

INQUIRING OF GOD

NO. 2996

A SERMON

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON

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*“And it came to pass after this, that David inquired of the LORD,
saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?”*

2 Samuel 2:1

YOU perceive, dear friends, that, although David knew that he was anointed to be king over Israel, yet he would not take a step towards his rightful position without first asking guidance from God, and moreover, he was not content with a general direction, but wanted to have a particular and special indication as to where he was to go. It was not enough for God to say to him, “Go up,” he wants to know precisely to which town of Judah he shall go!

Nor, mark you, was this an exception to David's usual habit. From his youth up, he had been accustomed to ask the Lord's direction in all cases of difficulty. When he fled from Saul, and went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest, Doeg told Saul that Ahimelech inquired of the Lord for David. It was not enough for David that he had Goliath's sword, he must also have guidance from God. When he was in the town of Keilah, which he had rescued from the Philistines, after he had twice inquired of the Lord whether he should do so, he asked whether the men of Keilah would deliver him up to Saul, and by means of the oracular response which he obtained from God, he was able to make good his escape.

Afterwards, when David had become king over Israel in Hebron, before he fought with the Philistines, he inquired of the Lord, “Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand?” The Lord's answer was favorable, and David gained a great victory, but when the Philistines came up again, David did not go out to fight with them until he had once more inquired of the Lord, and then it was that God gave him that memorable answer, “And let it be when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself; for then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the hosts of the Philistines.”

David was a man who always wanted to see God's finger pointing out the right road, to hear God's voice saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it,” and who never seemed to be satisfied unless he could hear the sound of his Master's feet close behind him, or see a clear indication that his Master was just in front of him, or walking by his side.

I hold up David to you as a model for your imitation in this respect, although I am going to leave David, and to talk more generally of the duty of inquiring of God as to what we shall do when we are in any difficulty, and indeed, of inquiring of Him at all times, whether we are in difficulty or not.

I. My first remark is, that TO INQUIRE OF THE LORD, AND TO SEEK GUIDANCE AT HIS HANDS, IS THE DUTY OF ALL CHRISTIANS.

This may be inferred from God's relationship to them. God is their Father, and they are His children, minors, who have not yet come of age. When a son is of age, it is respectful, and often very prudent, for him still to consult his experienced sire, but the child still in his minority should venture upon nothing of importance without first going to tell his father, and if that child be beset by many false friends, by those who would mislead and ruin him, it will be his privilege as well as his duty to be often running to his parent, and saying, “Father, what shall I do in this matter? What is true, and what is not, Show me what you would have me to do.”

If God be our Father, we are His children, and if we do not consult Him, surely we are but sorry children. We lose a great blessing, and incur no small guilt, if, professing to be the sons and daughters of our Father who is in heaven, we never ask Him to direct our way.

We also talk of God as our Shepherd, and an important part of a shepherd's duty is that of guiding his flock. What would you think if, in the East, where the shepherd leads the way, the sheep should all think themselves wise enough to find the road alone? Why, the flocks would soon be broken up, and the pastoral relationship would become mere farce. If God be your Shepherd, follow Him. Often say to Him, "Show me the footsteps of the flock." Desire always to hear the Shepherd's voice, for this is the mark of God's sheep, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me," How can you call God your Shepherd if you do not follow Him, and never consult Him?

Do you not know also, dearly beloved, that Christ calls us His spouse? But what sort of spouse would she be who never entrusted any of her secrets to her husband, and who asked no counsel of him even when she came into dire distress. There may be some women who are wiser than their husbands, and who can give advice rather than require to ask it, but it is not so in this case, for never did any other husband have so weak and foolish a spouse as Jesus Christ has. In fact, her only wisdom is to confess her folly, and to throw herself into her Husband's arms, and cry—

"Lead me all my journey through."

