

THE POWER OF A SIGH

NO. 2464

A SERMON
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 DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD;
 I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.”*
Psalm 12:5

YOU must all have noticed that David lived in very evil times. When he wrote this psalm, the days were dark, and his cry was “Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men,” from which I gather that, bad as the times may be in which we live, there have been bad times before these.

We are not the first persons who have had reason to complain of the evils by which we are surrounded. If we have to say that the love of many is waxing cold, and the truth is scarcely to be found, such experiences have happened to God's servants many times before the present. Let us not think it strange concerning the fiery trial we have to endure, as though we were the first persons to whom that trial has come.

No, dear friends, I feel greatly comforted when I remember that all through the history of God's people, there have been periods of darkness as black as that in which we live, times of trial and perplexity, when it has seemed as if the whole course of nature was out of order, and as if the very foundations were removed, so that men were ready to cry, “What can the righteous do?”

If it be so, that we are only weathering storms like those which tossed the barques of our fathers before us, and if their ships came safely into the harbor, notwithstanding the hurricane, let us take comfort and be assured that we too, shall weather this raging tempest, and that for us there will yet be a season when we shall be glad because we are quiet, because the Lord has brought us into our desired haven.

My subject on this occasion leads me to speak to those who are in personal trouble, and to say something concerning God's gracious dealings towards them. The text seems to me to tell us three things, first, that *God's people may be in a very sad case*, secondly, that *God's people have a Friend at hand*, a Friend who can hear even their sighing, and thirdly, that *this Friend will do them a good turn* when once He arises and takes their cause in hand, and He is certain to do it, for the text is virtually a promise, “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.”

I. First then, GOD'S PEOPLE—His own people—His elect people—His redeemed people—His well-beloved people—MAY BE IN A VERY SAD CASE.

Certainly, to begin with, *they may be poor*, and in addition to that, *they may be needy*, for I take it that the words “poor” and “needy” have not quite the same meaning. A man may be very poor, and that condition is bad enough, yet his needs may not be many. When he puts on his hat, he covers his whole family, and when he takes a crust into his mouth, he feeds his whole family.

But alas! there are many who cannot say that, for in addition to being poor, they are very needy. They have a number of mouths to feed, and a number of backs to clothe, they have more needs than one person would have if he were by himself. A man may have many who are so attached to him by the ties of nature that their needs become his needs, and therefore, in addition to being poor, he is needy as well.

It should not surprise any of us if we find ourselves to be poor and needy. The poor will never cease out of the land, and until Christ shall come again, there will be afflicted and poor people left who shall trust in the name of the Lord. Let us not say that because we are poor and needy, therefore we are not the Lord's. No, but let us rather argue the other way, for it is the poor to whom the Gospel is preached, it is often from among the poor that God chooses His very best and brightest servants.

Certainly, if you take the line of history, you shall see electing love looking far oftener into the cottage than into the palace, you shall see the redemption of Christ purchasing to itself precious souls more often among peasants than among peers and princes. They who have had least of this world's good have often had most of the good of the world to come, and they who have had most of this world's portion have, as a rule, had no portion at all in the kingdom of heaven.

Remember our Lord's solemn warning, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" And forget not Paul's words, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence."

So the apostle James writes, "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" You may therefore, be poor and needy, and yet not only be among the Lord's servants, but be among the very best of them, among the very richest of them, among those whom He loves best of all.

But next, God's best servants *may be oppressed* as well as poor and needy. The man who wrote this psalm, the Lord's servant David, was a man much oppressed. In his boyhood I imagine that he was the most despised of his father's family, I gather that from the fact that when his brothers came home to attend the sacrifice with Samuel the prophet, David was left alone to keep the sheep.

Jesse brought all his sons except young David, and set them before the prophet, and even Samuel, when he looked on Eliab, said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before me," but it was not so, and after the seven sons of Jesse had appeared, and been rejected, the prophet asked, "Are here all thy children?" And the father answered, "There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep." As soon as David came, the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he."

