just sound it,—it is mur-mer. Any child can say that; it is one of the easiest words to speak: and that is why, I think, we have that word for complaining and grumbling, because murmuring is such a very easy thing; anyone can murmur, anyone can grumble, anyone can complain. Murmuring seems to have been bred in the bones of the children

of Israel; for, in the wilderness, they were almost always murmuring; murmuring for water when they were thirsty, murmuring for bread, then murmuring for meat, murmuring because the Anakims were tall; murmuring first for one thing, and then for another; they were always at it; they were continually murmuring for forty long years in the wilderness. Ay, and many of us are all too apt to imitate them; but, the surest way to cure us of murmuring is to let us know our own ill-desert. A man, who has been taught to realize his own wickedness, and his own ill-desert, will be less likely to murmur than anyone else. The poor wretch, who has had the rope round his neck, and has been ready to be hanged, when he gets his pardon, and goes his way, you will not find him murmuring at the fare that is provided for him. He will say, "Oh! it is such a wonder to me to be alive at all, it is such an act of mercy that I have had my life spared, that this dry bread becomes like royal dainties, and this cup of cold water tastes to me like the richest wine might do to another man." The Lord does thus often take his children into the stripping-room, and into the starving-room, and lets them see that all their afflictions are less than they deserve, that their troubles are but as the small dust of the balance, compared with the mountains of tribulation and anguish which they deserve to have received in hell.

Again, when the Lord reveals to us our iniquity, it is to put us on our watch-tower. When he shows us the sin that is in our heart, it is like a captain pointing to a few skirmishers who have just come before an army that is advancing. "There, my men," says the captain, "you see those soldiers; they are the advance guard of the enemy; look sharply after them, for there is a great army behind them, so be on your watch." Thus the Holy Spirit discovers to us our evil desires and corruptions, he wakes us up to see them; and when we have seen them, he says to us, "Take care; this little that I have shown you is to warn you of a great army that is behind. These few evil ones that have just appeared to your vision are but the outriders of a host of black things that are ready to attack you; so, be always upon your watch-tower, be constantly looking out for foes." I think that soldiers need to have a few alarms on their march; if they had none, they might become careless, and relax discipline; and then they might be enticed into a defile, and so be surprised, and cat off.. But when they have a few enemies to harass them on the, flank and rear, they are more likely to be watchful, and to keep a sharp look-out, so that, in case of a sudden attack, they would be ready to repel the foe. The absence, of enemies is apt to breed a slothfulness which disables; and times of ease seldom suit God's soldiers. Holidays ruined the army of Hannibal; and it is for our good that God stirs up the Amalekites to make us ready for the battle, lest we should be surprised by even worse adversaries.

I will give only one more answer to this first question, and then I will pass to the other point The Lord often shows us our iniquity, to make us value salvation all the more. You know that the man, who thinks the most of a doctor, is generally the man who needs him most. When we are well, we often make jokes concerning doctors; we talk about their killing the people, and so on; but when we get ill, we send for them. We laugh at them while in health; but we are glad to make use of them when sick. So is it with the Lord's people; they may, perhaps, think lightly of Christ when they do not see or feel any present need for him; but when they discover their own leprosy, then it is that they value the great Physician. When they realize their own ruin, then it is that they prize the God-given remedy. It is a great service to us, sometimes, to show us our bankrupt's schedule. Every man has had. a bankrupt's schedule, because we are all bankrupts by nature. We set, up in trade for ourselves, and we soon became bankrupts; we never paid even a farthing in the pound, but our Lord Jesus Christ paid it all for us; yet we should not know how great was his grace in doing so, did he not; remind us of our debts, and of how very poor were in our own hopes of meeting debts so immense, so infinitely beyond all our powers to discharge. God say's to his children, "I brought you out; of prison, but you do not think much of my deliverance to-day; so I will take you back to prison, and let you once more see what kind of place it is, and then you will think more of the Breaker who broke your chains, and set you free. I have opened a fountain that sparkles with living water; you have been drinking of it day by day, till you are full, and you do not know its value. Come, I wilt put you in the waste, howling wilderness and you shall rafter the pangs of hunger, you shall have all the water in your bottle spent; then you will know the, preciousness of the rippling fountain, which grace hath opened for thirsty sinners. You have been feasting every day at my table, you have scarcely known what hunger is. I will just put you again in the desert of conviction, and make you hunger after righteousness, and then you will prize the bread that came dewes from heaven, and think more of Jesus Christ, my Son, than you would have done had it not been for this showing of iniquity and grievance."

All these things, of which I have spoken, are matters of heart experience, to all true believers. Many persons; do not know the plague of their heart. But you, who love the Lord, will own that, however quaintly I have put these things, there is great truth in them. It is even so; we have had very solemn times, all of us who believe in Jesus, since we first knew the Lord; there have been times when we could not tell our right hand from our left in spiritual matters; when, if anyone had asked us, "Are you the Lord's?" we dared not have answered. "Yes, we are;" for our corruptions were so strong, and unbelief had become so rampant, and poor faith seemed to be so slumbering, like the fire in the ashes, that we could not tell whether there was any fire or not. O brethren, do we not remember when we have sometimes knelt down in anguish, and cried, "O Lord, I long to have this point decided, "am I thine, or am I not? If it be so, why am I thus? Why this wrestling of two armies in the Shulamite? Why is it that these contentions and these warrings are carried on in my spirit? Show me wherefore thou contendest with me, and why my sin contends with me. O Lord, show me where I am vile;" and have we not found that these times of sore conflict have been of essential benefit to us? We have grown strong by these griefs; the sight of iniquity has made us wiser, more cautious, more prudent, more humble, more affectionate, and made us more firm in our belief in our Savior afterwards, than we had ever been before.

II. Now I will try to answer the question of the text in another sense: "Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance!"