What can be our reason for calling God our Lord if we refuse to consult Him? Do not even the heathen always conclude that a god is to be consulted? Though their lying oracles have deluded them, yet have they always been right in the idea that the very thought of godhead implied guidance, and shall we turn away from JEHOVAH who really can guide us? While the heathen look to stocks of wood and stone, shall we confide in human oracles, and neglect to consult God who knoweth all things?

I find *an argument for this truth in the offices of the Lord Jesus Christ*. What is our blessed Lord to us? He is a Prophet, but how can He be a Prophet to us if we never go to Him? What means the sacred mantle that He wears if He is never consulted? Is not His office a mere name, an empty title, an office which has no value, if we call Him Prophet, and yet never seek His face, nor say to Him, "What is thy way that I am to take? Be pleased to direct me in it."

He is a Priest, but is it not part of a priest's duty to use the Urim and the Thummim upon his breastplate, and to show to those who go to him what is the proper path for them to take? But how can I call Christ my Priest if I never consult Him? He is neither Prophet nor Priest to me if I choose my own way, or cut out my own path for myself.

In one place, at least, Christ is called a Counsellor, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." But how is He your Counsellor if you never consult Him? I cannot think that Christ takes upon Himself empty names and titles. I read, in a Preface to our Bible, "James, by the grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland." There is an empty title, for he was never king of France, though he was called so.

But Christ has no empty titles. He is called King because He reigns, and he is called Counsellor because He gives advice to His people and pleads their cause. If you would not, therefore, make out Christ's offices to be sinecures, and His glorious titles to be but empty words, go and consult Him, for thus you shall make glad His heart, and magnify His name, and prove your love to Him.

But dear friends, there is an argument which comes closer home than this. *Our own character should teach us the duty of inquiring of the Lord*. If you know yourself aright, you know that you are very far from being wise. If I understand myself aright, I was born like the wild asses' colts, with strong passions and much willfulness, but with no knowledge, or experience, and needing much guidance for the whole of life. What is the experience of the most experienced of men worth? I can conceive that, to the eyes of God, the greatest wisdom of Solomon was the greatest folly, and that the experience of Job was but as

the knowledge of a day. One of Job's friends said, "We are but of yesterday, and know nothing," and when we think we know the most, we generally know the least.

You have probably noticed that good men usually fail just where they think they are strongest, ay, and where they really are strongest. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, yet did he fail in righteousness when his sons saw him in a state of drunkenness. Moses was exceedingly meek, yet did he lose his temper, and say, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" Look, too, at Job, one who excelled in patience, yet he failed in patience.

And you and I will find that the devil will carry our hearts by storm, not where we think the walls are weak, or the fortress is dismantled, but just where the flag waves defiantly over the strongest and loftiest part of our bastion, for Satan delights to pull down our lofty things, of which we are so proud, just as God loves to pull down the lofty things of sin. See to it then, Christian, since you are so weak, and since you cannot see a day, nor a minute before you, that you often inquire of your God. Methinks, too, your past indiscretions, and the distresses into which your willfulness has driven you, might teach you henceforth to wait only upon God.

I shall give only one other argument here, because I need not prove what all admit, but what so few practice. *The Christian should inquire of his God for his own avowed object in life.* We profess, though we do not carry it out as we ought, that we are living for God. Is there a man living who could truly say, with Paul, "For to me to live is Christ"? I believe there are hundreds and thousands of such men, but I do not believe that anything like one-half of the professing Christians of today know what that text really means, "For to me to live is Christ." If they truthfully wrote their own commentaries upon it, many of them would say, "We cannot say that, we never could be so enthusiastic or so fanatical as to say that," and they would almost as soon give up their profession of Christianity as attempt to carry out that text as it ought to be carried out.

Yet this is what we profess, and if we profess to live for God's glory, and for the extension of Christ's kingdom, how can we do it except in God's strength, and how will God give us His strength without also giving us His wisdom with which to use it? A man clothed with divine energy, unaccompanied by divine wisdom, would be one of the most dangerous persons in the whole world. A man, who can speak so as to move the multitude, and to stir the souls of men, is a very dangerous person unless piety fills his heart, and the grace of God controls his tongue.

