

JUNE

Day 1

A Morning Prayer

O Lord, we come to your throne of grace relying on your promises in Christ Jesus, our Redeemer. Our sins are many and our shortcomings grievous. We are cold in the performance of our worship, regarding you as a hard master who requires more than we can perform. We wilfully blind ourselves to those acts of mercy which day-by-day show forth your kindness, forbearance, and love. Were we to speak the truth from our hearts, we must each own that we are debtors to you for things which we can never repay. Your arm sheltered our infancy and led us in our early years. Your grace alone has restrained us in past years when we refused to yield to temptation and partake in sin. And if we have labored for earthly wages, it was you who gave us strength and health to do our duty in the state of life in which it pleased you to place us. Young and old, rich and poor, all must alike proclaim that you are merciful and gracious, long-suffering and of great kindness. Amen.

RECOGNIZING SIN

S. D. Gordon

"For the wages of sin is death."

Romans 6:23

The ugly face of sin pushes in everywhere. It has to be reckoned with by everybody. Sin is so ingrained in life that it is constantly being considered. It is one of the most practical of all problems and one of the most personal too. In the Bible there occurs a remarkable sentence about sin, just six words but packed full of condensed vitality: *The wages of sin is death.*" There are no adjectives, no adverbs, no other qualifying words. There are just three hard, knotty, disagreeable nouns -- wages, sin, death -- with only enough other parts of speech to hold them securely together.

These nouns are the bones of the sentence; the other words are the ligaments that hold them in place. There is no soft padding and rounding of flesh. The intensity comes out in the very shortness and sharpness of the words. Each comes blurring out, goes straight to the bull's eye of the target, and hits it with a sharp ringing noise: *"The wages of sin is death."*

There are six words in the Bible used for sin. First, we have the word *sin* itself. The word literally means missing the mark. You see in your mind a shooting target. A man stands with his rifle raised and taking aim. He presses the trigger and the bullet flies through the air; but it misses the center, the "bull's eye" of the target. It goes off into one of the rings or flies off outside the target altogether. That is the literal meaning of sin. It is failing to hit that at which you have aimed. Now see yourself. Have you ever failed to reach the true mark of life at which you have aimed, that is, the Christian life as you have thought it to be? Have you failed even just once back in time somewhere? Because if you have, that is *sin*; and sin earns wages; and the wages of sin is death.

There is a second word we find. It is *transgression*. It means simply going over a boundary line

where you have no right to go. Here is a line at the side of your path. You have a right to be here in your own path, but you have no right over beyond the line. There is a sign up, "No trespassing allowed." But you go over that line to the other side. That is transgression. May I ask you, have you gone over that line in your conduct? I do not mean the line that others may have set for you, but the line that you regarded as the proper boundary for a true, pure life. Have you? Even once? Perhaps you pulled back again, but there's still a sure jog over the line. That is transgression; and transgression is sin; and sin earns wages; and the wages of sin, I regret to remind you, is death.

The third word is *iniquity*; that is, un-equity, not equal. Think of the path of life as a level, even-faced road without any gullies but every part on a standard level. Whatever breaks that even level surface is un-equity, iniquity. Now look far back over the road of your life. How does it look to you? Is there one sagging portion of road there, one place where it isn't plumb up to the level which you have thought of as the right level? Just one? There may be more than one, but we are not talking about numbers just now but about single facts. There is one, you say. That is iniquity, and iniquity is sin, and sin carries with it a return which is, I am very sorry to say, death.

A fourth word is *wickedness*. Its old, first meaning seems to have been crookedness; that is, winding aside, turning away, falling back. The path of godly conduct is a straight path -- no curves, crooks, or bends. To turn aside from this straight path is wickedness. Look over your own life. What sort of a line do you see? Is there any zigzag in it, any jog? Maybe not much, you say. But perhaps some, even one jog off the straight path? If so, that is described in the Bible by this old word wickedness; and wickedness is sin, and sin is a wage-earner, and the wages to be paid, I much regret to say, is death.

The fifth word that pushes its ugly face up into ours is the word *guile*. Guile means sneakiness, snakiness, trickiness. It means being one thing on the inside and trying to have folks think you're something else. It means putting clean white-painted shutters up around your life so folks may think that's what you are clear through. Has your life always been a clear reflector of the motives and purposes within? If once back in your life somewhere there has been the intention to deceive another, that is guile; and guile is sin, and sin has wages, and the wages spells out the one word "death."

There is still another word, a word that may seem too strong for some, and that is *lawlessness*. It would seem a bit extreme to call some people we know lawless. Yet when the matter is sifted down to the controlling spirit within, it is found to be the accurate word to use. All true law is the expression of God's will, and whatever we do that is different from God's will is lawless. May I ask if any of you have preferred your own way when that way is dead set against God's way? Perhaps even just now-and-then? Maybe even once? However insignificant it may seem in our thoughts, it is lawlessness; and lawlessness is the very seed of sin; and sin carries with itself a result, and that result is death.

Sin is not a moral disease, nor a misfortune, nor a weakness to be overlooked and gradually overcome. It is an act of the will. When a man sets himself to do the thing that is not right in God's eye, or omits to do the thing that he knows he should, whether in imagination, speech, or action, that is the thing called sin.

Quiet Talks on Personal Problems

Day 2

A Morning Prayer

O God most holy, everlasting, and true, take each heart and mold and fashion it that it may be holy unto you. Let it be the fountain of good to others, bringing forth things acceptable in your sight. Impress upon our hearts and minds that you require loving kindness, for all too often we are led astray by the evil one and are guilty of a harsh and unforgiving spirit. Teach us the nature of those holy traits that will prepare us for the mansions of glory. And give us a constant watchfulness, lest what we profess with our lips is not what we cherish in our hearts. Enable us to live ever ready to render an account of our actions, an account worthy of one of your disciples. Hear us now, for we pray in the name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

FORGIVING OUR ENEMIES

G. K. Rusden

"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:19-21)

The words, *give place to wrath*, may be interpreted in two ways. The first would enjoin us to interpose time for reflection before avenging ourselves. That is, we should allow time for our boiling passions to cool and our aspirations after revenge to evaporate and vanish. And thus the injunction of the text would only vary in form, but not in substance, with what Paul elsewhere writes: "Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:26,27). But the second interpretation, which just as strongly inculcates this duty, at the same time assigns the reason for it: Because God will render to every man according to his deeds and vindicate the cause of innocence and truth. "Shall not God," says our blessed Saviour, "avenge his own elect who cry out day and night to him, though he bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily" (Luke 18:7,8).

We must, therefore, put away all malice, bitterness, and evil speaking, for it is the prerogative of God's wisdom, justice and power alone to assign an equitable punishment to every crime, whether it be an actual one or merely an uncommitted premeditated one. By taking vengeance into our own hands we are guilty of the grossest injustice to men by constituting ourselves accusers, judges, and executioners in our own cause. We are guilty, also, of the greatest arrogance and affront to Almighty God in usurping his peculiar privilege and sovereignty. "Therefore," the apostle continues, "*if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*"

Now these words require a more extended explanation, for they seem to directly contradict the reasoning of St. Paul given elsewhere. Taken literally, it would seem Paul is exhorting us to wreak our vengeance on our enemies by means of a subtle and covert manner. However, a moment's reflection will enable us to remove the veil of allegory in which the words are shrouded and arm them with additional strength and authority for the practice of forbearance and love.

First, we cannot doubt that the real meaning of the apostle in this passage is to invite us to do

good to those who hate us, however contrary the "heaping of coals of fire upon their heads" may sound; for Paul immediately adds this positive and unqualified injunction: "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*" And besides, Paul, speaking by the Spirit of God, cannot negate the words of Jesus himself, who says, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

Second, in ancient times it was the practice to convey instruction in short and pithy sentences, and generally in verse, for the easier apprehension and retention in the memory. Hence Solomon writes: "A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles." Now what seems in our text to be an ambiguous expression of the apostle is a proverb of Solomon, and one familiar to the Jews at Rome. Paul is quoting Proverbs 25:21,22, which read, "*If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head.*" And what does Solomon say will be the consequence of this action? Will it be to inflict some kind of injury and thus triumph in revenge? No, for he continues, "*Yahweh will reward you.*"

This is the wisdom of the east, which loves to veil the truth in figures and awaken curiosity by a striking paradox, in this case the smelting of metals. Take iron for an example. In ancient times it was necessary to heap layers of coke and coals of fire upon alternate beds of the ore in order to melt it down for use. In like manner, we must heap upon our enemy layers of kindness in order to soften his hard and unfeeling heart. We must melt his obstinacy by repetitions of love. And if we succeed, we have conquered our enemy. But if we fail, then "Yahweh will reward us." The blessing we intended for him shall return tenfold to ourselves. The seed that we have sown on the churlish and impenetrable soil of our enemy's heart shall yet be wafted to heaven and ripen there into everlasting fruit.

The Church of England Magazine, vol. xvi, 1844

Day 3

A Morning Prayer

O Lord our God, we come before your throne of grace pleading the merits of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Arise in your might, we pray, and show forth your power to the people of this nation. Let your threatenings break the sad slumber of negligence and indifference in which sinful man rests. Let your Holy Spirit show him his sin, his grievous offense against you in rejecting the righteousness of Christ for his salvation. You have bid him to come to you for salvation, and have promised that all who do will be joyfully accepted. But your call, like the voice of Noah, that preacher of righteousness, has been not only disregarded but utterly held in contempt by a froward and rebellious people. Rouse them, O mighty God, before their hearts become so hardened that your Spirit no longer strives with them. Awaken them before that great day of tribulation comes unexpectedly upon them. Open their eyes to see that, unless they repent, they must stand condemned at the final judgment. Amen.

MANKIND LEFT TO THEMSELVES

Harvey Goodwin

***"So I gave them over to their own hearts' lusts,
and they walked in their own counsels.***

Psalm 81:12

Here was the act of rebellion, the determination not to serve and obey God; and it was a determination which was sure to bring down evil on their heads. And so it did; but mark what kind of evil, mark what was the sentence of God upon a chosen people who had made up their minds to disobey: "So I gave them up unto their own hearts lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations." A strange punishment this truly was! Strange at least to a mind not looking below the surface of things. Israel wishes to have his own way instead of God's way; wishes to follow his own imaginations instead of God's law; and the punishment is this--that instead of correcting the rebellious spirit by sharp chastisement and discipline, God suffers His rebellious servants to have their own way.

And it is clear from the tone of the Psalm that this punishment is looked upon as one of the most grievous which God's wrath can inflict, for the writer of the Psalm (speaking as in the words of God) laments over the people as over those who were now past recovery; as though the sword of the enemy, the famine, the pestilence were but slight scourges compared with that more bitter curse of being allowed to do as they would without check or curb.

This must needs seem strange to one who judges after the manner which is common in this world. For to be free from check, to do as he will, to be permitted to have his heart's lust or desire, to be able without permission or hindrance to follow his own imagination, this is what half of mankind are seeking after. This, to half the world, would be almost the definition of happiness. Nothing would delight him more than to receive such a sentence as this--"From henceforth you shall have your own heart's lusts, and you shall be allowed to follow your own imaginations." And yet this boon of freedom would be the deadliest curse. This coveted state of liberty is the last awful punishment reserved for those who have made up their minds to rebel,

and whom the ordinary chastisements and warnings of God have failed to bring to repentance.

Now let us look into this subject a little more closely. The Psalm from which the text is taken throughout belongs to Israel. It is a hymn of merry-hearted joy to the God of Jacob for all His mercy and goodness. Let us then for a moment consider the relation of Israel to their God. Israel was the chosen people. They were taken out of all the world as a witness for the true God. They were to be treated with special favor. They were to be the holiest as well as the happiest of mankind. How did God shew His love to them? Did He say, Your natural appetites lead you to such and such things, and as you are My chosen people I will not interfere to thwart your propensities? Did He say, Restraints are hard for human nature to bear, and therefore I will free you from restraints and you shall do as you please? Surely He did the very opposite of all this. God shewed His love to the Israelites by giving them a law more strict than any which had gone before it. He revealed Himself as a jealous God who would be obeyed. He showed that they were His chosen people by laying upon them a most complex system of ordinances and sacrifices and ceremonies. He curbed all their actions, and He punished them severely for all transgressions of His law. Thus the marks of His favor must have formed, to those who loved Him not, the most heavy galling bondage. And it was only as a last step, when the people were determined to rebel, that He granted them that prime blessing (as a worldly mind would consider it) namely, license to follow their own hearts' lusts and to do according to their own imaginations.

This is a strange method of showing favor, if the judgment of many in these as in all other days is to be taken as the standard of happiness! If freedom to follow our own ways were the great boon to be sought by mankind, then the wild children of Esau and not the tribes of Israel were the people really blessed by God, for they wandered after their own lusts and did according to their own imaginations while the Israelites were checked at every turn by some law or restriction or ordinance.

Therefore I would say in conclusion, let us claim our privileges as Christians. Let us think of ourselves as baptized into Christ precisely for this--that we may be His soldiers and servants, free from sin, free from the world, free from ourselves. Let us strive ever to live by rule, to keep a watch upon our lusts, our appetites, our words, our thoughts. Let us endeavor to realize the horrors of being allowed to do as we please. Let us seek nearer communion with Him in prayer and sacraments and in doing good. And let us ever pray, with the earnestness of men who feel the awfulness of being without God in the world, "Oh Lord! never leave us to our own hearts' lusts and to our own imaginations, but of Thy mercy govern us in this world and so lift us up forever!"

Parish Sermons

Day 4

A Morning Prayer

O God most high and holy, we come into your presence confessing that our offenses are many. Cleanse us, we pray, and take away every prejudice that hinders us from a clear view of ourselves. Your word declares that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Yet how blind we are to our own shortcomings and how quick to detect the shortcomings of others. Let Jesus be our example, and lead us in his steps. Give us his meekness and patience, his endurance, and his faithfulness even unto death. Whatever comes our way, be it evil or good, suffering or joy, let us praise your name and acknowledge your providence working for us. And with our confidence anchored in you, we shall walk through the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil. Hear us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PSALM 23

Charles Spurgeon

"Yahweh is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of Yahweh forever." (Psalm 23:1-6)

"The Lord is my shepherd." What condescension is this, that the infinite Lord assumes toward his people the office and character of a Shepherd! It should be the subject of grateful admiration that the great God allows himself to be compared to anything which will set forth his great love and care for his own people. A sheep is an object of property, not a wild animal. Its owner sets great store by it, and frequently it is bought with a great price. It is well to know, as certainly David did, that we belong to the Lord. There is a noble tone of confidence about this sentence. There is no "if" nor "but," nor even "I hope so;" but he says, "The Lord is my shepherd." We must cultivate the spirit of assured dependence upon our heavenly Father. The sweetest word of the whole is that monosyllable, "my." He does not say, "The Lord is the shepherd of the world at large, and leads forth the multitude as his flock," but "The Lord is *my* shepherd." If he be a Shepherd to no one else, he is a Shepherd to *me*. He cares for *me*, watches over *me*, and preserves *me*.

"I shall not want." I might want otherwise, but when the Lord is my Shepherd he is able to supply my needs; and he is certainly willing to do so, for his heart is full of love. I shall not lack for *temporal things*. Does he not feed the ravens and cause the lilies to grow? How, then, can he leave his children to starve? I shall not want for *spiritual things*, for I know that his grace will be sufficient for me.

