

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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SOLITUDE, SILENCE, SUBMISSION.

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## A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 7TH, 1896,

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

*On Lord's-day Evening, June 13th, 1886.*

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“He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.”—Lamentations iii. 28, 29.

THUS the prophet describes the conduct of a person in deep anguish of heart. When he does not know what to do, his soul, as if by instinct, humbles itself. He gets into some secret place, he utters no speech, he gives himself over to moaning and to tears, and then he bows himself lower and yet lower before the Divine Majesty, as if he felt that the only hope for him in the extremity of his sorrow was to make complete submission to God, and to lie in the very dust before him.

It seems to me that such conduct as this, which is characteristic of every truly gracious man in his hour of trouble, should also be the mark of all who are seeking God's grace, those who are not yet saved, but who are conscious of their need of salvation. I must, surely, be speaking right into the heart of some who are feeling the crushing weight and heavy burden of their guilt. If you cannot do anything else, dear friends, do what these two verses say, in order that, afterwards, you may be able to take that grand gospel step of faith in Jesus Christ which will certainly bring you into peace and joy.

Those of you who have the Revised Version will notice a correction which has been made long ago by all competent scholars:—“Let him sit alone and keep silence, because he hath laid it upon him. Let him put his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.” It does not matter which way you read the passage, because the conduct of one gracious man is virtually a precept to another; yet it is satisfactory to find that, if we are under the burden of sin, we are here commanded to do as the prophet did in his time of need.

My object just now is to explain this line of conduct, in the hope that some who are in trouble will at once heartily follow it.

No. 2,468.

I. First, then, observe that, in the time of great trouble HOLY SOLITUDE is commended to us: "Let him sit alone."

I earnestly advise you who are under concern of soul to seek to get alone, and to be quiet and thoughtful in your solitude; not merely to be alone, but to sit by yourself like a person in the posture of thought. When a soul is under a deep sense of sin, the more it can be alone, the better. That sense of sin will be increased by the loneliness; and when it becomes intolerable, it is highly probable that, in that loneliness, the way of its removal will be discovered. In this age, we all live too much in company; and in a great city like this, we are busy from morning to night, and we do not get the opportunities for quiet reflection which our forefathers were wont to take. I am afraid, therefore, that our religion is likely to become very superficial and flimsy for the want of solitary, earnest thought. Men, nowadays, usually go in flocks; someone leads the way, and the rest follow him like sheep that rush through a gap in the hedge. It would be better for us if we deliberated more, if we used our own judgment, if we drew near to God in our own personality, and were resolved that, whatever others might do, we would seek to be personally guided by the Lord himself.

I commend solitude to any of you who are seeking salvation, first, that you may *study well your case as in the sight of God*. Few men truly know themselves as they really are. Most people have seen themselves in a looking-glass, but there is another looking-glass, which gives true reflections, into which few men look. To study one's own self in the light of God's Word, and carefully to go over one's condition, examining both the inward and the outward sins, and using all the tests which are given us in the Scriptures, would be a very healthy exercise; but how very few care to go through it! Yet, beloved friends, if it be a wise thing to look well to your business, how much more ought you to look to the business which concerns your immortal souls! If a true shepherd will not neglect his flocks and his herds, should not a wise man care about his thoughts, his feelings, and his actions? Must it not be a wretched condition not to know whether one is saved or not? I sometimes hear people express surprise if they are asked whether they are saved; yet in what ignorance of your own soul's state must you be if you have never put that question to yourself, or if, when it is put, you feel inclined to give no answer to it! I press this matter home upon you, and if you would be saved, you must know first that you are lost. If you would seek to be healed, you must first learn that you are sick. It is not possible that you will repent unless you are aware of your sin; it is not likely that you will look to Christ unless you first know what it is for which you are to look to him. Therefore, I pray you, set apart some season every day, or at least some season as often as you can get it, in which the business of your mind shall be to take your longitude and latitude, that you may know exactly where you are. You may be drifting towards the rocks, and you may be wrecked before you know your danger. I implore you, do not let your ship go at full steam through a fog; but slacken speed a bit, and heave the lead, to see whether you are in deep waters or

shallow. I am not asking you to do more than any kind and wise man would advise you to do; do I even ask you more than your own conscience tells you is right? Sit alone a while, that you may carefully consider your case.

