

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WATCHING TO SEE.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“ I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”—Habakkuk ii. 1—4.

I KNOW that, on Thursday nights, there is a large number of friends here who are engaged in the work of the Lord, and sometimes it is meet to address them mainly; because, if the bread be put into the hands of the disciples, they will pass it on to the multitude. In the day of battle, if the command be given to the officers, they will repeat it to the various sections of the army, and so the whole mass shall be moved forward with one aim and object. Habakkuk was, like ourselves, called of God to labour for the good of the people among whom he dwelt. He was one of the later prophets who came to warn God's ancient people before the Lord meted out their last terrible measure of chastisement. He saw, in vision, his country given up to the Chaldeans, and he pleaded with God about the matter. He had a burden on his heart which pressed very heavily upon him; he saw the nation crushed beneath the oppressors, and he asked, “Why is this?” The Lord replied, “Because of the iniquity of the people.” Habakkuk understood that, but then it occurred to him that the Chaldeans, who were treading down the people, were themselves far greater sinners,—that, certainly, in the matter of oppression and bloodthirstiness, they were a far more guilty people than those whom they came to punish. So he used this fact partly as an argument with God that he would withdraw the Chaldeans and overthrow them, and partly he set it before the Lord as a difficulty which troubled his mind. He said, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?” Habakkuk was puzzled, as

No. 2,622.

David had been before him, and as many a child of God has been since. He felt as if he could not do his work rightly; so, in his perplexity, he came to consult God concerning it; and having laid the case before the Lord, he made use of the memorable and instructive words which we are now to consider under the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I. So, first, dear friends, we shall notice, in our text, THE ATTITUDE OF THE LORD'S SERVANT.

That is expressed in the one word, "watch." When you are puzzled,—when you are troubled,—when you do not know what to do, then may God help you to say, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." Before we can do any real service for God, we must first of all receive our commission from him. We cannot teach others aright unless we are ourselves taught of God, and his truest servants are those who continue waiting upon him that they may receive from him the words which afterwards they are to speak in his name to the people. Habakkuk is a model to us in this respect. Troubled in heart, he resolves to set himself to watch his God, and to listen for the message he is afterwards to deliver.

We learn from him that the attitude of the Lord's servant towards God is, first, *an attentive attitude*: "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me." If we have a deaf ear towards our Lord, we must not marvel if he gives us also a dumb tongue. If we will not hear what God speaks, we may not expect to be able ourselves to speak in his name; or, if we do pour forth a flood of words, yet we may not expect that they will be such as he will approve and bless. O dear friends, if we would work for God in the right spirit, we must begin as Jesus did, of whom it was written in prophecy, long before he came to the earth, "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." In the fulness of time, Jesus came forth, and taught to others what he had thus learned in secret; and, if we would teach others, we must first be ourselves taught by the Spirit of God. How much more we might know if we were only willing to listen to the Lord's messages! There is, in the Word of God, a voice which is often inaudible because we are so engrossed with other things. There is, also, the voice of the Christian ministry which oftentimes speaks to us, but it is like the cry of one in a wilderness, and it is not heard by us. There is, too, a voice in God's providence. How much the Lord says to his flock by every stroke of his rod, and by every blessing of his daily providence! There is a voice from every grave,—a message in every bereavement when friends are taken away. There are voices everywhere speaking to those whose ears are open. Above all, there is the blessed Spirit ever waiting to communicate to us the things of God by that soft mysterious whisper which none know but those who are themselves spiritual, but which

they know at once to be the very voice of God within their spirits. Brethren, we must be attentive; we must not allow a single sound from the Lord to escape us. Some men seem as if God must speak thunder and lightning before they will ever hear him; but his true children sit at his feet, that they may catch the slightest movement of his lips, and not let a single syllable from the Lord fall to the ground. The attitude of the Christian worker must be one of attention.

