

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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WHERE IS THE LORD?

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## A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 29TH, 1892,

DELIVERED BY

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“Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.”—Isaiah lxiii. 11—14.

I TOLD you, in the reading, that Israel had a golden age, a time of great familiarity with God, when Jehovah was very near his people in their sufferings, and was afflicted in their affliction, when he helped them in everything they did, and the angel of his presence saved them. But after all that the Lord had done for them, there came a cold period. The people went astray from the one living and true God. They fell into the ritualism of the golden calf. They must have something visible, something that they could see and worship. Even after they were brought into the promised land, and the Lord had wrought great wonders for them, they turned aside to false gods, till they worshipped strange deities, that were no gods; and provoked Jehovah to jealousy. “They rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.” Not that he ceased to love his chosen, but he must be just, and he could not patronize sin, so he sent their enemies against them, and they were sorely smitten, and brought very low. Then it was that they began to remember the days of old, and to sigh for him whom they had treated so ill, and they said one to another, “Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the

Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.”

I have but a short time, as the communion service is to follow, and therefore I must leave much unsaid that I think your own imaginations will make up to you at home.

But I shall ask you to notice, first, that the text contains *a sacred, loving remembrance*. It dwells very much upon what God did in the old times, when he was familiar with his people, and they walked in the light of his countenance. After that, I shall call your attention to *an object clearly shining* in the text. We get it twice over. In the twelfth verse, we read, “To make himself an everlasting name.” In the fourteenth verse, “To make thyself a glorious name.” When I have spoken of those two things, I shall dwell more at length upon *an anxious enquiry*, which is put here twice: “Where is he?” In the eleventh verse you get this repeated question, “Where is he? Where is he?”

I. So then, to begin with, we go back to God’s dealings with his people, and with us, and we have A SACRED, LOVING REMEMBRANCE. The people remembered what God did to them. What was it?

As it is here described, he first of all *gave them leaders*. “Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock?” Moses and Aaron, and a band of godly men who were with them, were the leaders of the people, through the sea and through the wilderness. Brethren, we are apt to think too little of our leaders. First of all we think too much of them, and afterwards we think too little of them. We seem to swing like a pendulum between these two extremes. Man is reckoned as if he were everything to some, and God becomes nothing to such; but, without unduly exalting man, we can truly say that it really is a great blessing to the church when God raises up men who are qualified to lead his people. Israel did not go out of Egypt as a mob; they were led out by their armies. They did not plunge into the Red Sea as an undisciplined crowd; but Moses stood there with his uplifted rod, and led them on that memorable day. We may well sigh for those glorious days of old, when God gave his people mighty preachers of his Word. There have been epochs in history that were prolific of great leaders of the Christian church. No sooner did Luther give his clarion call, than God seemed to have a bird in every bush; and Calvin, and Farel, and Melancthon, and Zwingli, and so many besides that I will not attempt to make out the list, joined him in his brave protest against the harlot-church of Rome. “The Lord gave the Word: great was the company of those that published it.” The church remembers those happy days, with earnest longing for their return. There were giants in those days; mighty men of renown, well fitted by the Lord to lead his people.

We are next told that God *put his Spirit within these shepherds*. They would have been nothing without it. Where is he that put his Holy Spirit within them? A man with God’s Holy Spirit within him, can anybody estimate his worth? God says that he will make a man more precious than the gold of Ophir; but, to a man filled with his Spirit, mines of rubies or of diamonds cannot be set in comparison.

When the eleven apostles went forth, on the day of Pentecost, endowed by the Spirit of God, there were forces in the world whose very tramp might make it quiver beneath their feet. God send us once more many of his servants, within whom he has put his Spirit in an eminent and conspicuous manner, and then we shall see bright days indeed! The command to such still is, "Tarry until ye be endued with power from on high."

