

THE LESSON OF THE ALMOND TREE

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the LORD unto me, You have well seen: for I will hasten My word to perform it.”
Jeremiah 1:11, 12.

OBSERVE, first, dear friends, that before Jeremiah becomes a speaker for God, he must be a seer. The name for a prophet, in the olden time, was a “seer”—a man who could see, one who could see with his mind’s eye, one who could also see with spiritual insight, so as vividly to realize the truth which he had to deliver in the name of the Lord. Learn that simple lesson well, O you who try to speak for God! You must be seers before you can be speakers.

The question with which God usually begins His conversation with each of His true servants is the one He addressed to Jeremiah, “What do you see?” I am afraid that there are some ministers, nowadays, who do not see much. Judging by what they preach, their vision must be all in cloudland, where all they see is smoke, and mist, and fog. I often meet with persons who have attended the same ministry for years; and when I have asked them even very simple questions about the things of God, I have found that they do not know anything. It was not because they were not able to comprehend quickly when the truth was set forth plainly before them, but I fear that it was, in most cases, because there was nothing that they could learn from the minister to whom they had been accustomed to listen. The preacher had seen nothing; and, therefore, when he described what he saw, of course it all amounted to nothing. No, my brother, before you can make an impression upon another person’s heart, you must have an impression made upon your own soul. You must be able to say, concerning the truth, “I see it,” before you can speak it so that your hearers also shall see it. It must be clear to your own mind, by the spiritual perception which accompanies true faith, or else you will not be able to say with the psalmist, “I believed, therefore have I spoken.” Let me say over again that sentence which I uttered a minute ago—the speaker for God must first be a seer in the light of God.

And, next, the true speaker for God must see what God sets before him. In this case, the Lord had set before Jeremiah’s eye “a rod of an almond tree.” We might have thought that, as a preparation for his prophetic work, he would have seen mysterious wheels full of eyes, or flaming seraphs and cherubs, or the wonderful creatures that were caused to appear in the dreams of Ezekiel and the revelation to John. Instead of this, Jeremiah simply sees “a rod of an almond tree;” and, beloved friends, when you look into the Bible, you will see some very simple things there—such things as save little children’s souls—such things as men with no education can understand and believe. Be not anxious to be numbered among those who are so “eclectic” and “cultured” that, if God sets before them the rod of an almond tree, they cannot condescend to notice it. That is something which everybody can see, so why should such remarkable eyes as theirs behold the plain things which ordinary individuals can perceive? They want to see—I scarcely know what they do want to see, except their own foolish dreams, and even those are hidden from them. God give us grace to see rods of almond trees when He sets them before us;—I mean, may He give us grace to see such simple truths as these: “You must be born again.” “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” “He that believes and is baptized, shall be saved.” What do you see, my friend? Do you see what God would have you see, what He has put before you in His Word? If so, I may say to you what the Lord said to Jeremiah, “You have well seen;” but if not, however gorgeous the panorama or pageant which you have

invented for yourself to behold, you had better be blind, for you will only be following some will-o'-the-wisp, that may amuse for a while, but will ultimately destroy the souls of men.

