

ENCOURAGEMENTS TO PRAYER

NO. 2380

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“I am the LORD your God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt:
 open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.”*

Psalm 81:10

THE preceding verse bids us turn away from any strange God: “There shall no strange god be in you; neither shall you worship any strange god.” Idolatry is the natural sin of man, it covers a very large surface of the realm of sin, and it is always cropping up in some form or other. Idolatry is not merely the bowing before graven images, the essence of it lies in putting trust in any other than the great invisible God. We can easily make to ourselves gods of our experience, of our wealth, of our talents. We can make idols of our children, of our wives, of our husbands, of our friends. We can make a god of anything by valuing it more than we do our Savior, or by trusting in it beyond our God, or by refusing to trust in Him apart from it. You can make a god of the means of grace, when you think more of the means of grace than of God, and the grace of the means. You can make a god of your Bible when you think that the reading of it, apart from the illumination of the Holy Spirit, will be all that you require. So you see that it is very easy for man to fall into idolatry.

The cure for this evil lies in our having a living God always before us. If you forget the living God, you will make to yourself an idol god. It is a necessity of your nature that you should have a god of some sort, and, to prevent your having a strange god, you must trust, cling to, and love JEHOVAH, the one only living and true God.

The man who has Christ before him does not need a crucifix. The man who comes to God through Jesus Christ does not want the intercession of the Virgin Mary or of saints and angels. The man who has set the Lord always before him does not desire symbols of JEHOVAH'S presence, in fact, he remembers the words of Moses to the children of Israel, “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, the likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God has divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.”

Such a man is afraid, sometimes, if there be anything like a similitude about his prayers, lest his mind should be taken away from worshipping God, who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth. He, therefore, generally seeks after great simplicity of worship, for an ornate ritual is a stumbling block to him, although there be some who think that it is a help to them. It only hinders him, and therefore he rejects it.

Oh, that God might always keep us clear of all idolatry by His good Spirit enabling us to worship Him in spirit and in truth! Then would these words be fulfilled in our experience, “There shall no strange god be in you; neither shall you worship any strange god.” He who has learned to trust the Creator will not want to trust the creature. He who has stayed himself upon the Rock of Ages will not be

tempted to support himself upon the broken reed of human strength. Who will lean on a cloud when his defense may be the munitions of stupendous rocks? Who will wish to feed on the mist, when he has eaten the true Bread which comes down from heaven? God, the true God, casts out all strange gods.

In our text, we have God coming very near to His people, and coming near them to encourage them to come nearer to Him. We have the Lord speaking to them that they may speak to Him. He opens His mouth to them, that they may open their mouths to Him. The text contains one encouragement, and two arguments for it, they will be our two divisions, first, *God encouraging His people*, and, secondly, *God using two great arguments*. You see, the exhortation is sandwiched in between two arguments, the first is, “I am the LORD—I am JEHOVAH—your God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt.” Then comes the exhortation, “Open thy mouth wide,” and that is followed by the other argument, “I will fill it.” There is a good reason indeed for opening the mouth wide, when God has promised to fill it.

I. To begin, then, the exhortation of the sermon will be that which we find in the text, in which we hear GOD ENCOURAGING HIS PEOPLE by saying, “Open thy mouth wide.”

I suppose that the Lord means by this exhortation, first of all, to help us *to get rid of the paralyzing influence of fear*. A man, in the presence of one whom he dreads, cannot speak boldly, and if he has been guilty of some great crime, and stands before one whom he regards as his judge, he is like the man in our Lord’s parable, “speechless.” A man on his knees, conscious of his sin, fearing the justice of God, would very naturally be unable to speak, and to encourage him God says, “Open thy mouth; be not afraid. Open thy mouth wide; confess your sin; acknowledge your wanderings from your God; go into the particulars of your iniquity; ask for my mercy; plead my promises; set forth the arguments that can be drawn from the cross of Christ. Open thy mouth wide; be not afraid to speak.”

