

“PRISONERS OF HOPE”

NO. 2839

A SERMON
 INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S-DAY, JULY 12, 1903.
 DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“As for you also, by the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoner out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto you.”
Zechariah 9:11, 12

THIS passage unquestionably has to do with our Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation. We are not at all in doubt about this matter, for the connection is exceedingly clear. If you begin to read at the 9th verse, you will see that we have, from that place on to our text, much prophetic information concerning our Lord and His kingdom. We read, first, something about His own manner of triumph and His way of conducting Himself in His kingdom—“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, your King comes unto you: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.” We know that the prophet speaks not thus of any man save of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the King who put aside the pomp and pageantry in which Eastern monarchs delighted, and, instead of riding upon a horse, He mounts a lowly ass. If He must ride in procession through the streets of Jerusalem, it shall be in that meek and humble guise. The King of the kingdom of grace is not high and lofty, haughty or proud, but condescends to men of low estate. The Pharisees and scribes murmured, “This man receives sinners, and eats with them,” and it was quite true. He is a King, and of a right royal nature, but His kingdom is not that of pomp and show, of force and oppression. He is just and righteous, but He is also lowly, gentle, and kind. The little children flocked around Him while He was here below, and now the meek and lowly ones of mankind delight to serve Him. How glad I am that I can say to any of you who have not yet yielded yourselves up to Him that you need not fear to become the subjects of Jesus, the Son of God, for He is so gentle a King, that it shall always be for your profit and pleasure, and never to your real loss or sorrow, to bow down before His gracious scepter! We have not to set before you a Pharaoh or a Nebuchadnezzar. Jesus of Nazareth is a King of quite another kind. Therefore, “kiss the Son, lest He be angry.” Bow before Him, and let Him be your only Lord and King. You see, then, that this 9th verse refers to our Lord Jesus, and tells us something concerning His personal and official character.

The next verse goes on to describe the weapons by which He wins His victories. Or, rather, it tells us what they are not. Not by carnal weapons will Christ ever force His way among the sons of men, for He says, “I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle-bow shall be cut off.” Mohammed may conquer by the sword, but Christ conquers by the sword which comes out of His mouth, that is, the Word of the Lord! His empire is one of love, not of force and oppression. He subdues men, but He does it by His own gentleness and kindness, never by breaking them in pieces, and destroying them upon a gory battlefield. Let others cement an empire with blood if they will, but Jesus does not do so. “He makes wars to cease unto the end of the earth. He breaks the bow, and cuts the spear in sunder. He burns the chariot in the fire.”

The same verse reveals to us more concerning the nature of Christ’s kingdom—“He shall speak peace unto the heathen: and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.” There have been universal monarchies in the past, but there shall never be another till Christ shall come again. Four times has God foiled those who have attempted to assume the sovereignty of the world, but, in due time, there shall come One who shall reign over all mankind. He is not of earthly mold, though He is, indeed, the Son of man. He is descended from no line of modern princes, and

bears no imperial name among the sons of men, yet He is the Prince of the house of David, and His name is the Son of God. He shall break all other kingdoms and empires in pieces, snapping the swords of the mightiest warriors, gathering scepters beneath His arm in sheaves, and casting all earthly crowns beneath His feet, for He alone is King of kings and Lord of lords!—

*“Kings shall fall down before Him
And gold and incense bring.
All nations shall adore Him,
His praise all people sing—
For He shall have dominion
Over river, sea, and shore,
Far as the eagle’s pinion
Or dove’s light wing can soar.”*

Thus I have shown you that this passage, in its proper connection, relates to the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation, so now we will consider its special teaching.

In our text, we have three things. The first is, *a divine deliverance*. “As for you also, by the blood of your covenant, I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.” Secondly, we have *a divine invitation*. “Turn you to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope.” And, thirdly, *a divine promise*. “Even today do I declare that I will render double unto you.”