Get alone again, dear friend,—especially dear young friend,—that you may *diligently search the Scriptures*. I am often astounded at the ignorance there still is of what is written in God's Word. Many persons who have even been in Sunday-schools for years, seem to be totally unaware of the plainest truths of the gospel of God's grace; but how can we know what is revealed unless we read and study it for ourselves? Alas, the dust upon many men's Bibles will condemn them! God has been pleased, in this Book, to give us the revelation of the way of salvation, and we ought to rush to the Book with eager anxiety to know what God has said in it; but, instead of doing so, though we can get a Bible for sixpence, and perhaps have a copy in every room in our house, how little do we read it! If you truly desire to be saved, get alone for the earnest and hearty study of the Word of God. How often you may meet with persons who profess to be infidels, yet if you press them closely enough, you will find that they have never even read the New Testament through. There are many more who are in doubt and anxiety, yet they have never gone to see what are the promises of God, and what the Lord is ready to do for them that seek him. I beseech you, as sensible and reasonable beings, do not let God speak to you, and you refuse to hear. You need to be saved from sin, in this Book God has revealed the way of salvation, therefore do not shut up the Book, and fasten the clasps, and leave it neglected. Oh, Book of books, the map of the way to glory; that man invokes a terrible curse upon his own head who refuses to study thee! He does, in effect, shut the gate of heaven against himself, and bar the road to everlasting bliss. If you would be saved, dear friend, sit alone, and consider your case, and then study God's thoughts concerning it.

Get alone, further, that you may *commune with your God*. After we have once learnt the way, we can commune with God anywhere,—amidst the roar and turmoil of the crowded city, or on the top of the mast of a ship; but, to begin with, it is best to be alone with the Lord. My dear hearer, have you ever spoken to God in all your life? Have you ever realized that there is such a Being in the room with you? There is such a Being; it is he who made you, and who has preserved you up to this good hour. You are, surely, not prepared to deny his existence; and if you are not, I beseech you, do not ignore that existence, and live as if there were no God. Oh, speak with him at once! Perhaps five minutes' earnest speech with him may be the turning-point of your life. "I will arise and go to my Father," was the turning-point with the prodigal; and it may be the same with you. "Oh, but I feel so guilty!" Then get alone, and say that to the Lord. "But I do not feel as I ought." Then get alone, and tell that to God. "Oh! but I—I am such an unbelieving being." Get alone, and tell out all the truth to the Lord; do not entertain a thought or a feeling which you dare not tell to him. Do not imagine that you can hide anything from him, for he reads your inmost heart.

Then take that heart, and lay it bare before him, and say with the psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." As one of God's creatures, I could not bear to think that I had seen the glory of the midnight stars, or warmed myself in the brightness of the noonday sun, and yet had never spoken to him who made them all and myself as well. One of our sweetest joys on earth is to speak with him in prayer and praise, to call him Friend, and to be on terms of sweet familiarity with the Most High. I do pray you, then, get alone for these three purposes, first, to consider your case, next, to study the Scriptures concerning your case, and then, that you may speak with God in prayer.

Get alone also for one other reason, and that is, that you may *avoid distraction*. I think that, on the Lord's-day, when people go home, after service, they sometimes make a mistake in talking with those who do not feel as they feel. If the arrows of God have entered your heart, go home alone. If there has been anything in the sermon which has been for your comfort as a Christian, go home alone. If there was anything in the sermon which has been for your warning as a sinner, go home alone. How often may even godly and gracious people talk upon some theme that may rob their fellow-believers of all the good they have received in God's house; and, as for unconverted persons, I am sure that, if they ever feel impressed under the Word, it will be their utmost wisdom to take care of that first impression, and not let it be driven away by foolish or frivolous conversation.