Am I addressing some child of God, or rather, one who hardly knows whether he is a child of God or not, but who wants to be one? Do you feel as if you cannot pray? God here encourages you to plead with Him. He says, “Open thy mouth.” Your eyes are filled with tears, or perhaps you are wishing that they might be, your heart is swelling with grief, but you cannot find expressions for your feelings. You are afraid to come before the Lord, you dare not take hold of the horns of the altar, you think that it would be presumption on your part to look to Christ, and hope for mercy, so, there you lie, dumb before God. But, bending over you in infinite compassion, the Great Father says, “Open thy mouth! Speak, my child; my ear is waiting to hear your cry; I am ready to grant your request. Oh! Be not silent before me; pour out your heart like water in my presence; turn it upside down, and to the last dregs let all flow out before me; reserve nothing; spread your case before me now.” I think that this exhortation means just that.

Next, “Open thy mouth wide;” that is, *speak freely in prayer to God*, be not hampered in your pleading. I have known children of God, who have felt a terrible awe in the presence of the Lord—which is a most proper feeling up to a certain point—but they have had a fear which has brought them into bondage, and bondage is a sad evil. We want freedom, and liberty of access to God, when we come before the mercy seat, and the Lord therefore encourages His people to break loose from all their shackles, when He says, “Open thy mouth wide.”

There are many prayers that it would not be right to pray in public, but they are very dear to God’s ear in private. I believe that there are prayers uttered by godly men, uneducated and illiterate believers, that might provoke a smile from us, but they are accepted in the Beloved, and received as good, sound supplication before the Lord God of Sabaoth. “Open thy mouth wide.” If you cannot pray as you would, pray as you can, but make yourself free with your heavenly Father, be bold with your Lord, shake off all reserve, and keep back nothing from your God. Bare your hearts before Him, you cannot conceal anything from Him, do not attempt to do so.

Freely commune with the Lord as friend speaks to friend, or as a child addresses his father. You are not now before your judge, you are not before an enemy, you are not before one who will harshly criticize you, and pull you to pieces, the Lord is all love and gentleness to those who seek His face. Then open your mouth wide. What is it that you have done? What is it that you want? What is it that your soul is craving for? What is it that drives you to despair? Open your mouth wide, let all come out, hide

nothing from your God. Let your very heart come marching out at the open doors of your lips, for God is waiting to hear your petition.

The exhortation of the text means, then, shake off all fear, and also exercise a holy boldness of familiarity and freedom in the presence of the Most High.

Do you not think, however, that it means something more than that? It must also mean *ask great things*, “Open thy mouth wide.” Now note this. The greater the thing that you ask, the more sure you are to have it. With men it is, usually, the smaller the favor you crave, the more likely you are to obtain it, but with God it is the other way, the greater the gift for which you ask, the more sure you are to have it. There is nothing greater to ask for than Christ, and you may have Christ for the asking, for God has already given Him to all who believe, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

If you ask for wealth, you may not get it, for it is a small and paltry thing which the Lord may not care to give you, but if you ask for eternal life, you shall have it, for this is a great thing, and God delights to give the greatest blessings to those who come to Him by Christ Jesus, so that, what might seem to hinder should now encourage. God can hear you if you cannot open your mouth, for He can hear the inward groans of your heart. But, oh, be you sure that He will hear you if you can open your mouth wide!

Is your sin great? Use that as an argument! Say with David, “For thy name’s sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.” Are you in a very sad plight, are you spiritually bankrupt? Then plead your poverty, there is no plea like it with God. Do you feel empty? Plead your emptiness. The more urgent your necessity, the more sure will mercy be to relieve you, the greater your want, the readier is God to come to you.

If, in going through the town, I see a doctor’s carriage hurrying along at a great speed, I should not think that the physician was driving to a person who had only the toothache. I should conceive that somebody, in dire extremity, had sent for him in hot haste to come and cure him, if possible, of a serious malady.