But, next, it must be a *patient attitude*. Observe what Habakkuk says, "I will stand upon my watch;" not merely, "I will be upon my watch for a moment;" but, "I will take my place like a sentinel who remains on guard until his time of watching is over." Then the prophet puts it again, "I will set me upon the tower,"—as if he took his position firmly and resolutely upon the tower, there to stand, and not to stir till he had seen and heard what God the Lord would have him see and hear. Do you think, dear friends, that we are sufficiently resolved to know our Master's will? Do we frequently enough get upstairs alone, and with our open Bibles search out what God would have us learn? And do we pray over the Word till we have wormed ourselves into the very heart of the truth,—till we have eaten our way into it, as the weevil eats its way through the nutshell, and then lives upon and in the kernel? Do we do this? Do we set ourselves upon the tower, determined that we will not go forth to speak for the Lord till the Lord has spoken to us, lest we go upon a fool's errand, to deliver our own inventions, instead of proclaiming the message that comes from God himself?

Your attitude, my brother or my sister, if you are a servant of the Lord, is that of attention and patience.

To which I may add that it is often a *solitary attitude*: "I will stand upon my watch." The church has gone to sleep, but "I will stand upon my watch." Like flocks of sheep they lie all around us, the multitudes of souls for whom we have to care; but there are still shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night, to whom the glory of the Lord is often revealed when the sheep perceive it not. The city lies wrapped in slumber, and no sound is heard among her ten thousand sleepers; but there is one who knows no sleep, nor gives slumber to his eyelids, for he is the appointed watchman of the night; and he keeps to his tower, and sets himself in his place, firmly resolved that, till the morning breaks, there shall be somebody to keep guard over the city. Well, sometimes, I say, that watchman has to be quite solitary. O brothers and sisters, it would be better for us if we had more solitude! It often becomes needful to us because we cannot find kindred spirits that can watch with us a single hour. The higher you get up in the Church of God, the more solitary you will be. For the sheep, there are many companions; but even for an under-shepherd, there are but few. As for that Great Shepherd of the sheep, the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls, the Good Shepherd, you know that his most favoured apostles could not watch with him even one hour, but he had to endure his terrible agony in Gethsemane alone; and such of his servants as he honours most will know best what is the meaning of Gethsemane, the olive-press, and the solitude which often accompanies the stern watch that the faithful

servant of God must keep. Never mind if all others around you say that you are hot-headed, and zealous, and enthusiastic, and foolish, and I know not what; say to yourself, "*I will stand upon my watch.*" What if they should think that you carry things much too far, and have too much religion, or are too consecrated? Reply, "*I will set me upon the tower, and will still watch, for that is my business even if I must attend to it all alone.*" The man who has God for his Companion has the best of company; and he that is a solitary watcher for the Most High God shall one day stand amidst yon shining legions of angels, and himself shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of his Father. Expect, therefore, if you are a servant of the Lord, sometimes to have to watch alone, and be thankful for that position if God honours you by calling you to occupy it.

Observe, further, that the attitude of the child of God who is called to be a prophet to his people—as I know that many of you are,—is one in which *the mind must be entirely engrossed*. The true servant of the Lord thinks of nothing else than this,—"*I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what the Lord will say unto me.*" He is wholly taken up with that one matter. Many of you have your secular callings to follow; but, without neglecting them, you can still, in spirit, be watching and waiting to hear the voice of God; for God speaks to us not only when we are in the study, or kneeling in prayer by our bedside, but he has ways of talking with us while we are going along the road, and so he makes our hearts to burn within us. He can speak with us in the thick of the greatest throng; and, perhaps, some of us were never more conscious of the voice of God than amid the rushing of ten thousand spindles, or in the midst of the crowded street. At such times, the noise and turmoil of this busy world have not been able to drown the gentle voice of God within our spirit. May you, beloved, be thus engrossed! If you intend to serve the Lord, give your whole soul to the learning of his truth and the hearing of what he has to say to you, that you may afterwards be able to tell out to others what you have yourselves been taught of God.

