

HIDING AMONG THE STUFF

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“Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come there. And the LORD answered, Behold, he has hid himself among the stuff. And they ran and fetched him from there.”
1 Samuel 10:22-23.

SAUL seems to have known that he was the elect person, having already been secretly anointed by Samuel and, therefore, while the voting was going on and while the lots were being cast, he hid himself. The Lord answered, “Behold, he has hid himself among the stuff. And they ran and fetched him from there.”

We hardly know why Saul did this. It would be wrong to impute to him an ill motive, otherwise one would be inclined to say that he did it out of mock modesty, so that he might appear to have forced on him an honor which he did not really covet. But this would not fit with the first part of Saul’s life, for in his early days and when he was first chosen king, he did seem to be one of the most hopeful persons who could possibly have been called to the office. At the end of the chapter from which our text is taken, you see an instance of his great wisdom. The men of Belial, we are told, “despised him and brought him no presents. But he held his peace,” a piece of wisdom which it were well if some ministers and others, too, among us knew well how to imitate—if they, too, would sometimes be silent when the men of Belial speak concerning them. It, indeed, were well for all Christians to often imitate the example of their Lord who, when He was reviled, gave no answer but that of patient, enduring silence.

We are inclined the rather, therefore, to give Saul the credit for being really so modest that he concealed himself from honor and must have greatness forced upon him. He had been born great in stature, but now to be made great in office seemed a burden which he did not covet—and so he hid himself among the stuff.

From this, if it really is so, we may learn that *without the Grace of God the fairest life may yet become foul* and, however beautifully a young man may commence his career, he may stumble and fall and never reach the goal. Oh, how many amiable daughters, the joy of their mother’s heart, have been enough, after all, to bring gray hairs with sorrow to the grave! How many goodly lads, of whom we might have said, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before us,” have, notwithstanding, proved very sons of Belial, bringing sorrow and bitterness into their fathers’ soul! There is only one form of moral life insurance and it is spirituality—the coming to Christ, being regenerated, receiving the indwelling Spirit into the heart—and setting the affections upon the eternal and the heavenly!

This done, we may look forward to a life of holiness, believing that “the course of the just will be as the shining light that shines more and more unto the perfect day.” Apart from this, however, there can be no complete dependence upon the best outward signs of promise, nor upon the noblest and strongest resolutions. Many a young Hazeal has said, “Is your servant a dog that he should do this thing?” And yet he has lived to do the very thing of which he would hardly dare to think! The horrible to his youthful heart became the actual deed of his later days!

I thought that this little incident of Saul’s hiding himself among the stuff when he was already destined and chosen to be king was much *like what sinners do* for whom eternal mercy has provided a crown and a throne. They are hiding themselves away among the stuff. And then, again, I thought that it was very much *like what many Christians do* for whom the Covenant of Grace has provided a crown of rejoicing in feasting with Christ and living according to His example—but alas, alas, they are very worldly and seek to escape from the high honors their Lord has in store for them—they, too, hide among the stuff!

First, then, let us have—

I. A FEW WORDS WITH THE SINNER WHO IS HIDING HIMSELF AWAY AMONG THE STUFF.

I dare say he thinks tonight that if he had been Saul, he would not have been hiding himself. If it were to have his head taken off, a man might very wisely hide himself, but to have a crown put upon his head does not seem to be a reason

for hiding oneself, but a reason for coming out into the open and saying, "Here I am! Do unto me as seems good to you!" But this conduct, which seems so strange in Saul, is an exact image of the behavior of many of you who are here tonight. There may be some of you here present who may be doing precisely what Saul did, only you are doing it more foolishly than he did. He did but hide away from an earthly crown, but you hide from a heavenly one! He did but shun a crown that fades—you seem as though you would avoid a crown that is undefiled and that fades not away! The crown which Saul sought to hide from no doubt brought many cares with it, for it is only too often true that—

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

But the crown which *you* are avoiding brings no care with it, but much of holy ease and joy—and that head lies easily enough which is crowned with God's crown of loving kindness and tender mercy! But you hide yourselves away from it—from the crown which Prophets and Apostles counted on, for which they were willing to sacrifice all things and counted their best prospects but as dross and dung," that they might win it! This crown, which glittered in the martyr's eyes and made him sing as he swam through a sea of blood to reach it—this crown is lightly valued by you—and you hide yourself away among the stuff, that you may escape from this gift of God's bountiful mercy and love!