"He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters." The Christian life has two elements in it, the contemplative and the active, and both of these are richly provided for. What are these "green pastures" but the Scriptures of truth--always fresh, always rich, and never exhausted. Sweet and full are the doctrines of the gospel, fit food for souls as

tender grass is natural nutriment for sheep. When by faith we are enabled to find rest in the promises, we are like the sheep that lie down in the midst of the pasture. But observe: "*He makes me to lie down.*" It is the Lord who graciously enables us to perceive the preciousness of his truth and to feed upon it. How grateful ought we to be for the power to appropriate the promises! There are some distracted souls who would give worlds if they could but do this. They know the blessedness of it, but they cannot say that this blessedness is theirs. They know the "*green pastures,*" but they are not made to "*lie down*" in them. Those believers who have for years enjoyed a "full assurance of faith" should greatly bless their gracious God.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." This unspeakably delightful verse has been sung on many a dying bed and has helped to make the dark valley bright. Every word in it has a wealth of meaning. To walk indicates the steady advance of a soul which knows its road, knows its end, resolves to follow the path, feels quite safe, and is therefore perfectly calm and composed. The dying saint is not in a flurry; he does not run as though he were alarmed nor stand still as though he would go no further. He is not confounded nor ashamed, and therefore keeps to his old pace. Observe that it is not walking *in* the valley but *through* the valley. We go through the dark tunnel of death and emerge into the light of immortality. We do not die; we do but sleep to wake in glory.

"I will fear *no evil,*" not even the Evil One himself; I will not dread the last enemy. I will look upon him as a conquered foe, an enemy to be destroyed, "*For thou art with me.*" This is the joy of the Christian! "*Thou art with me.*" The little child out at sea in the storm is not frightened like all the other passengers on board the vessel. It sleeps in its mother's bosom. It is enough for the child that its mother is with it, and it should be enough for the believer to know that Christ is with him.

The Treasury of David

Day 5

A Morning Prayer

O Lord, we come before your throne of grace asking that you would keep our feet on the straight and narrow path. The world offers many temptations, and Satan goes about seeking whom he may devour. Lead us as you did your chosen ones of old, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, guiding them when the way was shrouded in darkness, keeping them in the paths of obedience, and granting them submissive wills to follow at all costs. Increase our faith, we plead, and enable us to always remember that you will never leave us nor forsake us. We pray in the name of our Savior, Jesus the Messiah. Amen.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Jonathan Weaver

"Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces." (Ezekiel 1:14-15)

Here is presented a most beautiful and grand illustration of the nature of God's government. Whatever else the Almighty intended to teach by this wonderful vision, it serves to illustrate the nature of his providential dealings with men and nations. This vision may very properly be "epitomized as a representation of the march of God in the chariot of his providence, through the successive ages of the world."

The first object in the vision that attracts our attention is the appearance of the living creatures, which "ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning." In this age of rationalism on the one hand and Spiritualism on the other, it is difficult to explain to the satisfaction of either party the plain, unambiguous meaning of any part of God's word. A careful study of the holy Scriptures will, however, warrant us in the belief that God in part carries on the affairs of his government by the ministry of men and angels, for "he makes his angels spirits and his ministers a flame of fire." And this subservience of men and angels in the execution of his plans and purposes serves to impress our minds with the truth that all are servants of God.

Every creature in heaven and in the earth, together with all the elements, is under his control and may at any time and in any manner be employed to execute his purposes. He may employ an angel, a bird, a fish, an insect if he chooses. All are made to serve him, and all stand in an attitude of waiting, like the "living creatures," ready to go forward or return at his command, as directed by his wisdom, and accomplishing results sometimes that reach far into the future.

The old world was destroyed by water; the cities of the plain by fire; Baalam was reproved by the ass; the prophet was fed by ravens; Jonah was brought to the shore by a fish; the Egyptians were scourged by flies and frogs. He may employ the wind, famine, pestilence, war, lightning, and tempest to do his bidding. All are his servants, and he may use any one of them or any number of them. He may thrash a mountain with a worm and send an angel to protect a spire of grass. It is his absolute prerogative to employ such agencies and instruments as his own wisdom may dictate for the accomplishment of his designs.

Next in order we have the vision of the wheels. "Their rings, they were so high that they were

dreadful," and to add to the grandeur of their appearance, "they were full of eyes." These are the wheels of divine providence, and indicate to us the various changes and revolutions which occur in order that the divine purposes of God may be accomplished. Their being full of eyes denotes that all the vast changes and revolutions of time, in all places and under every conceivable circumstance, are directed, controlled, or overruled by the same unerring hand. "The events of time are all directed by an infinite intelligence. There is an end, a design in every turn of providence. Every movement of the wheel has an object, and to that object do the eyes never cease to turn."

We are now directed to the appearance of a wheel in a wheel. This at once suggests the idea of complication, and of retrograde motion--one wheel revolving one way and the other in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, the prophet is particular to state, once or twice, that when the living creatures went, the wheels went--"they all went straight forward." Now the ways of Providence are often intricate and mysterious to us, and sometimes appear to be contradictory. But if we were permitted to see all the designs and purposes of the Almighty, we would at once be convinced that all his ways are wise and just.

We see and understand only in part, and hence in our blindness we often think his ways are unequal. Why he does this and that we are not at present permitted to know. We *see through a glass darkly*. Jacob, in the anguish of his heart, said, "All these things are against me." Joseph was gone, and now Benjamin was demanded. He must go in sorrow to the grave. He saw the appearance of a wheel in a wheel. To his mind there was not only complication in the movement of the wheels, but actually a retrograde motion, a moving backward instead of forward. He was looking through a glass darkly. But when his sons returned from Egypt and told him that Joseph was still living, and that all the necessary arrangements had been made to take the entire household down to Egypt where there was bread enough and to spare, the old man saw for the first time how straight everything had gone forward in his case. Then he exclaimed, "It is enough, my son Joseph lives. I will go and see him before I die." Thus it will be in the end. When the plans and purposes of God are understood, all will exclaim, "He has done all things well."

Another peculiarity about this machine was that "the wheels were so high that they were dreadful." This indicates that the plans of God are in many respects far above our comprehension, reaching from the beginning to the end. In our present condition we are only permitted to see detached parts of his plans, a link here and there, and are unable to put them together. We see in part and understand in part--only in broken glimpses. "But when from some pinnacle of the better land we take a retrospect of the way in which the Lord has led us, we shall see that every turn, winding, crossing, check, obstruction, fall, sickness and sorrow were just as necessary to our everlasting happiness as that Christ should have died, or that the Bible should have been written."

Divine Providence

Day 6

A Morning Prayer

O Lord God, you are the governor of the universe. You order all things and have the hearts of men in your hands. In mercy look upon this nation and its people. We must confess that we are a sinful people who love wickedness and give ourselves to iniquity. We have preferred human wisdom to divine, the statute book of men to the declarations of your law. Look upon us in pity, lest our sin provoke you to sweep us away in judgment. And give your Holy Spirit to those who are in authority over us, that they may enact righteous laws for this land. Bless our president, granting him wisdom from above. Preserve him by your great power from the snares with which he is surrounded and from the temptations that throng his path, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

RIGHTEOUS NOAH

Job Orton

"And Noah did according to all that Yahweh commanded him. Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters were on the earth." (Genesis 7:5,6)

How happy are they who are righteous before God! This was Noah's character, and his deliverance is an emblem of the great salvation of all good men. They shall be saved from the wrath to come. Let us follow after righteousness, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were righteous before God, walking in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. Let us not partake of the sins of a wicked generation lest we also partake of their plagues. Rather let us set the Lord always before us, approve ourselves in his sight, and whatever others do, serve the Lord. Then will he hide us in his secret places, and surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh us.

How hateful is sin, which provoked God to blot out and destroy the creatures he had made! What a fearful thing is it to fall into the hands of the living God! Sin is that abominable thing which his soul hates, and which he will severely punish. This story should be a warning to a careless world. Let us attend to that important question in Job, *"Will you keep to the old way which wicked men have trod, who were cut down before their time, whose foundations were swept away by a flood"* (22:15,16)? Let us hear and fear, and do no more wickedly.

How uncontrollable is the divine power over all his creatures, animate and inanimate! His power of the beasts to make them tame and gentle and enter the ark; over all the elements, laying up the deep waters in his storehouses. He sets bars that they shall not cover the earth, but he takes off those bars when he pleases and causes the waters below and above to unite their force to execute his divine commission and chastise an incorrigible world. He sends rain in its season or can withhold the bottles of heaven. Who would not adore and fear this mighty God! Who can stand before him when he is angry!

Observe how exactly God fulfills his threats as well as his promises. By the preachers of righteousness in the old world he had long foretold this judgment; but the ungodly thought it would never come. Probably when Noah was building this ark they came and asked him what he was about, and when he told them they laughed at him and asked if he would sail on dry ground.

They thought much piety had made him mad. What contempt must have been poured upon Noah when they saw him shut himself up in his ark with so many beasts and birds. If there were any poets in those days, they were probably satirical and witty about the enthusiastic old man. Perhaps they made ballads of him and he became the song of the drunkard. Note the end. The flood came as God had said. Just and true are all his declarations. Men may sneer and despise, but Yahweh is a God of truth and judgment, and blessed are all they who wait for him and hope in him.

How unable to escape divine judgment shall sinners be at the great day! So sudden and unexpected shall that day come: "*As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be at the coming of the Son of man*" (Luke 17:26). How awful was the judgment in the days of Noah, to be surprised by death while in so carnal and secure a state, in the midst of peace and safety, even perhaps of mirth and riot. No doubt they tried all means to escape. In vain they fled to trees and mountains, perhaps clung to the ark believing what Noah had spoken. But it was too late. Thousands might be waiting round the ark and crying for admittance before it was borne upon the waters. But it was in vain, for God had shut the door and man could not open it again. Noah is safe in his vessel amid the gushing torrents, the roar of beasts, and the shrieks and cries of his drowning neighbors.

So shall the coming of the Son of man be--sudden and unexpected. Sinners shall have no way of escaping; none except those who are in Christ, of whose salvation the ark was a type. They shall be safe; all the rest shall perish. Be sober, lest that day come upon you unawares. Seeing we look for such things as these, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!

An Exposition of the Old Testament with Devotional and Practical Reflections

Day 7

A Morning Prayer

O Lord, you try the faith of your saints by suffering, often giving them bitter waters of affliction to drink and a cup of sorrow as their portion, that the world may know the power of grace and the strength of faith, which are your great and merciful gifts. Enable us to accept all the trials, difficulties, and annoyances of our earthly journey as coming from your hand, and let them work in us more of your will and keep us more closely in your way. Make them show us the vanity of life and worldly joys, which any moment may bring the clouds of disappointment. And when you spare us, preserving health, strength, and the enjoyments of life, let us not forget to thank you, our bountiful Giver. So shall we indeed adorn the doctrine of God our Savior and proclaim him to be our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

THE THORN IN THE FLESH

William Ramsay

"Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia." (Acts 13:13,14)

The facts that can be gathered from the narrative of Acts are these. Paul and his companions came to Perga with the view of evangelizing the next country on their route, a country similar in character to and closely connected in commerce and racial type with Cyprus, Syria, and Cilicia. For some reason the plan was altered, and they passed rapidly over the Pamphylian lowlands and the Pisidian mountain lands to Antioch, postponing the evangelization of these districts till a later stage of their journey. They went to Antioch for some reason which concerned only that city and did not contemplate as their object the evangelization of the province to which it belonged. John, however, refused to participate in the changed program, presumably because he disapproved of it. His refusal seems to have been felt as a personal slight by Paul, which suggests that the change of plan was in some way caused by Paul. What then was the reason? Is any clue to it given in any other part of Acts or in the words of Paul himself?

In passing from Perga to Pisidian Antioch, the travelers passed from the Roman province Pamphylia to the Roman province Galatia, and the rest of their journey lay in Galatia until they returned to Perga. Now we possess a letter written by Paul to the churches of Galatia in which he says, *"You know that it was by reason of physical infirmity that I preached the gospel unto you on the first of my two visits; and the facts of my bodily constitution which were trying to you were not despised or rejected by you, but you received me as a messenger of God"* (Gal. 4:13-14). We learn, then, from Paul himself, that an illness (we may confidently say a serious illness) was the occasion of his having originally preached to the churches of Galatia. The words do not necessarily imply that the illness began in Galatia; they are quite consistent with the interpretation that the illness was the reason why he came to be in Galatia and had the opportunity of preaching there. But they imply that the physical infirmity lasted for some considerable time and was apparent to strangers while he was in Galatia.

Here we have a reason, stated by Paul himself, which fully explains all the curious phenomena of the text of Acts. Paul had a serious illness in Pamphylia, and on that account he left Perga and

went to Antioch. It is unnecessary to repeat the argument that this is in perfect agreement with the known facts. Any constitutional weakness was liable to be brought out by "the sudden plunge into the enervating atmosphere of Pamphylia" after the fatigue and hardship of a journey on foot through Cyprus; a journey accompanied by the constant excitement of missionary work and culminating in the intense nervous strain of the supreme effort at Paphos. The natural and common treatment for such an illness is to go to the higher ground of the interior; and the situation of Antioch (about 3,600 feet above the sea, sheltered by mountains on the north and east and overlooking a wide plain to the south and southwest), as well as its Jewish population and commercial connection with the Pamphylian coastal cities, made it a very suitable place for Paul's purpose.

It is plain that Paul at the moment felt deeply wounded. The journey, which he felt to be absolutely necessary in the interests of future work, was treated by Mark as an abandonment of the work; and Paul's sensitive nature would consider Mark's arguments, plausible as they were in some respects, as equivalent to a declaration of lack of confidence. But that feeling, though it lasted for some years, was not of the permanent nature which would put it on the same plane as the [other] facts recorded by Luke. Who can think that Paul would have desired permanent record of his illness and Mark's desertion? And his desire on a matter personal to himself would be Luke's law.

Now it is a probable and generally accepted view that the physical weakness which was the occasion why Paul preached to the Galatians was the same malady which tormented him at frequent intervals. I have suggested that this malady was a species of chronic malarial fever. It is a physical weakness which recurs regularly in some situation that one is regularly required by duty to face, produces strong and peculiar effects on our human nature. Now in some constitutions, malarial fever tends to recur in very distressing and prostrating paroxysms whenever one's energies are taxed for a great effort. Such an attack is for the time absolutely incapacitating. The sufferer can only lie and feel himself a shaking and helpless weakling when he ought to be at work. He feels a contempt and loathing for self and believes that others feel equal contempt and loathing. In the public nature of oriental life, Paul could have no privacy. In every paroxysm, and they might recur daily, he would lie exposed to the pity or the contempt of strangers. If he were first seen in a Galatian village or house, lying in the mud on the shady side of a wall for two hours shaking like an aspen leaf, the gratitude that he expresses to the Galatians, because they "did not despise nor reject his infirmity," was natural and deserved.

A strong corroboration is found in the phrase, "a stake in the flesh," which Paul uses about his malady (2 Cor. 12:7). That is the peculiar headache which accompanies the paroxysms. Within my experience, several persons, innocent of Pauline theorizing, have described it as "like a red-hot bar thrust through the forehead." As soon as fever connected itself with Paul in my mind, the "stake in the flesh" impressed me as a strikingly illustrative metaphor; and the oldest tradition on the subject, quoted by Tertullian and others, explains the "stake in the flesh" as headache.

The malady was a "messenger of Satan." Satan seems to represent in Pauline language any overpowering obstacle to his work, an obstacle which it was impossible to struggle against. The words "messenger sent to buffet me" imply that it came frequently and unexpectedly, striking him down with the power of the Enemy.