Further, those who would speak aright for God must also take care to see with all their eyes. I do not suppose that everybody here, who had seen the vision of a rod, would have known it to be “a rod of an almond tree.” I do not imagine that I should, though I think I should readily know a rod if it were made of olive wood, or orange wood, having become familiar with them during my visits to the South of France. But I do not know that I should, in a moment, be able to say of a certain rod, “That is the rod of an almond tree.” But Jeremiah understood these things; and, therefore, as soon as he saw what was set before him, he did not merely say, “I see a rod,” but “I see a rod of an almond tree.” He distinguished at once the kind of rod that was revealed to him in vision, for he was a man who had those powers of discernment and discrimination which are most needful in the Lord’s servants; and if you, dear friend, are called to teach the children in the Sunday school, or if you try to win souls by private conversation, or if you are a preacher of the Word, blessed are you if you can see below the surface of the truth, and can peer into its hidden depths of meaning, and get a spiritual insight into the Word of God so that you do not merely see a small portion of the Scriptures, but you perceive a far larger part than most people do. You should, if you can, see it all. I can hardly think that many years of spiritual education and divine training would be required for you to attain to that position—at any rate, to see all that is needful for the due discharge of your ministry, all that may help you to know the meaning of the truth, and to bring it out for real, practical use among those to whom you seek to be made a blessing. O seer, ask to have clear eyes! Speaker, recollect that your speaking must begin with your eyes; and,—though it may seem a strange thing to say so—the first education for the true servant of God does not concern his tongue so much as his eyes. “What do you see?” Seek to be able to see all that you can see; and take care that you do not miss anything through inadvertence or neglect. “Search the Scriptures.” Be you one of those who gaze into the truth, as the angels desire to look into it, so that, when you see the vision, you shall be able to say, with Jeremiah, “I see a rod of an almond tree.”

Next, the servant of the Lord must seek to win the approval of his Master as Jeremiah did. It will be a grand thing for you, dear brothers and sisters who try to speak to others, if you would receive such praise as God so freely gave to Jeremiah, at the very first moment of his ministry, when He said to him, “You have well seen.” You shall well speak, if you have well seen. O my dear young brethren in the College, you who are here tonight, I hope that it will be true of you, whenever you think of the doctrine of human depravity, that you have looked into your own hearts, and seen the evil of your own nature till you have wept over it! So shall it be said to each one of you, “You have well seen that.” I hope that you will so clearly see the truth of the Fall that you will recognize the evil that comes of it, and the evil that abides in the corrupt nature of man. And then may you get such a sight of the cross—such a clear view of the atoning blood, and understand so fully the great doctrine of substitution and the divine plan of reconciliation, that God may be able to say to you, “You have well seen.” A lack of distinctness in our understanding of the truth will lead to a lack of distinctness in our utterance of it. Oh, to have eyes like those of the Heavenly Bridegroom, of whom His spouse said, “His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk and fitly set,” for, in His turn, He says to His bride, “Behold, you are fair, My love; behold, you are fair; you have doves’ eyes.” The ministers of the Church of Christ, who have to a great extent to be her seers, need to have clear, far-seeing, and pure-seeing eyes. May God grant us the power distinctly to trace His wondrous grace from the eternal fountain of electing love, along the streams of never-ceasing mercy which bring final perseverance to the saints, right onward to the coming of our Lord, and the blessed rising of all His Church to be with Him in His glory forever and ever! Before you venture to tell anything of the gospel message to others, you need to hear the Lord say to you, as He said to Jeremiah, “You have well seen.”

For this purpose it will be necessary that your eyes should be enlightened. What an appropriate prayer is that for you Sunday school teachers and Christian ministers to offer, “Open You my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law”! I think that if I had, as a preacher, to make only one request to my Master, and He asked me, “What will you that I should do unto you?”—I should reply, “Lord, that I may receive my sight more fully than ever, and see Your truth more clearly than ever,” because there is no fear about our speaking for God if our seeing is what it should be. That is the main matter, and therefore the Lord asks each one of us, “What do you see?” If our answer proves that we

have well seen, it is because the Spirit of God has enlightened us; and, enlightenment from God having been once received, we shall tell to others right gladly what God has revealed to us.

Yet once more, those who see what they can see, and take care to see it well, are the people who shall receive further instruction, for it was when Jeremiah said, "I see a rod of an almond tree," that the Lord went on to explain the vision to him, saying, "You have well seen: for I will hasten My word to perform it." Those who do not see what they can see shall not be allowed to see any more. If you will not use, in diligently studying the Scriptures, the judgment and perception which you already have, God will not give you further light, since you neglect the gift that is in you. He will leave your fire to burn low because you do not stir it up, and it shall get to be more dim than it now is, for he who will not learn more when God is willing to teach him shall forget what he already knows. I charge you, who are called to teach others in any way whatsoever, to submit yourselves fully to the teaching of the Holy Spirit. A disciple is the only person who can become an apostle; a scholar in the school of Christ is the only one who can be sent out to tell others what his Master wishes to have made known to the sons of men.

