

OUR GLORIOUS LEADER

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A SERMON
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 DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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“And when he had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem.”
Luke 19:28

A VERY beautiful spectacle it is to see the Lord Jesus marching in front and His followers eagerly following on behind. They were going up to Jerusalem, where it is true He would receive some honor, but where also He would be betrayed into the hands of cruel men, and put to a shameful death, but He went before them. As the shepherd goes before the sheep, not driving, but leading, as the captain goes before his soldiers as taking the post of danger, so our Lord went before them. It was far better that He should go first than that they should, for the disciple is never more out of place than when he outruns his Master. If he will follow his Master's commands, he shall do well, but if he shall follow his own devices and invent his own way, he shall do ill.

The pilgrimage behind the cloud is a safe one, but a rush before the cloud will end in a disaster. The Master must go first, not the disciple. But then, when the Master advances, it is right to see the disciple follow, ready of foot, quick at his Master's heel, delighted with his Master's company.

One likes to think of that journey up to Jerusalem, with Jesus Christ just a little ahead in the front, and His disciples closely following with Him. I thought it was a picture that might serve us as a model throughout the whole year. I am not going to talk to you long at this time, but wish just to sketch that picture before your mind's eye and say, “So be it unto each one of us.”

May Jesus be with us, may Jesus lead the way, and may His own divine Spirit give us grace to follow Him, not like Peter, afar off, but as loving disciples who keep closely under their Master's guidance! From the beginning of the year to the end of the year may we rejoice to feel that He goes before, but may we also with cheerful alacrity follow close behind. I present it to you, I say, as the picture for this new year of grace, and may it be verified in your experience.

Very simply, then, I shall try to call attention to the blessed fact that *Jesus goes before us*, and having done so, I shall ask you, in the second place, to *seek after a sweet realization of this truth*. And the first truth, then, to consider is—

I. THE BLESSED FACT—He went before them.

We have already said that *He was going the way of suffering*. He was going up to Jerusalem to suffer. When you are in the way of suffering, He will go before you. He was always *in the way of service*. There was more to be done at Jerusalem before He had finished His course. May we, in the way of service, always find Him going before us. And He was also, in the third place, *on the way to death*, and if we have any fears about our passage through the river, may this console us—He went before us.

To begin, then, at the beginning, here is the blessed fact that Christ has gone before *in the way of suffering*. He has done so by His own actual experience while He was here in the flesh. “He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” “In all our afflictions he was afflicted.” “He himself took our sicknesses and carried our sorrows.” Rest assured that in whatever way of suffering you have to go in consequence of your being a child of man, and especially in consequence of your being a child of God, you will find that Christ has gone that way before you.

Are you full of bodily pain, stretched upon the bed? Are you apt to think that none ever suffered as you do? He suffered more than you, He went before you along that flinty pathway. The pangs of His

death must have been extreme. And remember His passion in the garden, His agony in Gethsemane. You have not in this matter yet come to having drops of blood oozing in sweat from your countenance. No, He has gone before you there. In all the pangs of your bodily frame Jesus has preceded you.

Read the twenty-second psalm, with all its wonderful expressions—"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint." "Thou hast brought me into the dust of death." He knew the fever and its thirst upon the cross when He was dying there. He said, "Thou hast brought me to the dust of death." You have not one suffering that may be imagined to be more exquisite than what He had endured. Your griefs are molehills compared with the Alps of His sufferings.

But you will say that it is not exactly the pathway of personal bodily pain you are traversing, but you have endured much in the sufferings of others you have lost. You have had half your heart, perhaps, taken away at one time, friend after friend has been carried to the tomb, but He went before in this pathway also. Did you never read where it is written, "Jesus wept"? "Behold how he loved him," said the Jews, as they beheld Him at the sepulcher of the well-beloved Lazarus. He knows what bereavements means as well as you—He has gone before.

"Ah!" say you, "but in consequence of the bereavement I have suffered, I am left a widow. How shall I be provided for? In addition to the woe of the loss, I have to look forward to the future. Will these hands be able to find me daily bread? My garments may become by degrees more and more thin and time-worn. I fear cold, nakedness, and hunger." And suppose it should come to that, as it will not, I trust, yet He went before. You are not so poor as He. Hear you His voice tonight, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but I, the son of man, have not where to lay my head."

