

UNPARALLELED SUFFERING

NO. 2573

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“Christ also has once suffered.”
1 Peter 3:18.

IT is very unpleasant to our poor flesh and blood to suffer. Physical pain is a grievous infliction; mental agony or spiritual sorrow is still worse. Irons around the wrists can be worn till they fit easily; but when the iron enters into the soul, how it rusts the heart, and eats into the spirit! Perhaps, to some minds, the most difficult of all suffering is that which is not deserved at all, but which comes because we do not deserve it; I mean, that suffering which innocent persons are called to endure because of their innocence, when they are slandered and oppressed and persecuted, not for evil-doing, but for well-doing. I admit that there is much about this form of trial which should tend to make it a light affliction, for we ought to take it joyfully when we suffer wrongfully. Yet, as a rule, we are not able to do so; certainly not by nature, for there is a sort of sense of justice within man which makes him feel that it is very hard that he should have to suffer, not for unrighteousness, but for righteousness; not for any wrong-doing, but for having espoused the cause of God and truth.

The apostle Peter would have Christians prepare themselves for this suffering. They had to bear very much of it in his day; they will have to bear some of it as long as the Church of Christ remains in this wicked world. He says, in the verse preceding our text: “It is better, if the will of God is so, that you suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing.” Further on, at the beginning of the next chapter, he says “Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.” He warns us that we shall need to be clad in heavenly armor, for we shall have to pass through conflict and suffering for Christ’s sake and for righteousness’ sake. We must put on a coat of mail, and be enveloped in the whole panoply of God; we must have, as our great controlling principle, the mind of Christ, that, as He endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, we also may endure it, and not be weary or faint in our minds. We shall best bear our own sufferings when we find fellowship with Christ in them. Therefore, it is for your strengthening, that your spiritual sinews may be braced, that you may be armed from head to foot, and preserved from the darts of the enemy, that I would set forth before you, as best I may, the matchless sufferings of the Son of God, who “once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”

It has sometimes struck me that the first Epistle of Peter is greatly concerning Christ’s first advent, and that his second Epistle tells us about our Lord’s second advent. In this first letter, there are many references to the sufferings of Christ; it may interest you to notice some of them. In the first chapter, at the eleventh verse, we read: “Searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ.” When the apostle gets to the second chapter, at the twenty-first verse, we find him writing thus: “For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” Next comes our text in the third chapter; then, in the fourth chapter, at the first verse, is the passage I have already read to you; and in the thirteenth verse, the apostle says: “Rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings;” and in the fifth chapter, at the first verse, he calls himself “a witness of the sufferings of Christ.” Thus his frequent expression—his peculiar idiom—is, “the sufferings of Christ;” and in the language of our text he thus describes the great work of our redemption: “Christ also has once suffered.” It may seem a very small thing to you to call your attention to such words as these, but it does not appear small to me. It seems to me that there is a great depth of meaning within these few words,

and it shall be my objective, at this time, to bring out that meaning, as far as I can, under the Holy Spirit's guidance.

I. Notice then, first of all, A SUMMARY WITHOUT ANY DETAILS: "Christ also has once suffered." There is compassed within that expression a summary of the whole life and death of Christ. The apostle does not give us details of Christ's sufferings; but he lets us, for a moment, look into this condensation of them: "Christ also has once suffered."

It is *the epitome of His whole earthly existence* up to the time of His rising from the dead. Christ begins His life here with suffering. He is born into the world, but there is "no room for Him in the inn." He must lie in a manger, where the horned oxen feed. He is born of a poor mother, He must know the ills of poverty; and, worse still, Herod seeks the young Child's life. He must be hurried away by night into Egypt; He must be a stranger in a strange land, with His life in peril from a blood-thirsty tyrant. When He comes back from Egypt, He grows in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men; but you may rest assured that the years He spent in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, though we are not told about them, were years of sore travail—perhaps of bodily pain; certainly, of mental toil and preparation for His future service. Such a public life as His could not have been lived without due training. I will not attempt to lift the veil where God has let it fall; but I see, in the whole public ministry of Christ, traces of a wonderful mental discipline through which He must have gone, and which, I should think, must have involved Him in suffering. Certainly, it was one main point in His preparation that He was not without spiritual conflicts and struggles, which must have involved suffering to such a nature as His was.