I. So, first, we are to think of A DIVINE DELIVERANCE.

This must be a matter of personal experience, and, therefore, I should like that everyone whom I am now addressing would say to himself or herself, “Do I know anything about this divine deliverance in my own heart and life? If I do not, I have grave cause to fear as to my condition in the sight of God. But if I do, let me be full of praise to God for this great mercy—that I have a share in this divine deliverance—‘As for these also, by the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.’”

Do all of you, dear friends, know anything about the pit wherein is no water? Were you ever conscious of being in it? Regarding it as a state of spiritual distress, do you understand what it means to be in such *a comfortless condition*? It was a common custom, in the past, to put prisoners into deep pits which had been dug in the earth. The sides were usually steep and perpendicular—and the prisoner who was dropped down into such a pit must remain there without any hope of escape. According to our text, there was no water there, and, apparently, no food of any kind. The objective of the captors was to leave the prisoner there to be forgotten as a dead man out of mind. Have you ever, in your experience, realized anything like that? There was a time, with some of us, when we suddenly woke up to find that all our fancied goodness had vanished, that all our hopes had perished, and that we, ourselves, were in the comfortless condition of men in a pit without even a single drop of water to mitigate our burning thirst! Well do I remember that period in my own history, when I looked upon my past life which I had thought was proper enough, and saw it to be all stained and spoiled by sin! I could get no comfort from the recollection of my past attention to religious exercises. I had been very diligent, indeed, in attending the means of grace, and also in private devotion, but these cups of water had all become empty. I could not find one single drop in them that could cheer me, for I discovered that as my heart was not right with God, all my prayers had been quite unavailing! And that when I had gone up to the house of God, since my heart was not in the services, God had not accepted me, but had said to me, “Who has required this at your hand, to tread My courts?” I tried what good resolutions would do, but I gained no comfort from them, for I failed to keep them! I tried what attempts at improving myself in various ways would lead to, but, alas, the more I strived to make myself better, the more I discovered some fresh evil within my heart which I had not previously seen, so that I could say with the poet—

*“The more I strived against its power,
I sinned and stumbled but the more.”*

If I sought after water in my comfortless condition, I only found myself to be more intensely eaten up with thirst! Do you know what all this means? You need to know it, for this is the condition into which God usually brings His children before He reveals Himself to them!

The condition of being shut up in a pit wherein is no water is not only comfortless, but *it is also hopeless*. How can such a prisoner escape? He looks up out of the pit, and sees, far above him, a little circle of light, but he knows that it is impossible for him to climb up there. Perhaps he attempts it, but, if so, he falls back and injures himself—and there must he lie, out of sight, and out of hearing, at the bot-

tom of that deep pit—with none to help him, and quite unable to help himself. Such is the condition into which an awakened conscience brings a man. He sees himself to be lost through his sin, and he discovers that the law of God is so intensely severe—though not unduly so—and the justice of God is so stern, though not too stern—that he cannot possibly hope for any help from them in his efforts to escape out of the pit in which he lies fallen as a helpless, hopeless prisoner!

Nor is that all. A man in such a pit as that is not only comfortless and hopeless, but *he is also in a fatal condition*. Without water, at the bottom of a deep pit, he must die. Sooner or later—and he almost wishes it might be sooner—he must expire. Life itself becomes a burden to him! I have known a soul—I say not that it is so with all to the same degree—but I have known a soul feel within itself as if the pangs of hell had already begun! It feels itself so utterly condemned, even by its own judgment, and so certain to be condemned by the righteous judgment of God, that it writes itself down as already among the condemned, and gives itself up as completely lost! Many of God’s children have known this experience to the fullest possible extent—and all of them have been, in some measure, brought into the pit wherein is no water!

But concerning those who have believed in Jesus, our text is true, and God can say, “I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.”