Sometimes, the iniquity and grievance are not in ourselves but IN Others. Some of you may not have much of this world's goods; you, perhaps, live in a house where there are very ungodly people; down in your court, the Sabbath is always broken; in the street where you reside, you seldom hear anything on the Sabbath day except oaths, and. curses, and profanity, and everything which constitutes a breach of the day of rest; and others of you, by your very connections, are called to mix with evil companions, whose speech, instead of being seasoned with salt, seems seasoned with brimstone, flavoured only with blasphemy, and having perpetually in it the very brogue of hell. There are some of you, who are called to labor with workmen, who, instead of endeavoring to help you to heaven, seem trying, like Christian's neighbors and wife, of whom you read in. "The Pilgrim's Progress," to pull you back to the City of Destruction. You are, perhaps, asking this question, "O Lord, why am I in such a condition? Why has thy providence put me where I am thrown into contact with evil men? "Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?" I will tell you three or four reasons why the Lord acts thus towards you.

The first is, to let you see what you might yourselves have been. John Bradford—you have probably heard the story a hundred times,—when he used to see people going past his window, on the way to Tyburn, to be hanged, said, "There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God; if it had not been for the grace of God, John Bradford too would have been hanged." When you hear men swearing, you can say, "That is what I should have done, if the Lord had not kept the door of my lips." When you see men taken up for robbery, you can say, "That is what I might have been, if God had not kept me from sin." When you hear of the drunken brawl or the murderous affray, put your hand on your heart, and say, "Ah! the same sort of evils might have come out of this heart of mine; for human hearts are very much alike. 'As in wafer face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.' There is not much difference, by nature, between one heart and another; so, that man is a picture of what I might have been, if the restraining hand of God had not kept me back from sin." You know that, sometimes, drunkards help to make men sober; occasionally, drunkards are good apostles of temperance; for, when they come reeling through the streets, in all their bestial stupidity, a man very naturally says, "What a fool that fellow makes of himself!" and it leads him to say, "I must avoid that evil thing, because I would not make myself so foolish as he is," I think it was the old Greek lords who used to make their slaves drunk, in order to keep their children from the vice, by letting them see how disgraceful a drunkard looked.

Thus, perhaps, God allows wicked men to come in our way, to make us see the evil of sin, that we may turn from it, pass by it, abhor it, and not indulge in it. I have no doubt that the wickedness of men may be, employed, under the divine wisdom, and the overruling hand of God for the sanctification of his own people. Just as, sometimes a book that is full of bad orthography is one of the best things for teaching a child how to spell well, by leading him to correct the mistakes in spelling, so the Lord permits us to see this other kind of bad spelling in order to teach us how to spell aright. We have to correct ourselves by the evils of others, and to learn from their wrong-doing to avoid the sins into which they have fallen. Wrecks may sometimes be made into beacons; the ruin of one man may be a warning to another. It is so with the Christian, for he knows how to use his sight of iniquity, and of grievance, as he beholds it in others, as a reason for avoiding the same iniquity himself.

In the next place, God sometimes allows us to see the sins of others, to teach us to admire his sovereignty, which plucked us as brands from the burning. We look at our neighbors, and see them drinking down sin as a greedy ox drinketh down water, and we say, "What hath made us to differ from them?" Grace—free grace. And then we ask, "Why has grace come to us, and not to them? Why have these favors been given to us, and not to the rest of mankind?" And we are obliged re, say, with Christ, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." When only one member of a family is converted, what a proof that is of divine sovereignty! When there is a holy mother, with an ungodly husband, and wicked children, what an illustration that is of the sovereignty of God, in that one is taken, and the others are left! And when, in a house, two women have. been grinding at the mill, and one has accompanied her grinding with the songs of Zion, and the other has accompanied hers with the voice of cursing, what a proof there has been of the sovereignty of God, who "hath mercy on whom he will have mercy," for "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

Ay, Christian, God hath put thee in the very midst of sin, to make his grace the more conspicuous. If you ride in the country, and you see a field of wheat, you will very likely not notice one of the ears at all; but as you are going along, you see a hedge, and, by some chance or other, a grain of wheat has been dropped into the ground under the hedge, and from it a single ear of corn has grown up through the brambles, and there it stands alone. Very likely you nudge your friend who is riding with you, and say, "There is an ear of wheat growing up among the rambles." It seems the more astonishing and notable from the place where it is growing. So, I think, a Christian in the Church of Christ is not a thing to be wondered at so much. The sovereignty of God is not so much seen amongst the righteous by themselves as it is when we find the Christians growing up amid the bushes and brambles of an ungodly world, and proving themselves to be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation." Who ever noticed glow-worms in the day time? But, in the night, you will see them shining among the leaves. They were there day day, I daresay, but nobody saw them; but, in the night, with their little lamps glowing, everyone admires them.

So the Christian, when he is in good company, is a blessed man, and great instance of divine love; but when, in the order of providence, he is put into a dark place, where there is little of gospel light and truth, then it is that his lamp begins to be most useful, and he is more noticed than he ever was before. This is why the Lord sometimes puts his people there, to make his sovereignty, his power, his might, and his grace, the more apparent. Even as men sometimes set jewels in foils to show their brightness, and put dark spots in their picture to make the lights more apparent, so the Lord, in his providence, permits his people sometimes to sojourn in evil places; like Lot, to dwell in Sodom; and like Abraham, to go down among the Egyptians, or with the Philistines, in order that divine grace may be displayed, and the Lord's name may be exalted.