No sooner does He appear on the stage of action, and the Spirit of God descends upon Him in the waters of baptism, than He is hurried off to a forty days' fast in the wilderness and to a prolonged and terrible conflict with His great enemy and ours. Of that time, we may truly say that "*He suffered, being tempted.*" Throughout His life, you may read such words as these: "Jesus, being weary, sat thus on the well;" "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has not where to lay His head;" and then you can understand some of the ways in which He suffered. We cannot tell how much our Lord suffered even in the brightest portion of His career, for always was He "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." We cannot go into all the details of His life; but I think you may see that, even in the very smoothest part of it, He suffered, and Peter does well thus to sum it up: "Christ suffered."

But when He comes to *Gethsemane*, shall I speak of the bloody sweat and the groans which startled angels? No, I need not say more than this: "Christ suffered." Shall I tell of His betrayal by Judas, of His being hurried from court to court, falsely accused, despitefully entreated, bruised, and scourged, and made nothing of? Truly, I may sum it all up by saying that He suffered. And as for all the rest, that march along the *Via Dolorosa*—that fastening to the wood—that uplifting of the cross, the wounds, the cruel fever, the direful thirst, the mockery, the scorn, the desertion of His Father when He must at last yield Himself up to death itself—what better summary could even an inspired apostle give than to say, "Christ also has once suffered"? This expression sums up the whole of His life.

It is well for you and for me, when we have the time and the opportunity, to make as complete as possible our knowledge of Christ as to all the details of His life and death; but, just now, it must suffice us, as it sufficed Peter, to say, "Christ suffered." When next you are called to suffer, when pains of body oppress you, let this text whisper in your ear, "Christ also has once suffered." When you are poor, and needy, and homeless, recollect that "Christ also has once suffered;" and when you come even to the agony of death, if such shall be your portion, then still hear the soft whisper, "Christ also has once suffered." I know of no better armor for you than this: "Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind;" and be prepared to count it your honor and glory to follow your Master with your cross upon your shoulders.

Much may be said to be known concerning Christ's sufferings; but, still, to a great extent, they are unknown sufferings. Some eyes saw Him suffer, yet I might truly say, "Eye has not seen, neither has ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man the things which Christ suffered for His people." You may think brethren that you know something of Christ's sufferings; but they are a deep unfathomable, a height to which the human imagination cannot soar. We are obliged to leave this summary without any details: "Christ also has once suffered."—

*"Much we talk of Jesus' blood,
But, how little's understood!
Of His sufferings, so intense,
Angels have no perfect sense.*

*Who can rightly comprehend
Their beginning or their end?
'Tis to God and God alone
That their weight is fully known."*

II. Secondly, this is A STATEMENT WITHOUT ANY LIMIT. How indefinitely it is put! "Christ also has once suffered."

Do you ask the question, "*When did Christ suffer?*" It is answered by not being answered; for, truly, we may reply to you—"When Christ was on earth, when was there that He did not suffer?" "Christ also has once suffered." The apostle adds no note of time; he says not, "Christ suffered on the cross," or, "in the garden;" but the very indefiniteness of the statement leaves us to understand that, as long as Jesus was here, He was the acquaintance of grief. His life was, in a sense, a life of suffering. All the while He was here, even when He was not upon the cross, and even when no bloody sweat was on His brow, it is written, "Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sickness." He was bearing the load, not as some say, "on the tree" alone, but *up to the tree*, as the passage may be read—daily bearing it till, at length, He came to the cross, and there it was for the last time that He felt the pressure of human sin. You cannot get, and yet you do in some sense get, from my text, an answer to the question, "When did Christ suffer?"