When the stripling went down to the battle, he was snubbed by his eldest brother Eliab, although he was the one by whom the Lord meant to deliver Israel and to strike the Philistines. From his early days until the time when God set him in safety from him that puffed at him, David was terribly oppressed. Saul grew jealous as he heard the voices of the women singing, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." It soured the heart of the king of Israel, and he could not bear to think of it.

Gloomy and dark of mind, he thought of David as his supplanter, and hurled a javelin at him, seeking to slay the one to whom he owed so much. David had to escape out of Saul's sight, you know how the king pursued him all over the country, and followed him to the caves of the wild goats and to the valleys of the desert. David, though perfectly inoffensive, had to flee from his father-in-law, whose life he disdained to take when it was in his power. He was ever kind, and generous, and faithful to Saul, yet he was always the subject of slander and oppression.

So, you see that God's servants may be oppressed. You may be a child of God, and yet get a very bad name for yourself, ay, even through doing the things that are right, and through being something more than what men ordinarily are. Poor Joseph was cast into prison, not through wrongdoing, but as the result of his chastity and purity, and many a child of God has brought upon himself an ill name by simply being faithful to the truth and faithful to his God.

Do not wonder if somebody who is set over you, deals very harshly with you. It may be that in the providence of God, it is intended that it should be so with you, especially in your youth. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth," and there are some men I know of who had very hard times as

apprentices and as journeymen, who, nevertheless, in later life were obliged to feel that it was good for them that they were thus broken in.

It was a breaking in, but it was a rough colt that needed it, and though the treatment was unrighteous and unjust on the part of the oppressor, yet God overruled it and made it to work for good. He often takes His Joseph, who is hated of his brethren, and makes all the sheaves to do obeisance to that sheaf, and the sun and the moon and the eleven stars of the family are obliged to honor that lone star which once they had so much despised.

Do not be astonished if your way is rough on the road to heaven, rather wonder if you come to a smooth portion, and when people begin to speak well of you, look about you, and be a little afraid of what they are trying to do. Be not at all surprised when they abuse, and misrepresent, and slander you, take all that as a matter of course and go to God with it, but when they begin to cry, "Hosanna!" do not think much of it. The same folk who shout, "Hosanna!" today, may cry, before the week is out, "Away with him, crucify him, crucify him." Palm Sunday is not far off from Good Friday, the day of acclamations is followed very swiftly by the day of crucifixion.

Further than that, God's people may sometimes be so oppressed that they scarcely are able to speak for themselves at all. They may feel quite shut up and silenced. Read the text, "For the oppression of the poor, for the *sighing* of the needy." They dare not speak, they have to confine their language to a sigh, they dare not go and expostulate with the oppressor, and state their claims to justice, they dare not go and tell a friend about the wrong, lest further mischief should come of it. They are so bound and shut up, that they cannot come forth out of their prison, and all that they can do is bear their burden in secret, and sigh like that holy woman whom God loved so much, whose adversary "provoked her sore, for to make her fret."

Hannah was a woman of a sweet poetic mind, perhaps the greatest poetess mentioned in Scripture, but she was so broken down by her sorrow, that when she went up to the house of the Lord, she could not speak out, "Only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard." She was so overcome with sorrow that the priest of God did not understand her real condition, but began to rebuke her as though she had been drinking, whereas the only wine she had tasted had been the bitter cup of wormwood which her adversary had made her drink.

You also, my hearer, may truly be a child of God and yet be in a similar state to that of Hannah, unable to utter a word, but obliged to resort for relief to deep sighing, that expressive token of an inward, unutterable grief.

Once more, we may be God's people, and yet *we may be very much despised*. The text speaks of the righteous man as being puffed at, "Him that puffeth at him." You know, those who act thus, say, "Oh, he! pshaw! She—oh, well! she—pooh!" Just as if they could not say anything that would express their contempt of such persons and so they just cry, "Pooh-pooh! why, they are not worth mentioning!" They cast out your name as evil, they will not say what the evil in your character is, and that is always worse than stating it.