Are you out of the pit, my Brother or sister? Then it is certain that you came out of it, not by your own energy and strength, but because *the Lord delivered you!* Divine power, and nothing but divine power can deliver a poor law-condemned conscience from the bondage under which it groans! Let a man once know his real state by nature, as he is in the sight of God—let him see how the curse of death is written upon all his efforts and hopes, and then let him come out into light and liberty, and he will say, “The Lord has done it all! The Lord has done great things for me, whereof I am glad!”

There is this further comfort that *if He has set us free, we are free indeed*. It is only God who can deliver a conscience in bondage—and when it is delivered by Him, it need not be afraid of being dragged back to prison anymore. If a criminal breaks out of his cell, and is found at any time by the officers of the law, he may be arrested, and taken back to prison. But if the sovereign of the realm has set him free, he is not afraid of all the policemen in the world! He walks about the streets as a man who has a right to his liberty because of the authority which has granted it to him. Now, believer, God has brought you up out of all your trouble because of your sin. He has delivered you from all sense of guilt concerning it, and as He has done it, you are not afraid that it has been done unjustly, and you are, therefore, not afraid that you will be re-committed to prison, and be once more held “in durance vile.” The Lord has delivered you, so you are delivered forever! Who can curse those whom God has blessed? Who can condemn those whom God has justified? Who can again enchain the soul that God, Himself, has set free?

But *how has He done this great work?* This is one of the principal clauses of our text—“As for you also, by the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.” The people of God are set free from their bondage by the blood of the covenant! The blood of Jesus Christ has sealed, ratified, and fulfilled the covenant of grace to all who believe in Him. It was on this wise—we had sinned and we were, therefore, put into the pit of condemnation. In order to our release, Jesus came forward, and put Himself into our place—became our Substitute, and promised that He would pay blood for blood for all that was due from us to God. Glory be to His holy name, He paid it all! In the bloody sweat of Gethsemane—in His bleeding hands, and feet, and side—in the agony of His soul even unto death—He paid all that was due on account of His people’s sins, and now, the debt being discharged, the prisoners are set free! “By the blood of your covenant,” said God, who has a right to say it, “I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.”

Beloved friends, I trust that you will never be weary of listening to the doctrine of substitution! If you ever are, it will be all the more necessary that you keep on hearing it until you cease to be weary of it. That doctrine is the very core and essence of the gospel! To attempt to cloud it, or to keep it in the background is, I am persuaded, the reason why so many ministries are not blessed to the conversion of souls, and give no comfort to those who are in distress of heart on account of sin. Let this stand, once and for all, as our declaration of what the gospel teaches, that God “has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” “The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” “With His stripes we are healed.” They laid upon His back many cruel stripes which we deserved to receive, and into His heart they thrust the sword which otherwise must have been thrust into our heart. If any man is freed from a guilty conscience, and from the dread of hell by any means

apart from the blood of Jesus Christ, I pity him from my very soul! He had better go back to his prison, again, and never come out of it until this key is used to unlock the door—the *substitutionary* sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ! In the last dread hour of death, when conscience looks at sin as it really is, and no longer is blinded, nothing can bring it peace but the blood of the Lamb! Nothing can give the soul repose, when it is about to meet its God, except the knowledge that Christ was made a curse for us that we might be blessed in Him!

No prisoners are set free except by the blood of Jesus, and, beloved, as the blood of the covenant is Godward—the means of our coming out of the pit wherein is no water—so it is the knowledge of Christ as suffering in our place that sets the captive free. Are any of you in great heaviness because of your sin? Are you obliged to confess that your lives have been such that you could always weep over them? Is your sleep often disturbed at night by reason of the conviction that your years have been spent in vanity and transgression? Are you asking for mercy? Are you seeking rest? My dear friend, there is no doctrine that will ever give you true rest except the doctrine of the cross of Jesus Christ! Listen to it whenever you can. Seek out those preachers who preach most about the precious blood of Jesus. Read most those books which tell of Jesus as the great atonement for human guilt. Study diligently the writings of the four evangelists, and, especially, those parts of the narrative which describe the death and resurrection of our dear Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Sit down at the foot of the cross in contemplation, and never move away from it till from the cross the light of God comes streaming into your darkened spirit, so that you will be able to say, “I see it now! The Son of God suffered that I might not suffer! He was made the Victim that I might go free! Justice was magnified in Him that mercy might be magnified in me!” You will never be delivered in any other way!