Some of us are old enough to recollect the day before there were matches of the kind we now use, and early on a frosty morning some of us have tried to strike a light with flint and steel, and the old-fashioned tinder-box. How long we struck, and struck, and watched, and waited, and at last there was a little spark in the tinder, and then we would hold the box up, and blow on it very softly, that we might keep that little spark alight till we had kindled the fire that we wanted. That tenderness over the first spark is what I invite everyone to practise in spiritual matters. If you would be saved, if there is anything like feeling in your heart, if there is any good desire in your soul, do not begin to talk as soon as you get out of the Tabernacle; that would be like placing the lid on the tinder, and putting the spark out; but get alone, blow on that spark, for peradventure it may come to a flame, and you may find salvation. I advise all persons under sorrow of soul somehow or other to break right away from their companions; when the day's work is done, let them each one say to themselves, "I am not going out with that frivolous person, nor shall I sit in the house with those who will be talking of trifling matters; I have a soul that needs salvation, and I must have my soul saved now. I cannot afford to be in this giddy company."

"Let him sit alone." That is good advice which the prophet gives in the text, and I desire to press it upon every awakened person who desires to find the Saviour.

II. The text goes on to say, in the next place, that we should practise **SUBMISSIVE SILENCE**: "Let him sit alone and keep silence."

In what respects should seeking souls keep silence? I answer, first, if the burden of sin is pressing upon thee, be sure to abstain from all *idle talk*; for if the idle talk of others, as I have reminded thee, can distract thy thoughts, how much more would thine own! It ill becomes a man, who is on the brink of hell, to be laughing and jesting. When God is angry with thee, canst thou make mirth? I can understand how thou canst be merry when once thou hast come back to the great Father's house, and the fatted calf is killed, and thy Father rejoices over thee; but whilst thou art still covered with thy sins, and art not yet sure of God's forgiveness, sit silent. It is the best thing thou canst do; quietness becomes thee. Lay thy finger on thy lip till thou hast something better to speak of than thou hast as yet. Keep silence, then, from all idle talk.

Keep silence also in another respect. Do not attempt to make any *excuse for your sin*. Oh, how ready sinners are with their excuses! A man says, "But, sir, I have a besetting sin." Do you not think that a great many people make a mistake about besetting sins? There was a negro who used to get drunk, and he said that it was his besetting sin; but his brother negro said, "No, Sambo, it is your upsetting sin;" and so it was. If I were to go to-night across Clapham Common, and half-a-dozen men were to surround me, and rob me of my purse, then I should be beset; but if I were to know that there were thieves there, and yet I walked across the common on purpose to meet with them, you could not say that they had beset me, you would say that I was a fool to walk into their hands. The besetting sin is that which a man fights against, and wars against with all his soul, yet he is overcome by it. Do not lay any stress upon that, as though thy being beset by sin was any excuse to thee, especially if thou goest into the ways of sin. You go and sit with those who drink, and then wonder that you get drunk! You go and associate with those who swear or sing lewd songs, and then you wonder that, the next time you try to pray, a nasty verse of a bad song comes up! It is your own fault; if you go and wilfully mingle with sinners, how can you be a child of God? No, when you know that anything is a sin, keep out of the temptation. He that does not want to get wet should not go out into the rain. Instead of your excuse making your case any better, it makes it worse; therefore, keep silence before thy God.