I have occasionally heard a person say of another, "Oh, So-and-so! Humph!" with not another word, but only a shrug of the shoulders. That is an abominable way of attacking another, if you have anything to say against a person, say it out, and let us know what it is, but that, "Pooh!" or that shrug, which may mean so much and yet may have nothing in it, is dastardly. It is like a poisoned dagger which should never be used by an honest hand. We may be God's people, yet we may be thus assailed.

Have not some of those who have fought their way to the front, some who have been the bravest champions for God, as David was, been puffed at? Eliab said to his young brother, "I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of your heart, for you are come down that thou mightest see the battle." That was said to the ruddy youth before the fight with Goliath, but the mockers dared not talk like that when he came back bearing in his hand the giant's gory head, which he had cut off with the Philistine's own sword.

They puffed at him, and yet he was the man whom God had chosen, who should be honored and revered by all the people of Israel. He was to be famous among the greatest of kings, yet he must begin as a mere despised peasant boy. Never mind, young man, never mind what they say. They say, and they say, and they say, and when they have said it thrice, let them say it again as often as they please. As for you, go on in the path the Lord has marked out for you. Trust in God and serve Him faithfully, and then fear not, and be not dismayed, whatever man may do unto you.

Thus have I described the sad case in which a true child of God may be found.

II. It is more pleasant to turn to the second head, and say that GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE A FRIEND AT HAND.

There is a sister who may be in the congregation now, if so, she will be pleased to hear that she gave me my text for this discourse. As many of you know, my dear wife very kindly selects for me the texts that make up the daily portions in our little penny Book Almanac, and she put down this passage among the others, "For the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD."

And the dear child of God to whom I refer, wrote a letter to say how remarkably God had blessed this text to her comfort. She was in sorrow and trouble, and somewhat given to sighing, and she thought that perhaps God was grieved with her for sighing, but this text greatly cheered her. She gives a little picture of what she thinks the texts means, I will tell you what she writes, for it will be the best part of my sermon by a long way.

She says, "When I am in bed, and my little child wants its mother, if it utters a petulant cry, I do not take any notice of it. I know that it ought not to wake mother up and disturb her with its selfish cry, but if, instead of crying, it seems very weak, and very sad, and it gives a sigh, I cannot stand that, but go to it at once. When it does not cry to me, or cry for me, but I only hear it sigh, then I get out of bed at once and go over to the little cot to see what is the matter."

"Now will I arise, saith the LORD." See, it is the sigh that fetches the mother out of bed, there is great power about a sigh in the ears of a loving mother. If the child could speak and say, "Mother, come to me," mother might answer, "Not so, my dear, lie still." Or if the child only cried out in hastiness, "Oh, come to me!" mother might reply, "Be still, child, be still, you are not suffering so much as you fancy you are." But when the child involuntarily, in its weakness and sorrow, utters a little sigh, mother has heard it, and she is at once out of bed, and by the side of her little sighing child. Is not that a capital explanation of the text, "For the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD"?

See then, the power that there is in the sorrows of God's children to touch the heart of their great Father, when *He hears their sighs*. When those sorrows come to be so bitter that the sufferers can scarcely pray, when they cannot find any language in which to express their grief, when even their desires seem to fail, and they are so broken down and made so weak by the various troubles that have crushed them, that it comes to just this sighing and nothing more, then God cannot be still, He must get up. He has gone away and hidden His face before, but now He sees that the time has come to manifest His unchanging love and grace, "Now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him."

Yes, brothers and sisters, God hears our sighs even if we cannot hear them ourselves. When we think we have not prayed at all, we have often prayed the best. When we imagine that our groanings have been empty, they have often been the fullest. When we sigh because we think we do not sigh, God hears that sort of sighing which is only a longing to sigh. He hears the grief when the grief has no voice, He hears the sorrow when the sorrow cannot find a tongue.

Then note that as the Lord hears our sighs, *those sighs touch His heart*. The wicked have been puffing at the godly, they said, "Our tongues are our own, who is the ruler over us?" The Lord took no notice of them, but let them blaspheme if they would. But there arose the sad sigh of His children and that touched Him, He could not bear that.