Observe, also, that the prophet was *entirely submissive to the will of God*. He put himself into this attitude, that he might hear whatever God should say to him, and that his only thought, all the while, should be, "*What shall I answer when I am reprovèd?*" We need to be as much as possible like clean white paper for God to write upon. Our mind is often far too much occupied, and too prejudiced, to receive a clear impression of the will of the Lord. How many make up their mind as to what they will see in a text, and so they never learn what the passage would teach them if it were allowed to speak freely to them. If thou wouldst serve God, say unto thy soul, "*I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and I will give both my ears and all my heart to understand what God would have me know, and to learn what he would teach me.*" May this be the happy privilege of us all!

The last remark I will make upon this first head is, that the attitude of the Lord's servant was *eminently practical*. The prophet did not watch and wait merely that he might know the secrets of the future,

or be able to prophesy, or show his wonderful knowledge. No; but he wanted to know what he should answer when he was reprov'd. He knew that, when he went out into the world, men would begin to reprove him for being a prophet at all; they would rebuke him for his zeal and his earnestness, and he waited that he might have the right answer to give, with meekness and fear, to all who opposed themselves. That should be your wish and mine, beloved; for, if we serve God faithfully, we are sure to meet with objectors. Well, if this opposition is only against us, it does not matter much; but, alas! sometimes their critical and cruel remarks are against the truth itself; and, worst of all, against our blessed Lord. In such a case, it is well to have something with which we can stop the mouths of the snarling dogs. It is a blessing to have heard God's voice, for, if you repeat the message he speaks to you, even the echo of God's voice will break the rocks in pieces, and cause the cedars of Lebanon to split in twain. There is nothing that can stand against the Word of the Lord. In the twenty-ninth Psalm, David says, "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty;" and, if we have heard that voice, and know how, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to echo its mighty tones, they will strike the objector dumb; and even when he hates the truth, he will still be compelled to feel what force there is in it. So the servant of the Lord says, "I will watch and wait to hear what God will say unto me, for then I shall know what to answer when I am rebuked and reproached for the truth's sake."

This, then, is to be the attitude of the children of God. Get away to your watch-towers, brethren; get away to your tower by the brook Jabbok, and wrestle with the angel there; get away to the top of Carmel, and put your head between your knees, and cry unto the Lord until the heavens are covered with clouds, and the thirsty earth is refreshed with rain. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much;" but they who do not hear God's voice cannot effectually pray, for God will not hear their voice if they will not hear his. If we have been deaf to him, he will be deaf to us. The intercourse and communion necessary to prevailing prayer render it absolutely essential that we should first set ourselves to hear the voice of God, and then again it shall be said that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man, for the man first hearkened to the voice of the Lord.

II. The second part of our subject is, THE WORK OF THE LORD'S SERVANT.

We have seen what his attitude was; the next verse tells us about his work: "The Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." It was not long before the waiting prophet heard God speak; and if you and I wait upon him, it will not be long before we hear something that will be worth our waiting for; and, especially, we shall receive plain directions as to our duty.

Habakkuk was, first, *to see the vision*. The first name for a prophet was, "a seer." You, my brother, cannot be a teller of the good tidings of salvation unless you are first a seer. Mind that you see well all

that is to be seen. Use your eyes to the best advantage; and ask to be able to see what God sets before you. It is curious how the different senses are mingled in these verses. Did you notice the expression in that first verse, "I will watch to see what he will say unto me"? When God speaks to us, we can hear with our eyes as well as with our ears. There is an inner sense which sees the meaning of the Lord's language, and the inner ear hears the very tones in which that meaning is expressed. So, the prophet was first to be a seer, he was to wait to see what God would say unto him.