Paul describes the malady as sent to prevent him from "being exalted overmuch by reason of the

exceeding greatness of the revelations" which had been granted to him; and he clearly implies that it came later than the great revelation when "he was caught up even to the third heaven," about the year 43. The malady certainly did not begin long before this journey, and the attack in Pamphylia may perhaps have been the first.

St. Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen

Day 8

A Morning Prayer

O glorious God, from you all good gifts proceed. We bless you for your manifold and great mercies, for your love and compassion renewed to us each day, for the bounties of your providence. May our daily meals be always a reminder that we receive them from your hand. And forgive us in that we have permitted days and months, even years, to pass without thanking you for such innumerable blessings. With shame of face we confess that we have regarded them as our just due. Pardon us and grant that we may proclaim the abundance of your goodness all our earthly days, until we are called to depart this life and be with Christ our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

BARZILLAI THE GILEADITE

John Ker

"Now Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old."

2 Samuel 19:32

Here we have a man *who knows that he is old, but who is not distressed by the thought of it.* There are old men who do not know that they are old, or who seek to suppress the knowledge. "Grey hairs," the prophet says, "are here and there on him, yet he knows not." They do all they can to hide their growing age from others and from themselves; and when multiplying infirmities compel them to confess it, it is with melancholy if not with bitterness. Now here is an old man who has no difficulty in owning that he is old. He has no reticence, no shame, and, so far as we can see, he has no regret. He numbers up his weaknesses indeed, but it is much in the way a soldier counts the scars he has brought from the battlefield. We feel that if he had lived in the time of the New Testament, he would have been such a one as Paul the aged, and that he would have expressed himself in such words as these: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Few things in the world are so pleasant as the sight of a conscious, cheerful, hopeful man of old age, certain that he has not long to live but interested to the last in the best things of life--in the cause of God and man, and country and church.

This is the hoary head which is so beautiful when it is found in the way of righteousness. We should aim at this even from youth; for it is a truism which most people forget, that if we live we shall grow old. We think often of life, sometimes of death, but seldom of old age.

But how are we to prepare for this? By taking God with us early in the journey of life. Then we will be able to press forward the plea, "O God, You have taught me from my youth; and now, when I am old and grey-headed, forsake me not." God is willing to receive a man whenever he turns to Him; but the later he turns, the more shall be his regrets.

And if we reach old age, we can make it happy by seeking to make it unselfish. If, as we advance in life, we make our growing infirmities a discomfort to all about us, if we dwell upon them with needless and peevish rehearsal, if we use them for taxing our friends to do what we can perform for ourselves, we shall make our load heavier by having them always weighing upon our minds, and we shall lose the sympathy which would have made our burden lighter. But if, while we are

conscious of increasing weaknesses, we strive to save others from suffering by them, we shall more than half forget them in forgetting ourselves. We shall then commend old age by showing the young that every period of life has its resources for being happy and for doing good.

Sermons

Day 9

A Morning Prayer

Almighty God, with what shall we come before you? How shall we give you the honor due your name? All that we have is unworthy of your regard, and our best offerings serve only to remind us how gracious you are in receiving them. Among all our sins, spiritual pride is, to our shame, foremost. Yet you continue to bless us day to day and permit us to come into your presence because you delight in mercy, because your goodness is from everlasting to everlasting, and because, above all, you have respect for the sacrifice of your beloved Son, who gave himself a ransom for our souls. Enable us to see our utter unworthiness and embrace humility, for with it comes your blessing. We ask in the name of our Savior, Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRIDE

John Taylor

"When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the lowly is wisdom."

Proverbs 12:2

The writings of Solomon are filled with such observations upon the nature and life of man as to be the result of long experience, assisted with every advantage of mind and fortune. It was an experience that had made him acquainted with the actions, passions, virtues and vices of all ranks, ages, and denominations of mankind, and enabled him with the divine assistance to leave to succeeding ages a collection of precepts that, if diligently attended to, will conduct us safe in the paths of life.

Among all the vices against which he has cautioned us (and he has scarcely left one untouched) there is none upon which he denounces with more severity, or to which he more frequently recalls our attention by reiterated reflections, than the *vice of pride*. Pride is a corruption that seems almost originally engrafted in our nature. It exerts itself in our first years, and without continual endeavors to suppress it, influences our last. It mingles with all our other vices, and without the most constant and anxious care will mingle also with our virtues. It is no wonder, therefore, that Solomon so frequently directs us to avoid this fault, to which we are all so liable.

Pride was probably a crime to which Solomon himself was most violently tempted; and indeed it might have been much more easily imagined that he would have fallen into this sin than into some others of which he was guilty, since he was placed in every circumstance that could expose him to it. He was a king absolute and independent, and by consequence surrounded with sycophants ready to second the first motions of self-love and blow the sparks of vanity; to echo all the applauses and suppress all the murmurs of the people; to comply with every proposal and flatter every failing. Could any superiority to the rest of the world make pride excusable, it might have been pardoned in Solomon. But he has been so far from allowing it either in himself or others, that he has left a perpetual attestation in favor of humility--"*When pride comes then comes shame, but with the lowly is wisdom.*"

Pride, simply considered, is an immoderate degree of self-esteem or an over-value set upon a man by himself, and, like most other vices, is founded originally on an intellectual falsehood. He who overvalues himself will undervalue others; and he who undervalues others will oppress them. To

this fancied superiority it is owing that tyrants have squandered the lives of millions and looked unconcerned on the miseries of war. In this manner does pride operate when unhappily united with power and dominion, and has in the lower ranks of mankind similar though not equal effects. It makes masters cruel and imperious, and magistrates insolent and partial. It produces contempt and injuries, and dissolves the bond of society. Nor is this species of pride more hurtful to the world than destructive to itself. The oppressor unites heaven and earth against him. If a private man, he at length becomes the object of universal hatred and reproach; and if a prince, the neighboring monarchs combine to his ruin--so that *when pride comes, then comes shame*.

Every man has noted the indirect methods made use of in the pursuit of wealth--a pursuit for the most part prompted by pride. For to what end is an ample fortune generally coveted? Not that the possessor may have it in his power to relieve distress or recompense virtue, but that he may distinguish himself from the herd of mankind by expensive vices, foreign luxuries, and a pompous equipage. To pride therefore must be ascribed most of the fraud, injustice, violence and extortion by which wealth is frequently acquired.

Another consequence of immoderate self-esteem is an insatiable desire of propagating in others the favorable opinion he entertains of himself. No proud man is satisfied with being singly his own admirer. His excellencies must receive the honor of the public suffrage, he must make himself conspicuous and to draw the eyes of the world upon him. It is impossible to enumerate all the fictitious qualities, all the petty emulations and laborious trifles to which this appetite, this eagerness of distinction, has given birth in men of narrow views and low attainments.

There is a dangerous species of pride arising from a consciousness of virtue. Spiritual pride represents a man to himself as beloved by his Creator in a particular degree, and, of consequence, inclines him to think of others not so high in his favor as himself. This is an error into which weak minds are sometimes apt to fall, not so much from the assurance that they have been steady in the practice of justice, righteousness and mercy, as that they have been punctually observant of some external acts of devotion. This kind of pride is generally accompanied with great uncharitableness and severe censure of others.

Having thus proved the odious nature of pride, I am in the last place to show the amiableness and excellence of humility. Upon this head I need not be long since every argument against any vice is equally an argument in favor of the contrary virtue. But to evince beyond opposition the excellence of this virtue, we may in few words observe that the life of our Lord was one continued exercise of humility. The Son of God condescended to take our nature upon him, to become subject to pain, to bear from the time of his birth the inconveniences of poverty, and to wander from city to city amidst opposition, reproach and slander. He did not think it beneath him to converse with publicans and sinners, to minister to his own disciples, and to weep at the miseries of his own creatures. He submitted to insults and revilings; and being led like a lamb to the slaughter, he opened not his mouth. At length, having borne all the cruel treatment that malice could suggest or power inflict, he suffered the most lingering and ignominious death.

God of his infinite mercy grant that by imitating his humility we may be partakers of his merits. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honor, adoration and praise, now and forever! Amen.

Sermons on Different Subjects

Day 10

A Morning Prayer

O God most holy, we now offer our prayer through our Redeemer Jesus Christ. Accept us for his sake, and let your blessing accompany us throughout this day. Enable us to walk as those who prize so precious a gift. We know this day will bring temptations and trials, but strength to withstand and grace to overcome are ours if we only flee to the fountain of all good things. We may be overtaken by sorrow, but we shall be able to bear it with your help. Disappointments may surround us, but we should not be discouraged, for an eternal kingdom of joy awaits us. And if some looked-for pleasure eludes us, let us not grieve for having missed a shadow when we have before us the boundless substance. Raise us, we pray, above the things of time and sense that we may learn that we are appointed to work out in time a salvation which is for all eternity, the purchased gift of your dear Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SORROW AND JOY F. W. P. Greenwood

***"Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.
Is any merry? Let him sing psalms."***

James 5:13

Much of our experience is divided between its sorrows and its joys. The apostle James would have us sanctify our troubles and our pleasures by thoughts of Him who appoints them.

Let us look and observe how sorrows are entertained by the mass of mankind. If they are afflicted, do they pray? Far from it. Their manners, language, and conduct show plainly that they do not pray, that they do not bow themselves down in humble supplication before the God who chastens them. They do not look beyond the event of misfortune but speak simply of fate. They murmur at their destiny and blindly submit to a blind fortune.

One man is irritated by adversity. He takes no pains to conceal his vexation. The gloom of night is under his brows. He speaks as if he had suffered some sore injustice. He cannot specify any individual who has wronged him, but conceives himself wronged in some way by the event itself. Because he cannot retaliate against the event, he vents his bitterness in the ears of all who approach him. Another man may not be irritated by adversity but rather endures it. "There, it has come and I must bear it! It is done and cannot be undone. The harsh commands of fate are issued, and as I cannot resist, I have nothing to do but submit to them."

And the way joy is received and appreciated is not much different. It shows the same shallowness, the same lack of reflection, the same confinement to the present, the same dependence on circumstance. The joy of one will be noisy and boisterous while that of another will run in a gentler, though not a deeper, stream. Both kinds of joy are derived from casual sources, flow but a short distance, and are soon dried up. Though made glad by the mercies of God, such a man sings no psalms of praise and gives no glory to God's name. He takes the blessing which descends as if he had found it or bought it, as if it were entirely his own to use or abuse as he pleases.

The conclusion must inevitably follow that the mass of mankind are either without religion or that their religion is, for the most part, nominal and without efficacy. Are we content to be numbered among them? Surely not. But let us examine ourselves nonetheless. In sorrow are we prayerless without a hymn of joy rising to heaven? In adversity are we murmuring, despairing, obstinate? In prosperity do we congratulate ourselves without thanking our Maker or even thinking of him? If the occasions of grief and gladness do not lead us into God's presence and unite us to him with increasing love, then we may be sure that our religion is sadly deficient, that it is little more than a name, and that we are very far from the kingdom of God. We fall into the class of those whose religion is lifeless and of no practical value.

Now let us consider the man in whose heart the principles of religion have been carefully and tenderly fostered, on whose conduct and life they exercise their proper energies and yield their natural fruits. We can recognize him by his deportment in the day of tribulation and anguish as well and in the day of prosperity and rejoicing. In affliction he prays. He needs not be directly reminded of the apostle's counsel but goes easily and naturally by an inward prompting to his heavenly Father. He looks immediately to the grace of God, saying, "O God, You are my God; early will I seek You." "From the ends of the earth will I call upon You when my heart is in heaviness." The answer of his prayer is peace. There is peace on his face, peace in his speech, and peace in his kind deportment, because peace has come down from God and taken up its abode in his quiet and trusting soul. You may witness his sadness, you may see his tears, but his sadness wears no despairing or repulsive guise, and there is no unbecoming passion in his tears. He complains not of fate, for he acknowledges no such power. He worships the eternal and unchangeable God.

And see him in times of joy, how careful he is not to let it run to riot and spend itself in vain dissipation. The song of his gladness is a psalm of gratitude. He remembers that all this joy has a source; and as before in sorrow, so now in delight, he looks beyond earth and earthly things to God, the giver of all good things. He regards his happiness as a gift and seeks to impart of its abundance by making others happy, cheerful, and grateful.

In these two great conditions of life -- sadness and joy -- let us with faith recognize the hand of the Almighty, the supreme disposer of all events. Doubt and mistrust belong only to those who have not made religion their own by a practical application of its principles in their life. They have professed religion, but they have not made it their own unless they have experienced its instructing and sustaining power. It truly abides with those alone within whom it effectually works. They who have experienced its help and operation within them cannot doubt of its presence, and cannot mistrust its character. It is not with them a matter of profession only, but of conviction.

Sermons of Consolation

Day 11

A Morning Prayer

O God most high and holy, who dwells in light unapproachable, how shall we approach you, covered as we are with sin and tainted with iniquity? To us belongs confusion of face, and we have no merit of our own for coming into your presence. But the blood of Christ gives us access to your throne of grace, and it prevails for us. Yet our faith is weak, and too often our prayers seem to go unanswered. Hear us now as we make known our needs, for you remember that we are but dust. We seek pardon, peace, and deliverance from our sins--sins many and great. Set our feet in the way of your commandments and sustain us in our daily walk, lest we stumble and fall. Hear us now, for we ask in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

SINLESS PERFECTION?

Ralph Wardlaw

"Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" " (Proverbs 20:9)

This question may be viewed in various lights. We may apply it in regard to original sin, that is, the hereditary taint of our apostate nature. That there *is* such a taint, such an innate tendency to defection from God and to what is evil, might on philosophical principles be demonstrated from the facts of the case; for there is an absolute impossibility of accounting reasonably for the universality of sin in the whole species, and in every individual of every generation, on any other hypothesis. And that such is the representation of Scripture might be shown from the pervading tenor of the whole Bible, and from many explicit passages. This universal inherent sinfulness of nature was, I cannot doubt, in Solomon's mind when he wrote the words before us.

The question may also be viewed in light of the universally Scriptural assumption that all that is truly and spiritually good in the heart of man is the product of divine operation, of the renewing influence of God's Spirit: "Who can say," that is, say with truth, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" If the position of the apostle be a true one, namely, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," then there can hardly be a greater absurdity than the idea of a man spontaneously originating *self-change, self-conversion*; of enmity changing itself into love and choosing to love the object of its hatred!

The words do not merely imply but strongly affirm that the purification of the heart *is in no man perfect here*. There is a *purity of heart* ascribed to God's people and characteristic of them. God's children are "renewed in the spirit of their mind." But still, "Who shall say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" There have been some who have presumed to say it. But what is the truth? It is easy to say it; but when it is in direct contradiction to the explicit affirmations of Scripture, it will not be easy to prove it.

We may be perfectly sure that the idea of sinless perfection is a delusion. If it were in even one case realized, then the statement, "there is not a just man upon earth who does good and sins not," would cease to be true. And to the question in the text, "Who can say, I am pure from my sin?" might in that case be answered, "*I am.*" Therefore, to claim sinless perfection must be either a melancholy proof of the power of self-deception or a shocking manifestation of the extravagance of hypocritical pretension.

It is a characteristic of God's children to recognize that as they advance heavenward they see more and more reason for self-abasement, not because they sin more but because their view of the *purity of God* becomes fuller and stronger. The glass in which they view themselves becomes more clear so that little sins become more loathsome to minds growing in holiness.