It seems to me a very wonderful thing that the Almighty, the Infinite, to whom the heaven of heavens is nothing, who takes up the isles as a very little thing, to whom all this system of worlds is but

as the smallest grain of dust that does not turn the scale, yet is, as we say, “all there” when His children sigh, and His heart is touched, His heart is moved, His whole being is full of an infinite compassion.

He cannot bear that sighing. “‘Now will I arise, saith the LORD.’ I will get up from My throne of glory that I may deliver My people. I have heard their sigh, and I cannot stay away from them, love does master My omnipotence. I feel but one force—the force of my overwhelming love, it sways Me and impels Me to speed to their relief. I will get Me out of My hiding places, I will end my withdrawals from them, I will rend the veil, and come out from between the cherubim. ‘Now will I arise, saith the LORD.’” What has caused all this mighty movement? Nothing but the sighing of His needy people.

Will you also think that as this sigh is heard by God, it is a wonderful thing that God should speak of Himself as being *fully roused*? “Now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.” “Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself.” The thunder, the tempest, are but the hidings of His power, who can understand the fullness of His might?

What must God be when He says, “Now will I arise”—like one who leaves his couch, like one who rolls up his sleeve to make bare his arm, like one who sets himself with intent and purpose to do some work that will require all his skill and all his power? Think of God arising in His might. When He arises, He shakes terribly the earth, nothing stands before Him when He once arises.

Poor, sick, needy, sorrowing, sighing child of God, it is you who can bring Him into this marvelous state of activity. I tremble while I try to describe it—God making Himself fully God—arising, lifting up Himself, putting forth His power.

If you want a picture of it, remember Israel in Egypt. “And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect to them.”

Did you ever hear that text preached from by Handel in his masterly oratorio, *Israel in Egypt*? How he makes all the music of all the stringed instruments and the voices of all the singers bring out that sigh! “The children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage...and God heard their groaning.”

Now I can understand all the rest of the song, and all the rest of the music, I can understand how the chorus rings out with a great shout, “The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.” The beginning, the meaning of it all, is that they “sighed by reason of the bondage.” “Now will I arise, saith the LORD.” And when He does arise, then the sea in the fullness of its strength is but the trembling instrument of His omnipotence, and soon Pharaoh and his horses and his chariots are drowned in its depths.

The same God lives forever and ever, and lives for you as He lived for Jacob’s seed in the land of Mizraim, and you in your sorrow can still touch that heart of God as their sighing because of their taskmasters touched His heart in the days of old, and He will deliver you as He delivered them. Only sigh and cry unto Him, and He will come to you. He will come riding on a cherub, yea, flying upon the wings of the wind, and He will deliver you, and you shall glorify Him, for what He has done before He will delight to do again, “for his mercy endureth for ever.” Hallelujah! Wherefore, let His people even in their sighing learn to rejoice in Him.

III. Now I must close by dwelling for only a few minutes upon the third point, which is, WHEN GOD’S PEOPLE DO FETCH THEIR FRIEND BY THEIR SIGHING, HE WILL DO THEM A GOOD TURN.

What saith He?” I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.”

You know what God did for David. There was Saul hunting him about everywhere, and I do not doubt that David was strongly tempted sometimes to seek safety for himself, he did some few things that looked as if he meant to preserve himself from the hand of his adversary, but once, when he caught Saul in a cave, entirely in his hand, he only cut off the skirt of the king’s robe, and let him go. It was a grand proof of the power of faith to abstain from touching the man who thirsted for his blood.

That was another night of triumph for David when he went out with Abishai, and they stole through all the ranks of the sleeping soldiers, threading their silent way till they came where Saul lay asleep in the trench, with his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster, and Abishai said to David, "God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time."

He was ready to grasp the spear, and give one thrust at him, and pin him to the ground, and there was David, with the remembrance of his bitter persecutions hot upon him, but he laid hold of his companion's hand and whispered, "Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless? David said furthermore, As the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go."

