

WAITING, HOPING, WATCHING

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A SERMON
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 DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.
 My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning:
 I say, more than they that watch for the morning.”
 Psalm 130:5-6*

AS we read this psalm, we noticed, from the opening verses of it, that David was in the depths. He is not the only one of God's people who has been there. If we imagine that the experience of true saints is always a happy high level of peace, we make a great mistake. They have their rising and their fallings, their days and their nights, their summers and their winters. Where there is life, there are pretty sure to be changes. The statues in St. Paul's Cathedral are, I suppose, always cold alike, but living men are sometimes ready to faint in the heat, and sometimes they are well-nigh frozen with the cold.

If you are a living child of God, expect that you will have many variations in your experience, and that sometimes you will be in the depths as others have been. Was not your Lord there? This psalm is called, in the Latin version, *De profundis*, and I am sure that our Lord, though He is now *in excelsis*—in the very heights—yet had on earth times when He could sing this *De profundis* psalm, “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.” Then, how could we have fellowship with Him in His suffering if we were not sometimes in the depths too? How could we know what He felt, how could we be made like unto our Lord if we were not also cast down?

The best of godly men will be, occasionally or even often, in the depths of temporal trouble. David was hunted by Saul, hated by the Philistines, grieved by his son Absalom, he had many trials, and the best of God's people will have their trials too. Though faith often lifts us up above them, yet there are times when the iron enters into our soul, when, “for a season, if need be, we are in heaviness through manifold trials.”

God's people, too, are sometimes in the depths of spiritual sorrow. They do not always live upon the mountain with their transfigured Master, but they come into the valley where they are made to feel the power of inbred sin, and to mourn over it exceedingly. When the light of God's countenance is withdrawn, the dearest of His children has to cry, with his Lord on Calvary, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” There are depths of soul-agony which some Christians have never known, but into which others have been plunged again and again. It has been as much as the saint could do to call his God his own, for his very faith seemed to tremble under the pressure of affliction and depression of spirit.

This psalm ought to comfort you who are in the depths, as you see that others have had to go there too, but mind that you follow the example of the psalmist, and whatever you are called to suffer, never leave off praying. Whatever else you do, never neglect this one prime means of deliverance, then you may say with David, “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.”

*“Long as they live should Christians pray,
 For only while they pray they live,”*

but especially when their soul seems, as it were, to have found a sepulchre—when, while yet alive, they appear to be sinking down into the depths, then is the time when, with sevenfold earnestness, they must lift up their hearts and their voices, and cry mightily unto the Lord.

One of the designs of Satan, when he finds saints in the depths, is to keep them there, but the wise child of God will cry to his Lord when he gets there, for then Satan cannot keep him there for long. He who cries “out of the depths” will soon *be* out of the depths. That cry is the voice of life, and God will not leave that soul in the depths, or suffer His redeemed one to see corruption there.

Up you will rise if you can but cry. There is something marvelous about the power of prayer, when Jonah prayed out of the belly of the fish, he was soon brought up from the depths of the sea to stand on the dry land, and to go on his Master’s errand. Cry, then, if you are in the depths. If you never cried before, cry now. If you have been accustomed to pray, pull out all the stops of this wonderful organ of prayer, and let the music ascend into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, even though it seems to you to be nothing but discord.

But notice also that, while David thus cried unto the Lord, he made confession of his sin. He felt he could not stand before God on the footing of his personal character, he could not hope to prevail with JEHOVAH by his own merits, so he pleaded: “There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” Come, child of God, if sin is a dark cloud that hides your Lord’s face from you, come to Him with this great truth on your tongue and in your heart, “there is forgiveness.”

When Luther was in great trouble of soul, he was comforted by one who said to him, “Do you not believe your Creed?” “Yes,” replied Luther, “I believe the Creed.” “Well, then,” rejoined the other, “one article in it is, ‘I believe in the forgiveness of sins.’” Luther’s heart was lightened at once by the remembrance of the words in this psalm, “there is forgiveness.”