To pay the common tax, He must borrow money from the fish of the sea. His garment was the common seamless robe of peasants, He was but poorly clad, He was in all respects the child of poverty. First cradled in a manger, and then laid for His last sleep in a borrowed grave, for still He had not even where to lay His head. In the sleep of death, Jesus went before you. O son of poverty, O daughter of need, you may see the print of His footsteps all along that thorny way.

"Ay," says one, "but still there is added to poverty in my case the fact that I have been forsaken by friends, and I am very fearful that even those who stood somewhat faithful to me will soon grow weary, and I shall be left alone." And did you never hear Him say, "And I shall be left alone, and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me"? And have you never read how they all forsook Him and fled, and Peter denied Him with oaths and curses, and worst of all, Judas, who had been trusted with His little stock, sold Him for the price of a slave? "He that eateth bread with me has lifted up his heel against me." Ingratitude most cruel, treachery most base! Your Lord has suffered it.

You may see the prints of His pierced feet along that pathway if you will but look for them. Jesus went before you in actual suffering. And what if you have been serving your Lord with zeal and fervor, and you have been reproached, even by those who love Him. You have met with the cold shoulder where you expected to find encouragement. If your motives have been misrepresented by the very persons who ought to have supported you in your ardor, ah! what then?

Was not He also a reproach among His mother's brethren? When His zeal had eaten Him up, they said that He was mad, and even His mother and His brethren stood without desiring that they might see Him, because they thought Him bereaved of His wits, and if the wicked world has reproached and reviled you, did they not call the Master of the house "Beelzebub"? Shall they have soft names and honorable titles for the men of His household? If they said of Him, "He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?" do you think they will say great and flattering things of you?

O you that are made ashamed for His sake, and made a spectacle unto men, and unto angels, be not afraid, no strange thing has happened to you, thousands of saints have passed along this road, and chief of all, your Master, Christ, has gone before you. In the path of suffering, then, Jesus has gone before us, from the fact of having actually and literally experienced what we suffer.

He has gone before in another sense, namely, that now, though He reigns exalted high in the highest heavens, *He goes before us still in the intense sympathy of His sacred heart.* Jesus is not separated from

His people by the mere fact of distance. “Lo,” He has said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the world,” and you know what mysterious, yet real union exists between Christ the Head and all His members. It came out clearly in the case of Paul, when He said to him, “Why persecutest thou me?” He was persecuting only a few poor people in Jerusalem, or in Damascus, whom he despised, but Christ said, “Why persecutest thou me?” because persecuting the saints was persecuting Christ—Christ suffering in His members. Christ suffering on the cross was the head suffering, but when His people were rent to pieces in the amphitheater, when they were burned at Smithfield, and when today they are hooted and made a jest of, it is Christ suffering, still suffering in His members, and when any child of God suffers in any righteous cause, whenever affliction comes upon a saint in any form, Christ sympathizes with him. Rest assured—

***“In every pang that rends the heart,
The Man of Sorrows bears His part.”***

In all their affliction He was afflicted. A finger never suffers without the brain participating, and no humble member of the true church of Christ ever suffers without Christ, the glorious Head, suffering in sympathy therewith.

Now this is very cheering to those who have faith to receive it, because very much of the heart breaking that comes into the world is from a sense of loneliness. When men feel that somebody sympathizes with them, when those who are being beaten feel that others smart as they do, then they take courage. Oh! there is one who loves you more than you can love yourself, who sympathizes with you, you suffering saint, from the throne of His glory. Be you, therefore, glad, be of good courage, and let this comfort your heart.

There is a third way in which Christ goes ahead of us in the path of suffering, that is, *in the matter of providence*. While He has Himself suffered, and Himself sympathizes, in a third respect He goes before us ever in our sufferings, in preparing them for us, and preparing us for them. Our Lord has gone to heaven to prepare a place for us, and I believe He has prepared all the road as well as a place at the end of it. You shall find, O child of God, when you come into the deep waters, that Christ is there—there by His grace and Spirit, and there also by His providence, to take care of you.

It was appointed that Jacob and his tribes should all go down to Egypt. To Egypt they must go, but Joseph went down there before them, and became lord over all Egypt, not for his own sake, but for the sake of his brethren, for all the wealth of Egypt shall be used, if necessary, in order that Jacob and all his household shall be preserved during the time of famine.