I have another answer, and, I think, a better one, to the question of the text: "Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?" Why, my brethren, God shows us the sin of our fellow-men, that we may set more earnestly to work, and that we may be the means of saving souls and extending the kingdom of righteousness. When a captain takes his soldiers out to look at the one enemy, it is like what I heard of a celebrated Scotchman, whose words I am scarcely able to pronounce correctly. "Now, lads," he said, there they are; if ye dinna kill them, they'll kill you." That was their choice, and so it is with us. God brings us to walk in this city, where harlotry and vice are to be seen on every side, almost at noonday. Now then, soldiers of the cross, if ye dinna kill them, they'll kill you. If you do not stand up for your Master, and keep the banner of the cross in the air, the enemy will be more than a match for you. I have been struck sometimes, when I have looked in a window, and seen there pamphlets full of all manner of obscenity and infidelity and wickedness, and they have had the most blessed effect upon my mind; for I have thought, "Well, if there is so much wickedness, so much the more reason is there why every minister should be in earnest, and why every Christian should seek with all his might to do good."

Some of you live in very nice villas in the country; you do not go among the poor people, and you do not know what they are like. If you were to walk through some of the back slums and narrow alleys of London, you would say, Oh, I never thought there could have been such places upon earth!" and if you could go where I have sometimes gone, up an old creaking staircase, where you have to stoop your head for fear of hitting it against a beam, and go into a room, and see a whole family there; and go into another room, and see a whole family there; a little further, and see another family, all crowded and packed together; and then hear their language, and see their utter ignorance of everything concerning Christ, almost as unenlightened as the Hottentots in their kraals in Africa;—you would go away after seeing them, and say, "There is great reason that we should all be in earnest. We ought to be up and doing, sirs; we ought to be working well for our Master, after such a sight as this!" Oh! but we cover up our iniquity in this land a great delft; we fringe all London with fine streets, so flat, when a foreigner rides through them, he says, "What a grand city it is!" A varnished hypocrisy! What is there behind those streets? What will you find behind those palaces at the West-Bend? The very lowest places upon earth, where the poor are stowed away together by hundreds. We fringe the city with something that looks respectable; but, alas! for the internals of this city, how much of wickedness and sin dwell there! I bless God that there are some of you who are obliged to live where you see the wickedness of this city; I thank God that some of you cannot go to your houses at night, without seeing wickedness on the road. "Why," you ask, "do you bless God that there is this wickedness!" No I do not; but I bless God that you have to see it, because you will be the people who will go to or fore, and say, "Strive for the, salvation of men. Work, I beseech you, to do good, because the, world is still full of wickedness and the dark places even of this city are full of the habitations of cruelty."

It is a long time since I have made a good speech at a public meeting; but I do remember doing it once. I stepped out, as one of the speakers was delivering a very pretty oration, and I went into a neighboring house to speak with a woman who wished to join the church. It was not in London When I entered the house, theirs, was the husband horribly drunk; he had got his wife up in a corner, and was with all his might trying to boat and bruise her, and he was even tearing her arms with his nails till the blood freely flowed from her arms and face. Two or three friends rushed in, and dragged him away. She said she had endeavored, in all meekness, to persuade him to allow her to go to the house of God that night; and the only reason why he ill-treated her was, because he said she would always be going to that place of worship. And when I had seen that sight, and looked on the poor, bleeding woman, with tears in her eyes, I went back into the place, and spoke like a man who had got his heart, and his whole body, full of fire. I could not help it; I was all on flame against the sin of drunkenness and sought, with all my might, to urge the members of the church to do all they could to scatter the light of the gospel in a neighborhood which was so dark and black and filthy and abandoned. And I think it would do all of us good, when we are about to preach, if we were sometimes to be dragged through some of the worst parts of London, to let us see the wickedness of it. It would do our Sunday-school teachers good, many of them, for they would then be more in earnest with their children; and I think it would do good to some of our old friends, who sit and sleep almost all the service through, and are never much more than sleeping partners in the concern. If they did but know how the battle was going on, how tough the struggle and how stern the conflict, they would wake up from their slumbers, and go forth to the battle, and stand shoulder to shoulder, and deal blow after blow against the common enemy of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the welfare of man.

Ah, my brethren, we need to know more of the evil of men, to make us more earnest in seeking their salvation; for if there be anything in which the Church is lacking more than in any other matter, it is in the matter of earnestness. Whitefield said, in one of

his sermons "O my God, when I think how this wicked city is perishing, and how many are dying for lack of knowledge, I feel as if I could, stand on the top of every hackney coach in the streets of London to preach the gospel." Why did he say that? Why was his zeal so burning? Because he had seen the sinfulness of men and marked their follies. We shall never be thoroughly in earnest till we are thoroughly aware of the evil that is before us. When the horse sees the precipice, he throws himself back, and will not madly dash himself down. So is it with the Church of Christ; if she could see the evil that is before her, she would surely draw herself back, with energy, to save her own children from plunging into the yawning gulf. Ay, sirs, ye have iniquity in your very midst; and at your doors; ye have iniquity everywhere round about you, and yet, how few of you are striving to do anything for Christ! Ye are asked to help in this great battle; but ye have so many other things to do, ye cannot help us. Ye are asked to do something in this cause, to give it a little time; but ye cannot manage it. Ye are asked to speak; but ye have so little ability, ye cannot do it. One half of the people who call themselves Christians want to be pressed fifty times to do a thing; and then, when they are got to do it, they are not worth having, because they are only pressed men,—they are not one half so, good as volunteers. I would that all of us knew the evil state of this world, and the wickedness of men; and then I think that all of us who love the Savior would start up from our seats, and each one would say, "Here am I; let me be a volunteer against the enemy; let me, in my measure, whatever little measure that may be, go forth to serve my God, to practice virtue, and, by a holy example and by every other means, seek to stem the raging torrent of the iniquity of the age."