It may be that you have sinned many times and grievously, but “there is forgiveness.” Though a child of God, you have gone far astray from Him, but “there is forgiveness.” You have backslidden sadly and horribly, but “there is forgiveness.” The devil comes and howls at you, and tells you that your doom is sealed, and your damnation is sure, but “there is forgiveness.” Oh, blessed sentence! “There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.”

When David really felt in his soul that, whatever the depths might be in which he was plunged, yet there was forgiveness for him, that, however feeble his cries might be, there was forgiveness, then he rested in perfect peace, and he said, in the language of the text, “I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.”

There are three words on which I am going to speak; the first and the chief word is, *waiting*, “I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait.” The next word, which helps the first one, is, *hoping*, “and in his word do I hope.” And then the third word grows out of the first, and that is, *watching*, “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.” May the Holy Spirit bless us both in speaking, and hearing while we meditate upon these three words—waiting, hoping, watching!

I. The first word is, WAITING, “I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait.”

Upon which I observe, first, that *this is the constant posture of all the saints of God*. Before our Lord Jesus Christ came, all the spiritual people among the twelve tribes were waiting for His appearing, they firmly believed that He would come, yet they died without the sight for which they were looking. Over the door of the great mausoleum of the Old Testament saints is inscribed this epitaph, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off.” They were waiters—waiting until the Rod should come forth out of the stem of Jesse, and the Branch should grow out of his roots.

Some few of these waiters were found in the temple when the Lord appeared, you remember the names of Simeon and Anna, who were “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” They had grown grey in waiting, but still they were among “them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem,” and at last, Simeon could say, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” This expression, waiting for the Lord, describes all the saints, from righteous Abel

down to faithful old Simeon, who took the infant Jesus in his arms, and blessed God for the appearing of the Messiah, the woman's promised Seed.

But what about the saints since then? They also are, or should be, waiting for the Lord, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." Though too many forget it, He has said, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

This is the church's glorious hope in which, in some senses, both Jews and Gentiles are now united, for if the Jews are waiting for the coming of the Messiah, so are we, only they, in their unbelief, see not that He has come once. Let it not be said of us that we, in our unbelief, see not that He will come again, but believing in His first advent, let us, therefore, patiently wait and longingly look for the time when "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." O glorious hope! We are still waiting for its blessed realization.

Yes, and in this respect I may say, with Dr. Watts, that—

***"The saints on earth, and all the dead,
But one communion make—"***

in this fellowship of waiting. Fancy not, beloved, that in heaven they have no emotion but that of joy, we know that all their emotions are joyous, but among them is this one—that they, too, are waiting until the Lord shall again manifest Himself, for, in the day of His appearing, those disembodied spirits shall put on their resurrection bodies, changed and made like unto Christ's glorious body.

And in that day, they shall be united with all the saints who remain upon the earth, for without them, the glorified spirits above could not be made perfect, that is to say, the church of God above cannot be perfected as to all its members till those who are still in the world of trial shall be brought home to meet with them, and so the whole church shall be "forever with the Lord."

Therefore, dear friends, if any of you are troubled because you are waiting for the return of your Lord, and He seems long in coming, I remind you that the whole church of Christ is waiting, the whole twelve tribes of our spiritual Israel are "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body," at the return of our Lord. The manifestation of the Head will be also the manifestation of all the members of His mystical body. Wherefore, be content to be waiters, for all God's saints have been and still are such.

Observe, too, that *the children of God, on earth, are frequently in the posture of waiting as individuals*. Not only, as forming part of Christ's body, do they wait together with the rest of His people, but each one has to wait individually. In the first dawning of grace in the soul, when the heart is taught to believe in Jesus, it does not always happen that peace immediately follows upon faith.