Now if there is an Egypt to which you are to go, Jesus, your Joseph, has gone before you to make it ready for you, to find you a Goshen there, and to nourish you there till such day as you shall come from it. God, even your Savior Jesus, leads the van. As the cloud, like a mighty fire-banner, went through all the mazes of the winding way of Israel over the desert, so Jesus marches before us, the Leader, the standard-bearer among ten thousand, always in the van, and with His eternal power and Godhead making straight the pathway for His people’s feet. Let us be of good courage, then, in this respect. In the matter of suffering, He went before you.

But now realize here the retrospect. If He goes before, then follow Him. You love not suffering. It were not suffering if you did love it, but still if Jesus leads, look not to the way. It were better that that way should be full of thorns and briars which should tear your flesh, and Christ be with you, than that it should be a long green pathway, and your Shepherd lead you not. Go on. He went to His sufferings without a murmur. Moreover, even His flesh shrank, and at last He said, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

Say you, the same. Do you fear as you enter into the cloud? Within that cloud shall be the secret tabernacle of the Most High, wherein He will reveal Himself to you as He never did before. Some of us owe much to the anvil, and the hammer, and the fire, much to suffering, much to trials, and we thank

God we had them, and you will yet have to do the same, but oh! stay not back. Remember, after all, a want of resignation will not assist you in your suffering, but on the contrary, nothing makes suffering so light as resignation to it, and a perfect acquiescence in the divine will does much to take away the gall from the cup. You must go where Jesus leads, go you, therefore, willingly, cheerfully, trustingly, and even joyfully, for it is a triumph to a Christian to bear the cross after Jesus, and to be crucified and buried with Him were a high honor to any child of God. Go on, then, for Christ leads the way.

But now I must not tarry so long on that part, but I observe it is said *Christ leads the way in service* as well as in suffering. He was going up to Jerusalem to accomplish the rest of His life-work before He surrendered His Spirit to His Father. Now you and I, and each of us, have a service to perform. We were redeemed and with a price that we might serve the Lord. We are a royal priesthood, a peculiar people. We have a priesthood to fulfill. All God's children, all God's servants are priest and kings, and they have a rule to discharge, and a priesthood to fulfill. Now we are beginning a new year of service. It will be a very sweet thing to us if we can know that Jesus Christ has gone before us in the path of service.

Beloved, I might take the same truth, and say that He has gone before us actually, in having fulfilled the same service. If there is any good thing for you to do, Christ has done it before you. Are we called to preach the Gospel? You know how He was anointed to preach glad tidings to the poor. Are you called to teach the little ones? Did not He say, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven"? Have you to feed the hungry? On what a large scale did He do it! Have you to visit the sick, and to minister to their needs? Oh! how many thousands owed their opened eyes or restored limbs to Him!

Christ's life anticipates all the service of the church. One might very easily, in taking the life of Christ, find all the operations of a truly active church prefigured there—all of them. There is nothing new under the sun, and when a man has found something, and thought, "Here is something that is fresh," you shall find Christ has looked after the halt, and the blind, and the lame before you, and if you seek to raise the fallen woman, you will be made to remember Him who said, "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more."

I should be afraid to undertake any service in which I could not see that He has gone before. But what Christ has done, it is right for us to do, save only in that work of expiation where we cannot help Him. There He treads the winepress alone, and of the people there is none with Him, but in all in which He is our exemplar, it is always a safe thing for us to follow very closely, and we shall find that He has gone before us.

And truly He goes before us in all our works by His Holy Spirit, actively proving His divine sympathy with us still. I do not look upon the church of God as so many pious men and women at work by themselves, but I see God working by them, working in them, working through them. They are the workers to the eye, but no further. It is God that works in them to will and to do of His own good pleasure. If Satan saw in the work only the man, he would laugh at him, but he perceives "the hand of Joab" is there—a mightier hand than the hand of man, and therefore, it is that he is often put to the rout.

O you that speak for Jesus, that pray for Jesus, that give to His cause and work for His name, let this be your joy and your comfort—that Jesus Christ is with you and goes before you in all this service.

And so He does *in His providence*. If we had but eyes to see it, and could know all things, we should perceive that when we come to preach the Gospel God has been preparing men's hearts to receive it. Many a time a man will come up to the house of prayer, and it has been a trouble that has been ploughing up and down, and the minister has got a handful of seed to sow, which the birds would have devoured if they had fallen on hard soil, only God has ploughed the man, and made him like soil, ready to receive it. He has gone before us.