Suppose that man to have divine power given to him, as Judas had in a certain sense, but without the wisdom of God to guide him, and we might as well have a devil on earth as have such a man as that. No, if we would succeed in attaining our avowed object in life, the glorifying of God, we must inquire of Him.

II. Now I come to a second remark, which is this. **IF CHRISTIANS ASK GOD TO GUIDE THEM IN EVERYTHING THEY DO, THEY OUGHT TO SEE TO IT THAT THEY NEVER DO ANYTHING ABOUT WHICH THEY CANNOT ASK GOD'S GUIDANCE.**

This truth comes closely home to some people. For instance, *unlawful pleasures are manifestly forbidden to the Christian.* Those which the worldling may indulge in without any very great injury to himself are forbidden to the true Christian, because he cannot inquire of the Lord about them. I have heard of people who say that they can go to the theater, and yet be Christians. Well now, I should like somebody to write a form of prayer to be used by Christians in theatres, something to this effect—"O Lord, lead me not into temptation, but be pleased to bless the play tonight to my soul's welfare, grant that, if it be thy will that I should die here, I may enter into eternal life, having gone from the pleasures of this life to the pleasures that are to be hereafter!"

If I were to write such a prayer as that, you would say, "Oh, that is shocking! It is shocking for anybody even to think of praying there!" Ah, it is shocking—not shocking to think of praying, but shocking to go where you dare not pray! Should a Christian ever be anywhere where he would be ashamed to die? I heard a lady once say that religion ought to be confined to places of worship, and that it ought not to be talked about anywhere else. So I suggested to her that we ought to have our places of

worship made larger, for, of course, people would want religion when they came to die, so they had better die where religion would be in its proper place!

A Christian knows that he should not go to such places of amusement as worldlings frequent, they may go without any very great mischief, but he may not. He could not feed on the fare that is provided there, for it is not to his taste, and moreover, he would not go there because he could not expect to have communion with Christ there and he could not ask God's blessing upon his going there.

There are many amusements in the world, and you can always tell which are right and which are wrong by this text. You may do anything upon which you can ask God's blessing, but if you cannot ask God's blessing upon it, have nothing to do with it. If there are any things about which you have any doubt, leave them alone. Another man, who has no doubt about the matter, may do without sin what you must not do if you have any doubt about it. If you feel, in your conscience, that you can expect the Lord's blessing, and maintain communion with Christ in what you do, then you may do it, but if not, it is at your peril that you will do it.

Then, there are *unlawful avocations in which Christians must not be engaged*. I could not ask the Lord's blessing if I were selling gin and other spirituous liquors all day long. I do not know how some men may feel, but if I had pocketed the fools' pence, I could not pray, "Lord, be pleased to guide me where I shall open the next devil's-house, and set traps to catch poor drinking men." I should expect, if I went to ask God's guidance about that matter, that I should receive a very sharp rebuke from Him for having the impudence to ask Him about any such thing.

There are also other trades and employments which you must not touch, as you know that they are so beset with evil customs that you cannot ask the Lord's blessing upon them. I am sure that man up in the gallery did not ask the Lord to bless him when he was taking his shutters down this morning, and as he could not ask God's blessing upon it, he ought not to have done it.

There are some of you here who have your shops open still, your daughter hates the business, but she is chained to the counter now while you are here. How can you come to the house of God, and yet violate the day of God! Have you any conscience, or have you drugged it to sleep? If you should have your house full of silver and gold gained by such trading as that, it will be a curse to you, and a curse to your children, and to your children's children. It is a curse to have that which has not God's blessing upon it, and ill-gotten gains never can have it.

Old Hard-fists cannot ask God's blessing upon his action when he takes his brother by the throat, and cries, "Pay me what thou owest, even to the uttermost farthing," And the man, who grinds down the poor needlewomen who work for him, cannot ask God's blessing, neither can the man who pays his workpeople barely enough to get a crust of bread, spread out his money, and say, "Thank God that He has given me wealth!" No, the curse of the Almighty rests upon them, and God will one day avenge the blood of those whom they have cruelly put to death that they might increase their ill-gotten gains.