We meet with many, about whose salvation we have ourselves no doubt, but they have themselves little or no hope as to their own eternal safety. We feel sure that they have really trusted in the Savior, and therefore have been saved by Him, but by reason of temptation, or bodily weakness, or a measure of darkness remaining upon them through ignorance, they do not yet know the glorious liberty and assurance of the children of God.

I have no doubt that there are many, in the fold of Jesus, who do not feel themselves at rest, they are waiting until they shall possess full peace with God. They do at times enjoy that peace, sweet gleams of sunlight come to them, but they are soon in darkness again, and their unbelief struggles with their faith. They cannot get further than to cry with that poor man who said to Christ, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Well, beloved brother or sister, if you are in that condition, you are waiting that your faith may grow, waiting till the blessed Spirit shall be a Spirit of consolation to you, and shall take of the things of Christ, and show them to you.

You are sitting, as it were, in the porch of the King's house, and there is safety in waiting at His doors, but you would be much happier and more at rest if you entered the King's palace, and sat at His table. You do trust Him, may you never have any other trust! You are relying upon His righteousness, yet you do not feel that joy and peace which others of the children of God feel. Well, then, you are in this place of waiting, and for a while, perhaps, you will have to exercise that waiting spirit.

Many of us have gone further than that, but we are still waiting—waiting, among other things, for victory over sin. You know that you are forgiven, dear brother, you are quite sure that you are a child of God, and by God's grace, you have driven out many sins, but still, when you are fiercely tempted, strongly provoked, or placed in certain trying circumstances, you discover your weakness very sadly, and then your cry is, "Lord, give me victory over sin," and you will never be content till you have it.

Well, go on crying for it out of the very depths, go on hoping for it through the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, but if it does not come to you, and you have, day after day, and even year after year, to bitterly feel that the work of God is not perfected in you, still wait, for the Lord will not leave His work unfinished. He will have regard to the work of His own hands, He will go on with it till it is perfected, but in the meantime, you will be waiting for the complete victory.

And if you should get that, you will still have to be a waiter, oftentimes, in the matter of prayer. God does answer His people's prayers when they ought to be answered, the prayers that are such as you and I, in our most spiritual moments, would wish to have answered, shall be answered, but perhaps not at once. It would be difficult to say how long a Christian may have to wait for answers to prayer.

If I remember rightly, there is one godly man, who has been praying every day for thirty-six years for one thing, and recording his prayers in a book, and other believers have joined with him, yet the answer has not come, but he as fully expects it as when he first began to pray. I need not mention the brother's name, but I feel sure that he will be heard and answered, although at present he has not received the blessing he is seeking from the Lord.

I have heard of wives praying for the conversion of their husbands through their whole lifetime, and never living to see them saved, yet they were brought to the Lord after their partners had gone home. I have heard of parents pleading for their children by the score of years together, yet the prayer has not been answered at present, God is keeping them waiting, and it is theirs still to wait at the posts of His doors hoping and expecting the blessing they have asked of the Lord.

I will suppose that you have had your prayers answered, and therefore you have not to wait for that mercy, yet I am sure you know of something else to wait for. Sometimes we have to wait for conscious fellowship with God. We had it once, but we have lost it, so we cry to have it restored. When we enjoy it again, we cry for more of it, and when we have more of it, we still cry for more, and when we have the most that we ever have ever had, then our cry is yet keener for still more, for this sweet love of God enlarges the heart into which it enters. It brings with it a hallowed hungering and thirsting, it kills all unholy craving, but it creates a sacred appetite which is greatly to be desired.

O Lord, make my hunger for You to be insatiable! Let it never be satisfied. Enlarge my heart till it is as large as heaven, and then, since "the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee," make my soul as large as seven heavens, and then, since seven heavens could not contain You, go on to enlarge my spirit till I am filled with all the fullness of God! If this be the desire of your heart, you will always be waiting, and asking, and longing for more and more of fellowship with your Lord.