I have spoken thus with the view of helping those who are working for Christ; but now I must try to explain the vision mentioned in our text: "Jeremiah, what do you see? I see a rod of an almond tree."

I. Observe, first, that **THE ALMOND IS A WAKEFUL TREE.** The Hebrew word which is rendered "almond" comes from a root signifying to be wakeful, so this passage might be read thus, "I see the wakeful rod. Then said the Lord unto me, You have well seen: for I will waken concerning My word to perform it."

When the other trees are asleep, before the warmth of the springtime has awakened them from their winter slumbers, the almond tree awakes, and opens the lovely eyes of its abundant blossoms. In Jeremiah's country, it begins to bloom early in January, and it is in such haste to produce its fruit that it is often ripe before the end of March. You know how, even in our suburban gardens, one of the first signs of the approach of spring is that the almond tree begins to blossom. The East wind often keeps it back, yet it struggles to its utmost to come out while other trees are asleep. Even before the chestnut, which is generally up as early as almost any of our trees, has been able to cast off the blankets in which it slept during the winter, the almond tree has opened its eyes, and looked out as if it were asking whether springtime is not coming. The almond is a wakeful tree, and so, says the Lord, "I will be wakeful concerning My word to perform it."

Note, first, that *God never forgets a promise.* Alas! You and I do not remember all our promises. How often are they made only to be broken; but God never forgets one that He has given. We even forget God's promises; and, often, when we are in trouble, we can hardly recollect one that we can plead before Him. But God never yet forgot a promise; all these centuries, in which He has been dealing with men, He has never yet failed to keep His word. "Has He said, and shall He not do it?"

What is equally wonderful, *God has never forgotten a single person to whom a promise belonged,*—not even the least. Even if they have only desired to seek Him, or if they have only commenced to seek Him, He has been gracious to them, He has heard their cry, and has delivered them. This is a wide world, and there are many millions of people in it; yet no one of them has ever been able to say that God has failed to keep one of His promises. More than that, in the whole universe, throughout all the ages, there has never been a forgotten soul. He who counts the brilliant stars counts such dim things as our understanding; and He who numbers the very hairs of our head never fails to reckon the cries of our hearts.

Further, *there has never been a single occasion for the fulfilment of a promise which God has allowed to slip.* When the promise has become due, He has discharged it to the tick of the clock. There are no dishonored bills recorded against God in the archives of men or of angels. No one can look up to the heavens, and say to Him, "You have deceived me, and I was deceived;" but we can say, "Faithful and true are You, O Jehovah; this is part of Your Son's title, for He is the faithful and true Witness, and You are the faithful Promiser, who always performs what He has promised." "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness."

Let me also add that *there is not a threat in God's Word which has not been fulfilled,* or which will not yet be executed. He has been a wakeful God in that respect. When men have persisted in their iniquity, He has not allowed them to escape the just punishment of their evil deeds. Happily for us, we cannot hear the sighs and cries of the spirits shut up in prison; but they are there. In His mercy, God has made a

great gulf between us and those who are tormented in that flame; but they are there, though we cannot see or hear them. As surely as God lives, their iniquity and transgression are already receiving their just recompense of reward, and there is a worse doom to follow. As God watches over His people to do them good, so does He watch over the transgressor who is finally impenitent, and makes him to know the terrors of His wrath. That is the black side of this truth, and it must not be ignored. You may rest assured that a judge who does not punish the guilty is as unjust as the one who does not acquit the innocent. There must be, with every king who is worthy of the name, an execution of the sentence of the law upon evildoers, as well as the award of praise for them that do well. Paul says, concerning the earthly representative of authority, “He bears not the sword in vain;” and that sentence is certainly true concerning the King of kings. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

Look, then, dear friends, at this rod of an almond tree, and believe in a wakeful God who will surely deal with men according to His Word, whether in promise or in threat.