Now, my dear friends, in closing, allow me just this one remark to another class of hearers. There is one who, but a little while ago, was an abandoned sinner; he could drink, he could swear, he could break the Sabbath, and curse God. One day, he stepped into the house of God, and the Lord met with him, and now he is in misery, such as he cannot describe; his heart is all broken, his conscience, is as if it had been lashed with the tenfold whip of the law, and as if brine, had then been rubbed into his wounds; he is smarting all over with the wounds of his conscience, inflicted by the angry and fiery law of God. He is crying, in his agony, "O Lord, I must perish, I know I must; I see such wickedness in my soul, that I must perish and be cast away." Nay, poor soul, nay, that is not the right answer to the question of the text. The question is, Why doth the Lord show thee iniquity? I will give thee the right answer. It is, in order that he may deliver thee from it. If God has broken thine heart, he has broken it on purpose to give thee a new one. If he has killed thee by the law, he has killed thee on purpose to make 'thee alive by' the gospel. If he has wounded thee in thy conscience, he has done it that he may have room to pour in the oil and the balm of Christ Jesus. If he has stripped thee, he has only pulled off thy rags that he may put on thee a perfect robe of spotless righteousness; and if he has cast thee into the ditch, so that thine own clothes abhor thee, as Job words it, it is that he may take thee to the fountain filled with blood, and give thee a perfect washing. When the Lord pulls a man down, he does it in order that he may build him up again. When he breaks a man's heart, it is not for the mere breaking's sake, it is that he may make it anew. If you have misery in your conscience on account of sin, God has had dealings of love with you, and he has purposes of love concerning you. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." If you are a convinced sinner, Jesus died for you, for he died for sinners. If you can truly say that you are sinner, I can tell you that Christ Jesus hung upon the cross for you. Look at him there, bleeding; every drop of blood says to you, "I drop, poor sinner, for thee." Look at that gash in his side, whence flows the double stream of water and blood; it says, "Sinner, this stream runs for thee." Art thou a sinner? If so, Christ died for thee; and he hath not died in vain, thou shalt be saved. If thou dost but know thyself to be a bona fide sinner, a real one, no mere complimentary sham sinner, but a real actual one, 'who means what he says, when he declares himself to be guilty and vile; then, as the Lord liveth, Jesus Christ died for you on Calvary; you shall behold his face with joy; you shall be numbered with the Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven, and you shall sing eternal hallelujahs around the throne of God and the Lamb.

Habakkuk 2:1-4 WATCHING TO SEE

NO. 2622 INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 14TH, 1899, DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON, AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON THURSDAY EVENING, JANUARY 26TH, 1882.

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for as appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." — Habakkuk 2:1-4.

I know that, on Thursday nights, there is a large number of friends here who are engaged in the work of the Lord, and sometimes it is meet to address them mainly; because, if the bread be put into the hands of the disciples, they will pass it on to the multitude. In the day of battle, if the command be given to the officers, they will repeat it to the various sections of the army, and so the whole mass shall be moved forward with one aim and object. Habakkuk was, like ourselves, called of God to labor for the good of the people among whom he dwelt. He was one of the later prophets who came to warn God's ancient people before the Lord meted out their last terrible measure of chastisement. He saw, in vision, his country given up to the Chaldeans, and he pleaded with God

about the matter. He had a burden on his heart which pressed very heavily upon him; he saw the nation crushed beneath the oppressors, and he asked, "Why is this?" The Lord replied, "Because of the iniquity of the people." Habakkuk understood that, but then it occurred to him that the Chaldeans, who were treading down the people, were themselves far greater sinners,— that, certainly, in the matter of oppression and bloodthirstiness, they were a far more guilty people than those whom they came to punish. So he used this fact partly as an argument with God that he would withdraw the Chaldeans and overthrow them, and partly he set it before the Lord as a difficulty which troubled his mind. He said, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" Habakkuk was puzzled, as David had been before him, and as many a child of God has been since. He felt as if he could not do his work rightly; so, in his perplexity, he came to consult God concerning it; and having laid the case before the Lord, he made use of the memorable and instructive words which we are now to consider under the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I. So, first, dear friends, we shall notice, in our text, The Attitude Of The Lord's Servant.

That is expressed in the one word, "watch." When you are puzzled,— when you are troubled, when you do not know what to do, then may God help you to say, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." Before we can do any real service for God, we must first of all receive our commission from him. We cannot teach others aright unless we are ourselves taught of God, and his truest servants are those who continue waiting upon him that they may receive from him the words which afterwards they are to speak in his name to the people. Habakkuk is a model to us in this respect. Troubled in heart, he resolves to set himself to watch his God, and to listen for the message he is afterwards to deliver.

We learn from him that the attitude of the Lord's servant towards God is, first, an attentive attitude: "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me." If we have a deaf ear towards our Lord, we must not marvel if he gives us also a dumb tongue. If we will not hear what God speaks, we may not expect to be able ourselves to speak in his name; or, if we do pour forth a flood of words, yet we may not expect that they will be such as he will approve and bless. O dear friends, if we would work for God in the right spirit, we must begin as Jesus did, of whom it was written in prophecy, long before he came to the earth, "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." In the fullness of time, Jesus came forth, and taught to others what he had thus learned in secret; and, if we would teach others, we must first be ourselves taught by the Spirit of God. How much more we might know if we were only willing to listen to the Lord's messages! There is, in the Word of God, a voice which is often inaudible because we are so engrossed with other things. There is, also, the voice of the Christian ministry which oftentimes speaks to us, but it is like the cry of one in a wilderness, and it is not heard by us. There is, too, a voice in God's providence. How much the Lord says to his flock by every stroke of his rod, and by every blessing of his daily providence! There is a voice from every grave,— a message in every bereavement when friends are taken away. There are voices everywhere speaking to those whose ears are open. Above all, there is the blessed Spirit ever waiting to communicate to us the things of God by that soft mysterious whisper which none know but those who are themselves spiritual, but which they know at once to be the very voice of God within their spirits. Brethren, we must be attentive; we must not allow a single sound from the Lord to escape us. Some men seem as if God must speak thunder and lightning before they will ever hear him; but his true children sit at his feet, that they may catch the slightest movement of his lips, and not let a single syllable from the Lord fall to the ground. The attitude of the Christian worker must be one of attention.

