

THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN

NO. 2462

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“For who knoweth what is good for man in this life,
all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?
for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?”*
Ecclesiastes 6:12

MAN at his very best is only man, and well might David ask, “What is man?” In part, he is but red earth, as Adam was when he came fresh from his Maker’s hand. Solomon tells us, in the tenth verse of this chapter, “That which has been is named already, and it is known that it is man.” Whoever has lived, and however wise and good and great he may have been, he has been only man. Sum him up, add all together—the beauties of his body, the skill of his mind, even the virtues of his spirit, and what is he then but man? And man is but vapor, which appears for a little while, and then vanishes away, he is as thin and airy and unsubstantial as his own breath. He comes and he goes, he is here such a little while that he can scarcely be said to be, for he does but begin to be ere he closes his being so far as this world is concerned.

As man is as light as vanity itself, Solomon urges that it is idle and vain for him to attempt to contend with God. He puts it thus in the tenth verse, “Neither may he contend with Him who is mightier than he.” It is always unwise to contend with one who is mightier than yourself, but when the disparity is so great as between man and God—the creature of an hour and the self-existent Creator, the poor feeble worm called man and the almighty invincible God—you see at once what folly it is even to think of battling with Him. He is indeed foolish who would contend with his Maker. Shall the potsherd strive to break the rod of iron? Or shall the wax war against the fire?

There is no hope for us in such contention, yet how frequently do we—even we who are His children—begin to contend with our God! If He chastens us, if He takes away our comforts, if He permits us to be disappointed in our aspirations, straightway we begin to inquire, “Why is this?”

And I have known times when that question has been carried very, very far, when some whom we have esteemed have seemed to pick a quarrel with God, and they would not forgive Him. Their dear one was taken away, and they called God cruel. If they did not say as much, they thought it, and they have kept the anniversary of that bereavement, still unforgiving towards their God. That kind of rebellious spirit creates ten times more pain than the affliction itself did. Then the rod falls more heavily than it otherwise would have done, and the soul, dashing itself against the pricks, wounds itself against the goad far more than it was originally intended to be wounded.

No, beloved, we cannot contend with our Maker. Are we wiser than He? Do we understand providence better than He does? Can we sit in judgment upon Him? Do we dare to think of arraigning the great Judge of all at our bar? Let us only think of Him aright, and we shall say, “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it,” and by the grace of God, we shall get even further than that, and be able to say with the patriarch Job, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD....Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?”

What we often lack is the spirit of complete submission. If our childhood—I mean the childhood that comes of our regeneration and adoption into God’s family—if that childhood does not teach us this

submission, our common sense ought to teach us. We ought to feel how absurd it is that we who are but as a fly should fight with the flame, for we can but burn ourselves by such folly. We cannot possibly carry on successful contention against One who is so great, so good, so wise, as the infinitely glorious God.

I am going to speak to any who are in that contending state of mind, and also to others who perhaps may get into such a state unless they are warned of the danger to which they may be exposed. The ship that is on the stocks, and that has never been out to sea, is astonished when it is told that such-and-such a vessel leaks in the day of storm, but when that ship is itself launched, and gets out in the rough waters, it may come to wonder how the timbers resist the billows, and how it is that anything keeps afloat at all.

You who are young and inexperienced in the Christian life, and have never done business on great waters, may think yourselves competent to judge and to condemn the older ones for all their deficiencies and failures, but peradventure, when you get into the same seas yourselves, you may behave no better than they have done. Therefore, take warning beforehand, and learn from Solomon's words a lesson concerning yourselves, that you may never set yourselves in opposition to the Lord God, or compare yourselves with Him.

I. The first subject of consideration in our text is OUR LIFE WHICH WE DO KNOW, "Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth like a shadow?"

We do know something about our present life, and what we do know about it should humble us in the presence of God, for, first, *it is very short*. Observe that Solomon here says nothing about the "years" of our life, he only counts it by "*days*." He looks at our earthly existence as of so short a duration that if he were to reckon it by years, he could scarcely mention it, but if he only counts it by days, he may use the word "all," "all the days of his vain life."