And when God rides upon a cherub, and does fly, yes, does fly upon the wings of the wind, He is coming to relieve some great need of His people. To the man who has a great want, God says, “Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.” Ask great things. God’s people need to be taught to ask great things. That was a noble utterance of William Carey, “Attempt great things for God, expect great things from God.” The less you expect from man, the better, but the more you expect from God, the more you are likely to receive. Look for great things from Him, and come to Him with large requests—

***“Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring.”***

Our text must mean that, must it not—ask great things?

I think that it also means, in the fourth place, that we are to *feel intense desires*, “Open thy mouth.” It has been noticed that, whenever a man speaks with very great earnestness, he opens his mouth widely. We read in the Gospels that when our Lord went up into a mountain, and “was set, his disciples came unto him: and *he opened his mouth*, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit,” and so on. Someone observed that it was quite unnecessary to say that He opened His mouth, for how could He preach without doing so? But another and a wiser person replied, “Oh, if you go into many a church and chapel, you can see the thing done!” When a man does not speak distinctly and clearly, he does not open his mouth, but when he is emphatic and earnest in his address, he must open his mouth wide.

The Lord urges us to be in earnest when He says, “Open your mouth wide.” Cold prayers, so-called, are not real prayers, they are rather entreaties to be denied, all their force works backwards. We must pray with fervency, persistence, reiteration, if we would prevail with God, we must say, “I will not let you go, except you bless me.” The Lord loves that kind of pleading. There is no music in God’s ear that

is more sweet from His child than a loud earnest cry. God delights to hear the knocker of prayer hammering away at the door of mercy. If you have been denied six times, go for the seventh time, and knock, and knock, and knock, each time with greater vehemence, if you would be heard. "Open thy mouth wide."

O dear hearers, some of you have been seeking the Lord a little lately, and you have not found Him! No, but He is not a little God, to be sought a little, and when your whole heart and soul go after Him, when you are deeply anxious, and sorely exercised, and solemnly in earnest, then will this great God give you His great salvation. Oh, that you would open your mouth wide! Cry unto Him. I mean not with actual loudness of voice; but with the loudness of the heart's voice, which shall be heard in heaven.

Sometimes, when it rains very hard, and the servant does not come to the door very quickly, you give such a pull at the bell that it rings all over the house. Now give such a ring as that at the gate of heaven. A storm is raging, and you cannot endure waiting outside in the tempest. Pull the bell as if you would pull heaven itself down, give a ring that seems to say, "I must come in. Infinite love, I must possess you. Sovereign mercy, I must receive you. I die, I perish, I am lost forever, unless You come to me, my God." Open your mouth wide, and then He will be sure to fill it.

Once more, I think that this exhortation means, *exercise a great expectancy*. I inadvertently touched upon that point just now. The figure is, no doubt, taken from a bird's nest. Have you ever seen the little birds, inside a nest, when they expected their mother to come and feed them? If you have ever peeped in, and they mistook you for their mother, what did they look like? Why, they looked like a mass of mouth! They opened their mouths as wide as they could, and it is really surprising how very wide a little bird can open its mouth. The mother is about to bring a worm, or some other thing for it to feed upon, the wee birdie is famishing, and it cannot receive food any other way but by opening its mouth, and its hunger makes it feel as if its mouth was not half wide enough, and so it at least makes it as wide as ever it can when the parent bird comes to it—the father or mother which has been toiling and working all day long to satisfy its wants. They do work; poor little creatures, and how fast and how often they fly to and fro! They seem to say to their little ones, "We will fill you. Open your mouths wide and we will fill you."

As for you, poor souls, what a mouth you have, if you do but open it! I mean, what wants you have! I tell you that your wants are so great that, if all the saints on earth, and all the angels in heaven, were to put their stores together, and say, "We will fill you," they would undertake a task utterly beyond their power. None but God Himself can fill the human heart, only He can truly say, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Christ will fill it, however great your sense of sin and your need of pardon. The Father will fill it, however great your grief for having left His house. The Holy Ghost will fill it, however long your death in sin, however great your alienation from God. None but the Trinity can fill the heart of man. It was one of Quarles' quaint sayings that the heart was a triangle, and the world a globe, and, says he, "a globe can never fill a triangle, and none but the Trinity can fill the heart of man." Quaint as the conceit is, the truth which it embodies is absolutely certain.

"Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it," says God. Expect just this, that God will give you, in answer to prayer, all that you want, "I will fill it." Somebody, misquoting this text, says, "I will fill it abundantly." Tush! what do you want with your "abundantly"? God's Word is big enough without any of your adverbs. "I will fill it." If it is filled, it is filled, and God will fill you full. He will give you all that you require, and all that you ever can require between this place and the gates of heaven. "Open thou thy mouth wide, sensible of thy urgent necessity, and I," says God, "will supply all your needs, according to my riches in glory by Christ Jesus." "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it."

Now, just two or three words here concerning arguments that I might use to induce children of God to come before His presence asking great things.

First, *consider God's greatness*. You may expect great things from Him who made the heavens and the earth. Look up at the stars, see how the Lord flung them about by handfuls, and remember that all the stars that are visible to you are only the sweepings of stardust by the door of God's great house.

There are an infinite number of bright worlds which our telescopes have never seen. He who made all these things is great in power, therefore, ask something great of Him, when you come before Him in prayer.

Remember, also, *His goodness*. God delights to give, you are not asking Him to do that which will vex Him. The Lord is no miser who miserably doles out His coppers under pressure. He is a God to whom it is as natural to give as it is for the sun to shine, or for a fountain to flow. Come you, then, to Him with large petitions, since He is so greatly good.

Remember, also, *the channel by which mercies come to you*, it is Christ Jesus your Lord. Are you coming to the Lord for pennyworths, in the name of Christ? Say, will you satisfy yourself by asking for pence and farthings through the Lord Jesus? Such a mercy seat as this was meant for something grand and glorious, such a sacrifice as Christ's was provided for the greatest needs of men. Open your mouths wide when you mention the name of Jesus Christ. It seems a poor thing to stint yourselves in your prayers when the name you plead is—

*“The name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky,
Angels and men before it fall;
And devils fear and fly.”*

Note, next, that *the Holy Spirit is the Author of true prayer*. He “helpeth our infirmities,” and will you stutter and stammer when the Holy Spirit helps you? Will you say of such a thing, “This is too great for me to ask”? What! when the Holy Ghost prompts you to ask, does He not know what is fit for you to ask? Yield yourself to His gracious impulses, be borne along the stream of supplication by the Spirit's influence, and ask what you will! That is a pretty story that they tell of Alexander having given to a man a present which seemed far too great, so he was afraid that it could not be his, and then Alexander said, “It may be too much for you to receive, but it is not too much for me to give.” So the mercy may seem too great for you to have, but it is by no means too great for Christ to grant you. Open your mouth wide, then, while you have such a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to go to in prayer.

“Open thy mouth wide,” for *your wants are very great*. They are much greater than you know of, do not, therefore, fall short in your petitions. I think that, if I could have anything I asked for of any friend, I should be inclined to overleap my necessities a little, rather than to fall short of them. Certainly, with God, who is not impoverished by giving, and not enriched by withholding, we may take vast liberties. “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” Ask much in prayer, because your wants are so great.

And then think of *the wants of others*. Oh, when I think of what power prayer has, I would encourage brethren to pray great prayers for the conversion of London, for the establishment of Christ's Church in the land, and for the conversion of China, Africa, India. “Open your mouth wide.”

There was one who seemed to have great power in prayer, and I have often read his life, but I think the prayers he used to pray were for a pair of horses, or for a new suit of clothes, or something of that sort. He always obtained what he asked, but it seems a miserable business to pray like that. It is much nobler to pray, like Carey, “India for Christ!” or, “Lord, save China!” Now you have asked for something great this time, “Open thy mouth wide,” as you have such a great God to deal with about such great matters. You may ask for little things when you need them, and you are encouraged to do so, but still, do not confine your requests to them. Come to great things, and ask great mercies for others, if you are not under any great necessity yourself.

Remember, once more, *God's exceedingly great and precious promises*. How can you be praying on a right scale if you are always praying straitened in yourselves? O dear friends, the promises of God are not narrow! They are “exceedingly great and precious promises.” You have never measured them fully. Come, then, with an open mouth, and ask great things of your Father who is in heaven.