Perhaps another asks, "*What did Christ suffer?*" The text is remarkable in giving here no limit whatever to the statement: "Christ also has once suffered." What did He suffer? I answer—what was there that He did not suffer in body, in mind, and in spirit? What of pain—what of shame—what of loss—what of hatred—what of derision? He suffered from hell, from earth, from heaven—I was going to say—from time and from eternity; for there was a certain sense in which eternal pangs passed through the heart of Christ, and spent themselves upon Him. What did He suffer? Peter says, as if that should be enough for us to know, "Christ has once suffered;"—the very indefiniteness implies that He suffered everything that He could suffer.

And *where did Christ suffer?* Peter does not answer that question. Where did He suffer? In the wilderness? In the garden? In Pilate's hall? On the cross? The text as good as says, "No; yes; not somewhere only, but everywhere." Wherever He was, still was Christ enduring that great burden which He came into the world to bear till He would carry it away, and it should be lost forever.

From whom did Christ suffer? Mark how unlimited is the text: "Christ also has once suffered." From men falsely accusing Him, and slandering Him? Yes; and that is the comfort of His slandered people; but He suffered not from wicked men alone, but even from good men; the best of His disciples cost Him many pangs, and sometimes made His heart ache. He suffered from devils. He suffered from the Father Himself. There it stands—a sky without horizon—a sea across which I look and see no end or bound: "Christ also has once suffered." I think that Joseph Hart spoke well when he said that Christ—

*"Bore all incarnate God could bear,
With strength enough, and none to spare."*

So we leave this part of our theme; it is a statement without any limit: "Christ also has once suffered."

III. Now I want you to notice, in the third place, that this is A DESCRIPTION WITHOUT ANY ADDITION: "Christ also has once suffered."

Is that all? Was there not something else? No; this line sweeps the entire circumference. There was nothing in Christ, *before His suffering*, which was contrary to it. He never regretted that He had entered upon a course which involved suffering. "When the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem," warning His followers that He was going there to be mocked, and to be scourged, and to be crucified. He might at any moment have relinquished His terrible task, but that idea never entered into His mind. Even when He came near to the worst part of His pain, and His human nature shrank from it His true heart never was discouraged, or thought of turning back. He said, "The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" And He did drink it, though it involved more suffering than we can imagine; yet there was no resistance to that suffering. He suffered, but He never rebelled against it; He could truly say, "I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." He did not even complain, and Isaiah's prophecy was literally fulfilled by Him: "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth." If we were to describe the experiences of even the best of men, I am afraid that we would have to say, "He suffered very much, and he did not often murmur. Sometimes, however, he rebelled, and cried out." It was not so with Christ. Peter says, He suffered; and there is no addition to that. You know, my brethren, how, hav-

ing undertaken to suffer for sins, He went through with it. If He stood before Pilate, and His enemies smote Him, what did He do? He suffered. If they bound His eyes, and buffeted Him, what did He do? He suffered. When they spat in His face, what did He do? He suffered. When they nailed Him to the cross, what words did He speak against His murderers? Not one; He suffered: "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again." Even when they jested at Him, His only reply was the prayer, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." He suffered; and there was nothing to take away from the completeness of that suffering. The whole of His nature ran out into that act of obedience called suffering; it was the time when He must do the Father's will by suffering, and all the power of His being ran into that channel. The Lord had made to meet upon Him the iniquity, and, consequently, the suffering, of us all; and He just accepted it at the Father's hand without a complaint or a murmur. You can sum it all up in the language of our text, without a single word added to it: "Christ also has once suffered."