I pray you, members of this church, and members of Christ's body everywhere, touch nothing upon which you cannot ask God's blessing. The moment you perceive that God cannot be consulted about a thing, turn your back upon it, and say, "Let those who mean to damn their souls do the devil's work, but a Christian must not and will not touch it."

I am aware that, in saying these things, I may strike some persons who are engaged in trades which they conduct lawfully, my censure is not intended for those persons who, though in a trade which I might not choose, yet do their best to conduct it honorably. Still, I would make the censure as sweeping as it ought to be, for there are far too many men merely for gain following that which they know is damnable and must in the end ruin their own souls.

I think this rule may help to guide you through life—Do nothing upon which you cannot ask God's blessing. Young woman, if you can ask the Lord's blessing upon your contemplated marriage, you may enter upon it. Young man, if you can ask the Lord's blessing upon the taking of that new shop, you may do it. You, who have plenty of business already, and who now give some of your time to God's cause,

but who know that, if you take that next shop, you cannot continue to do so, ought not to give up the service of God's house in order to increase your worldly business.

I am not always sorry when men do not get on in business as fast as they wish, for I recollect the case of good Jehoshaphat, who "made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber," and a great mercy that they were, for if they had gone, and had brought the gold to the king, I do not know what Jehoshaphat might have done with it.

Was it not Mr. Cecil, who, on hearing that one of his friends had come in for a great deal of money, went to sympathize with him, and to pray for him "under the trying circumstances"? Doubtless, the more a man has, the more is he tempted not to use it rightly, and while it is, in some senses, a high privilege to have wealth, yet it involves such solemn responsibilities that a man should never have it without inquiring of God how he can rightly use it.

III. Now, thirdly, THIS DIVINE GUIDANCE IS AS NECESSARY NOW AS EVER IT WAS, AND IT IS NECESSARY IN ALL THINGS.

Some people say, "Yes, we believe that the Lord's guidance would be a great blessing to us, and that it is our duty to seek it, but how can we get it? There is no priest to whom we can go for direction, and we cannot come to our minister and say, 'What shall we do?' He is not able to give us the infallible answer we need." Your minister does not wish to do it, for he thinks he is better employed in preaching the Gospel to you and giving you infallible directions concerning your immortal souls.

I certainly do not approve of the practice by which some people say they can tell the Lord's will by just opening the Bible and noticing the first text which catches their eye. I know that Mr. Wesley frequently practiced this plan, but like some other good men, he had his foibles, and I know that others have imitated him, but I should think myself no more justified in seeking guidance in that way than I should in shuffling a pack of cards, I could no more expect to be guided by a text of Scripture, picked out in that haphazard style, than by a Norwood gipsy. No, no, we are above all that kind of thing.

How, then, does God guide his people? Well, there are several ways which are very clear, and the first is, *God guides them by His Word*. I will suppose there is a young woman here who is contemplating marriage, and she wants to know whether it would be right. She turns to her Bible, and she finds this text, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." The young man in question is an unbeliever, so she does not need to turn to any other passage of Scripture, for this one is decisive. If she really wants to know God's will, here it is, and she could not have it more clearly even if God were to flash it in lightning across the sky or roll it out in tones of thunder.

This is the way plainly marked out for her, and I would that she and all other young Christians—before they ruin their prospects, before they bring upon themselves lifelong misery—would hear the voice of God saying to them, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." The case is as plain as possible. Nobody need be consulted. You need not go to friends, you need not come to me and ask, "What ought I to do?" If you are disobedient, and are afterwards made miserable, it is nothing more than you ought to expect. I single that case out because it happens to be one that often comes up, especially in a large congregation like the present, with so many in it who are young, and here, I say, God's Word becomes a faithful and unerring guide.