I hope I am not addressing any who will remain for a long time in the pit wherein is no water. I did so myself, but I blame myself, now, for having done so. I must also somewhat blame the preachers whom I heard, because they did not make plainer to me the truth that all that was needed was already done, and that I had only to accept it as having been done for me. Liberty was provided for me—I had but to trust in Jesus, and I would at once be free! Dear heart, if you are lying in Giant Despair’s castle, if you have been beaten with his crab tree club till every bone in your body is sore, and your heart is ready to break, this is the key which will open every lock in Doubting Castle if you can but use it—“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”—even we guilty sinners who have so much sin to be cleansed from! Believing in this truth, trusting in Jesus, we are “accepted in the Beloved.” How gloriously God has brought some of us forth! We are not now in the pit wherein is no water. We are forever set at liberty, and our heart leaps at the very sound of Jesus’ name! Now is our peace like a river, and our soul is exceedingly glad because of the lovingkindness of the Lord.

II. I shall not be able to dwell long upon the second head of my discourse, which is A DIVINE INVITATION GIVEN.

Those who were prisoners in the pit wherein is no water were prisoners without hope, yet God has set them free. But sometimes they get into prison, again—they ought not to do so, but they do. Even after Giant Despair is slain, the pilgrims’ troubles are not all over, and, sometimes, saved men and women get into a despondent state. Then comes this gracious invitation, “Turn you to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope.” Do you catch the thought that is intended to be conveyed by these words? You have been taken out of the pit, and there, close beside you, is the Castle of Refuge. So, the moment you are drawn up out of the pit, run to the castle for shelter! The parallel to this experience is to be found in the 40th Psalm, where David says that the Lord had brought him up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set his feet upon a rock, and established his goings. And now that you are delivered from your prison pit, you are to go and dwell in the fortress, the high tower which the Lord has so graciously prepared for you!

The promises of God in Christ Jesus are the stronghold to which all believing men ought to turn in every time of trouble! And *Jesus Christ, Himself, is still more their Stronghold in every hour of need.* Sheltered in Him, you are, indeed, surrounded with protecting walls and bulwarks, for who is he that can successfully assail the man who is shielded and guarded by the great atoning sacrifice of Christ? Yet you will often feel as if you were still in danger. When you feel so, turn directly to the Stronghold. Do you doubt whether you are saved? Then run to Christ at once, and so destroy the doubt! Do you mourn your slackness in prayer, and does the devil tell you that you cannot be a Christian, or you would not feel as you do? Then run to Christ! Has there been, during this day, some slip in language, or has there even been some sin in overt act? Then run to Christ—turn to the Stronghold! Does darkness veil your Lord’s

face from you? Do you see no bright promise gleaming out of the gloom? Does God, Himself, seem as if He had ceased to be gracious unto you, and to have shut up the heart of His compassion towards you? Then run to Jesus—turn you to the Stronghold! Never try to fight your own battle with Satan, but run to Christ at once! Be willing to be called a coward rather than attempt to stand in your own strength! Let this be the proof of your bravery, that you flee to Christ, your Stronghold! “The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks.” You do not call the conies cowardly because they run among the rocks to find shelter. They know where their stronghold lies, and they resort to it in all times of danger. So, again I say to you, dear brothers and sisters, never try to combat sin and Satan by yourselves, but always flee away to Christ! Inside that Stronghold, the most powerful guns of the enemy will not be able to injure you. But if you leave the shelter of your Master’s protecting atonement, and come out into the plain to contend against your adversary in your own strength, you will be in imminent peril of being destroyed! Therefore, in the words of my text, I say to you, “Turn you to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope.”