Then, next, he was to "write the vision;" that is, *to make it known*; and, beloved, when you and I have seen or heard anything which God has revealed to us, let us go and write it, or make it known by some other means. God has not put the treasure into the earthen vessel merely for the vessel's own sake, but that the treasure may afterwards be poured out from it, that others may thereby be enriched. You have not been privileged to see, merely to make glad your eyes, and to charm your soul; you have been permitted to see in order that you may make others see, that you may go forth and report what the Lord has allowed you to perceive. God does not usually favour his servants with visions that they may keep them to themselves. Paul did for fourteen years hide one that he saw, but he was obliged to let it out at last; and I suppose that, if he had had more visions, he would not have been able to keep that one concealed so long. John no sooner became the seer of Patmos than he heard a voice that said to him, "Write." He could not speak to others, for he was in an island where he was exiled from his fellows, but he could write, and he did; and, often, he who writes, addresses a larger audience than the man who merely uses his tongue. It is a happy thing when the tongue is aided by the pen of a ready writer, and so gets a wider sphere, and a more permanent influence than if it merely uttered certain sounds, and the words died away when the ear had heard them. The first thing which you have to do, if God has called you to serve him, is, after hearing what he has said to you, to make it known to somebody else: "Write the vision."

And take care, dear friends, that, in the spreading of truth, you *use as permanent a means of doing so as you can*. "Write the vision;" that is to say, if you cannot write with the pen, if you have not that special gift, yet write it on men's hearts. Do not merely speak it; but seek to reach the inmost soul of your fellow-beings, and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, write the truth there. God help you not merely to sound it in their ears, but to write it on the fleshy tablets of their heart, and to leave the truth deeply engraved upon their memory! I have sometimes been greatly favoured in this way; indeed, it has often been the case, for I almost daily meet with persons who say, "We remember hearing you preach more than twenty years ago, and we recollect what you said;" and they will quote something which they then heard. I remember visiting, in one of our hospitals, a man who had heard me years before; and he said to me, "While I was lying here, one night, I thought I heard the very tones of your voice;" and he told me some similes that I had used when he listened to me. I am glad to be successful in producing

permanent impressions upon my hearers; I wish I could be more so. Mr. Jay used to say that, in preaching, we must say things that will "strike and stick." It is well when we can do so; and I urge you, who are the servants of the Lord, to mind that, when you teach the truth, you so teach it that it shall be permanently learnt under your instruction. "Write the vision . . . upon tables."

Then the next duty of the servant of God is to "*make it plain.*" I have sometimes thought that certain ministers fancied that it was their duty to make the message elaborate, to go to the very bottom of the subject, and stir up all the mud they could find there, till you could not possibly see them, nor could they see their own way at all. I could not help, the other morning, comparing some preaching to a boy who was in front of me, one summer's day, wanting a penny, and sweeping the crossing for me in such a fashion that he enveloped me in clouds of dust in order to clear my way! Have I not seen preachers do just the very same thing? They tell people all the difficulties they have discovered in the Bible,—which difficulties most of their hearers would never have heard of unless their ministers had told them,—and they raise a cloud of dust in order to make a pathway for a poor troubled soul! We would rather that they let the dust lie still, for we ourselves raise dust enough without their help.

"Write the vision, and make it plain." I suggest that as a motto to you who preach in the open air, and to you who speak in the lodging-houses or anywhere else. "*Make it plain.*" It is wonderful how plain we must make the gospel before some people will be able to understand it; they have no idea what we mean by many of the expressions that we use. The commonest language among Christians is often a distinct dialect to worldlings; they cannot make head or tail of it. You and I, speaking together of our Christian experience, perfectly understand one another; but if we were to say the same things outside to the mass of the people, we might just as well preach to them in Dutch. If you have a loaf of bread, and you want to feed a hungry child with it, it is hopeless to try to put that loaf of bread inside the child just as it is. Crumb it up, brother, crumb it up as small as ever you can; and pour over it some of the nice warm milk of your own hearty love; and in that way the child and the loaf will come into contact before long. There is no way of getting many great truths in the lump into most people's minds; we must break it up into small pieces; or, to use the words of the text, when we "*write the vision,*" we must "*make it plain.*"