"But," you say, "I thought that Christians sometimes reached a point beyond which they could go no further." Then you thought amiss, for that is not the teaching of Scripture. When the apostle Paul, the most marvelous runner who ever ran the Christian race, had been running for many, many years, he said that he had not yet attained, he even forgot the things that were behind, and pressed forward still toward that which was before, the prize of his high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, there is an infinity of grace and mercy beyond you, whatever of blessings you have as yet received, you have but sipped from the ever-flowing stream of eternal love. You have but

gathered a few shells washed up on the shore of the ocean of boundless grace. You have not received all yet, you cannot enjoy all yet, you must wait, and wait, and wait, for—

“Still there’s more to follow.”

Yes, and if we were to get as much of personal blessing as ever we could hold, we should still be waiting. You ask, “What for?” Well, I, for one, am waiting for the Lord to bless my work of faith and labor of love in the preaching of the Gospel, and are not you waiting for the same thing? After every address you give, after every time you have the members of your class gathered together, and talked to them about Christ, are you not waiting for more souls to be saved through your service?

Do you not wait to be able to serve God better? Are not some of you waiting to have your tongues unloosed—waiting to have your hearts enlarged—waiting for better opportunities of doing God’s work, or for more grace to use the opportunities you have—and waiting for the divine seal upon the efforts which you have put forth?

I know that it is so, and if we could all get that, we would still be waiting—waiting to see all our families saved—waiting to see all our neighbors saved—waiting to see this great London saved—waiting to see all nations bowing at Immanuel’s feet. We can never be satisfied until we have that, and if we had it, we should then be waiting, as some of my dear brothers and sisters in the church are just now waiting—waiting to be taken up to their home above—waiting till men shall say, “The pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel is broken at the cistern,” because the Lord had said, “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.”

David said, “I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness,” and we shall be satisfied when we see Christ—satisfied when, in our flesh we shall see the God that died for us—satisfied when He shall reign upon the earth, and we shall reign with Him—satisfied when we shall hear the eternal, “Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” Yet I imagine that, even then, we shall be waiting, waiting, waiting, throughout eternity, for some fresh revelation of the unutterable, untellable love of God in Christ Jesus.

You see, dear friends, how I have tried to set before you this waiting posture of the saints as a whole, and also of each one in particular. Now I want to show you that it is *a very blessed posture*, for waiting tries faith, and that is a good thing, because faith grows by trial. Waiting exercises patience, and that is also a good thing, for patience is one of the choice gifts of God. Waiting endears every blessing when it comes, and thus we get two joys—the joy of waiting for the joy, as well as the joy of enjoying the joy when it comes. We get a better appetite for the banquet by waiting awhile before we sit down to it.

Oh, the joy it will be to rest after toil! Oh, the delight of heavenly wealth after earthly poverty! Oh, the bliss of being perfectly rid of every tendency to sin after having struggled with it here for years! Thus, all these trials are preparations for a higher state of joy by and by.

While we are waiting, *this posture becomes intense* till, with the psalmist, we can say twice over, “I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait....My soul waiteth for the Lord.” That is really three times over. We throw our very soul into it, “My soul doth wait. My soul waiteth for the Lord.” It is as if our whole being was craving after more of God. Notice how it is all summed up in the object for which we wait, “‘My soul waiteth *for the Lord*.’ I want HIM. My soul does wait for the Lord, I want nothing else, I am not waiting for anything else.” There is nothing else to wait for, as David said on another occasion, “Now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.” But oh, we are waiting intensely, insatiably, for God, the living God, when shall we come and appear before God?

This, then, is the great longing and waiting of each one of the people of God, “I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait....My soul waiteth for the Lord.”

II. I have scarcely a minute in which to speak about the second word, HOPING, “and in his word do I hope.”

Observe, first, that *hope is the reason for waiting*. “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” Then, next, *hope is the strength of waiting*. You do not wait for a thing about which you are absolutely hopeless, if you have no hope of obtaining it, you say, “Then I will go my way, it is useless to wait any longer.” But inasmuch as you have some degree of hope in waiting for God, your spirit is sustained so that you can still continue to wait for Him.