My Brothers and Sisters, we believe there are many of God's spiritual kings who will yet be openly crowned and for whom our daily prayer ascends, but who are hiding among the stuff of worldliness! Is not worldliness the greatest sin of London? Of England? Of the world?

How we started with alarm, some of us, I mean when we heard the other day that the cholera was actually in this country and of cases reported very near to us. For my part, I thought that terrible as such an affliction would be, perhaps God might overrule it to the waking up of the slumbering multitudes of this great city. I think everyone must have observed that during the time of such visitations there is a large measure of tenderness in the public mind. Men dare not play with eternal matters when they feel them to be so near—and when death comes in the next street, or the next house, or the next room—they cannot trifle life away as formerly they did!

Something, certainly, is needed in this vast city to move the masses of our people away from downright stolid worldliness. It is not among any one class—it is common to shopkeepers, artisans and the poorest of the poor—yes, even the wealthiest of the land are perhaps the greatest worldlings of all and the most absurd with vanity and frivolity and a silly round of visits, wasting their time in giddy formalities! The day was when England attached some importance to religion. During the age of the Puritans, men talked of religion and felt ready to fight and die for the things which they held dear. But now religion is very much trifled with and the tone of the whole public press is just of this kind—that it is very much a matter of mere opinion, a matter of indifference! We seem to have gotten into an age of slumbering. Those fearful wars that are now raging abroad must wake up the public mind there to some sense of need more than this poor earth can supply, but we are so prosperous and so peaceful—and have been so long without any particular visitation—that it seems to me as if the whole of England were given up to slumber and to hiding among the stuff of worldliness! We are getting on in the world! We are prospering on the whole—though, of course, there are a few exceptions—but on the whole, things go pretty well and if there is a panic here and there, yet still it is soon over, for the heart of the nation is sound in its business prosperity—and so the mass of men hide themselves among the stuff. How are we to get at the public mind? Where, O God, shall Jonahs be found that shall move this Nineveh? Oh, when shall it ever be that a voice shall startle the slumbering millions? When, great Lord, when, from the highest to the lowest, shall Your Gospel have some respect and get an attentive hearing from the sons of men? Well, we have this reflection, that God has some even in this mass of worldliness, some whom He will surely bring in—and it is our business by earnest, indefatigable effort, to seek to bring out these uncrowned kings who are thus hiding themselves among the stuff! We must be peering here and there, turning over this and that bale of worldliness, trying to get at some of those who shall yet enter into eternal life!

Then, in addition to worldliness, how many there are now *buried among the stuff of ignorance*. They scarcely know the meaning of the word, "sin." Missionaries tell us that in teaching the Hindus, they find it difficult to make them understand what sin is because if you say, sin, they suppose they know what it means. They imagine it means eating meat, or touching animal food. If you speak of righteousness, they will give as their meaning for it the paying respect to a Brahmin!