But, next, it must be your patient attitude. Observe what Habakkuk says, "I will stand upon my watch;" not merely, "I will be upon my watch for a moment;" but, "I will take my place like a sentinel who remains on guard until his time of watching is over." Then the prophet puts it again, "I will set me upon the tower," — as if he took his position firmly and resolutely upon the tower, there to stand, and not to stir till he had seen and heard what God the Lord would have him see and hear. Do you think, dear friends, that we are sufficiently resolved to know our Master's will? Do we frequently enough get upstairs alone, and with our open Bibles search out what God would have us learn? And do we pray over the Word till we have wormed ourselves into the very heart of the truth,— till we have eaten our way into it, as the weevil eats its way through the nutshell, and then lives upon and in the kernel? Do we do this? Do we set ourselves upon the tower, determined that we will not go forth to speak for the Lord till the Lord has spoken to us, lest we go upon a fool's errand, to deliver our own inventions, instead of proclaiming the message that comes from God himself?

Your attitude, my brother or my sister, if you are a servant of the Lord, is that of attention and patience.

To which I may add that it is often a solitary attitude: "I will stand upon my watch." The church has gone to sleep, but "I will stand upon my watch." Like flocks of sheep they lie all around us, the multitudes of souls for whom we have to care; but there are still shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night, to whom the glory of the Lord is often revealed when the sheep perceive it not. The city lies wrapped in slumber, and no sound is heard among her ten thousand sleepers; but there is one who knows no sleep,

nor gives slumber to his eyelids, for he is the appointed watchman of the night; and he keeps to his tower, and sets himself in his place, firmly resolved that, till the morning breaks, there shall be somebody to keep guard over the city. Well, sometimes, I say, that watchman has to be quite solitary. O brothers and sisters, it would be better for us if we had more solitude! It often becomes needful to us because we cannot find kindred spirits that can watch with us a single hour. The higher you get up in the Church of God, the more solitary you will be. For the sheep, there are many companions; but even for an under-shepherd, there are but few. As for that Great Shepherd of the sheep, the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls, the Good Shepherd, you know that his most favored apostles could not watch with him even one hour, but he had to endure his terrible agony in Gethsemane alone; and such of his servants as he honors most will know best what is the meaning of Gethsemane, the olive-press, and the solitude which often accompanies the stern watch that the faithful servant of God must keep. Never mind if all others around ye say that you are hot-headed, and zealous, and enthusiastic, and foolish, and I know not what; say to yourself, "I will stand upon my watch." What if they should, think that you carry things much too far, and have too much religion, or are too consecrated? Reply, "I will set me upon the tower, and will still watch, for that is my business even if I must attend to it all alone." The man who has God for his Companion has the best of company; and, he that is a solitary watcher for the Most High God shall one day stand amidst yon shining legions of angels, and himself shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of his Father. Expect, therefore, if you are a servant of the Lord, sometimes to have to watch alone, and, be thankful for that position if God honors you by calling you to occupy it.

Observe, further, that the attitude of the child of God who is called to be a prophet to his people — as I know that many of you are, — is one in which the mind must be entirely engrossed. The true servant of the Lord thinks of nothing else than this,—"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what the Lord will say unto me." He is wholly taken up with that one matter. Many of you have your secular callings to follow; but, without neglecting them, you can still, in spirit, be watching and waiting to hear the voice of God; for God speaks to us not only when we are in the study, or kneeling in prayer by our bedside, but he has ways of talking with us while we are going along the road, and so he makes our hearts to burn within us. He can speak with us in the thick of the greatest throng; and, perhaps, some of us were never more conscious of the voice of God than amid the rushing of ten thousand spindles, or in the midst of the crowded street. At such times, the noise and turmoil of this busy world have not been able to drown the gentle voice of God within our spirit. Nay you, beloved, be thus engrossed! If you intend to serve the Lord, give your whole soul to the learning of his truth and the hearing of what he has to say to you, that you may afterwards be able to tell out to others what you have yourselves been taught of God.

Observe, also, that the prophet was entirely submissive to the will of God. He put himself into this attitude, that he might hear whatever God should say to him, and that his only thought, all the while, should be, "What shall I answer when I am reproved?" We need to be as much as possible like clean white paper for God to write upon. Our mind is often far too much occupied, and too prejudiced, to receive a clear impression of the will of the Lord. How many make up their mind as to what they will see in a text, and so they never learn what the passage would teach them if it were allowed to speak freely to them. If thou wouldst serve God, say unto thy soul, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and I will give both my ears and all my heart to understand what God would have me know, and to learn what he would teach me." May this be the happy privilege of us all!

The last remark I will make upon this first head is, that the attitude of the Lord's servant was eminently practical. The prophet do not watch and wait merely that he might know the secrets of the future, or be able to prophesy, or show his wonderful knowledge. No; but he wanted to know what he should answer when he was reproved. He knew that, when he went out into the world, men would begin to reprove him for being a prophet at all; they would rebuke him for his zeal and his earnestness, and he waited that he might have the right answer to give, with meekness and fear, to all who opposed themselves. That should be your wish and mine, beloved; for, if we serve God faithfully, we are sure to meet with objectors. Well, if this opposition is only against us, it does not matter much; but, alas! sometimes their critical and cruel remarks are against the truth itself; and, worst of all, against our blessed Lord. In such a case, it is well to have something with which we can stop the mouths of the snarling dogs. It is a blessing to have heard God's voice, for, if you repeat the message he speaks to you, even the echo of God's voice will break the rocks in pieces, and cause the cedars of Lebanon to split in twain. There is nothing that can stand against the Word of the Lord. In the twenty-ninth Psalm, David says, "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty;" and, if we have heard that voice, and know how, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to echo its mighty tones, they will strike the objector dumb; and even when he hates the truth, he will still be compelled to feel what force there is in— it. So the servant of the Lord says, "I will watch and wait to hear what God will say unto me, for then I shall know what to answer when I am rebuked and reproached for the truth's sake."