And my brethren, we only live by the day, and scarcely as much as that. We are at least taught by our great Master to pray for daily bread, as if the nourishment was for a daily life which is always to be reckoned by the day. Yet is a day more than you and I can be sure of, for who knows what even a day may bring forth?

*"The rising morning can't assure
That we shall end the day;
For death stands ready at the door
To take our lives away."*

At the very best, we can only count our lives by days. I know that we are often tempted to reckon that we shall live to a ripe old age, but suppose we should be spared seventy or eighty years, what a short time the longest life is! Suppose we could live even as long as Methuselah did—which we cannot do—yet how soon it would be all over, and when we came to the end of it, we should say, with old Jacob, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." The fact is, the older a man grows, the shorter his life seems to be, and it was because Jacob was so old, and had seen so many days, that he called them few and evil.

Children and youths appear to have lived a long while, men seem to have lived only a short time, older men an even shorter period, but the oldest man reckons his days the shortest of all. The calculations about time are very singular, for length seems to turn to shortness. Well, then, since I am such an ephemeral creature, the insect of an hour, an aphid creeping on the bay leaf of existence, how dare I think of contending with Thee, my God, who wast long before the mountains were brought forth, and who wilt be when mountains are gone forever?

Our life, besides being very short, is *singularly uncertain*, "All the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow." We do not know that we shall have even another day of this life, while we are sitting in the pew, our life may end. We cannot tell that we shall see next Sabbath day, another Thursday

night may never return to us. Do not let us forget this fact, for if the thought be unpleasant to us, it is because there is something wrong within.

The child of God, when he is right with his Father, forgets the uncertainty, and remembers that all things are certain in the eternal purpose and decree of God, and that all changes are wisely ordained, and therefore the uncertainty causes him no distress. Yet should this truth make us live with much caution, and care, and tenderness, and watchfulness.

If I may have to appear before my Maker before the clock strikes the hour of midnight, let me set my house in order. Since I may soon die, and not live, since I may be even now trembling on the verge of the unseen world, let me be prepared for everything by making my calling and election sure through faith in Christ Jesus my Lord and Savior.

Yet again, my brethren, our life is not only short and uncertain, but while we have it, it is *singularly unsubstantial*. Many things which we gain for ourselves with much care are very unsatisfying. Have you never heard the rich man confess that it is so? I have heard it often, and have marked it well. I have looked over his spacious estate, I have sat in his sumptuous mansion, I have heard from him all about his success in business, yet he has added, and added solemnly (the old man spoke not mere words, but spoke it from his heart as he said it), "But what is it all? It yields me no satisfaction now that I am about to leave it."

Have you never heard the scholar, who has won many degrees, and stood at the head of his profession, declare that, the more he knew the less he felt that he knew? In his acquirement of knowledge there was much vexation of spirit, and he could sympathize with Solomon when he said that "much study is a weariness of the flesh." There is nothing truly substantial apart from God, the Everlasting One, who lives and abides forever.

Depend upon it, we ourselves shall in a short time prove the unsubstantiality of our own lives. Worms will be scrambling for our flesh, and if we have not Christ as our Savior, devils will be fighting for our soul, and we ourselves, unable to help ourselves, shall have passed away from all that we once thought real, with a groan because it was so false and so deceptive. "Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity."

Now, look you, my brethren, it ill becomes us, whose lives are so uncertain, and whose lives at the best are so unsubstantial, to begin to contend with Him in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. It were far better for us at once to submit ourselves to Him, and to learn that in Him we live, and move, and have our being, and that if we live and move at all, it is all derived life and motion.

It were well for us to also give the Lord all this poor life, be it what it may, to be used in His service, and to be spent for His glory. It will give us something comforting and cheering to look back upon, if we have submitted to Him, and laid hold upon His way of salvation in Christ Jesus. And if, by His grace, we have lived in Him, and with Him, and through Him, and to Him, it will be real life, life that is substantial, "the life that is life indeed."