But this is our difficulty in England, too, and our people, as a common rule, uninstructed and untaught, do not attach the true meaning to the word, sin, nor understand what salvation means. How glibly will they confess "we are sinners." If they knew what it meant, they would never say it because they would be very unwilling to believe it true of them! They talk about salvation, but if they really grasped its meaning, they would eagerly seek it and press forward to obtain it—but they know not what they are to be saved from, nor into what state they are to be brought. They use the words,

but the ideas are not brought home to their minds. The multitudes still believe in saving themselves by good deeds. “By the works of the Law shall no flesh living be justified,” needs as much to be thundered out in London as once it did in Wurttemberg! We need it today as much as they needed it in the days of Luther—and the simple declaration of the plain Gospel is still as much required by the sons of men as in the days when Wycliffe sent out his evangelists from Lutterworth—or Whitfield, or Wesley went through the land preaching Christ Crucified! Truly, my Brothers and Sisters, we have this comfort, that dense as this stuff of ignorance is, God will bring out His people from it and we may go on working, hoping and believing that Christ shall see of the travail of His soul! We have seen many such instances. In fact, are we not such instances ourselves? From what blackness of darkness did not God bring some of us? From what utter ignorance of everything like spiritual truth did He redeem us? We hid away among the stuff and did not even understand the ruin of the Fall, much less the salvation which He brings us and yet, blessed be His name, today He has made us kings and priests unto our God and we know Him and are known of Him! Put worldliness and ignorance together and they make a terrible heap of baggage, among which sinners may easily hide—and this will render it more imperative upon the Christian laborer to be in earnest to seek out God’s uncrowned kings!

But, dear Friends, there are some men who, not content with mere worldliness and ignorance, go into *the haunts of sin*. Oh, how many there are for whom the Savior died who are still in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity—slaves of lust, serving Satan with the members of their body and with all the powers of their soul! “Such were some of you,” says the Apostle, “but you are washed; but you are sanctified”—and it must be an astounding sight to the angels if they know the blood-bought ones, if they have any idea of who those are who shall one day wear the crown and stand and sing among them—to see such persons wallowing in the mire of sin! My Brothers and Sisters! If you look back on your past state without grief and astonishment, I cannot understand you! Do you not sometimes say, “How is it that I, who am God’s child, should ever have been an enemy to Him who loved me with an everlasting love and, therefore, drew me with the bands of loving kindness?”

And perhaps there is some special sin which regretful memory will bring up before your mind tonight. You are now blood washed, now sanctified, now made an heir of Christ and you can scarcely bear to picture yourselves as having been what once you were! How Mr. John Newton, whenever he entered the pulpit to preach the Gospel of the Grace of God, must have felt astounded to find himself preaching it after having been such a blasphemer and everything else that was vile! And how John Bunyan, honest John Bunyan, when talking to the chief of sinners, must have felt as he would say, “the water standing in his eyes,” as he thought how he, too, had been a Jerusalem sinner, and yet “Grace abounding” had met with him! Oh, Brothers and Sisters, we hid ourselves among the stuff, we tried to conceal ourselves from the mercy of God, yet—

*“Determined to save
He watched o’er our path,
When Satan’s blind slaves
We sported with death”—*

and He brought us out to make and crown us kings!

There are some who have hidden themselves more successfully than this if it were possible, for in addition to going great lengths in sin there are *some who abstain from any opportunities which might lead them to be saved*. We know some who never give the minister an opportunity, who take a vow that they will never enter a place of worship at all. There seems to be no likelihood of their ever being saved, for they do not lie by Bethesda’s pool, and when the water is stirred they are thoughtless and do not think of stepping in. How many we have round about us of this sort, who, if they have any thought at all about religion, it is against it! They scarcely mention the name of Jesus except to blaspheme and only think of God impiously! Their case might be hopeless were it not that we have an Almighty God to deal with. We might give up in despair the multitudes around us were it not that Christ must see of the travail of His soul and must be satisfied and, therefore, let us, in good hope, hunt among the very darkest part of the stuff, for perhaps we may find some uncrowned member of the royal family of God!