If ever I see these benches full, I feel a little distressed, and yet elated, because I always reckon that I have got a picked congregation, and each man is sent with a design. Though there may not be salvation in every case, yet there are some to whom God will bless the Word, to which the Word will be fitted to the very letter, for God will guide the preacher, and oftentimes as much reveals Himself from the pulpit

as ever a Nebuchadnezzar's dream was revealed again by Daniel when it was gone altogether from his mind. You shall be sure that God is in the Word if it comes home to you in that way, and if you are a Christian worker, you may expect that the providence of God will prepare men's hearts for that work which you are trying to do.

I would that the church of God would now recollect that assuredly God is going before her in all her service at this moment. The world is prepared for the Gospel if we were but willing to present the Gospel to the world. When our Lord Christ came into this world there was a universal peace, and the peace of the public mind and the state of the public pulse was just suitable for the preaching of the Gospel by the Lord and by His apostles, and there is some such suitability as that now.

Chains that long have galled unhappy nations have been filed through. The people that sat in darkness have seen a great light, they have demanded liberty, and won it with a good right hand, and mean to hold it, and now is the time when the darkness flies and light comes for those who have the still brighter light of the everlasting Gospel of the ever blessed God to spring into the gap and proclaim salvation by a crucified Redeemer to all the sons of men.

Up, churches of London, and to your work! E'en now the very demand for education among you, and the stir that there is among the people, the breaking up of hoary systems of abomination, the motion and commotion—all this means good to you. You have been embedded in the ice and frozen up these long wintry days, but lo, the sun has risen and the long summer days shall soon come, and your barque shall be freighted and put out to sea, and bring a blessed cargo of souls home to God their Father. Let us be up and doing, for Jesus goes before us in the matter of providence.

May He help us to keep ever near Him. What He would have us do, oh! may we do it, word for word what He would have us speak, thought for thought what He would have us think, act for act what He would have us do. Let us never have a glorious leader and be a laggard people. Oh! for the grace that is in Him to bedew plenteously ourselves, that as He goes before us we may follow Him in the path of service.

Now very briefly upon one other point, which was *the path of death*. Our Lord was going to Golgotha, and there was to be, as far as this world was concerned, the end of His journey. To the cross He must be nailed, and in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea the Lord Jesus must sleep. Death is not a pleasant thing. It matters not how you gild the pill, it is a pill. If the Lord come not, however, before that time we shall have to pass through death, and we shall find it, if we are His people, to be infinitely less painful than the fear of death. We feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, and if our faith were greater, we should have no fear of death.

"Ah!" says one, "what I dread is parting, leaving my friends." He went before them, He parted from them all, and from His mother, and He said to John, "Behold, thy mother," and to His mother, "Woman, behold thy son," as the light faded from His eyes. He went before in the path of death. "Ah! but I cannot bear to think of the pain of dying," says one. You will never have such pain as His in death. He went before you, He had a sense of sin in dying, He was made a curse for us, as it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree," but no curse can ever light on you, believer. The blessing is yours because the curse was His.

Oh! He has gone ahead of you, He has gone where you shall never go, for He suffered the wrath of God, which you never shall suffer, for that wrath is gone and passed away forever. There are none of the surroundings of a dying bed which can suggest such horror as that which surrounded the death of our Lord, so that He has gone before you in everything that might alarm you in the prospect of your departure. He has gone before you. Be content to follow Him to the grave. It is no more—

*"A charnel house of sense,
Relics of lost innocence,
The place of ruin and decay;
The imprisoning stone is rolled away."*

It is now a nest of sweetness since Jesus laid in it. The grave is no longer unfurnished, there are His grave clothes left for you, and moreover, the stone being rolled away, you have the promise that you shall come out of it again. When the trump of the archangel sounds, those poor bones shall arise, and the body that was sown in weakness shall be raised in power. What joy it is then to think that He went before you, and how obediently, nay, triumphantly, may we follow Him, even to death itself. Here, then, is the blessed fact, in suffering, or service, or departure, Christ goes before us. Now the point we close with is this—

II. MAY WE, ALL OF US, HAVE A SWEET REALIZATION OF THIS TRUTH DURING THIS YEAR.

We believe a good deal of doctrine which we have never yet realized. We know much to be food which we have never fed upon. Many Christians are like these who have sacks of flour in the house, but no bread. They have nothing available for present food. Some are like rich men that may happen to be abroad with thousands in gold, but no small silver, no spending money. May you be able to coin the bullion of precious promise so as to use it in the journey of life. May you make practical application of precious truths, tasting the honey, drinking the wine, and being satisfied with them.