Then there was, in the next place, as a happy memory for the church, *a great manifestation of the divine power*. "That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name." "The right hand of Moses," by itself, was no more than your right hand or mine; but when God's glorious arm worked by the right hand of Moses, the sea divided, and made a way for the hosts of Israel to pass over. As the Psalmist sings, "He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap." The right hand of Moses could not have wrought that miracle; but the glorious arm of the Lord did. What we want to-day, brethren, is a manifestation of divine power. Some of us are praying for it day and night. We have expected it. We do expect it. We are longing for it with a hunger and a thirst insatiable. Oh, when will Jehovah pluck his right hand out of his bosom? When will he make bare his arm, as one that goeth to his work with might and main? Pray, O ye servants of God, for leaders filled with the Spirit, and with the power of God working with them, that multitudes may be converted unto Christ, and the sea of sin be dried up in the advance of his kingdom!

Then, there came to God's people *a very marvellous deliverance*: "That led them through the deep, as a horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble." Understand by the word "wilderness" here, an expansive grassy plain; a place of wild grass and herbs, for so it means. And as a horse is led where it is flat and level, and he does not stumble, so were the hosts of Israel led through the Red Sea. The bottom of a sea may be stony or gravelly, or it may be full of mire and mud. Probably, there will be huge rocks standing up in the middle of the stream. There may be a sudden fall from one stratum of rock to the other; and to come up from the sea on the further bank would be hard work for struggling people carrying burdens, as these Israelites did; for they went out of Egypt harnessed and laden, bearing their kneading-troughs in their clothes upon their shoulders. But God made that rough sea bottom to be as easy travelling for them as when a horse is led across a flowery meadow. Beloved, God has done so with his church in all time. Her seas of difficulty have had no difficulty about them. He has come in all the glory of his power, and smoothed the way for the ransomed to pass over. Has it not been so with you, my brethren?

And, as a blessed ending to their trials, God *brought them into a place of rest*: "As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord causeth him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people." In the desert they rested a good deal; but in Canaan they rested altogether. As the cattle come down from the mountains, where they have been picking up their food, when the plains are fat with grass, and they

feed to their full, and lie down and rest, so did God deal with his people, bringing them from all the mountains of their trouble into a sweet valley, a land that flowed with milk and honey, where they might rest. This is a memorial, a sketch of the past.

I read it, first, literally as a sketch of Israel's history. I read it, next, as a sketch of the church's history. There have been times with the church as at Pentecost, and the Reformation, when, though she had wandered, God returned to her, and made bare his arm, and raised up shepherds, and put his Spirit upon them, and then led his people straight ahead through every difficulty, and gave them rest. You are most of you acquainted with the history of the period before Luther's day. It did not seem likely then that the gospel would be preached everywhere throughout Northern Europe; but it was so, and God singularly preserved the first Reformers' lives when they were very precious. Zwingli died in battle; but he should not have been fighting, and he might have died a natural death. But Calvin and Luther, and the rest of them, for the most part, remained until their work was done, and they quietly passed away; and the churches, despite long persecution, had comparative rest. It was so here, and it was so across the border in our sister church of Scotland. She cannot forget the covenanting blood, and the putting to death of those who were for the Crown Rights of King Jesus; but, at last, she had her time of rest. Time would fail me to tell you the long list of shepherds that God gave to his covenanting church, the mighty men who, being dead, yet speak to us by their works, and who, while they lived, made the church of God in Scotland to be glorious with the presence of her Lord.

Well now, the same thing has happened also to us as individuals. We have had our cloudy and dark day, but God has appeared for our help. Some of you could tell how God led you through the deep as through a prairie. You went a way that you never knew, a new way, an untrodden path, as though it were the bottom of a sea but newly dry; but the Lord led you as a groom leads a horse, so that you did not stumble, and before long you came up out of the depths unharmed. With Moses and the children of Israel, you sang the praises of him who had triumphed gloriously; and then you began to learn another song, not so martial, but very sweet: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. In conflicts for the God of Israel, and his everlasting truth, some of us have been counted as the mire of the streets; but therein we do rejoice, and will rejoice; for Jehovah liveth, and he will bring up his people again from Bashan. He will bring them up from the depths of the sea, and there shall be rest again in the midst of Israel, if men are but faithful to God, and faithful to his truth.

Thus much upon the sacred memory of the past.