Possibly I may be speaking to one here who is hiding himself among the stuff tonight from God’s mercy, not by neglecting the means of Grace, not by going into outward sin, but by *raising difficulties in the way of his own salvation*. “Tis strange, ‘tis passing strange, ‘tis amazing,” but it is true, that the worst enemies to a man are those within his own heart! Men will resist hope, clamor for despair, urge difficulties and seem as if they were rather intent to make their own condemnation sure than to find out anything like hope! Have I not hunted some sinners—hunted them as men hunt fox-

es—sought to get hold of them by some means to unearth them? Have I not dug them out of one hole and ferreted them out of another and thought that surely I had them? At one time they could not be saved because they were such great sinners. When that error was dissipated, then they thought they could not be saved because they were not great enough sinners! When that was dealt with, they found their hearts too hard. And when they were informed that Christ could soften their hard hearts, then they had not sufficient sense of need—and if they were taught that a sufficient sense of need was not a meritorious recommendation, but they were to go to the Cross to get that—then they turned to some other subterfuge and so, though a thousand refuges of lies were swept away, yet they built up more and more and more and seemed intent on making an unending task for us and to bring an unending loss upon themselves! You are hiding yourselves thus among the stuff, but may God’s mercy find you! What advantage can it be to you to doubt God’s mercy and readiness to save? Suppose it could be proved to a demonstration that mercy could not reach you? Why, Man, let somebody else prove it! Do not try to prove it yourself! Why should you be your own accuser? Why should you be the devil’s advocate and stand up and plead against yourself? Soul, I tell you there is still hope! There is hope for you! There is hope till the jaws of death are shut! There is hope till Christ has pronounced the final sentence! So what can be your motive, you foolish one? What can be your motive for wanting to hide yourself away from the promises, to shut out the light of God’s Word, to get away from the kindness of Jehovah’s love?

And yet that was the way with most of us—the way with all of us, I suppose, more or less! But we were found out among the stuff. I recollect what a simpleton I thought myself for having hidden away so long. When I heard the message, “Look unto Me and be you saved, all you ends of the earth,” I seemed to say to myself, “Why, whatever have I been doing, that I could not understand that before?” You know how Bunyan puts it with regard to Christian when he put his hand into his pocket and found the key of promise—the first thing he said to Hopeful, his fellow-prisoner, was—“What a fool I am to be rotting in this stinking dungeon when I have a key in my breast that will open every lock in Doubting Castle!” And, truly, what a simpleton are you to hide yourself away from a crown, to be afraid to be made a king, to be afraid to be a child of God, to strive against receiving a gift which shall blot out your sins and cleanse you from all iniquity and bring you safe to Heaven! And yet, such folly is committed by many of us!

Now before I leave this point I should like to say to Brothers and Sisters in Christ here, “Do you not think it is the business of each one of us here to go and hunt among the stuff to find out some of these kings who are hiding? Some of us are very likely to find them because we were once hidden there, ourselves, and we know a little bit about the place. You experienced Christians, you once were in this muddle, but have now got through it—do you not think that you should lay yourselves out to seek such perplexed souls? You who were once so worldly, may you not often speak to these worldly ones? And you who once were the chief of sinners, who more fitted than you to get at people who are now like what you were then? There are many of our villages in England where the Gospel does not prosper and I have frequently thought that the reason is this—there is no adequate ministry. Very likely in the pulpit is a very proper ministry, indeed, very admirable, but such as the people cannot easily understand. He is altogether apart from their life, their tastes and habits, and ways of thinking—and he feels it might be bringing himself down to talk as they talk—and yet they cannot bring themselves up to comprehend him! Now, if the Lord ever will bless His Churches, it seems to me that He will raise up a set of men suitable for each class—men who know the temptations of those to whom they preach! Men who have been where their hearers have been—having suffered their trials—and so can speak with both knowledge and sympathy! Let me ask you, then, you people of God, to set to work and hunt among the stuff and, who knows, but you may find a sinner there who will be well worth having because this Saul, though he did hide himself, was yet a fine fellow when they found him! He was head and shoulders taller than any off the rest in the camp—and sometimes I think that some of these big sinners that we find out among the stuff make the very best of saints! Oh, it was a grand day for the Church when Richard Weaver, the collier, was found out among the stuff, for he has been head and shoulders taller than a great many of the ministers of Christ in his line of things! And there have been many others of his kind! The Church does not often fish, but when she does, she catches her best fish. If we could but launch out a little more into the deep and the working population—and the openly sinning population could be more fully touched with the Gospel, who knows but we might find leaders for Israel’s hosts and men of valor—men who love much because they have had much forgiven!