Lectures on the Book of Proverbs

Day 12

A Morning Prayer

O heavenly Father, we beseech you in the name of your dear Son to look upon us in pity, for we are sorely hindered in running the race set before us. We are surrounded by temptations, the flesh is very weak, evil thoughts arise, and we find too many things in life to encourage them. Our companionship with worldly men claim our time, the love of ease demands our thoughts, and we spend hours in planning how we may secure riches, as if this life were all and we had nothing else to care for. Awaken us from such sad delusion and from such daring impiety! Let not the bright gleam of wealth dazzle our eyes that we fail to discern your holy warning of how hard it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And teach us that most excellent petition, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." We acknowledge your bounty and thank you for the many good things you have given us to enjoy. Oh let them not be a snare to us, let not our hearts love them, but let our love be only for you, the great and merciful Jehovah--Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

AGUR'S WISH **Charles Simeon**

"Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, 'Who is Yahweh?' or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." (Proverbs 30:8,9)

We cannot with certainty determine who Agur was, but he was evidently an inspired man. His prayer is an excellent pattern for our imitation. He entreated the Lord with very great earnestness, yet he considered his condition in this world as altogether subordinate to his eternal welfare; and, therefore he consulted only the good of his soul in what he asked for his body.

He did not, through a dread of wealth, desire to be reduced to poverty, but he wished rather to stand at an equal distance from each extreme and enjoy that only which God should judge "convenient for him." It is not easy for us to say precisely what a suitable amount would be, because it must vary according to a man's education and habits. That which is poverty to one may be riches to another. Yet the line drawn by Agur seems to mark the limits most agreeably with the prayer our blessed Lord himself has taught us, *"Give us this day our daily bread."*

Agur was not actuated by any earthly motives, though he was praying about earthly things. He considered only the aspect of riches and poverty upon his spiritual progress, and disapproved of both equally on account of the temptations incident to both. Riches foster the pride of the human heart and engender a haughty and independent spirit. This was the effect of opulence on God's people of old, and the same baneful influence is observable in our day. The wealthy consider it almost an act of condescension to acknowledge God, and scarcely one in a thousand can stand to hear God mentioned in private or his will propounded as the proper rule of conduct. The Lord has spoken of riches as rendering our salvation difficult, yea impossible, without some signal interposition of divine grace.

Poverty has its snares no less than wealth. Where its pressure is felt, the temptations to dishonesty are exceedingly great. Even those who are in ease and affluence are too easily

induced to stray from the paths of strict integrity, especially when there is but little probability of detection. How much more strongly, then, may a dishonest principle urge on a man when suffering under necessity and distress.

It is God alone who fixes our condition in the world. And if we are Christians indeed, then we may be sure that our lot is that which is most suited for the good of our souls. If any changes take place, they have been sent to teach us that same contentment which St. Paul so richly experienced, and which it is no less our privilege than our duty to learn. If we have that which is best for our souls, then we have that which is really best.

Every situation of life has its peculiar temptations. Youth or old age, health or sickness, riches or poverty--all have their respective snares. It is our wisdom to seek for grace that we may approve ourselves to God in the station to which he has called us, rather than desire a change of circumstances that will only change but not remove our trials.

It was sin, and sin only, that Agur feared; and doubtless sin is the greatest of all evils. Let the same mind be in us that was in him. Whether we have poverty or riches, or whether we be equally removed from both, let us endeavor to improve in spirituality and holiness. Then will the wisdom of God be made manifest in appointing such a variety of stations in life; and the collective virtues of the different classes will display the glory of Him from whom they sprang.

The Entire Works of the Rev. Charles Simeon, M.A.

Day 13

A Morning Prayer

O gracious God, you have preserved us through the darkness of another night that you might heap fresh benefits upon us and bless us with your favor. Assist us this day that we might bring glory to you in all that we do, for we know that a morning will soon come when we shall bend the knee before you for the last time on this earthly pilgrimage. At the longest, the day is not far distant when our house shall be no longer a home to us, when our friends can no longer soothe, when death is at the door. Prepare us for that day when the Master comes, that he may find us with our loins girded, our lamps burning, and a joyous welcome on our lips. Hear us and answer for your dear Son's sake, our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

A WORTHY GOAL

Matthew Henry

***"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added to you."***

Matthew 6:33

Here is a double argument against the sin of anxious worry. Take no thought for your life, the life of the body, for you have greater and better things to take thought about--the life of your soul, your eternal happiness. That is the one thing needful about which you should employ your thoughts, and which is commonly neglected in those hearts wherein worldly cares have the ascendancy.

If we were but more careful to please God and work out our own salvation, we should be less solicitous to please ourselves and work out an estate in the world. Thoughtfulness for our souls is the most effectual cure for thoughtfulness for the world. Also, you have an easier and more sure way to obtain the necessities of this life than by fretting about them, and that is by *seeking first the kingdom of God*. Do not say that this is the way to starve. No, it is the way to be well provided for, even in this world.

It is the sum and substance of our whole duty. We must mind heaven as our end and holiness as our way. We must press toward it, give diligence to make it sure. We must prefer heaven and heavenly blessings before earth and earthly delights. Let care for our souls and another world take the place of all other cares.

"And all these things shall be added unto you." You shall have what you seek, the kingdom of God and his righteousness, for never anyone sought this in vain that sought it in earnest. And over and above this, you shall have food and raiment besides. What a blessed change would it make in our hearts and lives did we but firmly believe this truth, that the best way to be comfortably provided for in this world is to be most intent upon another world! If we give diligence to make sure to ourselves the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, the Lord will provide as much of the things of this life as he sees good for us, and more than that we would not wish for.

"The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

We must not perplex ourselves inordinately about future events, because every day brings along with it its own burden of cares and grievances. This does not forbid a prudent foresight and to prepare accordingly, but forbids perplexing solicitude and anxious thoughts over difficulties and calamities which may perhaps never come or, if they do, may be easily borne. What a folly it is to take upon ourselves today, by care and fear, that trouble which belongs to another day and which will never be the lighter when it comes!

The conclusion of the whole matter is this: It is the will and command of the Lord Jesus that his disciples should not be their own tormentors nor make their passage through this world more dark and unpleasant by their apprehension of troubles than God has made it by the troubles themselves. By our daily prayers we may procure strength to bear us up under our daily troubles and to arm us against the temptations that attend them.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Day 14

A Morning Prayer

We come to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus our mediator and intercessor. Be gracious to us, for we have strayed from the straight and narrow path by forsaking your commandments. We have indulged in fancies and hopes built on no surer foundation than what this world can afford. How often the things of time have engrossed us, have claimed our entire service even to the shutting out of all thoughts of Jesus. Forgive us, we plead, and make us remember our weakness and frailty. Then enable us to go forward in the power of the Spirit, that we may be more than conquerors through Christ. Amen.

THE WAY TO HAPPINESS

John Sandford

"Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments." (Deuteronomy 5:29).

The way to be happy is to obey God, and the source of obedience is the heart. Thus the psalmist says, "When You shall enlarge my heart, I will run in the way of your commandments." There can be neither genuine love, nor worship, nor obedience, unless our hearts are engaged. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." "With my whole heart have I sought You." "I will obey your precepts with my whole heart." "Blessed are they who seek him with their whole heart."

God's appeal in the gospel is addressed to our hearts, and for this reason: that "out of the heart are the issues of life." It is the state of the heart that distinguishes the righteous from the wicked. It is the heart that influences the conduct, is the source from which either good or evil flows, is the root that supports the tree and makes its fruit either corrupt or good. Therefore God speaks to our hearts in the gospel. He appeals to our gratitude, endeavors to enlist our affections, binds himself to us by a sense of benefit, provokes us to love and good works by reminding us of what great things he has done for us. It is by dwelling on Christ's love to us that our hearts are inflamed with love to him.

What is the nature and extent of the obedience required from us? We are to fear God and to keep *all* his commandments, and we are to keep them *always*. Our obedience is to be full and perpetual, for God will not own a partial obedience or a divided heart. Let us not imagine that he will overlook the indulgence of any cherished sin. To be his, we must be his wholly. We can obtain no discharge from Christ's service. In other services a man may engage for a year or a day; and with the term of servitude finished, the obligation to serve is canceled. But nothing can release us from the Saviour's blessed service; and if we are truly his, we have no wish to be discharged. Our desire is to be his in time and eternity, and feel that our highest happiness in heaven will be the opportunity to serve him without distractions, without intermissions, without end.

What will be the reward of our obedience? Our text gives the answer: that it may be well with us and with our children forever. True godliness has a promise of the life that now is, as well as that of the life to come. Beside the promise implied in our text, we have a similar one in Isaiah:

"Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea." Had Israel obeyed God, how glorious and happy she would have been. Every promise of her national prosperity would have been fulfilled, she would have escaped all God's judgments, her land would have flowed with milk and honey. Israel would have been the first and fairest of all nations, not the last, a nation trodden underfoot of all. She had been great and prosperous when she walked in God's statutes.

Though the promises to Israel were in some respects peculiar, yet the history of all nations and individuals prove that piety is rewarded even here, and that "his ways are the ways of pleasantness and peace." Godliness and peace are connected. But let us also remember that sin and suffering are connected too. Consider your own experiences as confirmation. In countless instances your sorrows have been the natural consequence of your sins; your own folly and sin armed the dart which pierced you. And sin not only stings us at the moment of commission, but in the righteous providence of God, it entails a curse and inflicts a punishment years afterwards. It was so with Jacob. It was so with David. Are any of you living in defiance of God? Be assured, you shall smart for it. God notes your sin, and he will punish it.

In like manner are the rewards of righteousness. "Reward" is a bold word for a man of a sinful nature ever to use. But God has pronounced it, and we need not be afraid of what he has sanctioned. He connects obedience with reward even in this world. Just as sobriety, industry, talent, and integrity will, to a certain extent, secure a man success in the affairs of this life, so obedience to God entails his blessing.

Now I wish to speak to those young people here who may not think this is true. You laugh at remonstrance and ignore admonition, and think that you know better than those who have lived longer than yourselves. You think religion dull and melancholy, and that self-indulgence and spirited riot are the way to be happy. But you will discover, perhaps too late, that you "sowed the wind" and "must reap the whirlwind." You are contracting habits that will bring forth fruit unto death, and you are embracing tempers that will sting you like the scorpion in the life hereafter. Even now, in the heyday of youth, you may be blasting character, blighting prospects, and laying the foundation of disappointment and misery for the time when you are old. The world is not a blind spectator, neither is your God. Both are observers, one to censure and the other to punish. Both record your sin, and both will one day publish it. And in the happier lives and deaths and glorious resurrection of those whom you now perhaps despise as overstrict and poor-spirited, you will read the confirmation of my text, that "it shall be well with them that fear the Lord and keep all his commandments always."

The Church of England Magazine, vol. xviii, 1845

Day 15

A Morning Prayer

O Lord most holy and merciful, we come before you with grateful hearts, for although we are but dust and ashes and weak and miserable, you have given us the means and aids by which we may be accepted at your throne of grace. We therefore come pleading the merits and sufficiency of your Son and our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. This day will bring trials and temptations to prove our love for you. Shield and guide us throughout its every hour. Hold back our hands from every evil deed, let not our tongues speak lies, keep our thoughts from foolishness, and enable us to do all to your glory, and to do it with all our might. Thank you for your never-ceasing fatherly care. Grant that we may be ever conscious of it. Amen.

PSALM 139 CHARLES SPURGEON

"O Yahweh, you have searched me and known me . . . How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand." (Psalm 139:1,17,18)

How well it is for us to know the God who knows us! The divine knowledge is extremely thorough and searching. It is as if he had searched us, as officers search a man for contraband goods or as pillagers ransack a house for plunder. Yet we must not let the figure run upon all fours and lead us further than it is meant to do. The Lord knows all things naturally and as a matter of course and not by any effort on his part. This infallible knowledge has always existed, and it continues unto this day, since God cannot forget that which he has once known. There never was a time in which we were unknown to God, and there never will be a moment in which we shall be beyond his observation.

That God should think upon him is the believer's treasure and pleasure. He cries, "How costly, how valued are thy thoughts, how dear to me is thy perpetual attention!" He thinks upon God's thoughts with delight; the more of them, the better is he pleased. It is a joy worth worlds that the Lord should think upon us who are so poor and needy. It is a joy which fills our whole nature to think upon God, returning love for love, thought for thought, after our poor fashion. How great is the sum of them! When we remember that God thought upon us from old eternity, continues to think upon us every moment, and will think of us when time shall be no more, we may well exclaim, "How great is the sum!" Thoughts such as are natural to the Creator, the Preserver, the Redeemer, the Father, the Friend, are evermore flowing from the heart of the Lord. Thoughts of our pardon, renewal, upholding, supplying, educating, perfecting, and a thousand more kinds perpetually well up in the mind of the Most High. It should fill us with adoring wonder and reverent surprise that the infinite mind of God should turn so many thoughts toward us who are so insignificant and so unworthy! What a contrast is all this to the notion of those who deny the existence of a personal, conscious God! Imagine a world without a thinking, personal God!

"If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand." This figure shows the thoughts of God to be altogether innumerable; for nothing can surpass in number the grains of sand which belt the main ocean and all the minor seas. The task of counting God's thoughts of love would be

a never-ending one. If we should attempt the reckoning we must necessarily fail, for the infinite falls not within the line of our feeble intellect. Even could we count the sands on the seashore, we should not then be able to number God's thoughts, for they are "more in number than the sand." This is not the hyperbole of poetry, but the solid fact of inspired statement. God thinks upon us infinitely. There is a limit to the act of creation, but not to the might of divine love. When I awake, I am still with thee. Thy thoughts of love are so many that my mind never gets away from them, they surround me at all hours. I go to my bed and God is my last thought. When I wake, I find my mind still hovering about his palace gates. God is ever with me, and I am ever with him. This is life indeed.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart." David is no accomplice with traitors. He has disowned them in set form, and now he appeals to God that he does not harbor a trace of fellowship with them. He will have God himself search him, and search him thoroughly, till every point of his being is known, and read, and understood. He is sure that even by such an investigation there will be found in him no complicity with wicked men. He challenges the fullest investigation, the innermost search. He had need be a true man who can put himself deliberately into such a crucible. Yet we may each one desire such searching, for it would be a terrible calamity to us for sin to remain in our hearts unknown and undiscovered. *"Try me, and know my thoughts."* Exercise any and every test upon me. By fire and by water let me be examined. Read not alone the desires of my heart but the fugitive thoughts of my head. Know with all penetrating knowledge all that is or has been in the chambers of my mind.

What a mercy that there is one being who can know us to perfection! He is intimately at home with us. He is graciously inclined towards us and is willing to bend his omniscience to serve the end of our sanctification. Let us pray as David did, and let us be as honest as he. We cannot hide our sin. Salvation lies the other way, in a plain discovery of evil and an effectual severance from it.

Treasury of David

Day 16

A Morning Prayer

O Father of mercies and God of all comfort, we rejoice to know that you are a very present help in trouble, and that all your dispensations are wise, righteous, and kind, even when they seem to be severe. It is not your word only that reminds us of our living in a dying world, but observation and experience too. You have permitted death to invade our small circle this day and have turned our dwelling into a house of mourning. May we find that it is better to be in the house of mourning than in the house of mirth. By the sadness of the face may the heart be made better, more serious to reflect and more softened to take impressions. May we remember that you have bereaved us not as an aggressor but as a proprietor, taking back what was lent us for a season but which never ceased to be your own. So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom, that wisdom which will lead us to secure an interest in a better world before we are removed from this. We ask in the name of our great Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING **F. W. P. Greenwood**

***"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting."
Ecclesiastes 7:2***

When the proprieties of time and condition invite to enjoyment, and the boundaries of God's law will not be transgressed by enjoyment, religion freely says to us "Enjoy." The text does not proscribe the house of feasting as always unlawful. It does not forbid our going to it, but it tells us that it is better to go to the house of mourning.