I must not enlarge upon this point, but I do want all my brothers and sisters in Christ, and especially all who are coming to the communion table, to go afresh to Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior. You were delivered from the pit years ago. You know that you were, though, perhaps, you have a little question about it at times. But at the present moment you are very dull and heavy—possibly the weather has helped to make you feel like that. It is very unsafe to judge our state by our feelings—they are poor, uncertain tests at the best—and they may greatly mislead us if we trust to them. Let us, rather, go all together to the cross whereon our Lord did hang, and let us still go on with Him as we began at the first. Let each one of us cry unto Him, with Dr. Watts—

*“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Your kind arms I fall!
Be You my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus, and my all.”*

Come along, my brother, you have been a child of God for 50 years, but still keep on coming to Jesus, even as Peter writes, “To whom coming”—perpetually coming—“as unto a living stone, disallowed, indeed, of men, but chosen of God, and precious.” You know how Dr. Guthrie, when he was dying, wanted those around him to sing to him “one of the babies’ hymns,” for he wanted to have the babies’ faith, that is, a child-like faith, implicitly trusting in Him! They who have gone the furthest in the divine life yet do well to walk in Christ just as they received Him at the first. This is my own desire—I, nothing—Christ everything! I, guilty—Christ my righteousness in whom my sin is all blotted out! I in myself condemned, but in Christ absolved and accepted! Come along, all of you who have met with little but failure! You who are at your best, and you who are at your worst—you who are rejoicing, and you who are sorrowing—you who are strong, and you who are weak! All together, let us come to the fountain filled with blood, and let us again prove that it still cleanses us from all sin!

III. Our last words are to be concerning THE DIVINE PROMISE with which our text ends—“Even today do I declare that I will render double unto you.” I want you to plead this promise in prayer. If you do so, and God fulfils it in your experience, you will then understand it better than you could with any explanation of mine.

First, if you who have been delivered from the pit wherein is no water, continually turn to Christ, *you shall have twice as much joy as ever you had sorrow*. The grief that we had before we found Christ was a very mountain of sorrow, but how has it been with you since you came to Jesus? Speak for yourselves, brothers and sisters! Let your own hearts say how it has been with you. Have you not, after all, had twice as much joy as you have had sorrow? I know that it has been so with me—my heart was full, almost to bursting, when it was full of sorrow—but when I found Christ, it seemed to be not only full of joy, but to be plunged into an ocean of bliss! Oh, the unspeakable delight of the soul that has found peace in Jesus after having been long in bondage to sin and Satan! I think I have told you before that I heard Dr. Alexander Fletcher once say when he was preaching, that, on one occasion, passing down the Old Bailey, he saw two boys, or young men, jumping, and leaping, and standing on their heads, and going through all sort of antics on the pavement. He said to them, “Whatever are you doing?” But they only clapped their hands, and danced more joyously than before. So he said, “Boys, what has happened to you that you are so happy?” Then one of them replied, “If you had been locked up for three months inside that prison, you would jump for joy when you came out.” “A very natural expression,” said the good old man, and bade them jump away as long as they liked! Yes, and when a soul has once been de-

livered from the pit wherein is no water, it has a foretaste of the joy of heaven! The possession of Christ is, indeed, not only double bliss, for all its sin, but much more than double! I have known saved souls, when newly converted, act so that their neighbors have thought that they were out of their minds, and have said, “What ails them?” Their mouths have been filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing, and they have said, “The Lord has done great things for us, for which we are glad.” And, poor sin-sick heart, if you can believe in Jesus, He will give you double joy for all the sorrow that you have been feeling for these last weeks, or months, or even years! “Ah,” you say, “if He would do that, it would be, indeed, joyous for me.” And joyous it shall be!