I shall now leave that point and for a short time only—

II. SPEAK TO THE CHILDREN OF GOD WHO HIDE AMONG THE STUFF.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, we can make a great many excuses for the unconverted arising from their ignorance and their lack of taste for Divine things. We can understand all that. According to their nature, their carnal minds will act. But we can make no excuses for ourselves. I think an apology is the last thing which a Christian should wish to make for

himself. You and I have avoided many a crown which we might have worn and have hidden ourselves among the stuff to escape from many a privilege which might have been both our enrichment and honor!

Let me mention one or two of these. I think among the crowns which every Christian should covet, one should be *the crown of the victorious suppliant*. Jacob won it at Jabbok. He knelt down as Jacob, but he wrestled so well that God knighted him on the spot and made him Israel! No, He did more than knight him, He placed him in the royal family, for He called him “a prevailing prince.” I seem to see Jacob coming over the brook Jabbok in the morning, limping on his thigh, but with a crown on his head which angels might have been proud to wear! He had conquered! This was the crown which Luther wore. He sometimes came down from his prayer chamber crying, “Vice! Vice!” “I have conquered! I have conquered!” He would go there and agonize with God for such-and-such a mercy till he was sure he had obtained it—and then he came down with his mouth filled with song because of it! To be a successful pleader with God is a very high attainment. God does hear the cries of His people—in a measure, of all of them—but there are some of them who understand this verse, “If you keep My commandment, you shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you.” An obedient life has given them great power in prayer! They mind God’s will and He graciously grants them their will. They delight themselves in the Lord and He gives them the desire of their hearts.

You all know some praying men and women who can do wonders that we cannot. We are in a pinch—God hears and delivers us in our necessities—He is a prayer-hearing Lord to us! But we have not got the *carte blanche* they have to go and ask what they will and it shall be done unto them. It is possible to have it and yet not use it—we have not the power upon our knees that they have. Now, why is this? Is it not the case with all of us that it is because we have been hiding ourselves among the stuff? Why, how many Christians there are whose time for prayer is almost swallowed up through the pressure of business? God forbid that you neglect your business, but those who do most business with God are generally those who do their business best with man—and there is a great saving of time in having time with God in prayer! At any rate, prayer and provender hinder no man’s journey, but I am afraid there are some who give more time and care to worldly matters than should be given—and at the expense of their souls. What would you think of a mother who had two children and who gave to one of these children all her nutriment and all her care and left the other poor little thing to pine, to grow weakly, to be crying, to be very sick and near to death? You would say, “What an unnatural mother! Why does she fatten one child and not care for the other when they are both her children?” Now, that is your case. You have got a body and a soul. You are all day long emptying out your carefulness for your bodily gain, but what about that other dear child—let me say, that far better child, for the body only links you with the beast, but your soul, if it is a saved one, leads you into fellowship with God—your poor soul, alas, is left starving, faint and ready to die, while the body is cared for and, perhaps, pampered! Oh, unnatural parent! And yet most of us may take this matter home and confess that we have been hiding among the stuff.

Again, do not let me be misunderstood. I am not finding fault with those who are diligent in business. I do not think there is any text in the Bible against this. Those who are slothful in business are also slothful about their soul—and there is no disease in the world worse than laziness! But to be so absorbed with business as to be always thinking of it is to give up the soul with all its noblest faculties—we are not citizens of earth—but only strangers and sojourners as all our fathers were.

It is this that so often prevents us wearing the crown of the successful pleader. We have hidden ourselves among the stuff.