So the two brave warriors threaded their way back through the sleeping host, taking with them the cruse of water and the spear that had been by the king's head, that he might see how nearly he had lost his life, and how completely he had been in their hands. No, David did not deliver himself from Saul's oppression, and it is a splendid evidence of faith when faith can hold her hand.

Perhaps you also have been oppressed, you have been ill-treated, you may have an opportunity of avenging yourself, and if you are a child of the devil, you will do it, but if you are a child of God, you will say, "No, no, I have no vengeance to return, it is not mine to repay. The only vengeance I would return is to show kindness sevenfold for all the ills done to me. I will not lift my hand to deliver myself."

Then God says, "Now I will do it, I will do it. I have heard the sighing of my poor child under all his oppressions, 'Now will I arise, saith the LORD.'" And within a short space of time Saul falls by the arrows of the Philistines upon mount Gilboa, and David is anointed first king over Judah, and by and by king over Israel as well, against him no dog dares to move its tongue, he is the delight of the united nation, and leads them forth to victories against the Philistines, for God has set him in safety from him that puffed at him.

Well now, God can take any of His children, and do just the same for them, He can lift them out of their troubles, and put them somewhere else where they shall be masters of those whose servants they formerly were. He shall lead your captivity captive, and make you to come to the bright side of the hill, if you have but had grace enough to travel on the bleak side of it clinging only to your God. "I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him."

The Lord does that in many ways. Sometimes He takes His servants, and puts them quite out of the power of their adversaries, many a time in providence has He done it. Sometimes He does not do anything of the kind, but He lets their adversaries puff at them, only He makes them feel that *all that they can do is puff*. Well, they may puff if they like till they have puffed their breath away.

I like that picture Mr. Bunyan gives us when he represents the pilgrims going by the cave where Giant Pope sits, and the giant has grown so crazy and stiff in his joints, that he can now do little more than sit in his cave's mouth, grinning at pilgrims as they go by, biting his nails because he cannot come at them, and saying, "You will never mend till more of you are burned." But he cannot burn them, so he may sit there and say what he likes, and sometimes, the children of God get so much grace, and so much faith, that those who puff at them may keep on puffing, but the godly are far above it all.

Does it not sometimes happen that a Christian woman lives with a husband who makes everything very unpleasant, but her soul is so full of the love of God, and she is taught so much patience, that she is set in safety from him that puffeth at her?

Some child of God has to go and run the gauntlet of persecution and do battle in a workshop with ungodly blasphemers, but he walks so near to God, and he is so peaceful and so full of the enjoyment of heavenly delights, that at last he does not come to take any notice of all the puffing except that he is driven to more prayer and to a closer walk with God. "I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him."

I do not know which is the better of the two, to get right away from the persecutors, or to be allowed to stop where you are, and feel, "It does not matter, all the bitterness is gone, all the injury is removed." Whichever God thinks is better for us, and more for His own glory, He will do, and either way we are content.

It may be that the one who puffs at some of us is neither a man nor a woman, we think that we could bear that kind of puffing, but it is the devil himself. Oh, sirs, we had better go a thousand miles round, over hedge and ditch, rather than once come into conflict with him!

I have had a sharp brush with him now and again, but I still need to pray every morning that prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," for all other temptations are as nothing compared with actual contact with that grim evil one. He knows how to smite, and he knows how to wound, but yet, if it were most for the good of others, if we, having to be leaders of others, must sometimes have a battle with the arch-enemy, it is a grand thing if the Lord so covers us with armor of proof from head to foot that He sets us in safety from him that puffeth at us, and we are made to feel that even the devil's temptations are but as puffs.

Yet, if that puff might bring a poisoned arrow into your soul, it is a blessed thing to feel that God can set you in safety from it all. For "who is he that shall harm you?" Who is he? Our Master met him in the wilderness and fought him in a threefold duel, and left the marks of His sword upon him. The scars are there, and you and I may look that grim adversary in the face and tell him that we know his Master, and that he knows his Master too, and that we are in that Master and that Master is in us, and as surely as He overcame, and triumphed once for us, so shall we overcome in His strength.