More than that, *God gives His servants the double of all that they expect.* When we come to our Lord, it is as it was when the queen of Sheba came to Solomon. She said that the half had not been told her, and if you raise your expectations to the highest point that you can reach, you who come to Christ will find them far exceeded in the blessed realization! He is, indeed, a precious Christ to all who believe in Him—but He is a hundred times more precious than you can ever imagine! You think that it must be a delightful thing to be saved, and so it is, but it is ten thousand times more delightful than you suppose! You have read the Scriptures, and have prized the blessings of grace of which you have read there—but you have not prized them at anything like their proper value! There shall be double rendered unto you, who are the people of God who have known the most of divine love, and have for years sat at your Master’s feet. As yet you know not the half of what He will reveal to you in His own time and way! Only have patience, and keep your souls upon Him while pressing forward in the heavenly race. The land has been full of silver mercy, but it shall yet be full of golden mercy! You have gone through green pastures, and by still waters, but there are fatter pastures, and deeper streams on ahead! The fullness of joy is not yet revealed to you—press on, and you shall discover it, and delight in it!

Oh, what double joy shall come to us when we reach the land Beulah, and when we come to the brink of the river that has no bridge across it, where the angels are hovering and waiting to welcome the spirits of the redeemed! When you dip your feet in Jordan’s chilly flood, you shall begin to hear the sonnets of the immortals! Your spirit shall be already, while yet it lingers there, partaking in the bliss that is yet to be revealed, and then, when you have crossed that narrow stream, and the last sigh is over, how great will be the double that God shall render unto you! I cannot tell you much about it, but in that land you shall need no candle, neither light of the sun—the Lamb shall be the light, for the Lord God shall give you light, and you shall reign with Him forever and ever! What a contrast between where we began, and where we are to leave off—the pit without water, and the bliss without alloy! What is the bridge that spans the great gulf between them, and carries us over into the glory-land? It is the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ! It is the blood of the everlasting covenant! So believe in it, trust your souls NOW on Jesus, and then rest assured that we will meet on the other side of Jordan, in the land of the hereafter where the Lord shall manifest Himself unto us, and fill us with ineffable delight forever and ever! God grant it, for His name’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALM 103.

Verses 1, 2. *Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.*

Three times the psalmist says, “Bless, bless, bless.” Come, my heart, wake up, awake every faculty, but especially my memory—“Forget not all His benefits.” Here is a list of some of them—as we read each one, let our hearts say, “Bless the Lord for that.”

3. Who forgives all your iniquities.

Hallelujah, bless the Lord for that! He who has felt the weight of his sin will leap for joy at the thought of the forgiveness of all his iniquities.

3. Who heals all your diseases.

He has restored some of us from the bed of sickness and extreme pain, and He is even now healing our spiritual diseases. Sometimes it may be that He gives the bitter medicine, but it is thus that “He heals all your diseases.” The process of sanctification is a healing process to the soul, so bless the Lord for it.

4. Who redeems your life from destruction.

Can you ever praise God enough for your redemption from a doom so great as to be the destruction of every hope, and of everything worth having? “Who redeems your life from destruction.”

4. *Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.*

There is about your head, even now, a halo of love, invisible to all but the eyes of grace and gratitude—a bright, shining crown of lovingkindness, and tender mercies. Have I not often told you that kindness is the gold of the crown, but that *lovingkindness* is the velvet to line the crown to make it sit softly on the brow? Mercies—these are the jewels, but the tenderness of the mercies is the ermine that makes the crown such that it cannot truly be said, “Uneasy lies the head that wears this crown.” No, but happy, happy, happy are all they who are thus crowned! Bless the Lord if you are among them.

5. *Who satisfies your mouth with good things; so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.*

There is an inward satisfaction that God gives to His people. They are not satisfied with themselves, but they are satisfied *from* themselves, from that “well of water” which springs up within them “unto life eternal.” What a mercy it is to be as satisfied as to get young again, to feel your spiritual youth coming back to you—to be young in heart, even if you are old in body. “Your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” Let me again pause here, and say, “Let us bless the Lord for this.” Do not let one of these mercies be passed over as if they made up a dry and uninteresting list like the lots in an auctioneer’s catalog, but let us bedew every one of these lines with a tear of heartfelt thankfulness!