Another important point is, to "*make it practical.*" I have heard this text misquoted a great many times, "that he that runs may read it." Kindly look at the passage, and see whether that is correct. It does not say, "that he that runs may read it," but it does say, "that he may run that readeth it." That is a different thing, and that is what we want to see. But I have known some people who have had the gospel delivered to them, and they have slept that heard it. There has been something about the prophet's very tone, and voice, and manner, that has tended to fill the ear with somniferous influences. "Ah!" said one to me, "I cannot help believing in mesmerism, and so would you if you could see how our minister mesmerizes the people

all round the gallery every Sunday. They can sleep soundly enough after he has been preaching a little while." Now, dear brethren, if we want to do any good to our fellow-creatures, we must hear God's voice ourselves, and that will not send us to sleep, but it will wake us up; and then we must go and tell the people very plainly what we have heard, and also tell it to them so earnestly "that he may run that readeth it." I believe that I could easily make some of you run if I were to take up a telegram from the table, and read, "Mr. So-and-so's house is on fire, he is requested to hurry home as fast as possible." Away he would go down the aisle directly the words were out of my lips. You see, that message is something that concerns him personally, something that may mean great peril to his property, so he runs that reads it, or hears it read; I wish I could always preach about the wrath to come in such a way that every unsaved man who heard me would take to his heels, and run for his life from the City of Destruction; or that I could so speak about the glories of heaven, and the preciousness of Christ, that men would straightway run to him, even to the Holy One of Israel, whom God hath glorified. Let us try always to write on men's hearts in a good running hand, that he that reads the message may at once begin to run to escape from judgment, and to find a Saviour, and to enter into eternal life.

There, child of God, is your attitude; and here is your work.

III. Now, in the third place, the next verse brings out our difficulty; that is, **THE TARRYING OF TRUTH**: "for the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

We preach a gospel whose chief glory lies in the future. The blessings which we proclaim have a most important bearing upon the present, but the stress and emphasis of them relate to the future, and hence it is that, oftentimes, men reject our testimony because, to them, the time is not yet; or they doubt its truth, because they do not at once see the results produced which we foretell.

Brethren, *every promise of God's Word has its own appointed time of fulfilment*; and every doctrine or privilege has its own allotted hour. There is an election of grace, but we shall not know all who are included in it till we shall meet the whole company of the faithful at the right hand of God. There is a redemption by blood, but the fulness of that redemption will not affect these mortal bodies until the trumpet of the resurrection has sounded out its mighty blast over land and sea. Then shall we see how Christ has redeemed the bodies as well as the souls of his chosen ones. Take any blessing that you please, and the same rule applies. Although there is much in the covenant of grace to be enjoyed to-day, there is much more that is yet to come. Still is the servant of God a prophet. He says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;"—that is a prophecy. He says, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee;"—that is a prophecy. He says, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever;"—that is a prophecy. He says, "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and

shall come forth ; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation ;"—that is a prophecy. And the testimony of Jesus is still the spirit of prophecy, and each prophecy has an appointed time in which it will be fulfilled.

And, further, *it is absolutely certain to be fulfilled.* There is no word which God's servant rightly speaks for his Lord which will not come true. Ye have not followed cunningly-devised fables ; and, therefore, ye need not speak your Master's message as though ye were old wives rehearsing the gossip of a country village. You are telling what God the Holy Ghost has revealed in the Word, and applied to your own soul ; therefore, tell it out boldly. Now, then, ye are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech sinners by you ; and you are to go and pray them, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God. Do you not see, dear brethren, the position you are to take up ? May you be helped to take it up ! You are a prophet, and your prophecy has a time for fulfilment, and it is absolutely certain to come to pass.