And next, keep silence from all *complaining of God*. No man is truly saved while he sets himself up as the judge of God; yet this is the practice of many men. If you give them the Word of God, they begin to pull it to pieces. They ask, "Is God so severe that he will mark our faults? Does he even take notice of our evil thoughts? Can it really be true that, for every idle word that a man shall speak, he will have to give an account in the day of judgment?" And then, after judging God to be austere, and too harsh in his dealings with poor fallible flesh and blood, they go on to snatch from his hand the balance and the rod, and sit upon their little throne, and dare to impugn the decrees of the great Judge of all. "It would be wrong," they say, "to cast men into hell, and to punish with eternal wrath the sins of a short life." And then they begin to traverse all

the teaching of Scripture, and to cavil at this and object to that. O sirs, if you would be saved, you must give up this wickedness! This kind of conduct will damn you as surely as you live.

When prisoners are tried by an earthly judge, and are condemned to die, if they are permitted to speak, they can have no hope of obtaining mercy by criticising the judge, and cavilling at the law. Of course they are not guilty, poor innocents! "It is the harsh law," they say, "that is to blame." But the law must maintain its majesty against such cavillers, and it cannot stoop to mercy, or sheath its sword, while a man is in that humour. So, sinner, sit thou alone, and keep thou silence; presume not to judge thy God. Behold, he cometh with clouds! The trumpet will soon proclaim his appearing, and they who were so free to judge their Maker will cry in another tone when that great day has at last come. With the earth reeling beneath their feet, and the heavens themselves on fire, they will beg the rocks to fall on them, and the hills to hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. Go, thou guilty one, sit thee still, and hold thy tongue, and bring thy rebellious heart to submission. Shall the flax contend with the fire, or the stubble fight with the flame? What canst thou do in warring with thy Maker?

Sit thou alone, and keep silence, next, from all *claims of merit*. I know that the tendency of the human heart is to say, "I am no worse than other people; I am a good chapel-going, church-going, psalm-singing person. I give to the poor, I say my prayers, and attend to all that sort of thing." Thou wilt never obtain mercy whilst thou hast a word of that kind to plead. Till thou art like a vessel turned upside down, and drained of every drop of human merit, there is no hope of salvation for thee. Thou must sit alone, and keep silence about those good works of thine, for they are all a lie, and thou knowest it. Thou hast never done a good work in thy life; thou hast either spoilt it by thy selfish motives before it, or by some carelessness in it, or else by some vainglorious pride after it. At the best, thou art nothing but a boasting Pharisee; and though thou mayest wash the outside of thy cup and platter, yet thine heart is full of wickedness, thy soul is steeped in sin. O man, talk no more so exceeding proudly, but sit thou still, and hold thy tongue about merit and deservings before the holy God! There is no way of mercy for any one of us until we shut our mouths, and utter not a single boastful word, but stand guiltily silent before the Lord.

I think it is well, too, when a poor sin-burdened soul is silent before God, and unable to make any *bold speeches*. I recollect that, when I first was seeking the Lord, I heard some good people talking about their confidence in God. I had to hold my tongue then, for I could not say a word about that matter. I heard a young friend say that he had found Christ; but I had to hold my tongue then, for I knew that I had not found him, and even after I had found him, there were times when I dared not say so. I felt in my spirit the question, "Am I self-deceived, or am I not?" And if I have spoken pretty boldly since that time, even now, occasionally, I feel that same silence creeping over me. It would have been well if Peter had been silent when

he said to his Lord, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I." I like a man who knows, not only how to speak, but how to sit still; but that latter part is hard work to many. There came a young man to Demosthenes to learn oratory; he talked away at a great rate, and Demosthenes said, "I must charge you double fees." "Why?" he asked. "Why," said the master, "I have first to teach you to hold your tongue, and afterwards to instruct you how to speak." The Lord teaches true penitents how to hold their tongues. They open not their mouth when he has laid trouble upon them, and even in the company of good people they are sometimes dumb with silence, and they hold their tongue even from good. It is not an ill thing that they should act thus, for often the will of the Lord is not done with words; and sometimes, that silence which is frost of the mouth is thaw of the soul, and the heart flows best before God when even praise sits silent on our tongues. O beloved, in thine hour of darkness because of thy sin, sit thou still, and hold thy tongue, for it is oftentimes the way of peace to the soul!