Further, *this hope is the sweetener of waiting*. Waiting is always sweet when there is a hope at the end of it. The vista may be very long, but you pursue your way with willing footsteps because you hope to reach the shelter at the end. But make sure that your hope is a good hope, that it is a well-founded hope, that it is a happy hope, that it is a hope that “maketh not ashamed,” that it is a hope that fixes itself on Christ alone, for if you have not that hope, you will not wait, and if you do not wait, you will not receive.

It is the waiting soul that gets the blessing. “It is good for me to draw near to God,” said David, and he also said, “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.” But you cannot do this unless you have hope, therefore pray the Lord to give you a good hope, and to brighten your hope, and keep your eyes always looking for that which is yet to come, and which is laid up in the promise of God for all His people.

III. Then the third word is WATCHING.

He that waits, and he that hopes, learns to watch. First notice the figure here used, and then observe that the figure is exceeded, “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.”

First, *what is the figure here used?* I should not wonder if it is partly the temple. There was the great temple at Jerusalem, and all the people went up to it to worship so many times a year. I will suppose that God has given warm hearts to you and me, and that we want to be at the ancient temple.

We have made our last march in the middle of the night, we have reached the bottom of the hill, and climbed up its steep sides, and we have reached the very gate of the temple. When we get there, it is still night, so we ask one of the guards, “We have come to appear before God; when will the service begin?” He replies, “Not till the day breaks.” “And what will happen when the day breaks?” “Why, then, they will offer the morning lamb, and they will burn the incense, the priest will trim the lamps, and the day’s service will begin.”

We are lifting up our hearts to God, we have come up to the temple on purpose to worship the Lord, we want to have a good long day of service, so we turn our eyes towards the hills over yonder, and we watch. We say, “Watchman, what of the night? Is the morning coming? When will the blessed day begin? We are longing to enjoy all the ordinances of the Lord’s house.” So the watchers stand there, and look out for the first tokens of daybreak on the Eastern hills.

Or it may be that the figure is that of the guards upon the city walls, the sentinels have had to watch all night long. With steady and weary tramp, the watchman has gone from one tower to another speaking to his brother sentinel as he has met him, keeping to his beat all through the dreary, cold, rainy, windy night, and he says to himself, “I wish it were morning.” As he exchanges the watchword with his companion, he says, “I wish it were morning. My eyelids are heavy, my head begins to ache with this constant watching for the enemy, I wish it were morning.”

Have you never been in that posture, dear friend? Have not I? I hope I know what it is to watch for the morning—that I may meet with God in His holy temple above, and also to watch for the morning that this weary sentinel work may be done, and that I may be where there are no more enemies who can assault the sacred walls of Zion.

Then, again, some of you know what it is to watch for the morning in another sense. There is a dear one sick, how he tosses to and fro! He is in a high fever, and you constantly give him a cooling drink, and you take care at the proper hour to administer the medicine, but there is many a groan, and many a weary cry, and you are all alone with the patient, everybody else in the house is sound asleep.

Have you not sometimes gone to the venetian blind, and turned it up just a little to see whether the sun has not risen? That clock's unwearied tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick—thousands of times—seems to go right into your brain, and into your heart, and the poor sufferer says, "Would God it were morning!"

You recollect how, in the day, he said, "Would God it were evening!" That is the way with the sick, and at last you get as weary as your patient is. The fact is, you are half afraid you did fall asleep, you do not know what mischief may come if you do not watch, and you begin to say with the sufferer, "Would God it were morning!"

Have you ever watched thus in a spiritual sense over a poor sin-sick soul? Have you ever watched thus over your own sick soul, until you have said, "I watch for the morning"? If so, this watching has been to you a picture and emblem of what your state of heart is in reference to your God, you are waiting, and you are watching, and you cry, "When will the day break, and the shadows flee away?"