The shadow, as it really is, will be a substance veiled in a shadowy form. It will have been worthwhile to have lived, for I reckon that angels envy men, after all. They have not our battlefields, they cannot have our victories. It is true that they have not our sins, but they can never know "Free grace and dying love" as we have known them. It is true that they have not to deplore wanderings such as ours, but neither have they been brought back upon the great Shepherd's shoulders, nor has there been music made for them as for sons that were dead but are alive again.

If we play well our part as Christians, they will think of us as Englishmen thought of old of their fellow-countrymen on a hard fought battlefield, they envied those who were privileged to fight battles that should bring to them such honor, and unfallen spirits might almost envy martyrs who can suffer for Christ even unto death, and men and women who, in their particular way, can contend against iniquity, and bear their witness for the truth and holiness of God, and for the precious blood of the Only-begotten in this sin-stricken world.

May God help us to lay our poor life, such as it is, at His dear feet! It is only a flower, but if the flower is once put into His hand, it will not fade. It is a frail vase, that is apt enough to break of its own weight, but if it is once presented to Him, He will preserve it, and give it a place of honor in His palace above.

If our poor life is given up to Christ, He will keep it for His own kingdom and glory. He will link it with His own immortality, and give to us eternal life like unto His own. Can we ever think of contending with Him? No, that can never be, rather let us come and creep beneath the shadow of His wings, let us be as little chicks that hide beneath the hen, and He shall cover us with His feathers, and under His wings shall we trust. His truth shall be our shield and buckler, we shall lose our nothingness in His eternal all, and we shall become great, blessed, happy, everlasting in our God, through Christ Jesus, His dear Son.

II. Now I lead you on, in the second place, to another consideration, which is in the text, **WHAT IS BEST FOR US IS NOT KNOWN TO US.**

It is ill for us to quarrel with God about His providence, for Solomon wisely asks, “Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?” We certainly do not know, as to temporals, what is best for us in this life, neither do we know even in higher matters, in spiritual experience, “what is good for man in this life.”

Suppose we ask the question, “Which is the better for a man in this life—*wealth or poverty?*”—what will be the answer? Wealth—the eye is dazzled with it, it brings many comforts and luxuries, yet there is a passage of Scripture as true now as when the Master first uttered it, “How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God.” Paul wrote to his son, Timothy, “They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”

Scripture all through represents the acquisition of wealth as involving very solemn responsibilities, and loading the soul with burdens. I do not doubt that there are some men who could never have sinned as they have done if they had not been successful in acquiring wealth. They could never have plunged into a damnation so deep as that which is theirs if they had not been able to indulge their lusts without stint. It must be a dreadful thing for a man with an evil heart to feel that he can get anything that his evil heart desires. Who knows, then, that wealth is a good thing?

Do any choose poverty? There have been some men who have willingly chosen extreme poverty as a help to grace, but I gravely question whether it has been a wise choice. There is as much to be said concerning the evils and the disadvantages of poverty as there is to be said on the other side. He that lacks bread, he that has children about him crying with hunger, he that shivers in the cold blast, is often tempted to envy, and to many other sins which he might not have committed if he had not been in that state.

It is not for you or for me to be able to balance the answer to this question, “Who knoweth what is good for man in this life—*wealth or poverty?*” There was a wise man who said, “Give me neither poverty nor riches,” and he seemed to have hit the golden mean. Yet I believe that there is many a man who has been helped to heaven by his poverty. At any rate, he has been incapable of committing some sins into which he might have fallen if the means had been in his hand. He could not destroy himself so effectually in certain ways for lack of the power to do it.

Brethren, it may be that some of you will get to heaven best with many talents or pounds entrusted to you, there are others of you who would not get to heaven at all that way, so you have not the talents or pounds committed to your charge. “Who knoweth what is good for man in this life—*wealth or poverty?*” We do not know, so we must leave the question unanswered.

Now take another question—that of *health or sickness*, “What is good for man in this life?” It seems at first that it must be good for a man to enjoy the best of health, and the most sprightly vigor, does it not? We all wish for it, and we are allowed to do so. Nobody thinks that sickness and disease can really be in themselves a blessing. Yet have I seen some gentle, holy, devout, matured spirits that could not

have come from any garden but that which was walled around with disease, and grief, and woe. I could quote many examples, and I have seen full many of them.