II. But now, in the second place, I want you to notice, AN OBJECT CLEARLY SHINING, like the morning star. I see, through the text, God's great motive in working these wonders for his people. *It was God who did it all*; my text is full of God. He brought them up out of the sea. He put his Holy Spirit within them. He led them with

his glorious arm. He led them through the deep. He caused them to rest. He did it all. When the history of the church is written, there will be nothing on the page but God. I know that her sin is recorded; but he hath blotted that out; and at the end, there will remain nothing but what God has done. When your life and mine shall ring out as a psalm amid the harps of glory, it will be only, "Unto him that loved us and laved us, be glory and dominion for ever and ever." "*Non nobis, Domine.*" "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." So will sing all of us who are the Lord's redeemed, when we have come up out of the great tribulation, and have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

But then, why had God done all this? Did he do it because of his people's merits, or numbers, or capacities? He tells them, many a time, "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel." God finds in himself the motive for blessing men who have no merits. If God looked for any motive in us, he would find none. He would see in us many reasons why he should condemn us; but only in himself could he discover the motive of his matchless mercy.

God works his great wonders of grace with the high motive of *making known to his creatures his own glory*, manifesting what he is and who he is, that they may worship him. He tells us in the text that he "led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name." So he has done, for to this day the highest note of praise to God that we know of, is the one that tells of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, and when this world is burnt up, the song that will go up to God in heaven will be the song of Moses, the servant of God, and of the Lamb. Still, if we want a figure and a foretaste of the ultimate victories of God over all his people's enemies, we have to go back to the Red Sea, and look at Miriam's twinkling feet, and hear her fingers making the timbrel resound as she cries, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." He did it to make to himself an ever-enduring name, and he has succeeded in that object.

Isaiah adds that the Lord led his people, and brought them into their rest, to make himself "a glorious name." God is glorious in the history of Israel. God is glorious in the history of his church. God is glorious in the history of every believer. The life of a true believer is a glorious life. For himself he claims no honour, but by his holy life he brings great glory to God. There is more glory to God in every poor man and woman saved by grace, and in one unknown and obscure person, washed in the Redeemer's blood, than in all the songs of cherubim and seraphim, who know nothing of free grace and dying love. So you see, beloved, the motive of God in all that he did; and I dwell upon it, though briefly, yet with much emphasis, because this is a motive that can never alter. What if the church of to-day be reduced to a very low condition, and the truth seems to be ebbing out from her shores, while a long stretch of the dreary mud of modern invention lies reeking in the nostrils of God;

yet he that wrought such wonders, to make to himself a name, still has the same object in view. He will be glorious. He will have men know that he is God, and beside him there is none else. Thus saith the Lord God, "All flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour, and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." O brethren, he is a jealous God still; and when the precious blood of Christ is insulted, God hears it, and forgets it not. When the inspiration of this blessed Book is denied, the Holy Ghost hears it and is grieved, and he will yet bestir himself to defend his truth. When we hear the truth that we love, the dearest and most sacred revelations of our God, treated with a triviality that is nothing less than profane, if we are indignant, so is he, and shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily, though he bear long with his adversaries. God's motive is his own glory. He will stand to that, and he will vindicate it yet; and we need have no doubt, nor even the shadow of a fear, about the ultimate result of a collision between God and the adversaries of his truth. Shall not the moth, that dashes at the candle, die in the flame? How shall the creatures of a day stand out against our God, who is a consuming fire? Here, then, is the hope of the people of God, the constant, persistent, invariable motive of God to make himself glorious in the eyes of men.

III. My third point is, AN ANXIOUS ENQUIRY, which I find twice over in my text. Believing in what God has done, and believing that his motive still remains the same, we begin to cry, "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?"