But *the figure is exceeded by the fact*, for the text says, "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." We have been watching longer than they who guard the temple or the city towers. The sentinel has only a few hours' night-watch, but some of us have been watching for these thirty years, some of you for these fifty years, ah, some of you for sixty years! I do not wonder that you have a stronger desire for the morning than they have who have only watched for one night.

Besides, you expect so much more than they do, for when the day comes, what does it bring to them? A little ease for the sentinel, a little rest for the nurse, but they will have to go back to the nursing or the watching as soon as the shades of night return. You and I are waiting for a daylight that will bring us endless rest and perfect joy, well may we watch more than they that watch for the morning, for theirs is but the morning of a day, but ours is the morning of an eternity which shall know no end. They do but watch for the sun with its passing beams, we watch for the Sun of righteousness whose glory makes heaven itself.

Well may we grow eager when we think of what is yet to be revealed in us. Well may our hunger increase as we think of the sweets that are reserved for us. You have heard of the Goths and Vandals, it is said that, somehow, they tasted of the grapes of Italy. I suppose that some bunches of fruit were carried across the Alps, and when those poor Goths and Vandals tasted them, what did they say? "Let us go to the land where these clusters grow, and eat them fresh from the vines." And it was not long before, in innumerable hordes, they swarmed over Italy. In a far higher sense, something like that has happened to us and therefore we sing—

*"My soul has tasted of the grapes,
And now it longs to go
Where my dear Lord his vineyard keeps,
And all the clusters grow."*

We wait for Him "more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning." Never did bride expect her marriage day as the true saint expects his Lord. Never did woman in travail long to behold her child as they, who watch for their Lord, long for His appearing. Never did prisoner, pining in the dungeon till the rust ate into his soul, pine for liberty as saints pine for their Lord. This is the right posture for the whole church, and for each individual Christian—waiting, hoping, watching, till He appears who is their Husband, Savior, Friend, and All-in-all.

God bless you, dear friends, and keep you thus watching, for His name's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 130

I will first read the psalm through, and afterwards say a few words by way of exposition.

Verses 1-8. *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

You notice that this is one of the Songs of Degrees, that is, psalms ascending by steps, and it begins at the very bottom, “Out of the depths.” But it gradually climbs up to the heights, “He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” May your experience and mine, beloved, be like a ladder—upward, always upward, step by step, ever rising, and getting nearer to our God!

The psalm begins very low, “Out of the depths.” The psalmist is in the depths of sorrow and conscious sin, the depths of weakness, the depths of doubt and fear, yet though he is in those depths, he does not leave off praying, “Out of the depths have I cried.” Some of the best prayers that were ever prayed have been offered in the depths. There are some men who never prayed at all until they came into the depths of sorrow, and those sorrows pressed their prayers out of them.

The psalmist’s prayer was a cry. That is a child’s prayer, it cries to its mother or its father, “Out of the depths have I cried.” But it was not like a child’s cries sometimes are—cries to itself, or cries to nobody, “Out of the depths have I cried unto THEE, O JEHOVAH.” That is the right kind of prayer which is directed to God as an arrow is aimed at the target.

In looking back over his past experience, the psalmist tells the Lord that he has prayed. Sometimes, it is a good thing to pray over your prayers. “I have prayed, Lord, now I present one more petition, ‘I pray You to remember that I have prayed. I pray You to hear me. Lord, hear my voice.’” What is the good of prayer if God does not hear it? Sometimes we ask God to answer our supplication. That is right, but at the same time, remember that it may be a greater blessing for God to hear our prayers than to answer them, for if He were to make it an absolute rule that He would grant all our requests, it might be a curse rather than a blessing.