It is better to go to the house of mourning because we obtain more improvement there. More valuable lessons are imparted there than in the house of feasting. Impressions of the most solemn kind, and not only so, but of the most useful, are received there. Our roving thoughts are chastened by the influences of affliction. Our hearts are instructed in the sober wisdom of life. A discipline is administered which befits our condition and is required by some of the highest wants of our souls.

The ways in which this instruction is conveyed to us may be made apparent by reflection. The death of a fellow being, the departure of one of our friends from the midst of us, is calculated to remind us more powerfully than almost any other event of our complete dependence upon God. Can any more important truth than this be borne in upon the mind? And plain as it is, do we not need to have it brought before us in such a manner that we cannot put it by? It is no light thing that a voice which for years has answered ours in the tones of social intercourse should be struck silent, that a form which has long been familiar to our sight--perhaps one of the daily blessings of our eyes--should pass away and be seen no more. Then it is that we cannot help feeling how frail we are. Who can stop the progress of disease, either of body or of mind? Who can guard against the fatal blows of sudden calamity? We are altogether in the hands of God. He takes away the breath which first he gave, and then we die and return to our dust.

With this sense of dependence on God comes humility into our hearts. We cannot but divest

ourselves of pride when we gaze on the poor, unconscious, and decaying relics of humanity. That this is the end of the body and of its glories, we know. We know also that the spirit itself is as little able as the body is to choose and command its own life and destiny.

With humility comes a godly fear. We cannot presume that our own life is more secure than was the life of the departed neighbor or friend. We therefore feel as if we ought no longer to brave, if we have hitherto braved, the divine forbearance nor delay the preparation which we need. We are moved to look on our neglected lamps, and we resolve to fill and trim them before the door is shut against us and we are left in outer darkness.

With godly fear come holy trust and earnest love. God is revealed to us not only as the omnipotent Disposer who does what he wills with his own, but as the Judge of all the earth who will do right, and the merciful Father of his children who chastens us for our benefit and loves those whom he chastens. Such a Being is not to be feared only, but chiefly and supremely to be loved. And this is our conviction in the house of mourning. It is a fact, and one which deserves to be pondered, that the love of God is often deepest in the midst of affliction.

And now let me pause to ask whether these impressions and thoughts are not in the highest degree beneficial? Do they not correspond with our true condition as mortal and immortal men? But do they come to us in the house of feasting? If they ever do, it is but rarely and uncertainly. There is no place for them, no time for them in that house. The sounds of merriment chase them away, except from prepared minds which cannot be long deluded, and from which the convictions of man's real state can never long be absent. But if we are not well established, we are apt to be entirely deceived in the house of feasting. Devoted to immediate enjoyment, we think not whence it was bestowed nor how soon it may be disturbed and turned into mourning. We become giddy and thoughtless, if not exceedingly vain and presumptuous. Levity may be obstinate as well as wild, and in her own congenial hall she refuses instruction and shuts out wisdom. There is imminent danger that the heart may grow hard in the house of feasting. We are not sensible there of our dependence on God. In the house of mourning our eyes are opened, and we see on what loose and shifting sands, and of what fragile materials our poor tabernacle is built.

In the house of mourning we are initiated into a discernment of the true worth of our pleasures. We are taught to know that the allurements with which many joys of earth array themselves are very deceptive and transitory. Thus we are made willing to be weaned from them, seeing that they are not so desirable as we once supposed them to be, that they have promised more than they can possibly perform, that they lead to disappointment certainly and perhaps to shame. We see how devoid of permanent value they are in their most innocent state, and how worse than worthless when they turn our minds from the appreciation and inheritance of those real joys which so immeasurably surpass them.

Again, in the house of mourning we see in a stronger light than perhaps anywhere else the indispensable importance of a good life. Virtue is revealed there in its true excellence and character. All doubt of its worth vanishes. All suspicions of its reality are dismissed and forgotten. We are skeptics no more. We see that the distinction between righteousness and unrighteousness is a real distinction, the most real of any. It convinces us that a good name is the most honorable title, and that all the wealth which ever occupied the grasp or the dreams of avarice is dross when compared to the riches of an upright, useful, and benevolent life.

I will only observe, in the last place, that in the house of mourning we are more than usually

disposed to mutual forgiveness and charity. Can we nurture hostile emotions in this house of peace and equality? A soul has gone from it to meet its Judge. It cannot be long before all who are left to mourn or sympathize must follow that soul to the only infallible tribunal. Where will be our petty animosities then? Where the disputes with which we have troubled each other's existence? Where the envyings and strifes, suspicions and evil speakings of which we have been guilty? Can we not forgive offenses now, we who have so deeply and continually offended? Can the righteous God be merciful to us who are unmerciful? Will Christ salute us as blessed children of his Father when we still nourish animosity and revenge against our brethren?

These and similar considerations force themselves upon us in the house of mourning. It would be strange if we forgot them as soon as we departed from it. It is more likely that they will remain with us, at least a little while, and influence our conduct, at least in some degree, when we return into the world.

Valuable are the influences of the house of mourning! It is better that we should go to it than to the house of feasting. The lessons of the one cannot so well be spared as the pleasures of the other. Feasted and filled, unchecked, unalarmed, unsoftened, we are too apt to forget our dangers, our mercies, and our obligations. Earthly desires and passions, temporal objects and interests claim us as wholly their own. But they seldom dare to go with us to the mansion of bereavement and sorrow. On its threshold they loosen their grasp and fall back; and we enter in alone, to be spoken to by other monitors, to be sobered and subdued. By the sadness of our countenances our hearts are made better. We see light in darkness, and hear a voice of comfort and joy from the chambers of mourning and death.

Sermons of Consolation

Day 17

A Morning Prayer

O Lord, everlasting and true, your glory reaches to the heavens and your power embraces all things. You ride upon the whirlwind and direct the storm. The lightning is your messenger, and you direct it to its appointed work. The loud thunder tells of your mighty power. And if you did not restrain them all and keep them within bounds, our land would be desolate and destruction would be among us. Oh, that we could learn to praise you for your goodness, could declare your wonders among men, and could show forth a due sense of your merciful forbearance toward us! Enable us to walk worthy of our vocation in Christ Jesus by bringing light to a darkened world. Awaken sinners by your Holy Spirit, and grant that they might see your majesty in the storm and tremble, lest they awaken your wrath in the day of judgment. We plead in Jesus' name. Amen.

DARKNESS **William Jay**

"Give glory to Yahweh your God before he brings darkness, before your feet stumble on the twilight mountains, and while you look for light he turns it into gloom and makes it deep darkness." (Jeremiah 13:16 ESV)

What kind of darkness? First, the removal of the gospel is darkness. Though the gospel will never be removed from the world, it may be withdrawn from a particular place or people. An eminent example are the Jews. The kingdom of God was taken from them. When we consider the miracles and the privileges by which they were distinguished and see how they were all laid waste, well may the apostle say, "Behold the severity of God. If he spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not you." Where now are the seven churches in Asia? Where is the famous church of Rome whose faith was spoken of throughout the whole world? At present, we have the inestimable benefit of their early piety in believing the gospel. But what if the Lord should send a famine to our land? I speak not of a hunger for bread or thirst for water, but of hearing the words of God. Then we shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord and shall not find it.

Impenitence is darkness. A man may be surrounded with food, yet he dies if he cannot use and digest it. The means of grace may remain, yet we become incapable of deriving benefit from them. It is an awful fact that God punishes one sin by another, and judicially blinds those who provoke him. Because they do not like to retain him in their knowledge, he gives them up to a reprobate mind. Because they do not love the truth, he sends them strong delusion to believe a lie. They delight in error, and they find it. They seek objections to the faith once delivered to the saints, and they are overcome by them. They trifle with the gospel, and at length they cannot seriously regard it or feel any impression under it. Thus is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says, "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive."

Public calamity is darkness. Was not the bondage in Babylon darkness to the Jews when their country, the glory of all lands, was desolated, and they were carried away captives and oppressed as slaves? And would not national calamity be darkness to us? If God has a controversy with us, it is vain to argue, If he is provoked and determined to punish, vain is the authority of rulers,

the wisdom of statesmen, the courage of warriors. "But he has a people among us," you say. He has, and he will take care of his own. He can secure them while destroying others. But even his own people may forward or even occasion the calamity, for no sin offends him like the sin of his own people.

The loss of reason is darkness. How soon may the understanding be eclipsed! How easily may the slender and mysterious basis on which intellect rests be destroyed! See Nebuchadnezzar eating grass like an ox. See the philosopher moping in driveling idiocy. Religion can only operate through the medium of thought. Therefore, while you have your mental powers, employ them lest darkness come upon you.

The loss of health is darkness. Is it nothing to possess months of sickness and have wearisome nights appointed to us? Yet even in those times many neglect religion. Their minds are distracted, and every path to the soul is occupied with the anguish of disease and the anxieties of recovery. Use your health while you have it in seeking God.

Death is darkness. Then you must give up your employments, however interesting; your possessions, however valued; your connections, however cherished; your religious advantages, however important. Stripped and silent you must retire into the gloom of the grave. This darkness is certain. It may be close at hand. There may be but a single step between living and dying, before going to a place from where one shall not return--even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death.

Hell is darkness, outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. The dreadfulness of this state it is impossible either to describe or imagine. But we know that it is possible to escape it. We also know that the present is the only opportunity for doing so. Behold, *now* is the accepted time; *now* is the day of salvation. Give glory to the Lord your God before he brings darkness.

Blessed be God for his long-suffering goodness and his warning mercy. He might justly have spared his words and come instantly to blows, but he speaks before he strikes and threatens that he may not destroy. May this kind alarm awaken our fear, and may our fear produce flight. May we flee for refuge to the hope set before us, even Jesus, who made atonement for sin by his own blood, in order that he might deliver us from the wrath to come.

Morning Exercises for Every Day in the Year

Day 18

A Morning Prayer

O Lord, how shall we approach you and what shall we bring to you? We will plead your dear Son's name and sacrifice, and your own mercy and love so wondrously displayed in it. Give us such a trust in your divine providence that, whether sorrow or misfortune or joy surround us, we shall confess with our lips and show forth in our lives that we are your disciples. Grant that we may stand firm on the rock of our salvation in both times of pleasure and times of trial, for your word assures us that you will never forsake us. But there are many who call themselves your disciples but who are mere professors only, having been deceived through the cunning craft of the evil one. They are walking blindfolded in their own self-righteousness to their ruin and sure destruction. Draw them, we pray, by your Holy Spirit, and lead them to repentance for Jesus' sake, that they may be clothed in his righteousness and so have peace and eternal joy hereafter. Amen.

FAITH

Richard Simonds

"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are ye not much better than they? . . . Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say to you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Matthew 6:26-29)

All nature is made to glorify the Great Creator. Yes, unintelligent and even inanimate nature may praise Him. "O Yahweh," exclaims the Psalmist, "how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions." And again, "Praise Yahweh from the earth, creeping things and flying fowl."

But we notice that the Savior impresses upon us another lesson regarding his feathered tribes: "*They sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns.*" Yet they are fed. And it is God who feeds them. How simple and practical a faith is here taught! We know, of course, that it is instinct which causes them to seek and find a supply of food for daily need. But seldom do we look beyond the operation of instinct to see from where this wonderful faculty is derived. And we might reflect further, that even the faculty of instinct would be useless and insufficient if there were no provision made apart from and quite independent of it. "*Your Heavenly Father feeds them.*" The Savior turns our attention to the Great First Cause.

We talk of instinct and admire it. The more religious go so far as to speak of a Providence. But Christ speaks directly, plainly, reverently of the "Heavenly Father" and of His constant and condescending care. Then He impresses the great lesson--the lesson of faith and trust and confidence in God's overruling Providence and special care for man. His is an eminently practical religion, one to be lived and acted upon. A religion of faith that shapes a man's ways as well as his thoughts. If God feeds the fowls of the air, will He not feed you? "*Are ye not much better than they?*"

Now the Savior gives no encouragement or sanction to that spirit of presumption which would

expect the Almighty God to provide daily miracles, and certainly not to that disposition of mere idleness and indolence that would prefer any course other than active energetic work. What he does teach is faith in God for the supply of food necessary for the sustenance of human life. Now this faith is not only required of those who are ill supplied with the necessities of life and may not know a day in advance how they are to be met, but it is required of those whose needs are amply provided for. The prayer that asks for "daily bread" is said by all, rich and poor alike. It confesses how real is our dependence upon God. Such a faith will not allow any to indulge in a spirit of irreligious independence, nor to fall into that sad state of indifference which consists of nothing worse than forgetfulness of God.

What great comfort this genuine faith and trust in God provides! How much anxious and depressing care will be avoided! Our Savior turns our focus to this when he says, "*Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment?*" He who created the body of the dust of the earth, and with a breath animated it, can with the utmost ease provide for the perpetual preservation of both. And although it is not His will or plan in our day to work miracles for this purpose, yet undoubtedly for His faithful people He will so order events and direct the thoughts and stimulate the energies that a way will be found out of threatening perplexity and need.

Take, therefore, no anxious thought for your life, for even the fowls of the air are provided for. And "*are ye not much better than they?*" Are not the flowers of the field dressed in finest texture of richest hue, though they continue but for a day? "*Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*" Let the bird and the flower teach us their silent and inarticulate lesson, to have faith in God.

After the example of our Lord, let us now notice anew with intelligent and interested eye all the works of God. Let us thoughtfully study them, assured that there are lessons of great value to be learned from all we see around us. The works of nature tell of the God who made them, of His wonderful wisdom, power, and skill. And the more these are studied, the more should the soul be filled with admiration and with love for Him.

Sermons

Day 19

A Morning Prayer

Almighty God, it is a fearful thing to fall into your hands, for judgment is yours; and we know you will not excuse the guilty. Are we ready this day to meet you face to face? Press this question upon our hearts. Let us feel and acknowledge its importance, and grant that we deceive not ourselves in the reply we give. Keep us from the delusion that because we rose from our beds this morning in safety and are now in health and strength, therefore we are secure for this night also. Who can call even the passing moment his own, much less the future? Time is ours now, but the existence of today must cease when the hour of our dissolution comes and we are put in the grave. Yet a time of resurrection is certain. Will we then be ready to give an account of our life? If we have not come to the only fountain of mercy, the blood of Jesus, then to die now will secure condemnation when every word, deed, and thought shall be brought to remembrance, and every neglected opportunity will rise as a witness against us. Oh, grant that none will let this day pass without making their salvation sure. We ask in Christ's name. Amen.

THE BRIDGELESS GULF **Charles Spurgeon**

"And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us." (Luke 16:26)

The lost spirits in hell are shut in forever. I see the angel standing at that iron door. I hear the awful key as it grates among the tremendous wards, and when that gate is closed he hurls the key into the abyss of oblivion, and the captives are fast confined, bound in fetters which will never break, in chains which never rust.