II. But the more obvious sense of the text is that which I give under the second head. THE ALMOND IS IN HASTE TO BLOSSOM AND BEAR FRUIT. Hence our translators have rendered the passage, “I will hasten My word to perform it.” The almond tree is not slow to bloom, it is one of the very first trees to tell us that springtime is near. And the Lord is quick to fulfill His Word.

Very briefly, let me remind you of *the quickness of God to fulfill His threats*. Do you realize, dear hearers, you who are now hearing the gospel, but have not received it, that God’s threats take effect at once? “No,” you say, “He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” That is most true; yet there is a sense in which His sentence takes effect at once. For instance, “He that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” If you have heard the gospel—and some of you have heard it many, many years—and yet have not heeded it, you will not be condemned for the first time at the last great day, you are condemned even now. Some people say to us, “Why do you ministers, in your preaching, so constantly deal with another life, instead of dealing with this one?” Our answer is, that we do deal with this life; we deal with it continually, for we believe that both sides of that text are true at this very minute, “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life: he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.” Even now, at this moment, while you are in this building, if you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the wrath of God is abiding on you.

Listen again. There is another immediate effect of the Word of the Lord, which follows as quickly as the blossom appears upon the almond tree. Upon some hearers, it produces an instant hardening. You remember how Paul wrote, “We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life.” You, dear friends, are deriving, from every gospel sermon that you hear, either life unto life, or else death unto death. If you get no good from it, you will assuredly get harm. An unbelieving hearing of the gospel is a multiplication of curses to your soul—another sermon for which you have to give account, another rejected exhortation recorded against you, another earnest invitation, which you have refused, and for which you will be held responsible. You are heaping up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath even while you hear the Word of the Lord. I am not now talking about what will happen to you when you die, or when you rise for the final judgment; I am speaking about what is happening now. The same sun which melts wax hardens clay; and the same gospel which melts some persons to repentance hardens others in their sins. Take heed that you do not soon see the almond tree blossom in this terrible sense.

There is also another sense in which a definite result is speedily coming, for you must soon die, unless Christ comes shortly. In any case, it cannot be long before some here will be gone. We who have reached middle life must not reckon on continuing to live for many years; but others are already bald with age, or their hair is grey, so they must soon die. Suppose, however, that you young people should live to be ninety; yet how soon that period will be ended! Years seem to spin round, especially as we grow older. I thought, when I was a boy, that a year was a very long time; but, now, one scarcely seems to have time to kiss his hand before it is Christmas day again. People say, “Christmas is coming,” as if it was a long way off; but the next one is coming as soon as the last one has gone. Time flies very rapidly as years advance upon us; it appears even to quicken its pace, though it does not really go any faster than it used to do. It will be but a short while, and you, my dear hearer, if you die without Christ, will find

that God is not slack concerning His threat—that, though He seems to tarry in long-suffering, yet He comes in due season after all; and when He comes—ah! When the last trumpet rings out, and the great white throne is set, and the angels gather in solemn pomp to the tremendous judgment of the grand as-size, you will find that the time, which seemed long enough, proved all too short, while the eternity, which you despised, you will dread with such despair as we cannot even imagine now. Forever, forever, forever, forever lost! I see “a rod of an almond tree” for some of you, for it may be that I am addressing some who will never enter any place of worship again. I may be speaking to some out of these many hundreds who will not be alive this day next week. Out of our great congregation, there never is a gathering of the same people twice in this place week by week. Even among our membership, there are now, on the average, two a week who are taken home; and I know not how many more out of the congregation. Who will be next? I see, for that next one, “a rod of an almond tree,” for God will hasten His Word to perform it.