IV. Once more, I want you to notice that this is A DECLARATION WITHOUT ANY QUALIFICATION: "Christ suffered."

There is no word to bid us imagine that He had *any alleviation of His agony*. Of a person in very bad health we may be able to say, "He suffers a great deal; but he has an excellent medical attendant, and a good nurse, and he has every comfort that can be given to him." But, in the case of our Lord, all is summed up in these two words, "Christ suffered." Were there no comforters? No; He suffered. Was there no sleeping-draught to deaden His pain? No; He suffered. But did not His Father help Him in the hour of His agony? No; His cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" proves that we may say of Him, even with reference to God, that He suffered. The death of Christ was quite unique; none of the martyrs were ever brought into the same condition as their Lord was in. I remember reading, in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, the story of a man of God, who was bound to a stake to die for Christ; there he was, calm and quiet, till his legs had been burned away, and the bystanders looked to see his helpless body drop from the chains. He was black as coal, and not a feature could be discerned; but one who was near was greatly surprised to see that poor black carcass open its mouth, and two words came out of it; and what do you suppose they were? "Sweet Jesus!" And then the martyr fell over the chains, and at last his life was gone. Oh, how much of the blessed presence of God that poor saint must have had to be able to say, at the last, when he was charred to a coal, "Sweet Jesus!" But the Lord Jesus had not that help and comfort. His Father's countenance was hidden from Him. "Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabachthani," is such a shriek as even hell itself has never heard, for the lost ones there have never known what it was to have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, as Christ had known it; and, therefore, they could never know the loss of it as Christ knew it in that supreme moment of His agony. "Christ suffered." That is all you can say of Him, He suffered, without any alleviation of His pain.

Further, He suffered *without any qualification, in the sense of being compelled to suffer*. We say of such-and-such a person, "He suffers greatly, but he cannot help suffering; he has a deadly disease, the pain of which cannot be alleviated, he is, therefore, obliged to bear it." The martyr, whom I mentioned just now, was bound to the stake; he could not get away, he suffered under compulsion, he was made to suffer. But you cannot say that of Christ. Herein is a marvelous thing that, while Christ suffered, you may take the word in the active sense. I do not know how exactly to express my meaning, but there is a sort of passive sense in which He suffered, and that is the sense in which we all suffer according to our share; but Jesus also suffered in an active sense; that is to say, He suffered willingly, resolutely, without any compulsion. At any moment, He might have broken loose from the cross, He might have called for twelve legions of angels, and scattered all His foes; He might have flung off His body, and appeared before them as a consuming fire to utterly destroy them; or, retaining His humanity, He might have smitten them with blindness, or worked some other miracle, and so have escaped from them. If we should be called to die for Christ, it would only be paying the debt of nature a little beforehand, for we are bound to die sooner or later; it is the lot of man. But there was no such need in the case of Christ; there was no necessity of death about that holy thing which was born of the Virgin Mary. It would not corrupt, and it needed not to die. All the way through His death, remember that He did not die as we do—gradually losing consciousness, floating away, and never able to suspend the process of dissolution; but, at any instant, up to the final committal of His spirit to His Father, He could have caused all those pains to cease. Now see with what an extraordinary meaning my text is girt about. As the painters foolishly depict Christ with a halo around His head which was never there, I may truly picture His sufferings, mystically and spiritually, with a halo about them which is really there, for He suffered, in this superhuman fashion, without any qualification as to alleviation or as to compulsion.

Dear friends, how shall I speak further upon this part of my subject? Only this word would I add—that “Christ suffered” *without any desert*. If we suffer, we must say to ourselves that we suffer less than we deserve; and even when a man suffers so as to die, we know that death is the penalty of sin. But “Christ suffered” in a very special sense because “in Him was no sin.” He had never done anything worthy of death, or of bonds. He suffered “for sins not His own.” There was nothing about Him that brought the suffering upon Him; His was the suffering of a pure and holy Being. We say of a criminal, not so much that he suffers, but that he is punished, He is executed, He is put to death. We never say that of Christ, we say that He suffered. Voluntarily, and without any obligation on account of demerit, He comes and takes upon Himself the sins of His people, stands in their stead, is chastened with their chastisements, is smitten with their smiting. Well does He say, by the mouth of the psalmist, “Many a time have they afflicted Me from My youth: yet they have not prevailed against Me. The plowers plowed upon My back: they made long their furrows.” So indeed they did, not only on His back, but on His heart. I am speaking now, not only of His external but of His internal sufferings. Truly did one say that “the sufferings of Christ’s soul were the very soul of His sufferings;” and so, no doubt, they were; but, in His case, there was no punishment due to Him, so in His sufferings there was nothing exacted from Him on His own account. I must leave you to think upon this great mystery, for I cannot speak of it as it deserves.