The graver's best art has been spent upon them, the graving tool has been very sharp, and the hammer has smitten them very terribly. They had never been such marvels of the Master's grace if it had not been for their sorrows. As for myself, personally, I confess that I owe more to the hammer, and the anvil, and the fire, and the forge, than I do to anything else. I have learned to bless the hand that has smitten me, I dare not invite its blows, but it has never come to me without being full of benedictions. I have seen more stars by night than by day, and I have realized more of my Master's love and grace in sorrow than I have ever done in joy.

Yet I doubt not that there are other spirits who have been brought nearer to God in their gladness, saints who, for very gratitude to God for their overflowing delights, and the mercies of this life, and the health of their bodies, have been drawn and bound more closely to their God. I am not going to decide the question, Solomon could not, so I will leave it unanswered, "Who knoweth what is good for man in this life—health or sickness?"

So is it with regard to *publicity or obscurity*. There are some persons, whose graces are best seen in public, and they minister for the good of others, they have to be thankful that God has placed them in a position where they are seen, for it has led them to watchfulness and carefulness. The vows of God have been upon them, and they have been helped in their way to heaven by the very responsibilities of their public position.

But sometimes, I have wished that I might be a violet, that I might shed my perfume in some lowly spot hidden by leaves. I would have liked, sometimes, to take my place in one of those pews, and listen to someone else telling out the story of redeeming love. There must be a great privilege about going in and out of your humble home unseen and unknown, one would escape the public criticism and the unkind envy of many, and the weights of responsibility that are enough to crush us. Yet I do not doubt that obscurity has its ills as well, and that many a man would fain escape from it. "Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?"

I used to be constantly told by people that they prayed for me that I might be kept humble. Oftentimes, I have thought to myself, "Dear souls, if you would but pray that I might be kept alive at all, and preserved from despair, I would be much more thankful," for if God sets a man up as high as the cross of St. Paul's, he would be safer there than if the devil set him in an easy chair. If God takes His Son, and sets Him on a pinnacle of the temple, He is safe there, and if He were to come down, and hide Himself away, He would not be any safer, nay, He would be in greater danger than He would be where His Father placed Him.

All depends upon your being where God puts you. Any man is safe if he is where God would have him to be, and if he trembles for his own safety, and clings to the Strong for strength, but those who think that their position gives them immunity from danger are in peril already from their fancied security. "Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life—publicity or obscurity?"

So I might go on with many other matters, and say that it is very difficult, indeed, impossible, to judge which is better. What, then? I think that we had better be content to remain just as we are, and be satisfied and thankful to be where God has placed us in His providence. Who knoweth what is good for us? God does, and that is better than for us to know.

Then let us enjoy what God has given us. Make the best of your position by enjoying every mercy that God has bestowed upon you, not fretting because He has not given you certain other things, but rejoicing that He has given you what He has bestowed. And use whatever you have to His glory. Instead of repining that you have not three, four, five, or ten talents, use the one that you have, and put it out to interest for your Lord.

Do not sigh for another place, as so many do, they are hoping, wishing, and longing to rise in the world, and if they do not get what they hope for, they will be very grieved and greatly depressed. Rise, if you can, but if, with all your efforts, you do not rise, thank God all the same. You do not know what is

best for you, that higher place might have been a snare to you, so be thankful to be where you are, and sigh not for that position which God has denied you.

Neither dote on the things that you have, for they will all soon pass away. We are travelers, and the world is but like an inn, if our room be uncomfortable, we shall be up and away in the morning. We are soldiers on the battlefield, if the field be rough and stony, let us fight the battle out, and win the victory, then we shall not mind what the soil is on which we stand!

Remember that, whatever you set your heart upon is probably a bad thing for you, if you make up your mind that you must have a certain thing, you have made an idol of it already, and if the idol should really become yours, it would bring a curse with it. Whatever we sin to gain, whatever we sin to keep, must be bad for us, but whatever our heavenly Father sends to us must be right for us to have, and we may well be content to let His unerring wisdom supply what is lacking through our ignorance.