Thus have I, at some length, handled the exhortation in the text, but I cannot do much with it, it is only the Holy Spirit, who can effectually whisper into your ear and heart, “Open thy mouth wide.”

II. Now, secondly, observe GOD USING TWO GREAT ARGUMENTS, upon which I will only speak briefly. One is put before the exhortation, and one is put afterwards, to keep it with an attendant on either side.

The first reason why you should open your mouth wide is, *because of what God has done*. He says, “I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt.” You recollect where these words occur, do you not? They are recorded very solemnly, in the twentieth chapter of Exodus, at the commencement of the Ten Commandments, “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” And now the same solemn words come before a promise, as if God made this precept to be as solemn as His law, and confirmed the promise with all the solemnities with which He established the covenant. “Open thy mouth wide,” says He.

Child of God, this text belongs peculiarly to you. “I am JEHOVAH, thy God.” The Lord has an election of grace, He has a peculiar people, whom He has chosen unto Himself, and they shall show forth His praise. God is the God of His people. “I am JEHOVAH, thy God,” says He. If He is not the God of others, yet He is your God. He has revealed Himself to you, He has chosen you, and you have chosen Him. Now, can you not open your mouth wide to your own God, to JEHOVAH, the great “I AM,” the boundless, the infinite, the almighty God, can you not speak freely to Him?

And then it is added, “I am JEHOVAH, thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt.” Now, that is the greatest thing that God could do for His people, and, if He has done that, will He not do the lesser things? Oh, what a wondrous deliverance that was when, with a high hand and an outstretched arm, He brought forth His people, despite all the opposition of Pharaoh! With terrible plagues He broke the power of the proud monarch, but as for His people, He led them forth like sheep, and brought them out into a glorious liberty, and crushed the chivalry of Egypt at the Red Sea, so that they could never again pursue the Israelites, nor disturb them in their wilderness march towards the land which God had promised them.

Well now, the Lord has done just that same kind of thing for all His people. He has brought us out of our spiritual bondage, we have eaten the Paschal Lamb, we have sprinkled the blood, we have escaped the destroying angel. We are no longer under the power of sin and Satan, the Lord has set us free, and, as for our sins, the depths have covered them, there is not one of them left, they sank to the bottom like a stone. Glory be to God for what He has done! If this does not lead us to open our mouths wide in prayer, what will?

“Ah!” sighs a poor soul, “He has never done that for me, I am still a bond slave.” Hearken. If He has done it for others, take hope from it, that God will hear prayer, and save you, seeing that He has saved others. Did you ever notice, in the old slave times, in the Southern States of America, how, when a slave escaped, others heard that he had followed the pole star, and so gained liberty, and they all took hope?

Well now, if the Lord has brought some of us out of bondage, take hope, you who are still in chains. God can deliver you, ask Him to do so. Open your mouth wide. When you get home, cry to God in your chamber. Better still, here in your pew, breathe a prayer for salvation and liberty, and if you want a word of advice and counsel, come on to this lower platform, and there shall be some friend to speak with you, and to pray with you about your soul. Only open your mouth, do not be ashamed. God says to you that He has brought His people out of Egypt, and He who has done that can do anything. Open your mouth wide and He will fill it.

But the second argument, with which the text closes, is concerning *what God will do*, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” “I will fill it.” The story goes—I know not how true it is, but I remember reading it, very well—that the Shah of Persia, a strange man altogether, on one occasion said to a person who had pleased him very greatly, “Open your mouth,” and when he had opened his mouth, the Shah began to fill it up with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and all sorts of precious stones. I feel morally certain

that the man opened his mouth wide. I do not know what your opinions may be, but I have the firm conviction that, when he found that such treasure was being put into his mouth, he made it as large as it very well could be, whether it looked beautiful or not. Would not you do the same if you had such an opportunity? Suppose that your mouth was to be filled with sovereigns, and you were in extreme poverty, would you not open your mouth? It would prompt a man to open his mouth wide if he heard the Shah say, "I will fill it." Now, the Lord says to each of His own people, whom He has so highly favored, "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it."

