

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

“NON NOBIS, DOMINE!”

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 22ND, 1902,

DELIVERED BY

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“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.”—Psalm cxv. 1.

EVERY careful reader can see the connection between this 115th Psalm and the one which precedes it. In the 114th Psalm, we see the gracious and grateful Jews sitting around the passover table, having eaten of the lamb, and singing of the miracles of Jehovah at the Red Sea and the Jordan. It must have been a very jubilant song that they sang; I think I can hear them singing, “What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?” When that joyful hymn was finished, and the cup of wine was passed round the table, they struck another note. They remembered their sad condition, as they heard the heathen say, “Where is now their God?” They recollected that, perhaps for many a year, there had been no miracle, no prophet, no open vision, and then they began to chant a prayer that God would appear,—not for their sakes, but for his own name's sake, that the ancient glory, which he won for himself at the Red Sea and the Jordan, might not be lost, and that the heathen might no longer be able tauntingly to say, “Where is now their God?” because the wonders wrought by God should cause them to tremble before him. You remember that, when the Israelites came up out of Egypt, and were marching through the wilderness, the Lord put “the dread of them and the fear of them” upon all the nations in their track, so that they were half defeated through the terror that had made them almost like dead men in the presence of the mighty God of Israel. So, the psalmist's prayer here is, practically, “Lord, do the like again;—not for our sakes, but for thine own name's sake;—that once again the heathen all around may know that there is a God in the midst of Israel, and that they may be caused again to tremble as they did before, and no longer blaspheme

or defy the God of Jacob." These observations will, I hope, show you how suitably this Psalm would be chanted while still the paschal supper was proceeding.

Now let us take the words of our text by themselves, and examine them under the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit. They are, I think, instructive to us in five ways."

I. First, they furnish us with A POWERFUL PLEA IN PRAYER: "Not unto us, O Jehovah, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

There are times when *this is the only plea that God's people can use*. There are other occasions when we can plead with God to bless us, for this reason or for that; but, sometimes, there come dark experiences, when there seems to be no reason that can suggest itself to us why God should give us deliverance, or vouchsafe us a blessing, except this one,—that he would be pleased to do it in order to glorify his own name. Moses is an example of how this plea prevails with the Lord. When he was on the mount with God, and Jehovah threatened to destroy the idolatrous Israelites, Moses pleaded: "Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." Joshua also used the same plea when he said to the Lord, after Israel's defeat at Ai, "What wilt thou do unto thy great name?" He could not say, "Lord, hear me for Israel's sake," for they were utterly unworthy. He did not dare to say, "Deliver us for my sake;" he had not conceit or self-righteousness enough to present such a plea as that. He could not even say, "Hear us for Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob's sake," for the people had broken the covenant which God had made with their fathers; so he pleaded with the Lord, "Think of thine own honour; think of thy great name; think of thy repute among the heathen;" and thus he prevailed. It is noteworthy that that awful attribute of holy jealousy, which, under some aspects, is like a terrible flame, is the very one which helps us when everything else fails. Jehovah is very jealous of his own honour, and hence it is that, when the heathen say, "Where is now their God?" he answers their taunt by ceasing to chasten his people;—not for their sakes, but for his own mercy and truth's sake, that the heathen may not think him unmerciful to his people, nor be able to accuse him of being unfaithful to his covenant.

Brothers and sisters, in all your times of distress, you will do well to urge this plea with the Lord. Possibly, you are pleading for a certain class of men or women who have grossly sinned; it may be that you have, on your heart, the case of one person who has gone to great lengths of iniquity. You can always plead, "Lord, save

that sinful soul, to make thy grace the more illustrious. Do it that others, who have witnessed his sin, may admire thy wonderful compassion;—that his relatives and friends, who have heard his blasphemies, and been horrified by them, may see what thou canst do when thou dost bare thine almighty arm, and magnify thy deeds of grace.”

You may be emboldened to urge that plea, *notwithstanding the vileness of the person for whom you plead*. In fact, the sinfulness of the sinner may even be your plea that God’s mercy and lovingkindness may be seen the more resplendently by all who know of the sinful soul’s guilt. And if your prayer should not be on behalf of some gross transgressor, but on behalf of a fallen church;—suppose it should be for a church that has lost its first love, a church that has turned aside from the truth, a church which has ceased to be zealous, a church like that of Laodicea, fit only to be spued out of the mouth of Christ;—you may still come before him, and say, “Lord, revive it;—not for that church’s sake, for thou mightest well make it a desolation, like Shiloh, where the ark of the covenant was at the first;—but do it for thy name’s sake, that all may see that thou canst trim the lamp when it already smokes, and gives forth a nauseous stench;—that thou canst take the fig tree ere it is utterly barren, and dig about it, and dung it, and make it bring forth fruit, O thou wondrous Husbandman of the vineyard!” I leave that thought with you, suggesting that, in your solitude when you withdraw to pray,—I mean you who, like Jacob, have your Jabboks and your Peniels,—you will find that this is one of the mightiest weapons that you can wield in that secret midnight conflict. There is a sacred art of gripping even the Angel of the covenant in that time of mysterious wrestling. Say, “For Christ’s sake, for God’s name’s sake, for his love’s sake, for the gospel’s sake;”—for all these are mightily prevalent pleas with the Most High.