This question suggests that *there is some faith left*. "Where is he?" He is somewhere. Then, he lives. Beloved, the Lord God omnipotent still liveth and reigneth. Many usurpers have tried to turn him from his throne; but he still sits upon it, and reigns amongst his ancients gloriously. He was, and is, and is to come, the Almighty; "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

He is; but where is he? The question implies that *some were beginning to seek him*. Where is he? Those were brave days when he was here on the moors, or on the hills of Scotland, or at the stakes of Smithfield, or the prisons of Lambeth Palace. Those were glorious days when Christ was here, and his people knew it, and rejoiced in him. Then the virgin daughter of Zion shook her head at the harlot of Rome, and laughed her to scorn; for she lay in the bosom of her King, and rejoiced in his love. O beloved, do we begin to long after him again? I hope that we do. I trust that the cry of many loyal hearts is, "Come back, King Jesus! When thou art away, all things languish. Adown the streets of Mansoul ride again, O Prince Emmanuel! Then shall the city ring with holy song, and every house shall be bedecked with everything that is beautiful and fair. Only come back!" If the King may but have his own again, I shall be well content to sing old Simeon's song, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word!" The church longs for the King's coming. Where is he? Where is he?

It shows now, dear friends, that she has *begun to mourn over his absence*. I like the reduplicated word. "Where is he? Where is he?" Not, "Where is Moses? Where are the leaders? The fathers, where are they?" Let them keep where they are. But where is he that made the fathers? Where is he that sent us Moses and Aaron? Where is he that divided the waters, and led his people safely? Where is he? Oh, it is a question that I put to all your hearts! Oh, if he were here! One hour of his glorious arm; just a day of his almighty working; and what should we not see? We will not ask for tongues of fire, or mighty rushing winds. Let him be here as he may; but if he be only here, the battle is turned at the gate, and the day of his redeemed is come. We sigh for his appearing.

Where is he, then? as the text asks. Well, *he is hidden because of our sins*. The church has been tampering with his truth. She has given into the hands of critics the Word of God, to cut it with the penknife, to rend away this, and tear out that. She has been dallying with the world. She has tried to gain money for her objects by the basest of means. She has played the harlot in what she has done; for there are no amusements too vile or too silly for her. Even her pastors have filled a theatre of late, to sit there and mark with their applause the labours of the play-actors! To this pass have we come at last, to which we never came before—no, not in Rome's darkest hour; and if you, who profess to be God's servants, do not love Christ enough to be indignant about it, the Lord have mercy upon you! The time has surely come when there should go up one great cry unto the Lord Jehovah that he would make bare his arm again; for well may we say, "Where is he? Where is he?"

For your comfort, the next verse to my text tells you where he is. *He is in heaven*. They cannot expel him from his throne. "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." By every possible contrivance, in these modern days, have they tried to drive Christ out of his own church. A Christless, bloodless gospel defiles many a pulpit, and Christ is thus angered; but he is in heaven still. At the right hand of God he sits; and let this be our continual prayer to him, "Look down from heaven, O Lord! Cast an eye upon thy failing, faltering, fickle church. Look down from heaven."

"Where is he?" Well, *he is himself making an enquiry*; for, as some read the whole passage, it is God himself speaking. He remembered the days of old, Moses and his people; and when he hid himself, and would not work in wrath, yet he said to himself, "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock?" When God himself, who is always a stranger here,—for are we not strangers with him and sojourners, as all our fathers were?—When God himself begins to ask where he is, and to regret those happier days, something will come of it. "Ye that make mention of the Lord—ye that are the Lord's remembrancers—keep not silence, and give him no rest,—take no rest, and give him no rest,—till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." "That little cloud", said one of old, when Julian the apostate threatened to extirpate Christianity, "That little cloud will soon be gone." All that I see to-day of darkness, is but a wave of smoke. Behold, the Lord God

himself shall chase it away with a strong west wind. He doth but blow with his wind, and the clouds disappear; and what stands before us to-day shall be as nothing.