Suppose you open your mouth wide in prayer. "I cannot," says one. Well, open your mouth and God will fill it with prayer, and then, when you have prayed the prayer that He has given you, He will fill it with answers. God gives prayer as well as the answer to prayer. Only open your mouth, and, as it were, make a vacuum for God to fill. God loves to look for emptiness where He may stow away His grace.

When you have done that, then open your mouth with praise. It is wonderful, when a man begins to praise God, how the praise keeps on coming. The praise of God is something like Mr. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. He began to write, he says, and he does not know how he wrote so much, but he quaintly says, "As I pulled, it came," and you will find it is so with the praise of God. Praise Him, and you *will* praise Him. If you do not praise Him, you never will praise Him. If you do not begin, you will never keep on, but once open the sluices of gratitude, and the streams will flow more and more copiously every hour. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it."

So is it in comparing our testimony concerning God's goodness. Sometimes we who are preachers have to cry, "What shall we say to the people?" I see some dear brethren here, who, I dare say, get as I do, into a very poverty-stricken state. They say, "Where shall we get the next sermon from?" Well, go in God's name, and say what He bids you, and He will tell you more. Open your mouth wide and He will fill it. Bear testimony to what the Lord has done for your soul, in your own small way, and He will be pleased to fill your mouth still with His good word, so that you shall abundantly utter the memory of His great goodness.

Now, then, let us all come before God with open mouths. Whatever state of mind we may be in, if we cannot pray, let us come and open our mouth and pant, as David did when he said, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." So let us come before our God. You who feel as if you could not speak, and could scarcely think, come with your mouth wide open, and stand there before God, or be like the little bird in its nest, open your mouth towards heaven. Mark how the parched earth, in times of drought, cracks, and opens its mouth for the rain. Let your parched heart begin to pray in the presence of your God, and thus ask for His grace. May God give us mighty desires! We read of Daniel, in the margin of our Bible, instead of "a man greatly beloved," "a man of desires." He was a man of great desires, and if we are like him in this respect, we shall soon be greatly blessed, and God will be greatly glorified. May it be so, for His great name's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

Psalm 81

We have here an exhortation to praise God, and this is always in season. Perhaps we need more stirring up to praise than to prayer, yet it ought to be as natural for us to praise God as it is for the birds to sing. Thus the Psalm begins—

Verse 1. *Sing aloud unto God our strength:*

Yes, the strength which the Lord gives you should be spent in praising Him. "Sing aloud." Throw your whole soul into it. If the Lord makes you strong, then give your strength back to Him in sacred song: "Sing aloud unto God our strength."

1. *Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.*

Other gods, such as Moloch, and Ashtaroth, are worshipped with mournful cries and sorrowful lamentations, but the God of Jacob, the God that hears prayer, the God of salvation, the God of the covenant, is to be worshipped with joy. He is the happy God, and He loves happy worshippers: “Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.” You do not need to be forced to praise Him, but you will do it with alacrity and delight, the very sweetness of your song will consist in the cheerfulness of it: “Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.”

2-4. *Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob.*

It is “a statute” that we should praise God, it is “a law” that we should make a joyful noise before Him. Happy law, and happy men who are under such a law! Let us be quick to obey it, and let not the King’s statute be disregarded by any one of us.

5. *This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not.*

God understands His people’s language, and in very truth He understands everything, but here He uses a Hebraism to show that He did not care for the speech of the Egyptians: “I heard a language that I understood not.” This sentence is like that other expression, “I never knew you.” Of course, the Lord knows everyone as a matter of acquaintance, but not as a matter of affection. He cared not for the Egyptians, they were aliens to Him, He went out against the land of Egypt. It was for Joseph, and for His own people who were under the leadership of Joseph in that heathen land, that He ordained this statute that they should praise the name of JEHOVAH.