III. Now I shall ask your special and patient attention for just a few minutes to the third point, which is, **PROFOUND HUMILIATION**: "Let him put his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope." Upon this matter, I would earnestly address those who are not yet saved, but who desire to be.

Dear friends, it often happens that men do not obtain peace with God because they have not come low enough. The gate of heaven, though it is so wide that the greatest sinner may enter, is nevertheless so low that pride can never pass through it. Thou must stoop if thou wouldst enter heaven. "Let him put his mouth in the dust." I do believe that this precept is needed by very many; and that, when they obey it, they will get peace, but never till then. "Let him put his mouth in the dust." Oriental monarchs require very lowly reverence from their subjects; it is out of keeping with our manners and customs, but the similitude holds good in our relation to the Lord God. When we come before him, we must prostrate ourselves till we bow our mouths in the dust. What can this expression mean? "Let him put his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope."

It means, first, that there must be *true, humble, lowly, confession of sin*. You say that you have been praying, yet you have not found peace; have you confessed your sins? This is absolutely necessary. Confess your sins to me? you ask. No, thank you; I do not want to hear your confession. It would do me much harm, and it could do you no good to tell them to me; it is to God alone that this confession should be made. Some men have never really made a confession of their sin to God at all; they have done it in such general and insincere terms that it did not amount to a confession. Go you, enter your chamber, shut the door, and get alone; and there, with words or without words, as you find it best, acknowledge before God your omissions and commissions, what you have done and what you have not done. Pour out the whole story before God, and cry with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Do not cloak or dissemble before the Almighty. Let all your sins appear. Take a lowly place; not simply be a sinner in name, but confess that thou art a sinner in fact and

deed. I do believe that some of you are in darkness much longer than you need to be, because you do not stoop to a humble confession of your sin. Let the lancet into this ugly gathering of yours that brings you so much inflammation of mind and pain of spirit. Let your confession flow like water before God; pour out your heart before him. Own to your sins, take the place of a sinner, for this is a great way towards finding salvation: "If so be there may be hope."

Further than that, dear friends, when it is said that we are to put our mouths in the dust, it means that we are to give up the habit of *putting ourselves above other people*, and finding fault with others. How often is the value of our penitence destroyed because we have looked at Mistress Somebody, and said, "Well, I am guilty, but still,—well, I am not such a hypocrite as Mrs. So-and-so." What have you to do with her? "Oh!" says another, "I know I have been a bad man, but then I—I—I have never been as bad as old So-and-so." What have you to do with him? Here are you pretending to be humble, yet you are as proud as Lucifer. I know you; you are like that man who went up to the temple, and pretended that he was going to pray, and then he said, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are," and so forth; "nor even as this publican;" turning his eye in disdain towards the true penitent. There is many a man who says, "I am a sinner, but then I am a total abstainer and wear the blue ribbon; that is a good thing, is it not?" Yes, it is, but not if you trust in it for salvation. "Oh, but!" says another, "I know that I have not lived as I ought, but I have always paid 20s. in the pound." So ought every honest man, but what is there to be proud about in that? Are you going to get to heaven by paying 20s. in the pound to a man, and not a penny in the pound to God? Yet that is often the way of men. Or else perhaps we are accusing others while we pretend that we are ourselves humble. We must get rid of all such bad habits if we want the Lord to have mercy upon us. I believe a sincere penitent thinks himself to be the worst man there is, and never judges other people, for he says in his heart, "That man may be more openly guilty than I am, but very likely he does not know so much as I do, or the circumstances of his case are an excuse for him." A woman, convicted of sin, says, "It is true, that woman has fallen, and her life is full of foulness; but perhaps if I had been tempted as she was, and had been deceived as she was, I should have been even worse than she is." Oh, that we might all give up that habit of cavilling at other people, and put our mouths in the dust in self-abasement before God!