The sinner cannot come to heaven for a multitude of reasons. Among the rest, *his own character forbids it*. As a man lives and dies, so will he be throughout eternity. The drunkard here will have all a drunkard's thirst there without the means of gratifying it. The swearer here will become a yet more ripe and proficient blasphemer. Death does not change but fixes character; it petrifies it. "He who is holy let him be holy still; he who is filthy let him be filthy still." The lost man remains not only a sinner, but a growing sinner in his rebellion against God. Would you have such a man in heaven? Shall the thief prowl through the streets of the New Jerusalem? Shall the atmosphere of Paradise be polluted by an oath. Shall the songs of angels be disturbed by the ribaldry of licentious conversation. It cannot be. Heaven were not heaven if the sinner could be permitted to enter it. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Remember sinner, there never was but one bridge between fallen man and a holy God. That bridge you reject. The person of the Mediator, his substitutionary death, his righteousness, all these make the only road from sin to righteousness, from wrath to acceptance. But these you reject. If you should ever be lost, then you will have finally rejected Christ; and inasmuch as you are not this morning saved, O my poor fellow creature, you are now rejecting Christ. You are as good as saying, "Christ died, but not for me. Christ shed his blood to save men, but I will not be saved in his way. Let Christ die. I count his death a trifle and his blood a vanity. I had sooner perish than be saved by him." This is what you in effect are saying. I know the words make you

shudder and you would not venture to utter them. But that is your feeling. You will not have this man to reign over you. You would sooner be destroyed than be saved through the atonement of Christ. Having rejected, then, the only way, it is no surprise that there remains no hope.

"But," says one, "how may I lay hold on Christ?" May the blessed Spirit enable you to do it. Here is how: *trust Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.* Conscious that you deserve his wrath, trembling because of his exalted law, look to Jesus dying on the cross, a bleeding Saviour for you. God eternal, Jesus by whom the heaven of heavens were made and the earth and the fulness thereof, takes upon himself the form of man and hangs upon the cross.

*See from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

There is life in a look at that crucified One. There is life at this moment for you. Will you glance at him with a tearful eye and plead, "Jesus, slaughtered, martyred, murdered for my sake, I do believe in you. Here at your feet I throw myself, all guilty, polluted, foul. Let your blood drop on me. Turn your eye upon me and say to me, I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore with the bands of my kindness have I drawn you."

Oh, that you would believe in Jesus! May the Spirit of God lead you now to accept him. We have not the hard terms or stern conditions of a blood-thirsty tyrant, but He kindly says, "Bow the knee and kiss the Son. Come, and welcome, sinner. Come." Young man, will you be saved or not? You sinner, yonder, with your gray head betokening the approach of death, will you believe in Christ or not? It may be this is your last time, and that you shall never hear the gospel faithfully and affectionately pressed home upon you again. Will you have Jesus to be yours? Spirit of God, lead that heart to say, "Yes, Lord, be mine." And as the acceptance is heard on earth, it is registered in heaven, and salvation has come to that man's heart this day.

Miracles and Parables of our Lord, Volume 3

Day 20

A Morning Prayer

O mighty God, arise and help us, for we come through the merits of our great Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that the spirit of man is set to do evil continually, and we lose ourselves in strife and contention even while we profess to love peace. We do not live together as we ought, because we will not walk by the Spirit. We refuse to obey the Holy Spirit's motions and therefore fall into temptation and sin, even when we have called for his aid. We refuse your counsels for godly living, even when we have asked for wisdom to help and deliver us. Oh, pardon our perverseness and inconsistency, our rebellion and sin, our weakness and folly. Enable us to see the utter sinfulness of sin and stand our watch so as not to dally with it. Let today witness better things of us, we plead, and grant that our future lives will be spent in accordance with the holy example of Jesus, who was obedient in all things. Amen.

THE SIN UNTO DEATH

Horatius Bonar

"If any man sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death." (1 John 5:16,17)

The sin mentioned here is not the same as the "sin against the Holy Ghost." The persons spoken of, as respectively guilty, are very different from each other. In the latter sin, it is the Scribes and Pharisees, the malignant enemies of Christ that are the criminals. In the former, that is, the case before us, it is a Christian brother that is the offender--"If any man see his brother sin." We must beware of confounding the two sins and the two parties. The sin unto death is spoken of as that which a believer could commit; but no believer could possibly be guilty of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

This clears the way so far, or at least it narrows the ground and so facilitates our inquiry. But while removing one difficulty, does it not introduce another? Does it not assume the possibility of falling from grace and thus denying the "perseverance of the saints?" We think not. But since much depends on the meaning of the expression "a sin unto death," we must first take that up.

Death may mean either temporal or eternal death, either the death of the body or that of the soul. In the passage before us, to me it seems to mean the latter. The sin unto death would mean a sin involving temporal death, a sin which God would chastise with disease and death even though he would not exclude the doer of it from his kingdom.

The difference between these two kinds of sins may be illustrated by the case of Israel in the desert. The generation that came out of Egypt died in the wilderness because of their murmurings; yet many of these were believing men and women who, though thus chastised by the infliction of temporal death and deprivation of the earthly Canaan, were not delivered over to eternal death. Moses himself was an example, and we might add Aaron and Miriam. In Moses we see a believing man suffering temporal death for his sin yet still a child of God and an heir of

the heavenly Canaan.

But have we any cases of this kind in the New Testament? The most remarkable instance of the kind is in the Corinthian church. That church was in many respects noble and Christlike, "coming behind in no gift." Yet there was much sin in it, and many of its members were not walking "as becomes saints." Specially in reference to the Lord's Supper, there was grievous sin, as the latter part of the eleventh chapter of the First Epistle to that church intimates. God could not suffer such sin in his saints. They are not, indeed, to be cast away nor condemned with the unbelieving world, but neither are they permitted to go on in unrebuked evil. Accordingly, God interposes. He sends disease on some of these transgressing members, and death on others. "For this cause," says the apostle, "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30). Weakness, sickness, and death were the three forms of chastisement with which the Corinthian church was visited.

We find the same solemn truth in the Epistle of James (5:14,15): "The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." Here sickness is spoken of as the consequence of sin, that is, sin in a saint. The sick and sinning one is to be prayed for, and if his sin and sickness be not unto death, God will have mercy on him. The sin shall be forgiven and the sickness taken away.

These passages shew the true meaning of our text. The sin unto death is a sin which God chastises by the infliction of disease and death. What this sin is, we do not know. It was not the same sin in all but different in each.

But then the question would arise, How are we to know when a sin is unto death and when it is not unto death, so that we may pray in faith? The last clause of the 16th verse answers this question. It admits that there is a sin unto death, which admission is thus put in the 17th verse: "All unrighteousness is sin; but all sin is not unto death." But what does the apostle mean by saying in the end of the 16th verse, "I do not say that he shall pray for it?" If we cannot know when a sin is unto death and when not, what is the use of saying, "I do not say that he shall pray for it"?

The word translated "pray" means also "inquire," and is elsewhere translated so: John 1:19, "The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?" (See also John 1:21, 25; 5:12; 9:2; 19:21.) Rendered thus, the meaning would be, "I say he is to ask no questions about that." That is to say, if he sees a brother sick and ready to die, he is not to say, "Has he committed a sin unto death, or has he not?" He is just to pray, leaving alone all such inquiries and leaving the matter in the hands of God who, in answer to prayer, will raise him up if he has not committed the sin unto death.

The passage now becomes plain. And while it remains an unspeakably solemn warning, it does not teach us that there is some one mysterious sin which infers eternal damnation; still less, that a saint of God can commit such a sin. It may be thus paraphrased: "If any one sees his brother in Christ sin a sin, and see him also laid upon a sickbed in consequence of this, he shall pray for the sick brother; and if his sin be one of which the punishment is disease and not death, then the sick man shall be raised up; for all sins that lead to sickness do not necessarily lead to death. And as to the question, How shall we know when the sin is one which merely infers sickness and when it is one which infers death, I say this: Ask no questions on this point, but pray and leave the case to God."

Let us now come to the lessons of our text: (1) Don't puzzle yourself with hard questions about the particular kind of sins committed. Be satisfied that it is sin and deal with it as such. It is not the nature or the measure of its punishment that you have to consider but its own exceeding sinfulness. (2) Be concerned about a brother's welfare. If any of you see a brother sin, do not leave him alone as if it did not concern you. Desire the spiritual prosperity of all the saints. Seek, too, the salvation of the unsaved. (3) Don't trifle with sin. Count no sin trivial, either in yourself or another. Do not dally with temptation. Do not extenuate guilt. Part with it, or it will cost you dear. (4) Take it at once to God. Don't puzzle yourself with useless questions as to its nature, but take it straight to God. In the case of a brother, do not raise evil reports against him because of it, but go and tell God about it. In your own case, do the same. Do not let it remain unconfessed for even a moment after it is discovered.

There is such a thing as the second death. And who shall deliver the doomed one from it? Who shall pray him up out of hell? Oh, the second death! When it has come to that, all is over! Christ's blood shed on the cross will be of no help then. Oh, do not wait until your sins have landed you in that hopeless condition, but take the offered pardon now. God gives it to you in his Son. Take it and live forever. He who died and lives presents to you the gift of everlasting life.

Family Sermons

Day 21

A Morning Prayer

O Lord, you are the judge of all, keeping the law in your own hands and executing judgment according to its unerring precepts. Keep us from presumptuously rushing in before you and usurping your authority by judging our brother. Make us to remember how we thereby bring ourselves into further judgment and provoke your wrath and indignation against us. Pardon us, we pray, for we have often broken that law which says "judge not." Set before us the holy example of our blessed Lord, who, as man, knew how to fulfill all righteousness by obeying your law to the letter, and who did not take judgment into his own hands but left the work of judgment to him who judges righteously. Preserve us from this great evil, for without your aid we are helpless. Let your dear Son's merits prevail for us, as we ask all in his name. Amen.

A NEEDFUL ADMONITION

Matthew Henry

"Judge not, that you be not judged."

Matthew 7:1

Our Savior is here directing us how to conduct ourselves in reference to the faults of others, and his expressions seem intended as a reproof to the scribes and Pharisees who were very rigid and severe, very magisterial and supercilious in condemning all about them, as those commonly are who are proud and conceited in justifying themselves. There are those whose office it is to judge, such as magistrates and ministers, but this is directed to private persons, to his disciples who shall hereafter sit on thrones judging; but not now.

Now observe the prohibition: Judge not. We must judge ourselves and judge of our own acts, but we must not judge our brother, not magisterially assume such an authority over others as we allow not them over us. We must not sit in the judgment-seat and make our word a law to everybody. We must not judge rashly nor pass such a judgment upon our brother as has no ground but is only the product of our own jealousy and ill nature. We must not think the worst of people nor infer such invidious things from their words and actions as they will not bear. We must not judge uncharitably, unmercifully, nor with a spirit of revenge and a desire to do mischief. We must not judge of a man's state by a single act, nor judge of what he is in himself by what he is to us, because in our own cause we are apt to be partial. We must not judge the hearts of others nor their intentions, for it is God's prerogative to try the heart, and we must not step onto his throne. Nor must we judge of their eternal state; that is stretching beyond our prerogatives. Counsel him, help him, but do not judge him.

"That you be not judged." This intimates that if we presume to judge others, we may expect to be judged ourselves. He who usurps the bench shall be called to the bar; he shall be judged of men. Commonly none are more censured than those who are most censorious. No mercy shall be shown to the reputation of those that show no mercy to the reputation of others. Yet that is not the worst of it; they shall be judged by God. From him they shall receive the greater condemnation.

There are degrees of sin. Some sins are comparatively but as motes, others as beams; some as a

gnat, others as a camel. Our own sins ought to appear greater to us than the same sins in others. That which charity teaches us to call but a splinter in our brother's eye, true repentance and godly sorrow will teach us to call a beam in our own. It is common for those who are most sinful themselves and least sensible of it to be most forward and free in judging and censuring others. The Pharisees, who were most haughty in justifying themselves, were most scornful in condemning others. Being so severe upon the faults of others while indulgent of one's own is a mark of hypocrisy.

Here is a good rule for reprovers. Go in the right manner by first casting the beam out of your own eye. A man must first reform himself before he can honestly reform his brother. Those who blame others ought to be blameless and harmless themselves.

It is not everyone that is fit to be reproved: *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs.* This may be considered as a rule to all in giving reproof. Our zeal against sin must be guided by discretion, and we must not go about to give instructions, counsels, and rebukes, much less comforts, to hardened scorers to whom it will certainly do no good, and who will be exasperated and enraged at us. Among the generation of the wicked, there are some that have arrived at such a pitch of wickedness that they hate and despise instruction; they are irrecoverably wicked. Yet we must be very cautious whom we condemn as dogs and swine and not do it until after trial and upon full evidence. Many a patient is lost by being thought to be so, who, if means had been used, might have been saved. As we must take heed of calling the good "bad" by judging all professors to be hypocrites, so we must take heed of calling the bad "hopeless" by judging all the wicked to be dogs and swine.

Our Lord Jesus is very tender of the safety of his people and would not have them needlessly expose themselves to the fury of those that will turn again and rend them. Let them not be righteous overmuch so as to destroy themselves. Christ makes the law of self-preservation one of his own laws, and precious is the blood of his subjects to him.

Matthew Henry's Commentary

Day 22

A Morning Prayer

O Lord our God, enable us now to seek you with fervent spirits, to worship you with sincere hearts, to love you with the warmest affections, and to be quick in obeying your word. May we strive with more earnestness, more zeal, and more watchfulness to walk in a manner worthy of our vocation in Christ Jesus. Let us go forth to our duties of this day with the confidence that you are with us to guide and direct in all we do. Stretch forth your arm to protect us and let your comforting spirit give us an assurance that we are safe. Be our shield and buckler, our strong tower. We pray in the name of our great intercessor, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

LUKE, THE MACEDONIAN

William Ramsay

"So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them."
(Acts 16:8-10)

The introduction of the first person at this striking point in the narrative must be intentional. Everyone recognizes here a distinct assertion that the author was present; the sudden change from third to first person is a telling element in the total effect. If Luke changes here at random from third to first person, it would be absurd to look for purpose in anything he says.

Luke, therefore, entered into the drama of the Acts at Troas. Now it is clear that the coming of Paul to Troas was unforeseen and unforeseeable. The whole point of the paragraph is that Paul was driven on, against his own judgment and intention, to that city. The meeting, therefore, was not prearranged. On the ordinary principles of interpreting literature, we must infer that this meeting, which is so skillfully and pointedly represented as unforeseen, was between two strangers. Luke became known to Paul here for the first time. The narrative pointedly brings together the dream and the introduction of the first person element: "When **he** saw the vision, straightway **we** sought to go".

When we examine the dream, we observe that in it "a certain man of Macedonia" was seen by Paul. Paul did not infer his Macedonian origin from his words but recognized him as a Macedonian by sight. Now there was nothing distinctive in the appearance or dress of a Macedonian to mark him out from the rest of the world. On the contrary, the Macedonians rather made a point of their claim to be Greeks, and undoubtedly they dressed in the customary Greek style of the Aegean cities. There was, therefore, only one way in which Paul could know the man by sight to be a Macedonian: *the man in the dream was personally known to him*. In fact, the Greek implies that it was a certain definite person who appeared.

In the vision, then, a certain Macedonian who was personally known to Paul appeared and called him over into Macedonia. Now it has been generally recognized that Luke must have had some connection with Philippi, and we shall find reason to think that he had personal knowledge of the city. Further, Paul, whose life had been spent in the eastern countries and who had come so far

west only a few days past, was not likely to be personally acquainted with natives of Macedonia. The idea then suggests itself at once that Luke himself was the man seen in the vision, and when one reads the paragraph with that idea, it acquires new meaning and increased beauty. As always, Luke seeks no effect from artifices of style. He tells nothing but the bare facts in their simplest form and leaves the reader to catch the causal connection between them. But we can imagine how Paul came to Troas in doubt as to what should be done. As a harbor, Troas formed the link between Asia and Macedonia. Here he met the Macedonian Luke, and with his view turned onwards, he slept and beheld in a vision his Macedonian acquaintance beckoning him onward to his own country.