Now, then, to realize that Christ goes before us is to realize that *we are never alone*. If I am in my study, and a problem staggers me, I am not alone—my Lord will teach me. You are in your little chamber with the needle, working hard for very scanty pay. You have to suffer—you have not got to suffer that alone. “I am with thee when thou passest through the fire; thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”

But you have got to go into the workroom, and there are those that point at you, and they have a jest for you, whom they know to be a follower of Christ. You have not to bear that alone. He has the heaviest end of that cross, and He is persecuted in His persecuted members. But you are busy in business, and your cares afflict you. Blessed be God you have not got to bear those cares alone, no, nor yet at all, for concerning them He has said, “Cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you.”

I have got to come here and preach. Who is sufficient for these things? But I am not to preach alone—“My grace is sufficient for thee.” His strength shall be made perfect in your weakness. You have to go to that Sunday school class. Oh! how incorrigible those boys are, and how careless those girls, but you have not got to win those souls alone. Jesus will go and His Spirit will be there, and you shall be helped in your work. Do try and realize all through this year that you are never alone. Not only is it, “Thou God seest me,” but it is this, “Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God.” And Christ is not with you behind, or pushing you into the danger, but He is with you before you, He goes before you, He is the shield catching the fiery darts upon Himself. You shall come behind the screen, and be sheltered by His precious promise.

I do not know where you may be this year, but let this thought abide with you—He will be with you. Perhaps you will cross the sea. Your lot may be to help to colonize some distant land. Over the sea, and on the billows, and on the shore, so strange to you, He will be your near companion. Perhaps this year there is a trial awaiting you, very heavy, or perhaps a temptation arising out of some new joy or fresh prosperity. Do not fear it, you shall be safe on the hilltops of joy and in the Valley of Humiliation.

Anywhere, He is with you. A child is told, perhaps at nightfall, that he has to go a considerable distance, it is to a lonely farmhouse, and the little one trembles to go across the moor in the dark. “Oh!” the mother says. “but Father is going with you.” Oh! then that changes the aspect of everything. The boy is pleased to go, even the dangers that seemed so great, only attract him now, he will be glad to be with his father.

Through the moor land of another year, you have to go, and it may be dark and cold, but your heavenly Father and your blessed Elder Brother will be with you. Therefore, be not afraid. You will have to contend this year for “the faith delivered once for all to the saints,” and to do much service too. If you are to render a good account at the year’s end, you are to try and live this year, not at a slow rate, like the cold-blooded frog, but to have hot blood in you. Regulated by prudence, and yet boiling over

with a burning zeal, you are to serve the Lord. And it may be you think you cannot do it. Is anything impossible when He helps you? Is any sacrifice impossible when it is for Him? Is any difficulty insurmountable when He Himself gives the all-sufficient strength? Oh! this is a very choice thought, though a very simple one—that Jesus will be with you all the year through.

The only other thought is, *take care that you abide with Him*. He is a quick walker. Idle souls will be left behind. He is a holy liver. Unclean spirits will find Him part company with them. Be you watchful, vigilant, sober, careful, zealous, and seek to have perpetual fellowship with Jesus Christ. I am sure those are the happiest that live nearest to God. I am certain of it.

I do know it is not the wealthiest that are the happiest. It is not those that have the most health that are always happiest, and those that are most esteemed amongst their fellow men. There is one rule without any exception—he that lives nearest to God has the most of that profound peace of God which passes all understanding. He says to you, “Abide in me.” May His words abide in you. May you abide in Him, and may this be to each one of you, and to this church, the very happiest year we have ever had.

Oh! that some poor sinner would seek the Savior! May the Lord’s lovely attractions entice Him! And I shall close by saying this—that if any soul longs for Christ, Christ is already longing for Him, and if you have a half of a desire towards Him, He has a heart full of desire towards you. There never was a soul that had the start of Christ in the matter of desire for salvation. God grant you grace to touch Jesus, and then to follow after Him, and to make His blessing abide with you, both now and forever. Amen and amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ISAIAH 35, HEBREWS 12:1-6

Isaiah Chapter 35. Verse 1. *The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them;*

They shall be so glad that they shall inspire gladness where all was desolation, and brooding, melancholy bats wing, and dragon’s howl. “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them.”