But, *sometimes, it apparently tarryes.* You tell men of the blessedness that comes of true religion, and they say, "There is such-and-such a believer who is very sorrowful." "Oh, yes !" you reply, "in his case, the vision is tarrying." "There is such-and-such a child of God who does not enjoy the light of the Lord's countenance." Just so ; we did not say that he always would, but we do say that he will one day walk in the light. "Ah !" says one, "I have been seeking the Lord for years, but I have not obtained peace and comfort yet." Just so ; he did not promise that you should obtain the blessing immediately ; it may be that, for a while, you shall "walk in darkness, and see no light," to test your faith. But, though the vision may seem to tarry, it will not really tarry ; it will come in God's good time. Oh, how often have you and I, struggling to live by faith and to glorify God, got into a maze, and we have said, "We shall get out of it ;" but we did not get out of it for a long time. "Oh !" we have said, "surely God will deliver us ;" yet, for a while, he did not deliver us ; we even got into still worse trouble than before ; and then the arch-enemy began to whisper,—

"The Lord hath forsaken thee quite ;
Thy God will be gracious no more ;"—

and what little faith we had, began to waver, for we said, "We did not think that we should be tried thus ; we thought we should come out of the darkness very much sooner than this." But now, brother, in looking back upon those past exercises and experiences, what do you say of them ? Did the Lord tarry, after all ? "Well," you reply, "he tarryed as I should like him always to tarry.

"He hid the purpose of his grace,
To make it better known.'

"He allowed the clouds to collect more thickly, to give all the heavier shower of blessing by-and-by. He did permit me to begin to sink, he did let me nearly go down ; but it was only to make me know how weak I was, that I might the more firmly cling to his hand when he plucked me out of the waves, and bade me stand still by his side."

I can personally say, at the present moment, that I should not like to have had one ache less, or one depression of spirit less, or one affliction less of any sort. I would rather not have any more,—as everybody says; but yet I am glad that my “rathers” count for nothing with God, and that I have not any permission or need to manage for myself. How much better everything is arranged by him! As for the past, it is all right; and, blessed be his holy name, it has been so right that it could not be better. It has not only been good, but it has been better; yea, it has been best of all. So shall every child of God find it. You may say, “This life of faith is hard. This hanging on so long, almost by one’s eyelashes,—will it not soon come to an end?” The end will come at the right time.

“God never is before his time :
He never is too late.”

Remember how Israel went out of Egypt at the appointed time. It is written, “And it came to pass the self-same day, that the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies,” and on that self-same day when infinite wisdom and infinite grace shall know that it is better for you to be delivered, you shall be delivered to the praise of the glory of God’s grace.

IV. The fourth verse gives us our last point; but I will only just hint at what I would have said if there had been more time. THIS TARRYING OF TRUTH BECOMES A TESTING OF THE PEOPLE, because that gospel, which we are to tell, does not bring forth all its fruit at once to those who hear us. What then? Why, this is the winnowing-fan, this is the sieve, this is the way by which God discerns between the righteous and the wicked. As for the wicked man, he says, “I do not see any present good coming out of religion. Look at that poor, miserable, sighing, groaning, poverty-stricken Christian over there; what good has it ever done to him? I do not believe in it.” Just so; now we know who and what you are, for our text says, “His soul which is lifted up is not upright in him.” He is so proud that he judges God’s Word, and condemns it. He will not have Christ to reign over him; he will not believe God; he will not wait for God; and the reason is, that his soul is not upright in him. Follow him home, and you shall see, in his life, that his soul is not upright in him. The man who judges God is one whom God will judge, and who shall not be able to stand in the day of judgment. I will not say that every man who rejects Christ is necessarily immoral; but I will say that, in nine cases out of ten, it is so; and that, when you trace an infidel’s life, there is something there that accounts for his infidelity. He wants a coverlet in his unbelief for something that he has good need to cover. There is something about his daily walk that does not agree with holiness,—some darling sin that spoils his hope of being saved as a Christian; so he tries, as far as ever he can, to get a hope out of falsehood, out of contradicting God. “His heart is not upright in him.”