6. *The LORD executes righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.*

Bless His name for this. In every age He has broken the oppressor’s rod. For a while, His people may be made to smart, but, by-and-by, He hears their cries, and He avenges their wrongs.

7. *He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel.*

Bless Him for this. He does not hide Himself from His people, so that they do not know “His ways,” and “His acts.” Revelation is a constant source of thanksgiving to those who understand it through the teaching of the Spirit who inspired it. God might never have spoken to us, or we might not have lived in a world wherein God had deigned to reveal His will. But that is not the case—“He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel.”

8. *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.*

Surely, dear friends, we can all bless God for this truth, for, if He had been quick to be angry, where would we have been? If His mercy has been scanty, we should long ago have been destroyed, but He is “slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.”

9. *He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger forever.*

Are you, just now, hearing the stern voice of His chiding? Does His anger, like a black cloud, seem to rest upon you, and hide His reconciled face from you? Then, bless the Lord that “He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger forever” against His own chosen ones!

10. *He has not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*

Bless the Lord for that. Sweep your hand over the harp strings so as to fetch the sweetest music from them. How true it is of me, and of you, “He has not dealt with us after our sins!”

11. *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him.*

Immeasurable mercy, illimitable grace, blessed be His holy name!

12. *As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

Here again I cannot tell how much we ought to bless Him. It is not merely pardon of a temporary character that is given to us, but our sin is carried right away into a land of forgetfulness, so that it will never come back again to us. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifies.”

13. *Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them that fear Him.*

Let us praise Him for His tender pity over our weakness, His forbearance with our infirmity and waywardness.

14. *For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.*

Some people do not remember that—they try to work us as if we were made of iron. But the Lord is full of pity. He knows that we are nothing but a mass of animated dust which the wind can soon carry away.

15, 16. *As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

In a very little time, unless Christ should first come in His glory, this is what will happen to all of us. A breath of fever-bearing wind, or some other disease borne on the wings of the wind will sweep over us, and the strongest of us will wither in an hour.

17. *But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him.*

Oh, bless Him for that! He does not die! He does not change! He does not fail any who trust Him!

17, 18. *And His righteousness unto children’s children: to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them.*

Let us bless God for His love to our sons and our daughters. Some of us have great joy in our children. I pray that all of you may have the same joy—that you may see that the Lord, who is your God, is also the God of your descendants, as the God of Abraham was the God of Isaac, and of Jacob, and of Joseph, and of Ephraim and Manasseh, from generation to generation. Grace does not run in the blood, but it often runs side by side with it. It is often the way with God, when He has blessed the father, to bless the son for the father’s sake. So you who are yourselves believers may pray with great confidence for your sons and daughters. Bless the Lord for this!

19. *The LORD has prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom rules over all.*

For this, also, we bless Him. If there was any part of the world that He did not rule over. If there were any circumstances which He could not control. If there were any events which happened without His permission. If He were not King everywhere, this would be an intolerable world to live in! But now we bless Him because “His kingdom rules over all.”

20. *Bless the LORD, you His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word.*

David calls in the angels to help him to praise the Lord—he wants to do it well, but feels that he is weak and feeble, so he calls in the best of help. We also sing—

*“Angels, assist our mighty joys,
Strike all your harps of gold!
But when you raise your highest notes,
His love can ne’er be told.”*

21. *Bless you the LORD, all you His hosts; you ministers of His, that do His pleasure.*

All who wait upon Him, whether angels or men, or the lower creatures, are called upon to glorify His great name—and they do!

22. *Bless the LORD, all His works in all places of His dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.*

Do you notice that there is not a single petition in the whole of this psalm? It is all praise! And herein it is like heaven, where they cease to pray, but where they praise God without ceasing! We cannot rise to that height here, but let us both praise and pray when we can.

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