I have heard of a poor Christian man, who was in great difficulty, and one day, when his wife and children were almost starving, and were shivering with cold, and he had nothing with which to make a fire, the devil said to him, "Your rich neighbor has a good stack of wood, and you may go, and take some of it, for the Bible says that, 'all things are yours.'" He was going to take it, but all of a sudden, that old command came into his mind, "Thou shalt not steal." That was quite enough for him, he did not need anything else, he turned back at once, for God's Word was to him a sufficient guide.

The next guidance is, *our own spiritual profit and God's glory*. You want to know whether you shall move to such-and-such a town. Well, is there a good Evangelical minister there? Can you hear the Word to profit in that town? If not, unless there are some very strong reasons why you should go there, you ought to remain where your soul can be best profited. A man would often be better off with less earnings

where he could hear a faithful minister than with more money in a place where the Gospel is not preached. Ask the question, too, "Can I serve God there?" If you cannot, what right have you to go there? If you have to give up a sphere of usefulness, and there is no other sphere open to you, then pause. You will always know which way to go if you have this compass in your hand, for it will always point you to the right pole, and if you use it, you will always be guided to the paths of righteousness—can I serve God there? Will my soul be in a more healthy state if I go there?

Then another way of guidance is *by the leadings of divine providence*. This is nothing like so clear as the rules I have already given you, because, when you want to do a thing, you can always find a providence which seems to be in favor of it. It is remarkable how many ministers leave salaries of £200 a year, in places where they might still have been comfortable and useful, to go where they would get £250 a year, and they have said it was a providence, and it is equally remarkable how very few of them ever move from £250 to £200.

I have but little faith in "providence" of this sort, I believe in divine providence, but I do not always believe in what people speak of as providence. They say, "There is such-and-such a thing, I know it is not quite right, but I would like to have it, and then, you see, there is so-and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so, and—it looks quite like a providence." Nonsense! God's providence never permits you to do wrong, but when you wish to act for the glory of God, a path cleared before you and an open door will help you to feel that you are being infallibly led by the providence and the Word of God, and by His Spirit in your heart.

Beside this, I think that *young persons would do well to seek advice from experienced and consistent Christian friends*. By stating their difficulty, it may be that God's servant will be helped to tell them just what they need, and often, you may receive, through the lips of a preacher, who knows nothing of your case, guidance from God. Many and many a time have I known this to be the case, God has told the preacher what to say about a certain person's case although he did not even know who the person was to whom he was unconsciously speaking, and who was guided aright by what the preacher was moved to say.

Sometimes, too, but rarely, *God guides us by very vivid impressions*. I have seen so much of people who have been impressed this way, and that way, and the other way, that I do not believe in impressions except in certain cases. I was once in conversation with two friends, one of whom was guided by his judgment, while the other was swayed by impressions, and I could not help noting that the man who was guided by impressions was, as such people always will be, "unstable as water." If I am impressed in one way one day, I may be impressed in another way the next day, so impressions are unreliable guides.

There was a young man, who was impressed with the idea that he ought to preach for me one Lord's day, but as I was not impressed to let him do so, it stood over, and probably will continue to stand over for some little time. He had no gifts of speech, but he thought his impression was quite sufficient. When I receive a similar impression, the revelation will be a proper one, and you will have the pleasure of listening to his voice, but certainly not before that.

Occasionally, impressions do guide a man right. A Quaker, one night, could not sleep, and he had a very strong impression that he must get up and saddle and mount his horse. He did so, and rode along the streets, his horse's hoofs noisily clattering in the silence of the night. He did not know where he was to go, but there was a light in one house, and something seemed to say to him, "This is the house to which you are to go."

He dismounted, and knocked at the door, and a man came down, and asked why he was there at that time of night. "Perhaps, friend," answered the Quaker, "thou canst tell me, for I do not know, but I have been moved to come here." "I can tell you indeed," said the man, with much emotion, and he took him upstairs, and showed him a short halter with which he was about to hang himself when the Quaker came to his door.