I think that putting our mouths into the dust also means that we realize *our own nothingness in the presence of God*. We have nothing to say, nothing to claim, nothing to boast of; if the Lord should never look upon us in mercy, yet we could not complain of him. If he were to banish us from his presence for ever, yet could we not open our mouths to accuse him, but must say, "Thou art just when thou judgest; thou art clear when thou condemnest." That, dear friends, is putting your mouth in the dust; feeling that, in God's sight, you are only like the dust. If you have sought the Lord, and have not found him, I do exhort you to sink yourself lower. Believe that you

have no strength, that you have no righteousness, that you are truly lost and ruined and undone, that you are nothing but a mass of loathsomeness before the thrice-holy God; and bow before him with this conviction in your heart, "if so be there may be hope."

I am not going to preach upon that last part of the text, because the time has almost gone, and also for another reason, because I have not to say to you, "*If so be there may be hope.*" There *is* hope for any man, or woman, or child here,—I like to say "child" as well as "man, or woman," because I believe that children are often the best part of my congregation. Last Monday week, we had five children before the church, one after the other, whose testimony for Christ was quite as clear as that of any of the elders among us. What an important part of the congregation the boys and girls make up! I believe that there are almost as many saved among the little ones now in this congregation as there are of grown-up people, perhaps even more. Well now, if any of you who are guilty,—whether old or young,—come before the Lord, and confess your sin, and trust in Christ for mercy, you shall have mercy. I do not know who you are, and I do not care who you are; but whosoever shall come, and confess his sin in all lowliness of heart, and in faith believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, he shall have mercy. Christ sits on his throne of grace, and stretches out the silver sceptre. Bow before him, and he will forgive your sin. The fountain is opened for sin and for uncleanness; if thou art sinful and unclean, come to the fountain that Christ has opened, and which the devil cannot close, and wash and be clean this very hour. God in infinite mercy is ready to forgive, his heart yearns over the wanderers. He stretches out his hands, and entreats thee to come back, and he is grieved until thou dost return. If there be in thy heart any sorrow for having sinned against thy God, if there be any anxiety to come back to him, come back. If thou dost but turn thy face towards him, whilst thou art yet a great way off, he sees, he has compassion upon thee, he runs to thee, he embraces thee. Fall into his arms now. Believe thou in his Son; trust thyself with Jesus, for he never yet failed any who trusted him. Make him the Trustee of thy soul, for he is a Trustee who can be trusted. Deposit in his hands thy spirit, for he is able to keep that which thou committest unto him against that day.

We are getting into summer, and I feel very anxious that none of my hearers should have to say, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." Then, before the harvest comes, now that the summer is just beginning, may the Lord incline your hearts to come and put your trust in Jesus! Many of you are from the country; you have come to see London. Of all the sights possible to you, the best will be first to see yourselves, and then to see your Saviour. There is no Exhibition like the exhibition of the love of God in Jesus Christ to guilty sinners. May this be the best day you have ever lived because it shall be the first day you have ever truly lived with the life of God in your soul! I pray the Lord to bless my words to every one of you without exception. Surely, there is not anybody here who would wish to be left out. God bless you all, for Christ's sake! Amen.

## Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

### LAMENTATIONS III. 1—33, AND 55—58.

We are about to read a chapter which is very full of sorrow ; while you are listening to it, some of you may be saying, " We are not in that condition." Well then, be thankful that you are not ; and while you hear of the sorrows of others, bless God for the joys you yourself experience. At the same time, remember that there is a way of sorrow which leads at last to rest and peace. There is truth in the words of the poet Cowper,—

" The path of sorrow, and that path alone,  
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

If you have never known the sorrows of the weeping prophet, or anything like them, I am not sure that you should congratulate yourselves, for there is a brokenness of heart that is worth more than the whole world, there is a crushed and bruised spirit in which the Lord delights, and which is a token for good to the one who possesses it.