V. I close with this last reflection. My text is AN EXPRESSION WITH AN EMPHASIS: “Christ also has once suffered.”

When we think of our own sufferings, as compared with our Lord’s, we may print them in the smallest type that the printer can use; but where shall I find capital letters that are large enough to print this sentence when it applies to Him—“CHRIST ALSO HAS ONCE SUFFERED”? It is almost as if the apostle said, “You have none of you suffered when compared with Him;” or, at least, He was the Arch-Sufferer—the Prince of sufferers—the Emperor of the realm of agony—Lord Paramount in sorrow. Just take that term, “a man of sorrows.” You know that, in the Book of Revelation, there is the expression, “the man of sin.” What does “the man of sin” mean but a man made up of sin, one who is all sin? Very well, then, “a man of sorrows” means a man made up of sorrows, constructed of sorrows—sorrows from the crown of His head to the sole of His foot—sorrow without and sorrow within. He did sleep with sorrow, and wake with sorrow; He was a man of sorrow, a mass of sorrow. Take the next expression, “and acquainted with grief.” Grief was His familiar acquaintance, not a person that He passed by, and casually addressed, but His acquaintance that kept close to Him throughout His life. He said once, “Lover and friend have You put far from Me, and My acquaintance into darkness;” but this acquaintance was with Him there: “acquainted with grief.” Listen to the words; and if you can see my Lord, pressed by the strong arm of grief until He is covered all over with a gory shirt of bloody sweat, then you know that grief had made Him to be acquainted with its desperate tugs. When you see Him bleeding at His hands, and feet, and side, with all His spirit exceedingly sorrowful even unto death, and God Himself leaving Him in the thick darkness, then you know that He was indeed acquainted with grief. You know a little about grief, but you do not know much. The hem of grief’s garment is all you ever touch, but Christ wore it as His daily robe. We do but sip of the cup; He drank it to its bitterest dregs. We feel just a little of the warmth of Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace; but He dwelt in the very midst of the fire.

There I must leave the whole matter with you; but, as you come to the communion table, come with this one thought upon you: “Christ also has once suffered.” Somebody perhaps asks me, “Is there any comfort in that thought?” Is it not a thing full of wonder that there should be more of comfort in the sufferings of Christ than in any other thing under heaven? Yet it is so; there is more joy in the sufferings of Christ, to those whose hearts are broken, or sorely wounded, than there is in His birth, or His resurrection, or anything else about the Savior. It is by His stripes rather than even by His glory that we are healed. Come, beloved, take a draught from this bitter wine, which shall sweetly charm away all your sorrows, and make you glad. May God, the Holy Spirit, grant that it may be so! And if there is anybody here who is not saved, remember friend that your salvation depends upon the sufferings of Christ. If you believe on Him, then His sufferings are yours, they have taken away your sin, and you are clear. Therefore, go your way, and be glad.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—293, 278, 281.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

PSALM 27; ROMANS 8:14-17.**Psalm 27 Verse 1.** *The Lord is my light and my salvation;*

First comes light, and then salvation. We are not saved in ignorance; the knowledge of our sinfulness is revealed to us, we discover our true condition in the sight of God, and then we perceive the mercy and the love of God. We see first the light and then the fullness of salvation, for this is not a matter of the past only, but of the present. At this very hour, each believer can say, “The Lord is my light and my salvation.” Can you say that, dear friend? If so, there is more real eloquence in that little sentence than in all the orations of Cicero.

1. Whom shall I fear?

“There is nobody that I have any need to fear. I need not fear the powers of darkness, for ‘the Lord is my light.’ I need not fear damnation, for ‘the Lord is my salvation.’ Then, ‘Whom shall I fear?’”

1. The LORD is the strength of my life;

Is not that a wonderful expression? Ordinarily, a man lives by the strength of his constitution, but the spiritual life lives by the strength of God within the soul.

1. Of whom shall I be afraid?

“For, if God is my strength, then am I strong as Samson, and I may slay the lion or the Philistines with equal ease.”

2. When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.

Good men have enemies because they are good men. There are two classes in the world—the righteous and the wicked—the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; and you know that, even in Eden, the Lord said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed.” We must expect, then, if we are among the righteous, that we shall be attacked by the wicked; but, when they come against us, we may believe that they shall be overcome even before we strike a single blow in our own defense.

3. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.

You know that, usually, we fear just before the battle begins—when we see the enemy encamped against us. We do not know what they are going to do, and we are sure to imagine the very worst; but such was David’s confidence in his God, that he said, “Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.” There they lie, their legions marshaled against him in all their dread array; but says the psalmist, “In this will I be confident.” Oh, the joy of the man who has received this confidence from God; and who is, therefore—

**“Calm ’mid the bewildering cry,
Confident of victory.”**

4. One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple.

Did David refer to any special spot, or to any one sacred shrine? I think not. He meant that he wished to be always at home with God; and that, you know, at the same time we can also be in our own houses or in the fields, on the land or on the sea. This was David’s great desire, that he might always dwell with God, like a child at home, wherever he was; and that he might have such communion with God that he might “behold the beauty of the Lord,” that he might ask of God guidance in all his difficulties: “and to inquire in His temple.” Those are two things, dear friends, for which I hope many of us have come here—that we may behold God’s graciousness and loveliness in the ordinances of His sanctuary, and that we may ask and receive of Him help in all our difficulties, and guidance in all our dilemmas. How often, in this house, has God spoken so personally to His dear children that they have thought that the preacher knew all about them, when he really knew nothing whatever of them, though God did, and sent a message by His servant, straight to their souls!

5. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me up upon a rock.

If I dwell with God, He will hide me away in the pavilion of His sovereignty; and, so long as He is King—and that will be forever and ever—He will not let me perish. His sword and shield shall be stretched out for my defense. Then God has also a tabernacle as well as a royal pavilion; as of old He had the holy of holies, into which no man could enter, on pain of death, save only the high priest on the

appointed day. “In the time of trouble,” the Lord Himself shall take us, and hide us there by the mercy seat, near the Ark of the Covenant, where His glory shall shine upon us, and where none can intrude to hurt us. We have the protection of the pavilion of sovereignty and the tabernacle of sacrifice; what two places can be safer? We have also the rock of God’s immutability; His people shall stand on that high mount, beyond the reach of their adversaries, where their feet shall never slide.

6. *And now shall my head be lifted up above my enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in His tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises unto the LORD.*

This is a blessed resolution; oh, that you and I would carry it out more and more! David says twice that He will sing the Lord’s praises: “I will sing, yes, I will sing praises unto the Lord.” Come, all you who sigh, change that word, and say, “I will sing.” Come, all you who make a mourning noise, and ask the Lord to help you to make a joyful noise before His face. Is not praise comely and fitting in the presence of such a God as He is who has dealt so well with us? Let each individual who knows the goodness of God say, “I will sing, yes, I will sing praises unto the Lord.”

7. *Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me.*

The psalmist has only just begun praising when he takes to praying; and that should be a Christian’s double occupation—praising and praying. I have often said that, as our life is made up of breathing in and breathing out, so we should breathe in the atmosphere of heaven by prayer, and then breathe it out again in praise—

*“Prayer and praise, with sins forgiven,
Bring down to earth the bliss of heaven.”*

8. *When You said, Seek you My face; my heart said unto You, Your face, LORD, will I seek.*

David springs forward to accept the divine invitation; the invitation was general: “Seek you My face;” but the response was personal: “Your face, Lord, will I seek.” Whether others would do so, or not, David resolved and declared that he would seek the face of the Lord; let every one of us, dear friends, do the same.

9. *Hide not Your face far from me; put not Your servant away in anger:—*

“Dismiss me not Your service, Lord.”

You know how masters do sometimes discharge their servants in anger; but what a gracious Master you and I have, beloved, or else He would have sent us adrift long ago! “Get you gone,” He would have said, “you disgrace My house, you mar My work, you do not perform your service well; be gone!” But He does not speak or act in that fashion.

9, 10. *You have been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.*

“They carried me when I was a child, and He will carry me now: ‘The Lord will take me up.’ When they steel their hearts against me, because I become a Christian, He will love me, and more than make up my loss of their love.”