So the weakest saint can say, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise." With such a text as that, let us give him a deadly thrust, and he shall spread his dragon wings and fly away, discomfited by one whose sighs have brought God to his help, whose cries have brought omnipotence to be infinitely more than a match for all the powers of darkness.

Now I have done my sermon, only I have been thinking that there are some here who will say, "Alas! we are not the children of God, and yet we are in trouble." Well, if you do not know yourselves to be the children of God and you are in trouble, yet the Lord our God is very full of pity, and full of compassion. He has pity even for natural and ungodly men when they are in trouble. I wish you would think of that, some of you who never prayed in your lives. If you are in trouble, now is the time to begin to pray.

A brother came to join the church this week. He had been ill and sick for some time, and he had gone to the hospital and obtained medicine, but it had not done him any good. He was about to take a dose of the medicine when it came to his thoughts, "I have never prayed to God to make me well," so he stopped and prayed a prayer to God, whom he did not know, that He would help him in his sorrow and his sickness, and give him health, and he came to tell me how God dealt with him in mercy, and how he was led by that answered prayer to put up many other prayers, and to trust Jesus Christ for the salvation of his soul.

Now, if you are in sore sorrow and in deep trouble, whatever it may be, turn you unto your God. He hears the young ravens when they cry. They cannot pray spiritual prayers any more than you can, and yet He hears their cries. Oh, if you are like the poor raven, yet let your cry go up to God, and He will hear you! He is a God full of compassion. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him," and He even has pity upon those who fear Him not.

O my hearers, do try Him and trust Him for yourselves! Do not think harshly of my God, fancy not that He is made of flint or granite. He will listen to your sighs, and your cries, and your tears. Only turn to Him with full purpose of heart, and He will not cast you away. May He bless you now, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 119:137-152

Verse 137. *Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments.*

It is well to be able to say this when you are being tried, when the hand of God lies heavy upon you, it is hard to kick against the pricks, but it is very sweet to submit and to say, “Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments.”

138. *Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.*

“Righteous” for the present, “faithful” for the future. There is no mistake about God’s Word, it will never fail us, we may trust it implicitly, and we shall never be disappointed.

139. *My zeal hath consumed me,—*

The psalmist had such zeal for God’s Word that he seemed like a sacrifice consumed with the fire upon the Lord’s altar.

139. *Because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.*

First, they despised them, then, they neglected them, at last they got as far as even to forget them. Forgetfulness of God’s Word is a very dreadful stage of disease of the heart.

140. *Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.*

To love God’s Word for its purity is an index of a pure heart. Some love it for its poetry, some love it for its doctrine, some love it for its mercy, but he is an advanced man in the kingdom of grace who loves it for its purity.

141. *I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts.*

Others may, but I am not following their example. It is well when a Christian man is a contrast to other men. When they call him a mere nobody, he adopts their words and says, “Yes, I am nothing, ‘I am small and despised,’ yet I do not forget the Lord’s precepts.”

142. *Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is truth.*

Pilate asked, “What is truth?” Here is the best possible answer, “Thy law is truth.” Not only does it contain the truth, but it *is* the truth. The Word of God is not only true, that is its quality, but it is *the truth*, that is its essence. It is the cream of all truths. “Thy law is the truth.”

143. *Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights.*

“Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me,” like two fierce dogs they had fixed their teeth in him, yet even then he could say, “yet thy commandments are my delights.” What a riddle is the man who knows God! He has great trouble and is full of anguish, yet he is delighted, how can these things be? The child of God knows what it is to be troubled on every side, and yet not to be troubled within.

144. *The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.*

As if he could not live without it, he did not call it true living except as he understood and enjoyed the precepts of his God.