While I have felt compelled to speak of these solemn truths, I am glad to turn to the other part of the subject, which is this, that *God is quick in performing His promises*. They are like the almond tree; they blossom and bear fruit very quickly. “What sorts of promises,” say you, “are thus speedily fulfilled?”

Well, first, the promise to give salvation to all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen—

*“The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives,
Redemption in full thro’ His blood.”*

I see “a rod of an almond tree” here. The psalmist says, “His word runs very swiftly;” and I am a witness that it does. Many years ago, I, a poor sinner, went into a place of worship to hear the gospel preached. The preacher repeated the Lord’s command, “Look unto Me, and be you saved.” I looked to Christ, and I was saved that very instant. It takes no longer to tell the story than it did to work the miracle of mercy. Swift as the lightning’s flash I looked to Christ, and the great deed was done; I was a pardoned and justified soul; in a word, I was saved. Why should not the same thing happen to you who are here? It will happen to everyone who shall now be led to believe in Jesus Christ.

“Oh, but!” says one, “There are often long delays before peace is enjoyed.” Then it is because you make them, for God does not. “But sometimes we have to wait,” says one. Yes, yes; I know all about that waiting. Do you remember, in the parable of the prodigal son, where he waited? Why, with the harlots and others with whom he wasted his substance in riotous living, or with the swine, when he was feeding them with the husks with which he would gladly have filled his own empty belly. That is where he waited; but when did he end his waiting? When he said, “I will arise and go to my father.” He did not wait any longer, for we read, “And he arose, and came to his father;” and then it is written, “When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and”—“and”—“and”—“and stood still, and waited for him to come”? No, no; I know that God waits to be gracious; but, according to the teaching of that parable, “when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran.” Do you know how fast God can run? Come, now, there is a task for you. We know, sometimes, how fast fleet runners can go. What a rate they go at! As we hear about them, we seem to realize the force of David’s description of Saul and Jonathan, “They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.” But again I ask, can you tell me how fast God can run? No, you do not know, you cannot tell; but you do know that He is all on fire with love to embrace a poor penitent sinner, and He speeds towards him at an amazing rate. Remember that hymn with which we commenced this service—

*“On cherub and on cherubim,
Full royally He rode,
And on the wings of mighty winds,
Came flying all abroad.
'And so delivered He my soul.”*

Swift as the lightning’s flash is the glance of divine compassion that brings life to a penitent soul. Believe then in Jesus, and “the great transaction’s done.” “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life.” “Why, sir, he only believed a minute ago! Has he received eternal life already?” Yes, he has everlasting life just as surely as if he had been believing in Jesus for fifty years. If you do but believe, this blessing is at once yours. “I see a rod of an almond tree.” Oh, that you also may see it blossom before your very

eyes, although, when you came into this house of prayer, it seemed as bare as the rest of the trees that have been nipped by the wintry winds!

This part of our subject is just as true about prayer. The man who knows how to pray remembers God's promises concerning prayer and its answer. Think of that remarkable passage in Isaiah 65:24—"It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." That is quicker than the telegraph: "Before they call, I will answer." God knows what petition is in your heart, He foresees what will be the utterance of your tongue, and He has the answers all ready for them. I have found many of my prayers answered years before I prayed them. "No," you say, "that could not be." Well, there was one of them that was answered more than eighteen hundred years before I prayed it. That was when I cried to God for a Savior, and He gave me One all those centuries before I was born, even the Savior who worked out for me a complete salvation on Calvary's accursed tree. O you praying souls, "I see a rod of an almond tree!" When men begin to pray in faith, they are speedily heard.