I thought, as I came here to-night, that the man who drives the tram car gave me a lesson on how I should look upon all future time. He starts, say at Clapham, with his car. If he could have a view of all that was on the road between Clapham and the Elephant and Castle, the carts, waggons, and other traffic that are exactly where he wants to go, and he were to add all those obstacles together, he might be foolish enough to say, "I shall not complete my course to-night;" but, you see, he starts, and if anything is on the rails, it moves off; and if, perhaps, some sluggish, heavily-laden coal waggon is slow to move, he puts his whistle to his mouth, and gives a shrill blast or two, and lo, it is gone! So when the church, serving her God, begins to look far ahead through prophecy, which she never did understand, and never will, she will think that she will never reach her journey's end. But she will; for God has laid the line. We are on the rails, and the rails do not come to an end till the journey's end is reached; and as we go along, we shall find that everything in our way will move before us; and if it does not, we will pray a bit. We will blow our whistle, and the devil himself will have to move, though all his black horses shall be dragging along the brewer's dray, or what else belongs to him. He will have to get off our track, as surely as God lives; for if Jehovah sends us on his errands, we cannot fail. The old Romans picture Jove as hurling thunderbolts. Sometimes God makes his servants thunderbolts, and when he hurls them, they will go crashing through everything until they reach their mark. Wherefore, be not for a moment discouraged; but trust you in God, and be glad without a shadow of fear.

If any here have never trusted in God, never made him their Friend, or been reconciled to him by the death of his Son, I pray them to think of their present condition. Opposed to God! You are standing in the way of an express train. You are urged to get out of the way. You will not! You are going to throw that train off the rails, you say. Poor fool, I could put mine arms about your neck, and forcibly drag you from the iron way; for assuredly, if you remain there, nothing can come of it but your everlasting destruction. Wherefore, flee, flee, I pray you, from the wrath to come. The train of divine judgment comes thundering along the iron road even now. It shakes the earth. Awake! Rise! Flee! God help you to do so! Behold, the Saviour stands with open arms to be your shelter. Fly to him, and trust in him, and live for ever! Amen.

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## Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

## ISAIAH LXIII.—LXIV.

Chapter lxiii. Verses 1—6. *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.*

It is a dark and terrible time; no one at God's side, his people discouraged, Edom triumphant. Then comes the one great Hero of the gospel, the Christ of God; and by his own unaided strength he wins for his people a glorious victory. He is as terrible to his foes as he is precious to his friends. He stands before us as the one hope of his ancient church. There is the picture Isaiah was inspired to paint. Now the prophet goes on to say:—

7. *I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord,*

Are you, dear friends, mentioning the lovingkindnesses of the Lord; or are you silent about them? Learn a lesson from the prophet Isaiah. Talk about what God has done for you, and for his people in all time: "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord." Let this be the resolve of every one of us who has tasted that the Lord is gracious.

"Awake, my soul, in joyful lays,  
And sing thy great Redeemer's praise:  
He justly claims a song from me,  
His lovingkindness, oh, how free!

"He saw me ruin'd in the fall,  
Yet loved me, notwithstanding all;  
He saved me from my lost estate,  
His lovingkindness, oh, how great!"

7. *And the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses.*

This is a verse full of sweets; but I must not dwell upon it. My object at this time is to read much, and to say little by way of comment; so I cannot stay to pick out the sweetneses here. There are very many. This passage is a piece of a honeycomb. Read it when you get home; pray over it, suck the honey out of it, and praise the Lord for it.

8. *For he said,*

In the old time, when God called his people out of Egypt, he said this.

8. *Surely they are my people, children that will not lie:*

Or, children that will not act deceitfully; or, that will not deal falsely.

8. *So he was their Saviour.*

He thought well of them. He treated them as though they were trustworthy. He took them into his confidence. He said, "Surely they will not

deceive me." This is speaking after the manner of men, of course; for God knows us, and is never deceived in us. We may deceive others; we may even deceive ourselves; but we can never deceive him.

9. *In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.*

Happy Israel! These were her golden days, when she was faithful to God, and God communed very closely with her. Then God was very near to his people, so near that he is represented as carrying them in his arms. He could be seen in a bush; he could be seen in a cloud; he could be seen working with a rod; he was so familiar with his people.

10. *But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.*

This was a great change in dispensation, though there was no change in the heart of God. He deals roughly with his people when they rebel against him. They would not be improved by tenderness, so now they must be scourged by his rod, and come under his displeasure. When men turn from God, he is "turned to be their enemy."

11. *Then he remembered the days of old,*

His people were never out of his mind, even when they wandered away from him. He remembered the love of their espousals, when they went after him into the wilderness. He remembered the days of old, the happier days, when his people walked closely with him. They also remembered these days. It is strange that they should ever have forgotten them.