11. *Teach me Your way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of my enemies.*

“Lord, do not let me get into difficulties, so that I shall not know what to do, for my foes are so sharp-eyed that, if they can find a fault in me, they will; and even if there is no fault, they will make one. Therefore, Lord, ‘lead me in a plain path, because of my enemies.’”

12. *Deliver me not over unto the will of my enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty.*

Am I addressing anyone who is being slandered? Has somebody borne false witness against you? Well, be very thankful that it is false. I do not quite understand why it is so often said, “You see, it is such a downright falsehood, and that is what grieves me so.” But, dear friend, it is much better that it should be false than true. If anyone brings an accusation against me, I shall be glad to find that it is false. Let not that be the sting of the trouble which really is the sweetness of it; be glad that they cannot say anything against you unless they speak falsely. However, if you expect to go to heaven without being slandered, you expect what you are not likely to get; for God Himself was slandered in Paradise; our Lord Jesus, in whom was no fault, was slandered when He was upon the earth; His apostles and followers in all ages have had the same treatment; and here is David saying, “False witnesses are risen up against me.”

13. *I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

That is the point to be noted; there is no getting over fainting except by believing, for believing saves us from swooning, and makes us strong: “I had fainted, unless I had believed.”

14. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart:

Here is a man of God giving us the benefit of his own experience; he waited upon God, and now he bids us do the same, that we may be blessed as he was. At our prayer meeting before we came in here, one dear friend thanked the Lord that, for more than sixty years, he had been enabled to rest upon the divine promises, and he had never found one of them to fail in the hour of need. These testimonies are very precious. I recollect, in my early Christian days, how my soul was greatly sustained by hearing a blind man say that he had lived on God by faith for more than sixty years, and he had found the Lord faithful to His promises all that time. Those of you, dear friends, who are younger than others of us, may be comforted by the experience of your seniors; but if we were to live to be ten times as old as Methuselah, we would never find God backward in keeping His promises: He must be true whatever happens.

14. Wait, I say, on the LORD.

Now let us read just a few verses to remind us of our union with our suffering Lord.

Romans 8 Verse 14. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

You can judge yourself, dear friend, by this test. Do you follow the Spirit's leading? Do you desire continually that He should be your supreme Guide and Leader? If you are led by the Spirit of God, then you have this highest of all privileges, you are one of the sons of God. Nothing can equal that honor; to be a son of God, is more than anything of which ungodly kings and emperors can boast, with all their array of pomp and wealth.

15. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear;

You did receive it once, and it was a great blessing to you. This came of the law, and the law brought you under bondage through a sense of sin, and that made you first cry for liberty, and then made you accept the liberating Savior; but you have not received that spirit of bondage again to fear.

15. But you have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

We who believe in Jesus are all children of God, and we dare to use that name which only children might use, "Abba;" and we dare use it even in the presence of God, and to say to Him, "Abba, Father." We cannot help doing it, because the spirit of adoption must have its own mode of speech; and its chosen way of speaking is to appeal to the great God by this name, "Abba, Father."

16. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

There are two witnesses, then, and in the mouth of these two witnesses the whole truth about our adoption shall be established. Our own spirit—so changed as to be reconciled to God, and led in ways which once it never trod—our own spirit bears witness that we are the sons of God; and then God's own Spirit bears witness, too, and so we become doubly sure.

17. And if children, then heirs;

For all God's children are heirs, and all equally heirs. The elder-born members of God's family, such as Abraham and the rest of the patriarchs, are no more heirs of God than are we of these latter days who have but lately come to Christ. "If children, then heirs." Heirs of what?

17. Heirs of God,—

Not only heirs of what God chooses to give, but heirs of Himself. There need be nothing else said, if this is true: "The Lord is my portion, says my soul." "Heirs of God,"—

17. And joint-heirs with Christ; if it is so that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.

Do you ever have in your heart a longing to behold the glory of God? Do you feel pressed down when you see abounding sin? Are your eyes ready to be flooded with tears at the thought of the destruction of the ungodly? Then, you are having sympathy with Christ in His sufferings, and you shall as certainly be an heir with Him, by and by, in His glory.

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