At any rate, I should feel it a very dreadful responsibility to have cast upon me, for then, after all, I should have to depend upon my own prayers, and therefore have to order my own way. But when I read that God will hear my prayer, that is much better, for He can do as He likes about answering it, and if I pray an improper prayer, what is better for me than for God to hear it, and then to set it on one side? And often, mine are such poor feeble prayers that it is much better for me that He should hear them, and then do for me exceeding abundantly above what I have asked or thought. I used to think that we ought to say that He is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God, but I do not say that now. It is enough that He hears, enough that you have presented your petition, and that God has heard it.

“Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.” That is, “Lord, consider my prayer; have respect unto it. Answer it according to Your wise consideration of it, ‘Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.’” Our prayers must usually be supplications, that is the word for a beggar’s pleading when he supplicates and asks for favors. That is what we do when we plead with God, and even if we do not speak, yet there is a voice in our supplications. In the sixth psalm, David speaks of the voice of his weeping, and there is often a voice in that sorrow which cannot find a voice. God hears the grief that cannot itself speak to Him, “Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.”

And now, having put up his petition, notice his confession, “If thou, JEHOVAH, shouldest mark iniquities, O Adonai, who shall stand?” So it should run. If God were to sit like a judge taking notes of

the evidence, and putting down against His people all their errors, who would be able to stand in that court? We should all be condemned.

Then, does not God mark iniquities? Yes, He does in one sense, but not in another, and through His infinite love and mercy, He does not deal with us after our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities. “If He did,” David seems to say, “I could not stand.” But he says more, “Who shall stand?” Whatever pretensions to perfection any persons may make, they are false. There is no man who can stand in God’s sight when He comes to mark our iniquities, and if we are taught of God’s Spirit, we shall know it to be so. In fact, the more holy a man becomes the more conscious he is of unholiness.

“But”—and what a blessed “but” this is!—one of the most blessed “buts” in the Word of God, “But there is forgiveness with thee,” or “There is a propitiation with thee.” There is a readiness to deal with men, not according to their just deserts, but according to free grace and the infinite mercy of God. “There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”

Is not that a very strange expression? One would have thought that it would have said, “There is judgment with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” But no, brethren, if there were judgment with God, and no forgiveness, then men would grow despairing, and they would be hardened and rebellious, or else all would be swept away in God’s wrath, and there would be nobody left to fear Him.

It is mercy that softens the heart, it is the forgiveness of God that leads men to love Him and to fear Him. The true fear of God—the holy filial fear—never rises out of judgment, but springs out of forgiving love. I hope, beloved, you feel that, because you are forgiven, you fear to offend God, because of so much love, you fear to grieve the blessed Spirit of God.

“I wait for JEHOVAH, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for Adonai”—the King, the Sovereign Lord—“more than they that watch for the morning, they that watch for the morning.” Our translators put in the words, “I say more than”—I suppose, to make the sense more clear, but by doing so, they spoiled the beautiful poetic simplicity of the original.

“Let Israel hope in the LORD.” Until this verse, the psalmist has been talking about himself, now he speaks about all the people of God. True religion is expansive, as your own heart gets warmed, you begin to call others in to share your felicity. “Let Israel hope in the LORD.” Did not their father Jacob do so? When all night he wrestled at the brook Jabbok, he hoped in the Lord, and so he gained his name Israel, and went away triumphant because he hoped in JEHOVAH.

“For with JEHOVAH there is mercy.” Believe that, O seeking sinner! “With JEHOVAH there is mercy.” Believe this, O backslider! “With JEHOVAH there is mercy.” Believe this, downcast child of God, “and with him is plenteous redemption.” There is enough for you, and there is enough for all who come to Him. There is not a slave of sin whom God cannot redeem, for “with him is plenteous redemption.”

“And he shall redeem.” There is the comfort of it, He not only has the redemption, but He will make use of it. “He shall redeem Israel”—the whole of His Israel, all His people—“He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” Oh, come to Him, then, with all your iniquities, and pray to be redeemed from them, and as surely as JEHOVAH lives, He will fulfill this promise, and redeem you from all your iniquities.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—113, 130

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