Beyond this, we cannot penetrate through the veil in which Luke has enveloped himself. Was he already a Christian or did he come under the influence of Christianity through meeting Paul here? The prohibition against preaching in Asia would not preclude Paul from using the opportunity to convert an individual who was brought in contact with him. The inference that they met accidentally as strangers is confirmed by the fact that Luke was a stranger to the Levant (the lands bordering the eastern shores of the Mediterranean). In one of the many ways in which men come across one another in traveling, they were brought into contact at Troas. Luke was attracted to Paul, and the vision was taken by Luke as well as by Paul for a sign. He left all and followed his master.

St. Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen

Day 23

A Morning Prayer

O heavenly Father, when we consider your majesty and purity and reflect upon our lowliness and guilt, how shall we come into your presence to bow before your throne of grace? We are unworthy of your notice, and were you to judge us according to our deserts, our most innocent periods of life and most devout times of worship would make us shrink back with dread and despair from your presence. But we are encouraged to approach you by the revelation you have given of yourself as the Lord God gracious and merciful, by the invitations and promises of your word, and by the mediation of your dear Son. We rejoice that he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and being raised from the dead he entered into the holy place to be our advocate. May we therefore draw near in full assurance of faith believing that all things are now ready, that we are as welcome as we are needy, and that the blessings we implore are as gracious as they are great. Yes, you delight in mercy, and have not only permitted but commanded us to ask and receive that our joy may be full. O hear us now for Jesus' sake, we pray. Amen.

ONE THING NEEDFUL

T. J. Stonewall Jackson

"Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.' And Jesus answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.'" (Luke 10:38-42)

My Dear Sister:

Your very welcome letter of last week reached me this morning, and I am rejoiced to learn that you are so much concerned about "the one thing needful." I have borne in mind that our sainted mother's prayers would not be forgotten by our heavenly Father. Though dead, her prayers, I trusted, would be precious in the sight of the Lord. The Saviour says in Mark, sixteenth chapter, sixteenth verse: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." But you may ask, "What is it to believe?"

To explain this I will quote from an able theologian, a devoted servant of God. To believe, in the sense in which the word is used here, is feeling and acting as if there were a God, a heaven, a hell; as if we were sinners and must die; as if we deserved eternal death, and were in danger of it. And in view of all, casting our eternal interests on the mercy of God, in Christ Jesus. To do all this is to be a Christian.

You speak of having done all that you know in order to be accepted. This is too apt to be our error. We must not depend on making ourselves holy, but just come to the Father and ask, for the sake of Jesus, and rely entirely on the merits of Christ for our prayer being answered. The

Father loves the Son, and for His sake pardons those who plead the Son's merits. We should never think of presenting any merits of our own, for we are all sinners. Do not trouble yourself too much about not having repented enough for your sins, for your letter shows that you have much concern about the subject. But let me advise you simply to do as God enabled me to do: that is, to resolve to spend the remaining part of life in His service, to obey the teachings of the Bible until death, and to rely entirely on the mercy of God for being saved. And though the future looked dark, it has become very bright. Never despair; even old Christians sometimes have dark moments. Never omit to pray at regular times. For years your salvation has been my daily prayer and shall continue so.

A Letter from Thomas Jonathan Jackson to his sister, Feb. 8, 1858

Day 24

A Morning Prayer

O Lord, you are the judge of all, keeping the law in your own hands and executing judgment according to its unerring precepts. Forgive our presumption in judging others, for thereby we usurp your divine authority. Grant us by your Holy Spirit that convicting grace which will keep our feet on the straight and narrow path. Set before us the holy example of our blessed Lord, who did not take judgment into his own hands but left the work of judgment to you. Oh, preserve us from this great evil, for without your aid we are helpless. Let your dear Son's merits prevail for us. Amen.

JUDGING OTHERS

John Brown

"Judge not, that you be not judged."

Matthew 7:1

It is scarcely necessary to remark that this prohibition, like many others in our Lord's discourse, is not to be interpreted in its utmost latitude. The capacity of judging, of forming an estimate and opinion, is one of our most valuable faculties, and the right use of it one of our most important duties. "Why do you not of yourselves judge that which is right?" says our Lord. "Judge righteous judgment." If we do not form judgments as to what is true and false, good and evil, how can we embrace the one and avoid the other?

The judgments here referred to obviously respect personal actions and characters, and the command is as plainly addressed to the disciples of Christ as private individuals. It is one of the first duties of civil magistrates to form, and pronounce, and act on just judgments respecting all matters which come before them for determination. And it is one of the first duties of ecclesiastical rulers to form judgments respecting all who apply for admission to the communion of the church; and, like Paul and Silas, in the case of Lydia, to admit only those whom they "judge to be faithful," or believers; and also to censure and exclude those who disgrace their profession.

It cannot be supposed that our Lord here forbids his disciples to form a judgment of the state and character of men from their avowed principles and their visible conduct, for in a subsequent part of this chapter he directs them to judge by this rule. We are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness"; but in order to do this we must exercise judgment as to what are unfruitful works of darkness. We are to "withdraw ourselves from every brother who walks disorderly"; but in order to do this we must judge as to what is disorderly walking. We are to "mark them that cause divisions and offenses, and avoid them." But to do this we must judge what is calculated to cause division and offense.

When our Lord calls on his disciples not to judge, he calls on them not to be officious, rash, presumptuous, severe, or partial in forming their judgments, nor hasty in declaring them.

We are not to be *officious* by meddling in that which is none of our concern. In other words, it is a Christian's duty to "mind his own business." There are many subjects on which we are not called to have any judgment at all.

We are not to be *rash* in our judgments. Even when called to judge, we are not to decide till we have carefully examined the subject. "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him."

We are not to be *presumptuous* in our judgments, pronouncing on things beyond our reach--such as the views and motives of another, and acting as if our conjectures were infallible truths.

We are not to be *severe* in our judgments. We are surely not, as some people seem to think, bound to believe that an avowed infidel or an open profligate is a good Christian. But we are bound to put the best construction on doubtful actions, and never, without full proof, to trace apparently good actions to bad motives.

We are not to be *partial* in our judgments. We are not to condemn in one what we approve, or at any rate pass by, in others. Certainly we are not to condemn in our neighbor what we overlook in ourselves!

And as we are not to judge officiously, rashly, presumptuously, severely, or partially, so neither are we to be *hasty in proclaiming our judgment*. An official judge, whether civil or ecclesiastical, is commonly bound to declare his judgment. But a private individual should, in every case, have a very obvious call before he proclaims an unfavorable judgment. Indeed, I apprehend that the command, "Speak evil of no man," absolutely requires us steadily to avoid giving an opinion to a man's disadvantage to anyone but to himself, except when duty demands it.

To be fond of judging others savors of pride. To be prone to condemnation savors of malignity. It is very difficult to obtain possession of all the materials necessary to form a correct judgment. And to pronounce judgment without this is to run the hazard at least of doing cruel injustice. What I hastily condemn, if I knew all, I might only pity, or even perhaps approve. To pronounce on motives and principles is an invasion of God's prerogative, who searches the heart. It is unseemly and inhuman for men, who are so liable to error, to condemn others with rigor and smugness. And to be harsh and severe in their judgments of each other is peculiarly unbecoming in those who must equally stand before the judgment seat of God, each one to give an account of himself; and all of whom, if strict justice is the only principle attended to, must be condemned in that judgment.

Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Day 25

A Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, you have implanted in us parental instincts and commanded us to train up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We feel our solemn responsibility in this task and ask that you would give us wisdom in discharging our duties. Let us not seek great things for them as to this world, but let our greatest prayer for them be their salvation, that they may live to please you and be numbered with your saints in glory everlasting. And may we guard against multiplying riches and leaving them incentives to pride, vanity, idleness, and sensuality. Enable us instead to lay up treasure in heaven, leaving behind an inheritance of godly prayers and examples of godly virtues. And by our example may we teach them that true happiness does not consist in a life free from trials and afflictions, but in exercising patience when calamities and reproaches are our portion, for your word declares that such patience will be blessed and rewarded in heaven. We pray in the name of Christ our Savior. Amen.

A GODLY INHERITANCE

Daniel Wilson

"Giving thanks unto the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Colossians 1:12

"Meetness" is a suitableness, a fitness for a certain state or certain employments; a disposition of heart, of feeling, of habits adapted to a certain condition, namely, the society of the saints in light. Meetness is a very different thing from pardon and justification, and the attempt to confound it with them and thus build up man's merits on the ruin of Christ's righteousness is the fundamental error of too many of our modern divines.

This meetness is an internal change, gradually produced by the Holy Spirit by the renewing of the soul, which fits and prepares the fallen and corrupt heart of man for holy pleasures, holy duties, and holy society in the heavenly world. By nature we have no meetness, no preparation, no qualification, no congruity, no capacity for partaking of the inheritance of the saints in light. We have not only no right nor title, because we are sinners and have broken the law of God and are under the curse, but besides that, we are excluded by having no taste, no possibility of finding happiness in a holy heaven. We should be out of our element there. It would afford us no gratification. It would be distasteful, incongruous, miserable to us.

There is a "carnal mind" in each of us which is "enmity against God." There is a will opposed to the divine will. There are affections full of impurity, disorder, perturbation, opposition to holiness. There is an understanding darkened, besotted, "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, because of the hardness of our hearts." There are false notions attached to the words *happiness, pleasure, satisfaction*. The business of heaven, the perpetual songs of praise, the incessant contemplation, adoration, love of infinite holiness there exercised, the converse with holy beings, the ceaseless effusions of perfect love to God and his saints would afford us no delight. For "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Nor

will the offers of the Gospel, nor a profession of belief in it, nor the outward privileges and sacraments of the church, if there be nothing more, make us fit. "No man can come unto me," says our Lord, "except the Father who has sent me draws him."

But God makes us meet by the interior operations of his Spirit, with which he is pleased to accompany the preaching of the Gospel. "The Lord opened the heart of Lydia, that she attended to the things spoken by Paul." "By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." "Then has God also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

The apostle uses the expression *partakers of the inheritance* with reference to the division by lot of the land of Canaan to the several tribes and families of Israel. And he intimates that in like manner we are made meet to be partakers, to have our allotted portions, of the inheritance of the heavenly Canaan. Agreeable to this will be the welcome at last, "'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" This implies what is the truth of the case, that we do not attain the heavenly glory by our own works in the way of merit, but in the way of inheritance--a free gift in consequence of the will and testament of our dying Saviour who purchased the inheritance for us, for which the Father is pleased to fit us and make us meet by the operations of his Spirit.

This inheritance is of *the saints in light*. The saints are now in much darkness. They are in sorrow, in heaviness through divers temptations, in troubles, storms, afflictions. It is only hereafter that they will be saints in light absolutely and entirely. Then the saints will walk in the unclouded light of that beautiful vision, "*The city will have no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God will lighten it and the Lamb will be the light thereof.*"

Seek, brethren, more and more of this *meetness*. Implore the Father, through the merits of his Son, to grant you more of the grace of the Holy Spirit to carry on the sanctification of your souls. And let all the afflictions, sorrows, and comparative darkness of this world have the blessed effect of quickening your desires and anticipations for the unclouded joy and brightness of the next.

Expository Lectures on St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians

Day 26

A Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come now imploring you to hear our prayer as we remember the sacrificial death of your only Son, Jesus Christ, the son of David. Give us that strength which shall enable us to be ever ready to follow him in all things, even unto death. May we be prepared to give up our health, strength, and worldly substance as proofs of our patience and obedience and love, if it be your good pleasure. Endue us with your Holy Spirit that we may think no sacrifice too great if it brings us nearer to you. May no labor be too arduous if it assists us in perfecting holiness and bringing men, both Jew and Gentile, to the saving knowledge of Jesus the Messiah. And in all our troubles and in every sorrow, teach us to draw nigh to you. Let us walk by faith, trusting in your divine providence, and casting all our cares upon you in the full assurance that you care for us. We ask in the blessed name of our Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Amen.

The 144,000 Joseph Seiss

***"Then I heard the number of those who were sealed:
144,000 from all the tribes of Israel."***

Revelation 7:4

Who, then, are these 144,000 sealed ones? This is a vital question in the right interpretation of this part of holy writ. But very conflicting and uncertain have been the answers generally given to it. Many writers are so perplexed and confounded with it that they scarcely presume to answer it, and seek to quiet inquiry by saying that the subject is too difficult for man to handle. Did people only keep themselves to the plain reading of the words as they are, without subjecting them to chemical treatment to bring them into affinity with radically false conceptions of the Apocalypse, they would save themselves much perplexity, and their readers much confusion.

So long as men will keep thinking of the present Church and the location of these events in the past or in what is now transpiring, just so long they will remain bewildered in the fog and fail to find any solid way through these wonderful revelations. If we only take to heart, that, when John writes "children of Israel" he means "children of Israel"--the blood descendants of the patriarch Jacob--and that when he mentions "the tribe of Juda," "the tribe of Reuben," "the tribe of Gad," "the tribe of Aser," "the tribe of Nephthalim," "the tribe of Manasses," "the tribe of Simeon," "the tribe of Levi," "the tribe of Issachar," "the tribe of Zabulon," "the tribe of Joseph," and "the tribe of Benjamin," he truly means what he says, we will at once have the subjects of this apocalyptic sealing unmistakably identified.

But many are so morbidly prejudiced against everything Jewish that it is concluded in advance that anything merciful referring to the Israelitish race must needs be understood some other way than as the words are written. Though all the prophets were Jews, and Jesus was a Jew, and the writer of this Apocalypse was a Jew, and all the Apostles were Jews, and salvation itself is of the Jews, and the Jews as a distinct people are everywhere spoken of as destined to continue to the world's end, it is regarded as the next thing to apostasy from the faith to apply anything hopeful that God has said to this particular race. Though Paul says that to his "kinsmen according to the flesh" "the promises" pertain, that "God has not cast away His people which He

foreknew," "that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (but only "in part" and only until then), and that God's unchanging covenant still has something favorable for them in reserve, even then many otherwise enlightened Christians become impatient and will not at all hear us when we presume to pronounce God's own words as if He really meant what He has said.

No wonder, therefore, that they cannot find a consistent interpretation of a vision of grace which is predicated of Jacob's literal seed in contradistinction from all others. Nor is there a vice or device of sacred hermeneutics which so beclouds the Scriptures and so unsettles the faith of men as this constant attempt to read *Church* for *Israel*, and Christian peoples for Jewish tribes.

As I read the Bible, when God says "children of Israel," I do not understand Him to mean any but people of Jewish blood, be they Christians or not. And when He speaks of the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob and gives the names of the tribes, it is impossible for me to believe that He means the Gentiles in any sense or degree, whether they be believers or not. And this would seem to be so plain and self-evident a rule of interpretation that I can conceive of no legitimate variation from it, except in such case as the Holy Ghost Himself may explain to the contrary.

The Apocalypse

Day 27

A Morning Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, we come to you in the name of our blessed Redeemer. Draw us to that fountain where we may wash and be clean, that we may be purified from the sinful defilement which comes with each day's association with the world. Strengthen us to resist the assaults of the evil one, who is ever lying in wait to ensnare our souls, whose desire is to keep us in bondage to the pleasures of the world. Awaken us to our danger from his constant assaults, cunning devices, and deep-laid traps. Let your Holy Spirit open our understanding that we may recognize them when they arise, and perceive when we are tempted to stray from you. And may our constant aim be to keep you in all our thoughts, your love as our chief good, and to go on our way steadfast in faith, firm in hope, and confident in your promises. Amen.