I believe that the same question might be asked *concerning Christian experience*, “Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?” It must be good to be full of high joys—to rise to the loftiest heights of holiness and blessedness, must it not? Yes, yes, but it may be good to go down into the very deeps, to know the plague of your own heart, and to feel the scourging of your Father’s rod. “Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?” A mixed experience may be better than one uniform level either of height or depth.

I have sometimes half envied those brethren who are evenly the same in temperament, never going up and never going down, but I am not sure whether it is not better both to go up and to go down. I have had a taste of both experiences, and if I could change to the uniform even tenor of my way, I would not dare to make the change.

I feel about this matter very much as the old woman did when she had been long sick, and one asked her, “Don’t you wish to die?” She answered, “I wish the Lord to do with me as He wills.” “But,” said the friend, “suppose the Lord put it to you whether you would live or whether you would die?” “Then,” she replied, “I would put it back to Him, and ask Him to choose for me, for I would not want to have the responsibility of the choice.”

Let us try to put ourselves into God’s hands wholly, spirit, soul, and body, and to beg Him to do just what He wills with us, since we are quite clear that we do not know how to take care of ourselves.

III. Lastly, the text mentions another form of our ignorance, and it is this, WHAT SHALL BE AFTER US IS NOT KNOWN TO US, “for who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?”

The question may mean, “Who can tell a man *what he will yet go through in this life?*” He is now well-to-do, he is prosperous, he is healthy, but who can tell him what is yet to come to him? No one, therefore, let not the rich man glory in the wealth which may take to itself wings and fly away. Let not the man who is honored by his fellows reckon that the applause of men is any more substantial than a vapor. Let not any man glory in what he now possesses, for who can tell what may yet come to him, or be taken from him?

But I think that the text has its main bearing on *what will happen after death*. That we must leave in the Lord’s hands, it is not for us to know what will be done when we are called away from the earth. Many are plotting and planning to settle what shall come to pass after they are gone, yet much of their scheming is in vain.

Somebody else will take that house which you have had such trouble to build, strangers will tramp along those passages, and laugh in those rooms, and know nothing about you. Your sons, whom you have brought up with the idea that they shall succeed you, may die before you do. You may have your estates entailed, as men try to do, and the chains of the law may seem to be riveted fast, but accident and the corrosion of time may bring them all to nothing.

“Who can tell a man what shall be after him?” I cannot tell what shall happen when my work is done—what shall happen here, who shall come here, where these people will go, what shall happen to

the College, what shall become of the Orphanage—all these questions are proposed to me full often, and friends ask, “What is to be done when you are gone?”

Well, dear friends, if you could tell me what will be done, I wish you would not, for I do not want to know, what has that to do with us? Are we not to leave the future as we leave the present, in the hand of God? And will not all be well? The Lord did very well without us before we were born, and He will do very well without us after we are dead. I will not say that He will not notice our departure, for He notices everything, but it will be an almost inconsiderable item in the innumerable details of His universal government.

So, with regard to *our present service*, let us just feel this, “It is not for me to be worried because of what happens to me, and to quarrel with God about it.” God sees the end from the beginning. He takes in the whole run of things, and it may be for His glory that some of us should work on throughout our whole life with very little success, because He intends that the “work” should appear unto us, and the “glory” to our children.

He may mean this age to be a time of sowing, and the next age to be a time of reaping. He may mean that this century may be spent in compassing the walls of the Jericho of sin, and that, on a sudden, there will come a day which He has ordained for the tumbling down of every castle and every portion of that vast wall. It is for you and me to know that God sees further than we do, and not to begin to measure His work with our inch line. Just leave it all with Him, you who are troubled either about the present or the future.

As for you who have no God with whom you can leave either the present or the future, you have cause to worry yourselves, and you may well do so, for you have no helper. You have no God to live with, and no God to die with, no God for the day of judgment, no God to help you when you are driven from His presence and from the glory of His power. You have turned your back on Him, one day He will turn His back on you. You may well be afraid, you may well let care gnaw at your very hearts, for again I remind you that you have no helper. Oh, that you were wise, that you would seek God in Christ Jesus, and be reconciled to Him! May His infinite grace bring you to this blessed condition!