This, then, is to be the attitude of the children of God. Get away to your watch-towers, brethren; get away to your tower by the brook Jabbok, and wrestle with the angel there; get away to the top of Carmel, and put your head between your knees, and cry unto the Lord until the heavens are covered with clouds, and the thirsty earth is refreshed with rain. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much;" but they who do not hear God's voice cannot effectually pray, for God will not hear their voice if they will not hear his. If we have been deaf to him, he will be deaf to us. The intercourse and communion necessary to prevailing prayer render it absolutely essential that we should first set ourselves to hear the voice of God, and then again it shall be said that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man, for the man first hearkened to the voice of the Lord.

II. The second part of our subject is, The Work Of The Lord's Servant.

We have seen what his attitude was; the next verse tells us about his work: "The Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." It was not long before the waiting prophet heard God speak; and if you and I wait upon him, it will not be long before we hear something that will be worth our waiting for; and, especially, we shall receive plain directions as to our duty.

Habakkuk was, first, to see the vision. The first name for a prophet was, "a seer." You, my brother, cannot be a teller of the good tidings of salvation unless you are first a seer. Kind that you see well all that is to be seen. Use your eyes to the best advantage; and also to be able to see what God sets before you. It is curious how the different senses are mingled in these verses. Did you notice the expression in that first verse, "I will watch to see what he will say unto me"? When God speaks to us, we can hear with our eyes as well as with our ears. There is an inner sense which sees the meaning of the Lord's language, and the inner ear hears the very tones in which that meaning is expressed. So, the prophet was first to be a seer, he was to wait to see what God would say unto him.

Then, next, he was to "write the vision;" that is, to make it known; and, beloved, when you and I have seen or heard. anything which God has revealed to us, let us go and write it, or make it known by some other means. God has not put the treasure into the earthen vessel merely for the vessel's own sake, but that the treasure may afterwards be poured out from it, that others may thereby be enriched. You have not been privileged to see, merely to make glad your eyes, and to charm your soul; you have been permitted to see in order that you may make others see, that you may go forth and report what the Lord. has allowed you to perceive. God does not usually favor his servants with visions that they may keep them to themselves. Paul did for fourteen years hide one that he saw, but he was obliged to let it out at last; and I suppose that, if he had had more visions, he would not have been able to creep that one concealed so long. John no sooner became the seer of Patmos than he heard a voice that said to him, "Write." He could not speak to others, for he was in an island where he was exiled from his fellows, but he could write, and he did; and, often, he who writes, addresses a larger audience than the man who merely uses his tongue. It is a happy thing when the tongue is aided by the pen of a ready writer, and so gets a wider sphere, and a more permanent influence than if it merely uttered certain sounds, and the words died away when the ear had heard them. The Great thing which you have to do, if God has called you to serve him, is, after hearing what he has said to you, to make it known to somebody else: "Write the vision."

And take care, dear friends, that, in the spreading of truth, you use as permanent a means of doing so as you can. "Write the vision;" that is to say, if you cannot write with the pen, if you have not that special gift, yet write it on men's hearts. Do not merely speak it; but seek to reach the inmost soul of your fellow-beings, and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, write the truth there. God help you not merely to sound. it in their ears, but to write it on the fleshy tablets of their heart, and to leave the truth deeply engraved upon their memory! I have sometimes been greatly favored in this way; indeed, it has often been the case, for I almost daily meet with persons who say, "We remember hearing you preach more than twenty years ago, and we recollect what you said;" and they will quote something which they then heard. I remember visiting, in one of our hospitals, a man who had. heard me years before; and he said to me, "While I was lying here, one night, I thought I heard the very tones of your voice;" and he told me some similes that I had used when he listened to me. I am glad to be successful in producing permanent impressions upon my hearers; I wish I could be more so. Mr. Jay used to say that, in preaching, we must say things that will "strike and stick." It is well when we can do so; and I urge you, who are the servants of the Lord, to mind that, when you teach the truth, you so teach it that it shall be permanently learnt under your instruction. "Write the vision... upon tables."

Then the next duty of the servant of God is to "make it plain." I have sometimes thought that certain ministers fancied that it was their duty to make the message elaborate, to go to the very bottom of the subject, and stir up all the mud they could find there, till you could not possibly see them, nor could they see their own way at all. I could not help, the other morning, comparing some preaching to a boy who was in front of me, one summer's day, wanting a penny, and sweeping the crossing for me in such a fashion that he enveloped me in clouds of dust in order to clear my way! Have I not seen preachers do just the very same thing? They tell people all the difficulties they have discovered in the Bible,— which difficulties most of their hearers would never have heard of unless their ministers had told them,— and. they raise a cloud of dust in order to make a pathway for a poor troubled soul! We would rather that they let the dust lie still, for we ourselves raise dust enough without their help.

"Write the vision, and make it plain."

I suggest that as a motto to you who preach in the open air, and to you who speak in the lodging-houses or anywhere else. "Make it plain." It is wonderful how plain we must make the gospel before some people will be able to understand it; they have no idea what we mean by many of the expressions that we use. The commonest language among Christians is often a distinct dialect to worldlings; they cannot make head or tail of it. You and I, speaking together of our Christian experience, perfectly understand one another; but if we were to say the same things outside to the mass of the people, we might just as well preach to them in Dutch. If you have a loaf of bread, and you want to feed a hungry child with it, it is hopeless to try to put that loaf of bread inside the child

just as it is. Crumb it up, brother, crumb it up as small as ever you can; and pour over it some of the nice warm milk of your own hearty love; and in that way the child and the loaf will come into contact before long. There is no way of getting many great truths in the lump into most people's minds; we must break it up into small pieces; or, to use the words of the text, when we "write the vision," we must "make it plain."