145. *I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes.*

Here we have both a prayer and a resolve, but the resolution grew out of the prayer, and was connected with it. The psalmist prays to God to help him to keep His statutes. Are any of you hard put to it just now by strong temptation? I commend this verse to you, “Hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes.” Cry unto God, “Do help me, O LORD: let not strong temptation drag me away from You! I long to be holy, my whole heart’s desire is to keep Your ways, O help me, I pray You!” This verse begins with, “I cried,” and the next verse begins in the same way—

146. *I cried unto thee;*

It is good when you can cry. The living child cries, and it is the man of God whose prayer is a cry of almost inarticulate utterance and grief, “I cried.” “I cried.” What did he cry?

146. *Save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.*

David had no notion of salvation without obedience, so he prays, “Save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.” Is that the salvation you desire—salvation from sin? If so, you shall have it. God, the Holy One, delights to bestow holiness, and He will speedily hear and answer such a prayer as that.

147. *I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried:*

The psalmist was still crying, crying early in the morning, before the sun was up, he was up, and crying to God.

147. *I hoped in thy word.*

It is well when hope goes with prayer, when you begin to see daylight even before the sun is up. "I hoped in thy word." Not in any enthusiastic impression of his own, but in God's Word itself, the psalmist placed all his confidence.

148. *Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.*

As he was up before the sun, so he was praying before they set the guards for the night watch, and when they were changing guards, and he heard the cry of the hour from the watchman, he was still crying to God, and at the same time he was meditating, "that I might meditate in thy word." Ah, that is the way to cry!

Meditation is very much neglected nowadays, we read, perhaps, too much, we meditate, for certain, too little, and meditation is to reading like digestion after eating. The cows in the pasture eat the grass, and then they lie down, and chew the cud, and get all the good they can out of what they have eaten. Reading snips off the grass, but meditation chews the cud, therefore, "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest." In this matter we often fail, we shall be wise to imitate David who devoted the early morning to prayer, and the night watches to meditation.

149. *Hear my voice—*

So the psalmist used to pray aloud. It is a very great help in prayer if you can do the same. If we pray aloud to be heard of men, it is a sin, but if we pray aloud that we may hear ourselves, so that our devotion may be excited, we shall often find it very profitable, and if people hear us by accident, so much the better, they are not hearing anything that will do them hurt, they are hearing that which may do them good.

149. *According unto thy lovingkindness.*

That is, do not hear it to judge it, to censure it, to criticize it, but hear it as a father hears his child, loving to hear its little voice speaking in broken accents.

149. *O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.*

Just now, the psalmist prayed, "Hear me, O LORD!" In the 146th verse, he cried, "Save me," now his prayer is, "O LORD, quicken me!" When God puts more life into us, then we have more strength to bear our burdens, and having more spiritual life, we have more power to resist temptation. Quicken is an essential mercy, containing within itself a multitude of blessings, "Quicken me according to thy judgment."

150. *They draw nigh that follow after mischief:*

He could hear the sound of their feet behind him, they were running after him, and he could detect the pit-pat of their malicious footsteps.

150-151. *They are far from thy law. Thou art near, O LORD;*

What a comfort that is! They are *trying* to get near, but You *are* near. I can hear the tread of their feet behind me, but I can see Your face close to me. How comforted is the psalmist in the time of trouble! His adversaries may be as keen of scent as bloodhounds, but God is with him, therefore he fears them not.

151-152. *And all thy commandments are truth. Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.*

So that this psalm was written by David when he was an old man. He had known the Lord's commandments when he was young, and now, in his declining days, he can say, "I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever."

O young men, if you want to be happy old men, begin by knowing God's Word! If you have known that God has founded His Word of old, you know that which will comfort you when you grow old, in

fact, you have found a perpetual spring within your heart, if from your youth up you have known in the fullest sense the Word of the Lord.

Some are changing their creed every day in the week, as the weather changes, but blessed is that man who has so learned Christ to begin with that he keeps in the old way all his life. He is the man who can truly grow. Transplant a tree six times a year, and you will not get any fruit from it, but blessed are they that are planted in the courts of the Lord, for they shall flourish there, and shall still bring forth fruit in old age.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—728, 747, 753

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