But it is mainly to His children that I have been speaking, and to you who believe, I hope I need no longer say, “Let us joy in our Father’s love and care, and not want to know what is before us, but be content to believe, not want to judge, but be satisfied to leave all with Him.” Thus, while we live, we shall praise His name, and when we die, we shall still go on praising His name forever and ever. I feel as if I could not help ending my discourse with that verse which I have often quoted before—

*“All that remains for me
Is but to love and sing,
And wait until the angels come
To bear me to the King.”*

God bless you, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—757, 39, 626

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 147

Verse 1. *Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.*

“It is good,” that is to say, it is a thing that ought to be done, it is a right thing “to sing praises unto our God.” “It is good,” that is to say, it is profitable, it is beneficial to our own hearts. Prayer is

refreshing, but praise is even more so, for there may be, and there often is, in prayer, the element of selfishness, but praise rises to a yet higher level. Prayer and praise, together make up spiritual respiration, we breathe in the air of heaven when we pray, and we breathe it out again when we praise.

“It is good to sing praises to our God.” What a mercy it is that it is pleasant, too! There are many things that are good that are not pleasant, and many more things that are pleasant that are not good, but here is a holy duty which is also a heavenly pleasure. It is the bliss of heaven to praise God, let us anticipate that bliss by praising Him now, “for it is pleasant.” And then there is a third commendation, “and praise is comely.” That is to say, it is beautiful, it is a good thing in its right place, it is according to the natural and spiritual fitness of things that God should be praised. In God’s sight, one of the most beautiful things in the world is a grateful heart, “it is pleasant; and praise is comely.”

2. *The LORD doth build up Jerusalem:*

There is something for which to praise Him. When the Jews came back from captivity, and found their beautiful city all in ruins, God helped them to build it up again, so they sang, “The LORD doth build up Jerusalem.” We may sing the same sacred song, for the psalmist does not say, “The LORD *hath* built,” but “The LORD *doth* build up Jerusalem,” He is going on to build it, the Divine Architect’s plan of salvation is still being carried out, the great Master Builder is still placing stone upon stone in the wondrous courses of His election of grace, “The LORD doth build up Jerusalem.” O Lord, build up *this* part of the wall!

2. *He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.*

Those that were far away, captives in Babylon, He brought back again. God has a long arm, which He is casting round His outcast chosen ones, for He means to gather them all to Himself. He has an elect redeemed people, and they are scattered throughout the whole world, but even Caiaphas knew enough of the truth to declare that Christ “should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.”

3. *He healeth the broken in heart,—*

He does it still, mark you, for the verb is in the present tense, “He *healeth* the broken in heart.” These are two of God’s great occupations, to gather outcasts, and to heal broken hearts.”

3. *And bindeth up their wounds.*

Oh, what a blessed God He is, thus to interest Himself in the sorrows of mankind, to give His infinite mind and heart to this wondrous work of healing the wounds of our lost humanity! You see, it is thus that the Lord builds up Jerusalem, the two verses are the complement of each other. “The LORD doth build up Jerusalem”—with what? Outcasts, and broken hearts, and wounded spirits. Many of the stones that God puts into His great temple are such as men would exclude. Broken hearts and bruised spirits, that look as if they never could have any strength in them, God uses in building up His church.

What a wonderful leap it is from this third verse to the next!

4. *He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.*

Yet is there as much grandeur and glory in His compassion as in His omniscience. To bind up wounds, is as God-like a work as to count the stars, God does both, taking perhaps a greater delight in the first than in the second. There is not a star in the Church’s firmament to which God has not given the light, He knows the number of His shining ones, and He keeps their light burning, their names are all in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

5-6. *Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. The LORD lifteth up the meek:*

That is the Lord’s usual way, those that are down, He raises, but—

6. *He casteth the wicked down to the ground.*

This is what God is always doing, uplifting and overturning, putting people and things in their right places.