Such strong impressions are not to be despised, and I have no doubt that highly-spiritual minds do become like the photographer's sensitive plate and do receive impressions. What another man may be a fool for talking of, such men may truly speak of, for God does sometimes reveal His will in that way.

IV. And now, to close, let me say that, **WHEN WE HAVE RECEIVED COUNSEL FROM GOD ABOUT ANYTHING, LET US ACT ACCORDING TO IT.**

If you go and ask God about anything, do not, as some people do when they consult their minister, make up your mind beforehand as to what you will do, but having consulted your God, and learned what is His will, mind that you do it. If all the devils in hell stand in your way, mind that you do it. If friends oppose, and foes assail you, still do it. There may be a point on which I differ from you, but I shall do what I believe is right, and shall not hesitate, whoever may oppose. When God moves us, we are not to be turned aside by any man's word, or by a thousand men's words. If once we have "Thus saith the Lord," we must and will go on, over the mountains and through the seas if God so wills it.

I will finish with an instance of what I mean. There was a missionary, who is still living, who had given himself to God's cause, and had gone out without purse or scrip, simply depending on the bounty of heaven. He was called, in the providence of God, to go in a vessel to one of the guano islands, where a great number of ships were congregated to take away that valuable manure. He found very little opportunity of serving his Master for some time until a mutiny broke out on the island. The mariners rebelled, they fought with the men employed in moving the manure, and the most fearful scenes ensued, the men being drunk from morning till night.

The ship-masters did not know what to do, but at last they sent for one of Her Majesty's men-of-war. It came, and when the captain had landed with the marines, he told the mutineers that, unless they submitted at once, he would fire upon them. They appeared to be very humble and seemed to be subdued at once. The vessel could not stay long, for she was looking out for slavers on the African coast, and as soon as the ship was out of sight, the mutineers were as wild and ferocious as they were before.

There was one man there—no very extraordinary man in his own esteem—he sits behind me now, he was the missionary of whom I spoke. He felt in his heart that he had a call from God to speak to those men, so he begged the captain to send him on shore in a boat, but the captain said he was not such a fool, for the missionary would be killed directly. He asked again, but received a similar refusal. He found out another captain, and persuaded him to plead his cause, and at last, after much talking, it was agreed that he should go, though the captain said, "You will surely not go and preach the Gospel to those devils, they ought to be hung, every one of them."

The missionary said that he felt that God had called him to do it, and he would go. So he was rowed ashore, and down came these fiends in human shape to meet him. He felt some little apprehension, but he was sure that he was doing the right thing, he had asked counsel of God, and he knew that God would help him, so he pulled out of his pocket a Bethel flag. The great, rough fellows came crowding round him, but holding up the Bethel flag, he began talking to them as if he had been the coolest and most collected man in the world, though I expect his heart was beating fast all the time.

He said, "My good fellows, they tell me that you are like devils, that you won't work, and that it is no use for me to come to talk to you, but I believe that some of you had pious mothers, who used to teach you the Gospel, and I know that, when you were in England, you were not what you are now, besides, I have heard you sing your songs, and I should like you to sing with me now." Then he gave out the hymn—

*"O God of Bethel by whose hand
Thy people still are fed;
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Hast all our fathers led."*

After they had sung the hymn, he went on talking to them, and when some big fellows, a little way off, looked as though they were meditating mischief, he pointed to them, and said, "If any of you

attempt to disturb me, there are plenty of good fellows round me who will stop you, so you had better come, and listen to what I have to say," The man came near, and he preached to them with fervency and power, and his Master's blessing was upon him, for the next day, all the men were at their work again, and many of them were ready to do as they had done in their better days, and what Her Majesty's ship, with so many guns, could not do, the poor preacher's word did, for it turned the lions into lambs.