11—14. *Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.*

Now comes a prayer suggested by their condition of sorrow and desertion.

15. *Look down from heaven,*

Thou art still there, though we have wandered. Look down upon us from heaven, O Lord!

15, 16. *And behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not; thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.*

That last sentence may be read, "Thy name is, our Redeemer, from everlasting." This is a sweet plea with God: "We have offended thee; but we are still thy children. We have wandered from thee; but we are still thine own, bought with a price. Thy name of 'Redeemer' is not a temporary one; it is from everlasting to everlasting, therefore look on thy poor children again. Leave us not to perish."

17, 18. *O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. The people of thy holiness*

Or, "Thy holy people."

18, 19. *Have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name.*

“Thou didst give us the land by an everlasting covenant; but we have had it only a little while. Lo, the enemy has come in, and driven thine Israel away from her heritage! Can it be so always, O Lord?” Happy times seem very short when they are over; and when they are succeeded by dark trials, we say, “The people of thy holiness, thy holy people have possessed it but a little while. Our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We are now become (for this is the true rendering of the passage) like those over whom thou hast never borne rule, those who were never called by thy name.” That is a sad condition for the church of God to be in; and I am afraid that it is getting into that condition now, sinking to a level with the world, leaving its high calling, quitting the path of the separated people, and becoming just like those whom God never knew, and who were never called by his name. It is a pitiful case; and here comes a prayer like the bursting out of a volcano, as though the hearts of gracious men could hold in the agonising cry no longer:—

Chapter lxiv. Verses 1, 2. *Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, as when the melting fire burneth,*

Or, much better, “as when the brushwood burneth”; for if God does but come to his people, they are ready to catch the flame, like the dry heather which is soon ablaze; and his enemies also shall be like brushwood before the fire.

2, 3. *The fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence.*

O Lord, come again! Thou didst come in the past; repeat thy former acts, and let us see what thou canst do for the avenging of thy people.

4. *For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.*

God is ready to help. He has everything in preparation before our needs begin. He has laid in supplies for all our wants. Before our prayers are presented, he has prepared his answers to them; blessed be his name! You remember how Paul uses this passage, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.” The spiritual man is a privileged man.

5. *Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways:*

God does not wait for us to return to him. He meets us. He comes to us the moment that we turn our feet towards his throne. While we are, like the prodigal, a great way off, he sees us, and has compassion upon us, and runs to meet us.

5. *Behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.*

In thy faithfulness, in thy love, in thyself, in thy ways of mercy there is continuance. This is our safety. What are we? Here is the answer:—

6. *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

It is not a flattering picture that the prophet draws. Even our righteousnesses are like filthy rags, fit only for the fire; what must our unrighteousnesses be like? We, ourselves, are like the sere leaves on the trees; and

just as the wind carries away the faded leaves of autumn, so our sins, like a mighty blast, carry us away.

7. *And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee :*

That is a wonderful description of prayer. When a man rouses himself from sinful lethargy, and stirs himself up to take hold of God in prayer, he will become an Israel, a prince prevailing with God.

7, 8. *For thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, thou art our father ;*

Adoption does not come to an end because of sin. Regeneration or sonship does not die out ; it cannot die out. I am my father's son, and so I always shall be ; and if I am my heavenly Father's son, I shall never cease to be so. "Now, O Lord, thou art our Father !" This truth must not be perverted into an argument for sinning ; it ought rather to keep us from sinning, lest we should grieve such wondrous love.

8—12. *We are the clay, and thou our potter ; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever : behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire : and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord ? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore ?*

The prophet touches the minor key, and weeps and wails for the sorrows of his people ; but he does not neglect to pray. In the next chapter God breaks out, and says, "I am sought of them that asked not for me ; I am found of them that sought me not." How much more quickly is he found of them who do seek him ! Verily, God does hear prayer ; and he will hear prayer ; let us not cease to pray to him, as we look round on the sad state of the professing church at this time, and with Isaiah let us cry, "Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord ? Wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore ?"

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HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—107 (Song I), 953, 954.

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