Another important point is, to make it practical. I have heard this text misquoted a great many times, "that he that runs may read it." Kindly look at the passage, and see whether that is correct. It does not say, "that he that runs may read it," but it does say, "that he may run that readeth it."

That is a different thing, and that is what we want to see. But I have known some people who have had the gospel delivered to them, and they have slept that heard it. There has been something about the prophet's very tone, and voice, and manner, that has tended to fill the ear with somniferous influences. "Ah!" said one to me, "I cannot help believing in mesmerism, and so would you it you could see how our minister mesmerizes the people all round the gallery every Sunday. They can sleep soundly enough after he has been preaching a little while." Now, dear brethren, if we want to do any good to our fellow-creatures, we must hear God's voice ourselves, and that will not send us to sleep, but it will wake us up; and then we must go and tell the people very plainly what we have heard, and also tell it to them so earnestly "that he may run that readeth it." I believe that I could easily make some of you run if I were to take up a telegram from the table, and read, "Mr. So-and-so's house is on fire, he is requested to hurry home as fast as possible." Away he would go down the aisle directly the words were out of my lips. You see, that message is something that concerns him personally, something that may mean great peril to his property, so he runs that reads it, or hears it read; I wish I could always preach about the wrath to come in such a way that every unsaved man who heard me would take to his heels, and run for his life from the City of Destruction; or that I could so speak about the glories of heaven, and the preciousness of Christ, that men would straightway run to him, even to the Holy One of Israel, whom God hath glorified. Let us try always to write on men's hearts in a good running hand, that he that reads the message may at once begin to run to escape from judgment, and to find a Savior, and to enter into eternal life.

There, child of God, is your attitude; and here is your work.

III. Now, in the third place, the next verse brings out our difficulty; that is, The Tarrying Of Truth: "for the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

We preach a gospel whose chief glory lies in the future. The blessings which we proclaim have a most important bearing upon the present, but the stress and emphasis of them relate to the future, and hence it is that, oftentimes, men reject our testimony because, to them, the time is not yet; or they doubt its truth, because they do not at once see the results produced which we foretell.

Brethren, every promise of God's Word has its own appointed time of fulfillment; and every doctrine or privilege has its own allotted hour. There is an election of grace, but we shall not know all who are included in it till we shall meet the whole company of the faithful at the right hand of God. There is a redemption by blood, but the fullness of that redemption will not affect these mortal bodies until the trumpet of the resurrection has sounders out its mighty blast over land and sea. Then shall we see how Christ has redeemed the bodies as well as the souls of his chosen ones. Take any blessing that you please, and the same rule applies. Although there is much in the covenant of grace to be enjoyed. to-day, there is much more that is yet to come. Still is the servant of God a prophet. He says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved; "that is a prophecy. He says, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee;"— that is a prophecy. He says, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever;"— that is a prophecy. He says, "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation;"— that is a prophecy. And the testimony of Jesus is still the spirit of prophecy, and each prophecy has an appointed time in which it will be fulfilled.

And, further, it is absolutely certain to be fulfilled. There is no word which God's servant rightly speaks for his Lord which will not come true. Ye have not followed cunningly-devised fables; and, therefore, ye need not speak your Master's message as though ye were old wives rehearsing the gossip of a country village. You are telling what God the Holy Ghost has revealed in the Word, and applied to your own soul; therefore, tell it out boldly. Now, then, ye are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech sinners by you; and you are to go and pray them, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God. Do you not see, dear brethren, the position you are to take up? Stay you be helped to take it up! You are a prophet, and your prophecy has a time for fulfillment, and it is absolutely certain to come to pass.

But, sometimes, it apparently tarryies. You tell men of the blessedness that comes of true religion, and they say, "There is such-and-such a believer who is very sorrowful." "Oh, yes!" you reply, "in his case, the vision is tarrying." "There is such-and-such a child of God who does not enjoy the light of the Lord's countenance." Just so; we did not say that he always would, but we do say that he

will one day walk in the light. "Ah!" says one, "I have been seeking the Lord for years, but I have not obtained peace and comfort yet." Just so; he did not promise that you should obtain the blessing immediately; it may be that, for a while, you shall "walk in darkness, and see no light," to test your faith. But, though the vision may seem to tarry, it will not really tarry; it will come in God's good time. Oh, how often have you and I, struggling to live by faith and to glorify God, got into a maze, and we have said, "We shall get out of it;" but we did not get out of it for a long time. "Oh!" we have said, "surely God will deliver us;" yet, for a while, he did not deliver us; we even got into still worse trouble than before; and then the arch-enemy began to whisper, — The Lord hath forsaken thee quite; Thy God will be gracious no more;— and what little faith we had, began to waver, for we said, "We did not think that we should be tried thus; we thought we should come out of the darkness very much sooner than this." But now, brother, in looking back upon those past exercises and experiences, what do you say of them? Did the Lord tarry, after all? "Well," you reply, "he tarried as I should like him always to tarry."

'He hid the purpose of his grace, To make it better known.'

"He allowed the clouds to collect more thickly, to give all the heavier shower of blessing by-and-by. He did permit me to begin to sink, he did let me nearly go down; but it was only to make me know how weak I was, that I might the more firmly cling to his hand when he plucked me out of the waves, and bade me stand still by his side."

I can personally say, at the present moment, that I should not like to have had one ache less, or one depression of spirit less, or one affliction less of any sort. I would rather not have any more,— as everybody says; but yet I am glad that my "rathers" count for nothing with God, and that I have not any permission or need to manage for myself. How much better everything is arranged by him! As for the past, it is all right; and, blessed be his holy name, it has been so right that it could not be better. It has not only been good, but it has been better; yes, it has been best of all. So shall every child of God find it. You may say, "This life of faith is hard. This hanging on so long, almost by one's eyelashes,— will it not soon come to an end?"

The end will come at the right time.

God never is before his time:

He never is too late.