But how does this test discern the righteous? Why thus: “The just shall live by his faith.” You know that a Christian man, a holy man, a just man, a justified man, talks thus: “Yes, if God has

spoken anything, it is true. If God has said that, it will be fulfilled. I will wait. Troubles may multiply; cares may come like a deluge; but I will wait. I am sure that God is true, and I will wait and watch for the unfolding of his purposes. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; I will never give up reliance upon him." Now, that man is a just man, and that is the man who will live. It is always well when these three things go together—righteousness, faith, life. They ought not to be found apart; they should always be together. "The just man"—that is, the righteous man—"shall live." Ah! there is no true life without that righteousness. "Shall live by his faith,"—and there is no true life without faith, and no true righteousness without faith. These three go together; may we all have them, and may it be your joy and mine to keep on telling to others what God has revealed to us, that we may thus gather out his own believing people, his elect and redeemed ones, while the graceless will, perhaps, despise and hate what they may see, and so will ripen for the flames of hell! God grant, of his grace, that they may yet be delivered, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

HABAKKUK II. 1—11.

Verse 1. *I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.*

"I shall look to God, and I shall also look to myself. There shall be an expectation as I gaze upward to my Lord, and there shall also be an examination as I look within at my empty, guilty, good-for-nothing self."

2. *And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.*

The prophets were accustomed to write their messages upon wax tablets, and the Lord bade Habakkuk thus write what he had seen. God would have both his law and his gospel plainly revealed to men, so that they might know and understand his will. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "We use great plainness of speech;" and the Lord would have all his servants do likewise. It is not for us to bury the gospel under a mass of fine words, but to set it forth in the simplest and clearest possible language; for it is not the power of human words that God blesses, but the truth itself as it is applied to the heart by his Spirit.

3. *For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.*

Is that a contradiction,—“Though it tarry, . . . it will not tarry”? No; to us, it appears to tarry; but, in God's way of reckoning, it does not really tarry. To our impatient spirits, it seems long in coming; but God knows that it will not be a moment beyond the appointed time.

4. *Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.*

This grand text was quoted by Paul when he wrote his Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Hebrews. It proves that Old Testament saints understood New Testament life. David and Abraham lived by faith, even as Paul and Peter and the other apostles did.

5. *Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people :*

This was spoken of the Chaldeans, an ambitious nation so exceedingly greedy that it seemed as if the whole world would not be large enough to satisfy their voracious appetite. Their great kings enlarged their mouths like Gehenna, and they seemed as insatiable as the very maw of death itself. They heaped up nation upon nation to make a huge empire for themselves.

6. *Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his ! how long ? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay !*

That which is said of ambition may also be said of covetousness. What an idle task it is for a man to go on perpetually hoarding,—heaping together more than he can possibly enjoy himself, as if it were made for nobody but for one man, and he must needs grasp all the wealth of the world. There is scope enough for the loftiest ambition when you seek the nobler joys of grace ; there is room for a sacred covetousness when you “covet earnestly the best gifts ;” but, in every other respect, may these two things—ambition and covetousness—be ever thrust far from us !

7. *Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them ?*

So it happened to Chaldea that the nations, which they had spoiled, by-and-by grew strong enough to take vengeance upon them, and to spoil them in their turn. Usually, when men do wrong, it comes home to them sooner or later. The chickens they hatch come home to roost ; at night, at any rate, if not before. Towards the end of life, a man begins to gather the fruit of his doings ; or if he does not reap it in this world, certainly he will in the world to come.

8, 9. *Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee ; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil !*

He fancies, when he gets rich by oppressing others, that he will himself rise out of harm's way. He says that he will make the main chance sure. He who has plenty of gold fancies that he will be able to preserve himself from sorrow ; but this is what God has to say about that matter :—

10, 11. *Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.*

These Chaldeans were great builders, as we know by the vast ruins that still remain ; and most of their buildings were erected by labour exacted from the people whom they oppressed. They received no wages for their work ; so even to-day, from the ruins, the stone cries out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber answers it. Let all men know that, sooner or later, God will execute justice even upon the greatest nations. If they will be destroyers, they shall be destroyed. Their evil policy shall, by-and-by, sweep them away. “There is a something in the world,” says one, “that makes for righteousness.” Indeed there is, only it is more than a something ; it is God himself who is ever working in all things towards the vindication of his own righteous and holy law.