7. *Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp to our God:*

False gods have been served with discordant yells and cries of agony, but our God is to be worshipped with songs of thanksgiving. Think not that He desires you to come before Him with groans and moans, He will hear them if they are sincere, but He would have you raise your hearts to something higher and better.

8. *Who covereth the heaven with clouds.*

Little children do not think that is a matter for gratitude, they are sorry to see the clouds and the rain, but wise men know how fraught with blessing are the clouds God sends. It is even so in providence and grace.

8. *Who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.*

For every blade of grass, we ought to thank and praise the Lord. If he be a benefactor who makes two blades of grass grow where only one grew before, what a Benefactor must He be who makes all the blades of grass grow, without whom there would be none at all! Even on the mountains, where it may be that we have no cattle, yet there are wild creatures that must be fed, so the Lord makes the grass to grow there.

We are often selfish, and we talk of things as being useless if they are of no use to us. Are there no other living things, then, but men, and is God only to care for those animals which most of all rebel against Him? Let us think differently of this matter, and bless the Lord even for the grass that grows on the waste places, where only the chamois or the wild gazelle will feed, for they, too, have their purpose to fulfill in God's sight.

9. *He giveth the beast his food, and the young ravens which cry.*

Unclean creatures though they be, God feeds them. We have known people have only one bird in a cage, and yet forget to feed it, but God has myriads of birds, millions of beasts, and fishes innumerable, yet they are not starved. The commissariat of God never fails, my soul, will He not feed you? If He hears ravens, will He not hear your cry?

10. *He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man.*

Man boasts of his strength, and he looks at his fine horse, and glories in its strength, but God has something higher and better than sinew and muscle to boast about.

11. *The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him,—*

That is His joy. As a man is proud of his horse, or of the muscles which enable him to run swiftly, so God takes delight in those that fear Him—

11. *In those that hope in his mercy.*

These are His jewels, these are His glory.

12-14. *Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders,—*

What a blessing this is, not only in a nation, but in a church! If you were ever members of a church where they seemed to quarrel punctually once every month, you would soon be sorry to be a professor of religion at all, but to live in a church where brotherly love rules, this is a thing for which to praise the name of the Lord. "He maketh peace in thy borders"—

14. *And filleth thee with the finest of the wheat.*

There is generally peace where there is plenty. Dogs fight when there are few bones, and when God's people are well fed, they do not so often quarrel with one another. If they are fed with the finest of the wheat, there will be peace in their borders.

15-16. *He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly. He giveth snow like wool.*

Light and fleecy, it covers the plants and protects them from the cold, the snow is a kind of garment to protect them from the frost.

16. *He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes.*

You must often have been reminded of white ashes as you looked at the hoarfrost in the early morning.

17. *He casteth forth his ice like morsels:*

Hailstones, like little pieces of bread, broken off and scattered abroad—

17. *Who can stand before his cold?*

In all this, the Lord is really fattening the soil, and preparing food for man and beast in the coming spring and summer.

18. *He sendeth out his word, and melteth them:*

He has only to speak a word, and the ice, the snow, the hoarfrost, and every sign of winter will disappear, and we shall begin to swelter in the heats of summer.

18. *He causeth his wind to blow,—*

That is all—

18. *And the waters flow.*

Ice saws and axes could not set free the frozen rivers, but His wind, the very breath from the mouth of God, does it at once.

19. *He showeth his word to Jacob, his statutes and his judgments to Israel.*

And we have come into the place of Jacob and Israel, even we who have believed, for Abraham is the father of believers and we are his spiritual seed according to the promise. So we have to bless God that He has showed unto us His Word, His statutes and His judgments.

20. *He hath not dealt so with any nation:*

There are no other people who know the Lord as God's people do, and remember, they constitute one nation. We are Englishmen, perhaps, or Americans, that is a skin-deep distinction, but if we are in Christ, we are one family, we are of that one peculiar nation which, all over the world, is distinct from every other nation.

20. *And as for his judgments, they have not known them.*

If they have been left in the dark, let us do all we can to carry or send the light of the Gospel to them, and as we think of the great things God has done for us, let us join in a joyful Hallelujah, as the Psalm ends—

20. *Praise ye the LORD.*

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.