So is it when God's people want to have their spiritual life revived. When we get into a dull doleful state, as we sometimes do, if we cry to God, He is able to quickly revive our drooping spirits. You remember that verse in the Song of Solomon, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib"?—which were, I suppose, noted for their swiftness—"I was dull, motionless, lifeless; but before I could tell where I was, I found myself almost flying along like the chariots of Amminadib." So may it be with you, dear friend! Though you are like Laodicea, neither cold nor hot, yet remember what the Lord said to the angel of that church: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hears My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." Renewed communion with Christ may be enjoyed at once, even by you who have fallen into a lukewarm state.

Our subject also applies to deliverance from trouble. "The righteous cry, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles." God may not take away your trouble; but yet, in a moment, He may give you grace to bear it, and turn the trouble itself into a source of joy. "I see a rod of an almond tree" full often. In times of deep depression, God can lift up the heart very speedily.

So can He bless His Word. As neither snow nor rain returns to Him void, so is it with His Word; it shall prosper in the thing to where He sent it, and it shall prosper at once. O you who want to win souls, go about your work very boldly, believing that God will bless you! "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," said Christ. When Peter preached, the apostles and disciples did not wait for several years to find out the result of his sermon—though I daresay there were further results after a long time—but they picked up three thousand birds which had been brought down by that one discharge of the great gospel gun. Oh, that you and I would so work for God as to expect immediate results, and go and look for them! "I see a rod of an almond tree." I believe that there are some here who will tonight lay hold on Christ. It was a great joy to me to have a sister come in, just before service, to tell me that, years ago, she found the Lord when I was preaching at the Agricultural Hall. She said, "That will comfort you." I said, "Yes, it does; it shows me that I was useful once; but," I added, "I want to be useful now; I want to see souls brought to Christ now." And so they will be; let us believe it, and see this rod of an almond tree blossom tonight.

III. Now, to close, I can only briefly remind you that THE ALMOND TREE SETS AN EXAMPLE TO ALL WHO WOULD BE LIKE GOD. He hastens His Word to perform it; oh, that you and I would be in haste to perform our word!

Is there one here who *wishes to seek the Lord*? "Seek you the Lord while He may be found; call you upon Him while He is near." There will be a friend or two, on the lower platform, after the service, to talk with any of you who wish to say anything to them about your own souls, and to hear from them some good words about the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not go away, even from this service, till you have sought and found the Savior. Seek Him now, you young people. Recollect that precious promise, "Those that seek Me early shall find Me." Others shall find the Lord if they seek Him; but, certainly, the young shall do so whatever others do not. Be up early, then, while yet you are in your teens, before you get to be a young man, seek the Lord now, for you shall surely find Him if you search for Him with all your heart. God help you to do it!

Then, you who have found Him, be *prompt in obeying Him*. Do you know what David said? "I made haste, and delayed not to keep Your commandments." If you have found the Savior by faith, be baptized

according to His command and His example. Unite yourself with His people, and begin at once to serve Him.

And then, you who have been serving the Savior, *if you have any good desire in your heart to do anything for Christ, do it.* You may be dead tomorrow morning; therefore I would advise you to do something for Christ tonight. Are you going to leave something in your will for the Master's cause? Be your own executor if you can; and whatever you think of doing, do it speedily; do not leave anything till tomorrow that can be done today. "I see a rod of an almond tree." There are some men who must act now, or they never will do anything, for it is pretty nearly the end of the day with them. Up, brother, up! "I see a rod of an almond tree." Do what you can tonight. Speak to your children about Christ tonight. Wake them up if they are in bed. Speak to that friend to whom you have often intended to speak. I know of one who resolved to speak to a man who used to come to his counter twice a week to buy some goods. He thought, "The next time he comes in, I will speak to him about his soul." He never came again! On the morning when he should have come, there came a messenger to say that he was dead. Therefore, take advantage of every opportunity while it lasts. "In the morning sow your seed;" but do not wait for the morning; "In the evening withhold not your hand;" and "whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might."