1. *And the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.*

God’s people are a happy-making people. They are a blessing in themselves, and they shall be a blessing to others, till all shall say, “These are the seed that the Lord hath blessed.” “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.”

2. *It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God.*

A wonderful sight to see, for there is one of the most lovely sights in the world when the glory and excellency of God are to be seen in the works of His grace in His own people. It is such a sight that it makes men first rejoice in their hearts, and then rejoice with their tongues. They shall “rejoice with joy and singing,” which is the double rejoicing of the heart and of the lip. Well, those must be a favored people who, wherever they go, can make others glad after this fashion. Brethren, they must be full or they could not overflow! They must be alive, or else they could not quicken the desert places. They must themselves be in flower, blooming like the rose, or they could not make the wilderness so full of verdure. The Lord grant that we may be in that state that we may be able to go into the wilderness.

There are some of God’s people that cannot trust themselves to go where they are wanted, because they have not grace enough. They are so weak that they are like the weak man standing on the river’s brink, who cannot leap in to pull out a drowning man for fear they should be pulled in themselves. But oh! they are blest indeed who dare go into the wildernesses and into the solitary places, and carry the transforming benediction of heaven with them till the wilderness changes its dress, and the brown of the arid sand gives place to the ruddiness of the rose, because God has come there with His people.

3. *Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.*

Are there such here tonight? No doubt there are—weak at work, and weak at praying. The two things go together—weak hands and feeble knees. May they both be strengthened.

4. *Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; He will come and save you.*

It is very singular how salvation and vengeance are so often associated together in Scripture. It is the day of salvation, “and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.” Vengeance upon the false is the best consolation to the true. When God smites the sham, even to the heart, then does He bless that in which the truth is found. “He will come and save you.”

5-6. *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.*

See what the presence of Christ does. See what the presence of Christ’s people will do when He comes in them and with them. They make the wilderness rejoice. But besides that, the dwellers that are found in the wilderness—these lame and deaf people—get the blessing. Oh! may God make us to be a desert to others of this sort.

7. *And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.*

The greenest spots your eye ever rested upon are just there where the grass is so rooted in the morass that it is always green with a delicate tinge, and the reeds and rushes spring up abundantly. O God, make poor parched hearts to become like this! You barren ones, you desolate ones, He can give you the best verdure that is possible. Your hearts shall be as green and fresh as the spots where there is grass with reeds and rushes.

8. *And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.*

Oh! what a blessing that is to us poor fools! We should err anywhere. To err is human, and we seem to have come in for a double share of it. The more we look at our lives the more we see the folly of our hearts. What a mercy it is that when we walk in the way of faith, in the way of Christ, fools as we are, we shall not err!

9-10. *No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Like frightened things. They kept us company part of our road, but when the Lord appeared they took to themselves wings and fled away. We could not tell where they were gone to. We were surprised to find that they had quite vanished. Oh! for the appearing of the Lord tonight to His mourning people who may be here.

HEBREWS 12:1-8

Verse 1. *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us,—*

Or “entangle us.”

1-3. *And let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

The Lord does not wish His people’s hands to hang down, and their knees to become weak, so in this passage, as in many others, He administers gracious remedies. Among the rest, He bids us consider His

own dear Son. Shall we faint under our small afflictions when He endured so well under His heavy burdens? Come, be strengthened, my weak heart.

*“His way was much rougher and darker than thine;
Did Christ thy Lord suffer, and wilt thou repine?”*

4. *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.*

It has hardly come to blows and bruises yet—certainly not to bloody strokes. You have not lost blood yet for Christ.

5. *And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:*

Neither think too little of it, nor too much of it—too little of it by despising it and not listening to the voice of the rod, nor too much of it by fainting when you are rebuked of Him.

6. *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.*

Oh! what comfort there is here! Whenever we are under the scourging hand of God, how we ought to be cheered with the thought that this is a part of the heritage of the children. There are Elis who spoil their children. God is not one of them. He spares not the rod, and the more He loves, often the more He corrects. A tree of common fruit may be let alone so long as there is some little fruit on it, but the very best fruit gets the sharpest pruning, and I have noticed that in those countries where the best wine is made, the vine dressers cut the shoots right close in, and in the winter you cannot tell that there is a vine there at all unless you watch very carefully. They must cut them back sharp to get sweet clusters. The Lord does thus with His beloved. It is not anger. Afflictions are not always anger. There are often tokens of great love.

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