RESISTING TEMPTATION

Thomas à Kempis

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (I Peter 1:6,7)

So long as we live in this world, we cannot be without tribulation and temptation. Hence it is written in Job, *"The life of man upon earth is a life of temptation."* Everyone, therefore, should be careful concerning temptations, and watchful in prayer, lest the devil take advantage thereby to deceive him, for he never sleeps but goes about seeking whom he may devour. No man is so perfect and holy that he does not sometimes suffer temptations. We cannot be altogether without them.

Nevertheless, temptations are often very profitable though they be troublesome and grievous, for in them a man is humbled, purified, and instructed. All the saints passed through tribulations and temptations, and profited thereby. There is no order of man so holy, no place so secret, that there will not be temptations or adversities in it.

No man is altogether free from temptation while he lives on earth, for the root of temptation is in ourselves, who are born with evil inclinations. When one temptation or tribulation goes away, another comes. We shall always have something to suffer, because we are fallen from the state of bliss. Many seek to fly away from temptations, but find instead that they fall more grievously into them. By flight alone we cannot overcome. But by patience and true humility we become stronger than all our enemies. He who only avoids temptations outwardly and does not pluck them up by the roots, shall profit little. Yea, temptations will return all the sooner, and be more violent than before. It is by small steps, and by patient endurance through God's help, that you shall more easily overcome them.

Take counsel often when temptations arise, and do not deal roughly with him who is tempted. Give comfort in the same way that you would wish it for yourself. The beginning of all evil temptations is our wavering thoughts, and so little confidence in God. As a ship without a helm

is tossed to and fro by the waves, so the man who is careless and forsakes his purpose is tempted in many ways. Fire tries iron, and temptation tries a just man. We often know not what we can do until temptation reveals what we are.

Let us be watchful, especially in the beginning of temptation; for when the enemy is not allowed to enter but is resisted at his first knocking, then it is that he is more easily overcome. It has been said, "Resist at once, for the remedy is applied too late when the evil has grown strong through long delay." There comes first into the mind a simple thought of evil, then a strong imagination; afterwards comes delight, and the evil motion and consent. And so, little-by-little our wicked enemy gets complete entrance, because he was not resisted in the beginning. And the longer a man remains negligent in this duty to resist, the weaker he becomes and the stronger the enemy grows against him.

Some suffer great temptations in the beginning of their conversion, others in the latter end. Others again are much troubled almost through the whole of their life. Some are but slightly tempted, according to the wisdom and equity of the Divine appointment, which weighs the states and deserts of men and ordains all things for the welfare of His own chosen ones. We ought not therefore despair when we are tempted, but pray all the more fervently that God will grant us help in all our tribulations. He will surely do so, according to the words of St. Paul, by providing a way of escape that we may be able to sustain it.

Let us, therefore, humble our souls under the hand of God in all temptations and tribulations, for He will save and exalt the humble in spirit. The progress a man has made will be proved in temptations and afflictions, and therein is his reward greater and his virtue more manifest.

Of the Imitation of Christ

O King eternal, immortal, and invisible, who dwells in light inaccessible, you are incomprehensible. The highest archangel can never find you out to perfection, and yet you have revealed yourself to man. In your word we behold you in every character and relation that can suit our necessities or encourage our hope. Your throne is in the heavens and your kingdom rules over all. All nations before you are as nothing, yet you condescend to hear the prayer of even the most destitute. We bless you, for you have regard for our souls as well as our bodies, and have provided for our future interests as well as our present. We acknowledge your providence in all that befalls us, for you know what will best advance our welfare. If darkness veils your dealings with us this day, may we trust and not be afraid, believing that what we do not know now we shall know hereafter. These mercies we humbly ask in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our most gracious Lord and Redeemer. Amen.

GOD INCOMPREHENSIBLE

F. W. P. Greenwood

***"Look, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; when He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; when He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him."* (Job 23:8,9)**

The God whom we worship is incomprehensible. The Being whom we are required to serve is not subject to the apprehension of any of our senses. The stream perceives not its fountain, the creature understands not its Creator. Many things we know, but we know not him who knows us best, and who knows us far better than we know ourselves.

God is incomprehensible in his nature and ways of providence, in the modes of his existence and government. He is invisible, and on that account incomprehensible. It is not given to us to look upon his face and live. We know that he must be about us, but that he is so is a deduction of reason and not an intimation of sense.

God is incomprehensible because he is eternal, and of eternity itself we can form no adequate conception. That eternity is an attribute of Deity is a plain conclusion of reason. It must be that everything which does or ever did exist should be brought into existence by some cause; and therefore the cause of everything else is itself uncaused, independent, without beginning, and without end. What thoughts are these! And yet, that the first Cause could ever begin to exist, or that there ever was a time before which there was no time, is, I will not say inconceivable, but unreasonable and absurd. There must have been time prior to any supposed time, and that time must have been an eternity. And equally old with that unimaginable eternity must have been the existence of the great First Cause, the eternal, immortal, invisible God.

God is incomprehensible because he is omnipotent and infinite. He fills all space as well as all time; inhabits both immensity and eternity; is endless and boundless. Equally present throughout his vast dominions, he lives and reigns as the absolute and unapproachable sovereign. In the calm silence of a starry night, we look up to the myriads of worlds which adore God in their brightness. We calculate the distance of one of these from the spot on which we

stand, and the result seems like a fable and overwhelms us with astonishment. With the aid of telescopes, new sparkles of heavenly fire emerge into the field of vision, as distant from those we last saw as they from us. And in the midst all around is God to uphold what he has created, to regulate what he has ordained. How can we perceive, how can we know the Maker, when we see but a small fragment only of the works throughout the whole of which he dwells invisible?

Neither are our ideas capable of rising to the summits of God's power and wisdom. We know that these must be as infinite as the universe. How the same Hand which holds and balances all worlds should also give to every bird its plumage, every blade of grass its hidden texture, and every insect its invisibly minute and yet perfect economy; and how the same Mind which orders the motions of the planets, regulates the seasons, commands the lightnings, and weighs the proportions of the atmosphere, should also note each sparrow which falls to the ground and number all the hairs of our heads, is something which we may distantly admire and yet endeavor to reach in vain. It is knowledge too high for us, and we cannot attain to it.

But though we have attended to the mysteries of God's existence, we have not yet spoken of the wonders of his ways and the dispensations of his providence. Here too he is incomprehensible. We stand and contemplate the only world of whose affairs we have any knowledge, a world in which evil is mixed in large proportions with good; and we are prompted to ask why this is so. Why must earth be desolated and earth's inhabitants be mournfully swept away in the struggle? Why is sin permitted to enter the bowers of innocence and blight its blossoms, to exercise dominion over the soul of man and often to reduce it into hopeless slavery? We see the proud sinner triumph, we see the righteous man distressed. We know that from the first instant of its being, human flesh is the weeping heir of unnumbered ills. Diseases lay waiting in disregarded ambush and rush out upon us with deathly strength. The apparently useless man, who cares for none and for whom no one cares, lives on into shaking old age and second childhood, while the son, who by his manly exertions placed himself as a staff in the hands of his parents, is suddenly struck from under them.

Should we be surprised that we cannot comprehend these events when we so feebly and imperfectly comprehend the Being who directs them? Until we can, let us be humble in our ignorance and confiding in our devotion. Let us be satisfied that he who knows all things completely will order all things wisely; and that we who cannot comprehend his ways ought not to elevate our blindness into the judgment-seat over them.

Our ignorance here becomes, in a high and important sense, our bliss. If with our present constitution and powers we could understand fully the nature of the Supreme and make ourselves masters of his will, would it not then argue God's finiteness and imperfection, and diminish both our veneration and our confidence? But with respect to the eternal, all-seeing, and all-pervading Deity, this cannot be so. We cannot comprehend him. To know this is to know enough; for the very reason why we know no more is the reason why our dependence should be absolute and fearless. Weakness cannot comprehend Omnipotence, but it can lean upon it securely. The finite cannot measure the Infinite, but it can resign itself cheerfully and unreservedly to its disposal. Let us make, therefore, a wise use of our ignorance. Let the cause of doubt be the origin of confidence, and confusion and amazement will subside into submission and quietness.

Sermons of Consolation

O God our Father, accept us now and bless us for Jesus Christ's sake, for we come pleading his merits. He died for our sins and rose again for our justification. If not for our iniquities, he would never have left your throne and borne a life of sorrow and suffering, and undergone an ignominious death. But he saw man's miserable and lost condition. And when there was no one to help, nothing that could avail to appease your righteous indignation for broken laws and despised commands, he then offered himself as the lamb of God to redeem lost mankind. By means of Christ's precious blood you are pleased to accept all who will come to you through him. Our time for repentance is very short, our opportunities very few. Yet they are sufficient if we will neither waste the one nor despise the other. Enable us to use both in our service and to our soul's eternal benefit. Amen.

THE SURPASSING GLORY OF THE PURCHASE PRICE

Erich Sauer

"For you were bought at a price."

1 Corinthians 6:20

How greatly this purchase price surpasses all the world's standards and reckonings! "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with perishable silver or gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ as of a guiltless and unspotted lamb . . . foreseen before the foundation of the world . . . raised by God from the dead, who granted to him glory" (1 Pet. 1:18-21). Here Peter allows us to see five different facts:

1. All other payment is *temporal*, but the purchase of Golgotha is *eternal*. All money--silver and gold--had its beginning with the creation of the world; but we are purchased with the blood of a lamb "chosen before the foundation of the world."
2. All other payment is *earthly*, but the purchase price of Golgotha is *heavenly*. The metals, the common means of payment in general business life, come out of the earth; but Christ, the Son of the living God, came out of *heaven*. As he left heaven, he said: "a body hast Thou prepared for Me . . . that I may do Thy will, O God." By this will we are now sanctified "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:5-10).
3. All other payment is *human*, but the purchase price of Golgotha is *divine*. In the mercantile life of the earth, all values are settled by human agreement. Therefore there can be depreciation of the means of payment, inflation, change of values, indeed, departure from the gold standard, and it is *men* who determine the degree of these changes. But the purchase price of Golgotha derives its glory, its value, from *God*. It is God who has chosen and glorified this Lamb with whose precious blood we are purchased.
4. All other means of payment are *unclean*, but the purchase price of Golgotha is *holy*. It is the blood "of a guiltless and unspotted lamb." To all earthly money there cleaves some history of sin; if perhaps not in every case a sin of the present possessor, yet perhaps some sin of a former owner, or at least from the whole contact of the mammon service of this world (Luke 16:9). But

Jesus is holy. He, the Holy One, gave his life for us, the unholy; and now we, purchased through his blood, are privileged to be transferred into the world of purity and holiness.

5. All other means of payment have an *end*, but the purchase price of Golgotha is of *endless* efficacy. In the destruction of the world, in the burning of the elements, all silver and gold will be at last dissolved (2 Pet. 3:10). But Jesus in his glory, as the Lamb on the throne bearing the wound-marks of his love, will in all the endless ages be the central object of the praise and thanksgiving and worship of all the glorified (Rev. 5).

To lead to this center of salvation was the task and meaning of the Old Testament. The Old Testament exists for the New Testament. Christ Himself is the goal and soul of the pre-Christian historical revelation. He is the goal of Old Testament history, the meaning of the Old Testament worship of God, the fulfilment of Old Testament Messianic prophecy, and, already in Old Testament times, the continually present and acting God in the whole Old Testament revelation.

From Eternity to Eternity

Day 30

A Morning Prayer

O Lord God great and glorious, giver of all good things and sole author of every blessing, how little have we deserved at your hands and yet how much have we received. We have had no claim on your bounty, yet it has been unfailing. And though we have not walked in your ways as we should, yet you have preserved us when danger was nigh and when sickness was round about. Make us humble and truly thankful for all these undeserved mercies and blessings, and enable us to express our thankfulness in deed as well as in word. And if you have denied us any good thing, if you have withheld the thing we asked for, let us not complain. Close our lips against the utterance of even one murmur and let not discontent lay hold of us. Teach us to see a merciful Providence overruling every event, turning all things not only to your glory and honor but to the good of all. Amen.

MEETING TRIALS

John Menzies

"And Jacob their father said to them, 'You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me.'" (Genesis 42:36).

If we look to the account in which our text is found, I think we shall see that when Jacob cried out, "All these things are against me," he had lost sight of the sovereignty of God. In other words, he no longer regarded God as the sovereign disposer of every event and the almighty ruler of all that is ordered for the sons of men. He no longer saw the finger of God in that which befell him but was ascribing it all to some second cause, for notice how he says to his sons, "*You have bereaved me.*"

It is true that at this trying hour all was very dark to Jacob. It might have seemed as though it were impossible that anything but sorrow and trouble would continue to come upon him. Still, had he remembered the wisdom of God, and that God's judgments are unsearchable and his ways past finding out, or had he focused his mind upon the love of God and remembered that God is gracious as well as wise, this bitter cry would never have escaped his lips. He would instead have acknowledged that however dark were present circumstances, however unpromising present appearances, all must be well at last, all must be ordered aright.

What, then, are the practical lessons which we may learn from the cry of Jacob on this trying occasion?

First, it reminds us *to be very careful in the judgments which we form of God's dealings with us.* Jacob cried, "All these things are against me," and he thought he judged correctly when he said so. It seemed, indeed, as if everything were ordered exactly contrary to what would have tended to his good. It seemed as if the tide of adversity had set in full upon him, and would sweep everything before it with resistless force. But the sequel of the story shows clearly how very erroneously he judged. Joseph was alive and in prosperity. Simeon was alive and under the care of a kind and tender brother. Benjamin returned from Egypt in safety. So those very things which Jacob thought to be against him were all for him, were working for his good. The dealings

of God are necessarily very imperfectly understood by us now. But there will be a time when we shall see "face to face," when all shall be made clear and plain. Let us patiently await that time, and judge nothing before that time.

Second, we are taught *that it is foolish to be impatient and cast down just because relief does not come at the first moment we seek it.* Medicine, we know, takes time to work its cure. In like manner, there must be time for the dispensations of God to produce their proper effects upon the heart. "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Believe that the reason why he often prolongs the time of trial is so that we may gain the greater good from it. He knows better than we what really conduces for our good, and in the end we shall find that the trial was continued exactly so long as was needed to effect the good for which God designed it.

Third, let us learn *to take up our cross and bear it,* whatever it is that our heavenly Father sees fit for us. Until we can take it up and cheerfully bear it, no deliverance is at hand. This too we see exemplified in the case of Jacob. So long as he was ready in rebellious murmurings to say "All these things are against me," and did not acquiesce in the trial to which God had called him, there was no ray of consolation. The famine still continued, the corn which his sons had brought back from Egypt was spent. Not until he consented to part with Benjamin did God's providence begin to clear up. So will it be with us. The trials that God sends will not be removed until he has taught us not merely to submit to them, but to acquiesce in them as his providential government and gracious discipline; that is, until he has compelled us cheerfully to resign ourselves into his hand.

Fourth, it is very important *that we should grow in the knowledge of God and be able by faith to rest upon him at all times.* We have seen that the reason why Jacob murmured was because he did not realize God's presence and providence in that which befell him. It is so with us. Imperfect knowledge of God and weakness of faith are the true grounds of all that anxiety and sorrow which torments us. We fail to see God in all the tenderness of a father, which he is to us. Whatever be the outward circumstances, and however great the trials which await us here, let our faith be strong and in lively exercise, and then the mind will be kept in perfect peace.

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