Verses 1, 2. *I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.*

Some of us recollect when we used to go into our own room, and shut the door, and read such a chapter as this, and say, " Here is a description of my true condition." We were once broken in pieces, torn asunder, through a terrible sense of sin. Our thoughts were like a case of knives perpetually pricking us ; and, at such a time, these were our words as well as the words of Jeremiah, " He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light."

3, 4. *Surely against me is he turned ; he turneth his hand against me all the day. My flesh and my skin hath he made old ; he hath broken my bones.*

Conviction of sin seems to dry up the very sap of our life till we become withered with age. Worse than the agony of a broken bone is the pain of a broken heart. When the Holy Spirit convinces of sin, believe me, it is no child's play ; in the case of some of us, it was sore wounding.

5. *He hath builded against me,—*

" As if he deliberately built walls to stop up my way, and erected castles from which to attack my soul, ' He hath builded against me,'"—

5. *And compassed me with gall and travel.*

" He has shut me up in a circle of bitterness."

6, 7. *He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old. He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out : he hath made my chain heavy.*

Like a prisoner in his dungeon, who has to wear manacles and fetters.

8. *Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.*

That is the worst trial of all, for there is comfort in prayer ; but when even that seems denied you, into what a terrible state of sorrow is your heart brought !

9—11. *He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked. He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places. He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces : he hath made me desolate.*

You who remember that experience, bless God that you have passed through it, that you have gone over that rough road into the place of peace and rest in Christ. You who have never known this path, it will be well for you when you do, trying as you may find it.

12. *He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow.*

“Every sermon I hear seems a shot at me, every text of Scripture seems an arrow aimed at me.”

13. *He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins.*

“They are not merely shot at me, but they have actually hit me; they have wounded me; they have pierced me in vital parts.”

14—17. *I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day. He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood. He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes. And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity.*

“It seems so long ago since I was prosperous that I forget what it was like. I have been so troubled that I do not remember what it was to be at ease.”

18—21. *And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD: remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.*

Notice that, in all his sorrow, this man still had hope. His soul was humbled, and therefore he had hope. I think that, in the New Zealand language, the word for hope is “swimming thought”—the thought that swims when everything else is drowned. Oh, what a mercy it is that hope can live on when all things else appear to die!

22. *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*

Hear that, troubled heart; you are not yet destroyed, you are still in the land of the living,—as we say, “on praying ground and pleading terms with God.” “It is of Jehovah’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.”

23, 24. *They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.*

“With all my troubles, and losses, and griefs, I still have a God; ‘therefore will I hope in him.’”

25. *The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.*

Even though it be out of the depths of the utmost distress that you seek God, you shall find him to be good to you. He is hard to none, unkind to none. Only go thou, and test him and try him, and thou shalt find that it is even as I say.

26, 27. *It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.*

And it is not bad for him if he keeps on bearing it in his old age. Our shoulders ever need the yoke; we are such uncertain creatures that we cannot bear too much freedom, even from sorrow.

28—31. *He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. For the Lord will not cast off for ever:*

What music there is in that line! He may put thee away for a while, and seem to leave thee; but “the Lord will not cast off for ever.” God may seem to put us away from him, but it is written, “He hateth putting away.” There is no divorcement between Christ and the soul that is once espoused to him, their separation shall not be perpetual, for nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

32, 33. *But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.*

Now notice, in the 55th verse, what came to the prophet after all this sorrow.

55, 56. *I called upon thy name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice : hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry.*

Sometimes our prayers get to be so very weak that they are only a breathing ; yet we must never forget that "Prayer is the breath of God in men, returning whence it came," and "Praying breath is never spent in vain."

57, 58. *Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee : thou saidst, Fear not. O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul ;*

What a comfort it is that Christ in heaven is our great Advocate, and that he has pleaded the causes of our soul before the throne of God !

58. *Thou hast redeemed my life.*

He who is our Advocate is also our Redeemer, and therefore we are doubly safe. Glory be to his name !

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"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL."

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