Remember how Israel went out of Egypt at the appointed time. It is written, "And it came to pass the self-same day, that the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies," and on that self-same day when infinite wisdom and infinite grace shall know that it is better for you to be delivered, you shall be delivered to the praise of the glory of God's grace.

IV. The fourth verse gives us our last point; but I will only just hint at what I would have said if there had been more time.

This Tarrying Of Truth Becomes A Testing Of The People, because that gospel, which we are to tell, does not bring forth all its fruit at once to those who hear us. What then? Why, this is the winnowing-fan, this is the sieve, this is the way by which God discerns between the righteous and the wicked. As for the wicked, man, he says, "I do not see any present good coming out of religion. Look at that poor, miserable, sighing, groaning, poverty-stricken Christian over there; what good has it ever done to him? I do not believe in it." Just so; now we know who and what you are, for our text says, "His soul which is lifted up is not upright in him." He is so proud that he judges God's Word, and condemns it. He will not have Christ to reign over him; he will not believe God; he will not wait for God; and the reason is, that his soul is not upright in him. Follow him home, and you shall see, in his life, that his soul is not upright in him. The man who judges God is one whom God will judge, and who shall not be able to stand in the day of judgment. I will not say that every man who rejects Christ is necessarily immoral; but I will say that, in nine cases out of ten, it is so; and that, when you trace an infidel's life, there is something there that accounts for his infidelity. He wants a coverlet in his unbelief for something that he has good need to cover. There is something about his daily walk that does not agree with holiness, some darling sin that spoils his hope of being saved as a Christian; so he tries, as far as ever he can, to get a hope out of falsehood, out of contradicting God. "His heart is not upright in him."

But how does this test discern the righteous? Why thus: "The Just shall live by his faith." You know that a Christian man, a holy man, a just man, a justified man, talks thus: "Yes, if God has spoken anything, it is true. If God has said that, it will be fulfilled. I will wait. Troubles may multiply; cares may come like a deluge; but I will wait. I am sure that God is true, and I will wait and watch for the unfolding of his purposes. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; I will never give up reliance upon him." Now, that man is a just man, and that is the man who will live. It is always well when these three things go together — righteousness, faith, life. They ought not to be found apart; they should always be together. "The just man"— that is, the righteous man —"shall live." Ah! there is no true life without that righteousness. "Shall live by his faith," — and there is no true life without faith, and no true righteousness without faith. These three go together; may we all have them, and may it be your joy and mine to keep on telling to others what God has revealed to us, that we may thus gather out his own believing people, his elect and redeemed ones, while the graceless will, perhaps, despise and hate what they may see, and so will ripen for the flames of hell! God grant, of his grace, that they may yet be delivered, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Spurgeon's Exposition of Habakkuk 2:1-11

Verse 1 I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.

"I shall look to God, and I shall also look to myself. There shall be an expectation as I gaze upward to my Lord, and there shall also be an examination as I look within at my empty, guilty, good-for-nothing self."

2. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

The prophets were accustomed to write their messages upon wax tablets, and the Lord bade Habakkuk thus write what he had seen. God would have both his law and his gospel plainly revealed to men, so that they might know and understand his will. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "We use great plainness of speech;" and the Lord would have all his servants do likewise. It is not for us to bury the gospel under a mass of fine words, but to set it forth in the simplest and clearest possible language; for it is not the power of human words that God blesses, but the truth itself as it is applied to the heart by his Spirit.

3. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

Is that a contradiction,—"Though it tarry,... it will not tarry" ? No; to us, it appears to tarry; but, in God's way of reckoning, it does not really tarry. To our impatient spirits, it seems long in coming; but God knows that it will not be a moment beyond the appointed time.

4. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

This grand text was quoted by Paul when he wrote his Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Hebrews. It proves that Old Testament saints understood New Testament life. David and Abraham lived by faith, even as Paul and Peter and the other apostles did.

5. Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:

This was spoken of the Chaldeans, an ambitious nation so exceedingly greedy that it seemed as if the whole world would not be large enough to satisfy their voracious appetite. Their great kings enlarged their mouths like Gehenna, and they seemed as insatiable as the very maw of death itself. They heaped up nation upon nation to make a huge empire for themselves.

6. Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!

That which is said of ambition may also be said of covetousness. What an idle task it is for a man to go on perpetually hoarding,—heaping together more than he can possibly enjoy himself, as if it were made for nobody but for one man, and he must needs grasp all the wealth of the world. There is scope enough for the loftiest ambition when you seek the nobler joys of grace; there is room for a sacred covetousness when you "covet earnestly the best gifts;" but, in every other respect, may these two things — ambition and covetousness — be ever thrust far from us!

7. Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them?

So it happened to Chaldea that the nations, which they had spoiled, by-and-by grew strong enough to take vengeance upon them, and to spoil them in their turn. Usually, when men do wrong, it comes home to them sooner or later. The chickens they hatch come home to roost; at night, at any rate, if not before. Towards the end of life, a man begins to gather the fruit of his doings; or if he does not reap it in this world, certainly he will in the world to come.

8, 9. Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

He fancies, when he gets rich by oppressing others, that he will himself rise out of harm's way. He says that he will make the main chance sure, He who has plenty of gold fancies that he will be able to preserve himself from sorrow; but this is what God has to say about that matter:

10, 11. Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people. and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

These Chaldeans were great builders, as we know by the vast ruins that still remain; and most of their buildings were erected by labor exacted from the people whom they oppressed. They received no wages for their work; so even to-day, from the ruins, the stone cries out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber answers it. Let all men know that, sooner or later, God will execute justice even upon the greatest nations. If they will be destroyers, they shall be destroyed. Their evil policy shall, by-and-by, sweep them away. "There is a something in the world," says one, "that makes for righteousness." Indeed there is, only it is more than a something; it is God himself who is ever working in all things towards the vindication of his own righteous and holy law.