Whenever any of you have anything to do which you know is right, do it. After you have inquired of God, do not stop to consult friends, but go and do it. Take your sling and your stone, and in God's name, sling the stone into the giant's forehead, and like David, come back victorious, for that shall be your best answer to those who would persuade you not to do it. Never ask God to guide you, and then, when He says, "This is the way," stand still, and say, "That way is too hard, too stern, too difficult, I will not walk in it." Go forward, for, if hell itself were before you, God would divide it even as He divided the Red Sea for His ancient people. Only have faith in God, for "all things are possible to him that believeth."

There is one short message that God gives for guidance to every one of us and more especially to you who are not converted. It is this, "Seek ye my face." This very moment, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," for "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." When you have taken God's advice concerning your poor soul's eternal welfare, when you have believed in Jesus to the salvation of your soul, then go to Him about your temporal concerns, and about everything, and you will then be able to say, with the psalmist, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 63

"A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah."

Shall we praise God in the garden and not praise Him in the wilderness? No, we will sing a new song when we come into the desert, for even if we are in a desert, that is no reason why there should be a desert in us, so let us praise God even in our wilderness experience.

Verse 1. O God,

Two very solemn words, never use them, I pray you, as hasty, thoughtless expressions. God's name must never be taken in vain, I fear that there are some who do this, and are not rebuked for it. When we say, "O God," there ought to be something solemn to follow.

1. Thou art my God;

The second word "God" signifies "my strong One, my mighty One, to whom I can bring all my weakness and all my care, for thou art strong enough to take care of me even in the wilderness."

1. Early will I seek thee:

That is, "at once." "I will not delay, but immediately will I seek Thee. I will not so much seek to get out of the wilderness, or seek for comfort in the wilderness, as seek for everything in Thee."

1. My soul thirsteth for thee,—

This is a blessed experience. It is a sad thing to be without God in any degree, but it is a blessed thing when we cannot rest without Him.

1. My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;—

"My flesh"—"that lowest part of me—even that has been awakened and quickened:" "my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." "Where there is no water, no well, no cloud, no rain, I am longing for thee, my God." "My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;"—

2. To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.

David remembers better times that he had enjoyed in the past, and he longs to have them back again. He wants again to know, and feel, and enjoy, all he has ever known, and felt, and enjoyed, and blessed be God, he will grant us that boon.

3-4. *Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live:*

“Whether I live in a sterile wilderness or in a fertile land, I will bless thee while I live.”

4. *I will lift up my hands in thy name.*

“I will pluck up spirit, I will begin to pray, I will begin to work. I will look toward heaven: ‘I will lift up my hands in thy name.’”

5. *My soul shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:*

There is everything that is satisfactory in God. If we do but enjoy His presence, we cannot lack anything. Are we not put, as it were, into heaven itself when we are brought near to God? Are we not willing to remain for a while on earth, and to keep out of heaven, if we may but have the Lord with us, and constantly enjoy His company?

6. *When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.*

When one is living near to God, he is not afraid of sleeplessness. He would be glad of the rest that sleep brings, but if he cannot sleep, he finds a sweeter rest in God. I remarked one day, to one who lives very near to God, that it was a weary and sad thing to lie sleepless, and he said to me something that stuck by me. “I do not think so,” said he, “for when I wake in the night, my Heavenly Father talks so sweetly to me that I do not want to go to sleep, and when He does not want to speak to me, I speak to Him in prayer, and so the hours glide away most happily.”

7. *Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.*

“If I cannot look up, and see the light of Thy face, the very shade of Thy wings shall make me glad, and I will sing like a nightingale, in the dark.”

8. *My soul followeth hard after thee:*

The Hebrew is, “My soul is glued to thee.” “I am like a dog that keeps close to his master’s heels and will not leave him.”

8. *Thy right hand upholdeth me.*

We should not follow the Lord if His hand were not still underneath us to keep us going.

9-10. *But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes.*

The jackal is the creature meant here, for he haunts the battlefield, and devours the slain. So it came to pass with many of David’s foes. They fell in battle, and the wild beasts devoured them.

11. *But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.*

If they cannot be stopped by reason, or by repentance, they shall be stopped with a shovelful of earth, for God will stop the mouths of all liars in one way or another.

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.