6. *I removed his shoulder from the burden:*

Is not that true of many of you in a spiritual sense? Oh, what a burden of sin we used to carry! How have we got rid of it? Does not the Lord here remind us of how we lost that grievous load? “I removed his shoulder from the burden.”

6. *His hands were delivered from the pots.*

We used to be busy enough with the slave’s occupation of making bricks without straw. Hard was the task when we were under legal bondage, harder still the toil when under the bondage of our own sin, slaves of ourselves: who could ever have a more tyrant master than himself? But that is all over now, and the Lord can say, “I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.”

7. *Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee;*

What a gracious word is this! How it reminds us, in the most loving tones, of our obligations to the Lord! “Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee.”

7. *I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.*

A very humbling sentence this! God has often proved us, and He has often disproved us. When He has tried us, we have not endured the test as we ought to have done. We have murmured and complained, and the waters, which ought to have been waters of joy and of happy patience, have been waters of strife.

“Selah.” That is, “Pause,” screw up the harp strings, lift up the heart. Such a Psalm as this is to be read by installments, with little halts on the road, for us to meditate and think upon the truth brought before us. We may well pause here when we hear the Lord reminding us of our faults and of His great mercy to us: “I delivered thee; I answered thee...I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.”

8. *Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me;*

What! Is there any question as to whether God’s people will hearken to Him or not? Alas! sometimes our ears grow very heavy, we are so occupied with the cares of the world, so sleepy while passing over the Enchanted Ground, that we do not hear that dear voice to which we ought to give heed whenever it speaks: “Hear, O my people...O Israel, if you will hearken unto me.”

9. *There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god.*

It is strange that we should ever wish to do so. Oh, that we might be wholly delivered from everything that looks like idolatry, and be enabled to cleave to the worship of the one living and true God with the serenity and certainty of faith!

10-11. *I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.*

Oh, how plaintive is this lament! Is it not full of sorrow? “Israel would none of me.” Her own God, her own Friend, her own Benefactor, her own Husband has to cry, “Israel would none of me—would not have my law, my promise, my guidance, myself—Israel would none of me.”

12. *So I gave them up—*

Dreadful word! If God gives us up, even for a moment, there is no telling into what sin we may plunge, and if He were to give us up altogether—ah, me! This is the most direful of sentences: “So I gave them up”—

12. *Unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels.*

O God, save us from this awful state! This indeed is hell—to be given up of God. Pray, dear brothers and sisters, that such a terrible curse may never come upon you. Yet it is a most righteous punishment; if a man will not have God, and will give God up, what can be a more righteous retribution than that God should give him up? He does so at last with ungodly men, yet He does it very reluctantly, and He says, “How shall I give thee up?” May He never give up one of you!

13. *Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!*

And can we not echo that lament, and say, “Oh, that we had hearkened unto God, and that we had walked in His ways”? What a happy life would the believer enjoy if he always had an ear for God’s commandments, and a foot for His ways! “Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!”

14-15. *I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured forever.*

“Their time”—the time of His own people—“should have endured forever.” They might have been always conquerors, always kings, always favored of God, always walking in the light, as God is in the light. So might it be with us if we would first hearken to God, and next, walk in His ways. The mark on the ear and the mark on the foot are two of the tokens of Christ’s sheep: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” May we all have both the ear-mark and the foot-mark!

16. *He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat:*

How sweet would Gospel doctrine be if Gospel precepts were observed! When you do not enjoy the preaching of the Word, is it not because you are out of health, and your spiritual appetite is impaired? “He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat.”

When the soul lives near to God, then the Word of the Lord is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.

16. *And with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.*

You know what this “honey out of the rock” is. You have tasted it, and in days gone by you have feasted on it, perhaps you have not had much of it of late. If so, remember why this is. God will give His children bread, but He will not give them honey unless they live very near to Him, you shall have the necessaries of life, but not luxuries. The high and heavenly joys of the divine life shall be denied you if you walk at a distance from your God; but if you stay close to Him, you shall have the finest of the wheat, and you shall be satisfied with honey out of the rock.

May the Lord bless the reading of His Word to us, and may He draw us nearer to Himself! Amen.

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