There is another crown which it strikes me every Christian ought to seek to wear, and that is *the crown that Christ gives to all who come to His feast and hold fellowship with Him*. The great delight beneath the skies, next door, in fact, to Heaven, itself, is communion with the Lord Jesus Christ! And when He brings us into His banqueting house and His banner over us is love, He crowns us with the crown wherewith He was crowned in the day of His espousals—the crown of His Church’s love and His love for her!

Well, you and I have worn it, but we do not always wear it, and why not? Is it not because we are too much hiding among the stuff? There is too much thinking about the family, perhaps not for God’s sake, but merely for our own! Too much planning, even when we are worshipping, with a view to the eye of our fellow creatures. Why, even into this House of Prayer there may be a deal of stuff brought! A farmer may have brought his whole farm here! And in these pews, I have no doubt, many a weaver has thrown his shuttle, many a blacksmith has wielded his hammer and many a carpenter has driven his plane! You can bring your stuff here well enough without bringing it on your backs, for you can bring it in your souls—and it is just this distraction, this taking off of the mind from Divine things—which prevents our entering

into spiritual fellowship. The preacher, too, knows what this is. He knows what it is to think so much about the management of the service, the ruling of the Church, the arranging this point, the setting of this Brother to work and the calling to account of this other one, that he gets to be like Martha—cumbered with much serving! And he loses the sweetness of sitting at his Master's feet. It should not be so, for it is all hiding among the stuff and, after all, is doing us real mischief. If we had more Grace, we would come out and wear the crown at all times and be kings and priests unto our God!

And, dear Friends, again. There is another crown which every Christian ought to try to win and that is *the crown of the successful laborer*. I hope we do not mean to go to Heaven without our crown, or with crowns without any stars in them. Some of you have had many spiritual children. God has blessed many of you to the conversion of two and three and some of you, of scores! God be thanked for that! You are not an unfruitful people. You have sought to bring souls to Christ. But, alas, there are some of you who do nothing of the kind. You come here to the House of Prayer and listen to the service and are pretty well content. Your children, your families, your neighbors and the outlying world you do not try to win to Christ, nor do you seem to care much about them! God forgive you, my dear Friends, and grant that you may not hide among the stuff any longer. When you come to die, it will be a sore matter of regret to you that you did not serve your Master more! I never heard of a Christian who died lamenting he had done too much for Christ, been too earnest, too indefatigable and so had shorted his life! There have been men who have shortened their lives for Christ, but even when chided by their friends, they have only gone on, still working—and have rejoiced to die for His dear sake!

When the physician told Master John Calvin that he must cease from working so much or he would die because he had a complication of painful diseases, he replied, “Would you have my Master come and find me loitering?” Oh, it was well said, Master Calvin! It were well said, too, if we could all say it! What have you done for Christ, my Brothers and Sisters? Have you spoken a word for Him? Have you written a word for Him? Have you done *anything* for Him? If not, though you have a crown within your reach, yet you are hiding among the stuff! May you be brought out from that stuff and made to wear the crown of the successful worker!

Once more, the Master is soon coming. He will either come in the clouds in visible personal Presence, or else He will come in death. One of the two things will certainly occur before long. *When He comes He comes to crown His people—will He find us, then, among the stuff?* There are crowns and palms for all the faithful when the pierced feet shall stand on Olivet, and the multitudes shall be gathered in the Valley of Decision. He shall come gloriously upon Mount Zion with His ancients—and in that day when—

*“He shall reign from pole to pole,
With illimitable sway”*

and when His Kingdom shall be universal, we who have been with Him in His humiliation, shall also be with Him in His Glory! But if He were to come tonight would He not find a great many of His people hiding away from their royalty, dishonoring their privileges and unworthy of their crown? “When the Son of Man comes shall He find faith upon the earth?” If He came now, how many of us would be found in places and positions far different from those in which we should wish to be found? When I called to see a friend not many months ago, I found her cleaning a doorstep, and she hardly liked me to call upon her when she was so employed. She blushed and said if she had known I had been coming she would _____. “There,” I said, “I know what you would have done—you would have put on your best things and wasted an hour or two of your time—but I like to come and catch you just as you are.” Then she smiled, and I said, “My good woman, that is exactly how I should like the Lord to come and find me—at my work. Working for His family in some way or other—scrubbing the doorstep or doing something else—it matters not as long as He finds His people busy for Him.”