And, lastly, *be ready for your immediate departure.* Be prepared to go home to heaven tonight. Come, now, are all things ready for your journey? If not, pack up all the luggage, label it, and have everything ready for the start at any moment. Blessed is that man who is ready to blossom in heaven any instant. "Oh!" says one, "I should not like to die tonight. I believe that I am a Christian, and that I am saved; but I do not feel ready to go." Set your house in order, then, for your house cannot be right if it is not in order. If your house is in order, why, then you are ready to die. There is no right living except living as you would wish to live if you knew that this was to be your last day. The right way to spend the next hour is so to spend it as if it were your last hour. The Lord bring us into that happy condition that it shall not matter to us one single farthing whether we live or whether we die; and may He keep us in that blessed state, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *PSALM 18:1-19.*

Verse 1. *I will love You, O Lord, my strength.*

"I do love You, and I will love You yet more and more. I bind myself to You for the future as well as the present."

2. *The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*

Note how David delights to heap up poetic imagery to describe his God. They who glory in the Lord would gladly speak worthily of Him; and because there is no one object in nature that can fully set Him forth, they mention many, as David does here. Like him, if we would convey even a faint idea of what God is to us, we must think of all things that are strong, and worthy of our confidence, and putting them all together, we must say that our God, our strength, in whom we trust, is all this, and much more,

3. *I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from my enemies.*

Prayer brings salvation. Prayer must, however, be mingled with praise, for prayer and praise make up the breath of the Christian life. Have I not often reminded you that we breathe in the air of heaven by prayer, and then breathe it out again in grateful praise?

4, 5. *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.*

"They were before me, behind me, all around my path whichever way I turned."

6. *In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even into His ears.*

What a difference there is between this living God of David—our living God—and that impersonal nonentity which, nowadays, is regarded by many as God. The god of the pantheist—what is he? A nobody and a nothing; but our God made the heavens; and our God hears the prayer of all who truly cry unto Him.

7. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was angry.

The cry of one of His oppressed children stirred Him to anger. Nothing moves the heart of God like an injury done to His people. You remember how the prophet Zechariah wrote to the captive Jews in Babylon, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, He that touches you touches the apple of His eye.”

8, 9. There went up a smoke out of His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under His feet.

In this wonderful poetic description, Jehovah is represented as descending from His throne at the cry of one of His children in distress.

10. And He rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yes, He did fly upon the wings of the wind.

So swift is prayer to reach the ears of God, and so swift is God to come and answer His people’s prayers.

11. He made darkness His secret place; His pavilions round about Him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.

Like an Oriental king, who travels beneath his royal canopy, the Lord is pictured as coming to earth with the bursting clouds and opening heavens as the pavilion of the Deity.

12. At the brightness that was before Him, His thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire.

These are some of the weapons with which He assails the adversaries of His people. With this dread artillery, He smote Pharaoh of old, when He rained hail upon the land of Egypt, and fire mingled with the hail, and the fire ran along the ground.

13, 14. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave His voice; hail stones and coals of fire. Yes, He sent out His arrows, and scattered them; and He shot out lightning, and discomfited them.

God Himself came forth on His people’s behalf, and fought for them from heaven. As we read that “the stars in their courses fought against Sisera,” so did God make the very tempests in the skies to be like an invincible legion, sweeping before it the enemies of His anointed servant.

15-18. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at Your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils. He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me. They prevented me in the day of my calamity:

They went before him, they blocked his way.

18, 19. But the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; He delivered me, because He delighted in me.

Oh, how sweetly this record continues! Never was there a poem more lofty in its diction. Even Milton cannot equal the language of this Psalm. This inspired writing rises superior to all human compositions, even if regarded only from the poetic point of view.

But what must have been the psalmist’s experience when he was delivered after this wonderful fashion? And if God has delivered you and me in a quieter and gentler way, yet He has quite as surely delivered us; and blessed be His name from this time forth, and even forevermore!

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—18 (VERSION 1), 900, 196.

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