Some of my Brothers seem to be inclined to get their people to stand up with their mouths wide open gaping for the Second Advent. The true way of waiting for His blessed appearing is to work unceasingly for Him! Christ will come, will come Personally and visibly! Let this be your great joyous hope, but still believe that the best way to meet Him is with trimmed lamps and burning lights as men watching and waiting for their Lord, and not as idle star-gazers who go out and read the prophecies and stand puzzling their minds about disputed facts while souls are perishing! Oh, Brothers, we have something else to do, I hope, with the intellect of the Christian Church, than to have it forever spending itself to no profit!

I might almost say of this what Paul did of certain other matters, that it was wasting precious time and thought on “endless genealogies and old wives fables,” for in my heart of hearts I do believe them to be but very little better. Oh, if the Christian wants to be ready for his Master, as he should be, let him be contending with Christ's foes who are many

and strong! Let him be caring for Christ's sheep, many of whom are very weak and sorely wounded. Let him work with his fellow servants and eat and drink, and bring out of the storehouse things new and old, for blessed is that servant who, when his Master comes, He shall find so doing!

Now, Christians, let me say to you in closing, do seek, as God shall help you, to get away from that baggage and that stuff of yours. Get up! Get up from those valleys where the reeking fog of earth is always lingering—get up to those healthful mountains where the breezes of Heaven fan the cheeks! Get above the mists and clouds into a clearer and serener atmosphere!. Ask the Holy Spirit to assist you in your spiritual mounting. Do not let it be said any longer that when a crown is ready for you, you are hiding away from it. May you be ready to be crowned and, being crowned, live as a king and a priest to the Glory of your Lord! May God add His blessing to these words for Jesus' sake.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

PSALM 120:1-3.

Verse 1. *In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and He heard me.* Slander occasions distress of the most grievous kind. Those who have felt the edge of a cruel tongue know assuredly that it is sharper than the sword. Calumny awakens our indignation by a sense of injustice and yet we find ourselves helpless to fight with the evil, or to act in our own defense. We could ward off the strokes of a cutlass, but we have no shield against a liar's tongue! Silence to man and prayer to God are the best cures for the evil of slander. It is of little use to appeal to our fellows on the matter of slander, for the more we stir it, the more it spreads. It is of no use to appeal to the honor of the slanderer, for they have none, and the most piteous demands for justice will only increase their malignity and encourage them to fresh insult! However, when cries to man would be our weakness, cries to God will be our strength! The ear of our God is not deaf, nor even heavy. He listens attentively, He catches the first accent of supplication. He makes each of His children confess—"He heard me."

2. *Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.* Lips are soft, but when they are "lying lips" they suck away the life of character and are as murderous as razors. Lips should never be red with the blood of honest men's reputations, nor salved with malicious lies. The faculty of speech becomes a curse when it is degraded into a mean weapon for smiting men behind their backs. Those who fawn and flatter, too, and all the while have enmity in their hearts, are horrible beings! They are the seed of the devil and he works in them after his own deceptive nature. Better to meet wild beasts and serpents than deceivers! These are a kind of monster whose birth is from beneath and whose end lies far below.

3. *What shall be given unto you? Or what shall be done unto you, you false tongue?* The Psalmist seems lost to suggest a fitting punishment! It is the worst of offenses—this detraction, calumny and slander. Judgment sharp and crushing would be measured out to it if men were visited for their transgressions. But what punishment could be heavy enough? What will God do with lying tongues? He has uttered His most terrible threats against them—and He will terribly execute them in due time.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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