Let me just whisper a word in the ear of anyone who has scarcely learnt to pray. Poor sinner,—

“Laden with guilt and full of fears,—

thou sayest, “How can I plead with God for mercy? I have rejected it for years; I have been often rebuked, and I have hardened my neck; I fear I have no plea with which to urge my suit in craving God’s mercy.” Here is one for thee to use; say to him, “For thy mercy and thy love’s sake, have pity upon me, the least deserving of all thy creatures; for, surely, if thou wilt but save me, it will be an eternal wonder to men and to angels. If thou wilt save me, then will I sing,—

“‘All thy mercy’s depths I prove,
All its heights are seen in me.’”

I remember one, who said, “Oh, if the Lord Jesus Christ will but pardon me, he shall never hear the last of it!” And this is what all poor guilty souls may truly say, “Should there be mercy for such a sinner as I am,—so old a sinner,—so daring a sinner,—so God-provoking a sinner? God’s grace blot out my sin? Will the

Lord put me into his family, and call me his child? Then, tell it in the deeps of hell, and let all the devils know what great things God can do; and tell it in the heights of heaven, and let all the principalities and powers there learn new music as they sing of the greatness of the lovingkindness of the Lord, who can pardon and save the very chief of sinners." I suggest that every seeking sinner here should plead the name of God, and plead the glory of Christ; plead that he will be honoured, that men will magnify his great name and the preciousness of his atoning blood, and the power of his gospel, if it shall save you. This is a good plea; take care that you use it.

II. Now, secondly, my text appears to me to embody THE TRUE SPIRIT OF PIETY: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." That is to say, true religion does not seek its own honour.

Self-seeking is the exact opposite of the spirit of a true Christian. He would rather strip himself, and say, "Not unto me, but unto thee, O Lord, be all honour and glory!" He seeks no crown to put upon his own head; twice he refused to wear it. Even if the world would press it upon him, he says, "Not unto me; not unto me." He does not wish for honour; he has done with self-seeking; his one great object now is to glorify God: "Unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." Do you not think, dear friends, that, if this is the true spirit of religion, we shall very often have to condemn ourselves for being so faulty in it?

For instance, suppose, *in preaching the gospel*, a man has, even as a small part of his motive, that he may be esteemed an eloquent person, or that he may have influence over other men's minds;—I will not suppose that he has so sordid a motive as worldly gain;—but I need not "suppose" what I have suggested, for it is lamentably true that this mixture of motives may steal over the preacher's soul. Ah! but we must fight against this evil with all our might. Somebody once told Master John Bunyan that he had preached a delightful sermon. "You are too late," said John, "the devil told me that before I left the pulpit." Satan is a great adept in teaching us how to steal our Master's glory. Yet, if ever we speak aright, it is because we are taught of the Spirit, and not because of our own wisdom. Even when we have had the undoubted help of the Holy Ghost, we are far too apt to attribute at least some little power to ourselves. But a true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ loathes himself when he finds that this evil habit has fastened itself upon him; and he cries, "No, Lord; not unto me, not unto me, but unto thy name give all the glory and praise." We are to preach so as to glorify God, not to glorify ourselves; and the man who occupies the pulpit merely that he may manifest his own cleverness, ought to be hurled from it forthwith, for he has no right there whatsoever. "Glory be to God," should always be the preacher's motto.

And as it should be so with our preaching, do you not think that the same thing is true concerning *our praying*? Are there no petitions, presented at prayer-meetings, in which there is at least some idea that we are saying very proper things, and very pretty

things, and that people will think we have a great gift of prayer? Did you never have such a feeling as that steal over you? Yet, my brother, the only prayer of the right kind is that which is offered for the glory of God. If I turn from your public prayers, and look into your private supplications, shall I not see self there?

The right spirit in which to do everything is to do all to the glory of God. *In almsgiving*, for instance,—a practice which, I trust, will never die out, though there are some who tell us that it is wicked to give to the poor;—in almsgiving, is it not possible to do it simply to get rid of the applicant, or to satisfy your own conscience, or that you may be thought generous? That is not right; we must give our alms to God alone. Let not our right hand know what our left hand giveth, for it is not to man that we are giving it, but as unto the Lord. Let our thankoffering be dropped into the box, and nothing be said about it. Let us get as far as possible from the spoiling glance of the human eye, that the whole act may be as a spring shut up, a fountain sealed, something done for Jesus, and for Jesus only, that he may have it, and have all the glory of it.

And in any service that you may render, do you not know that it must be done simply and only for Christ's sake if it is to be acceptable to him? Yet, often, you can scarcely set a man to open pew doors, or to give out a hymn, or to teach a Sunday-school class, but “great I” will be sure to lift its head unless it is constantly kept under. Pride grows apace, like other ill weeds. Yet remember that, whatever we do in order that we may make ourselves the end and object of it, is spoiled in the doing, and is not pleasing to God. Indeed, we are not offering it to God; we are offering it to ourselves. May we never be swayed by the fear of man, or the wish to win human approbation! May we do that which we believe to be right, because it is right, and because we wish to honour and glorify God in doing it; and when we are rendering any service to the Master, let us never even wish for human eyes to see it. That is the true spirit of piety; may God grant that we may have it to the full! But, oftentimes, we cherish another kind of spirit. Even the sweet singer among you may be singing a hymn “to the praise and glory of God,” yet be thinking to himself or herself, all the while, “Do not those who are listening to me think that I have a very sweet voice?” Or, possibly, you are in the Sunday-school, and you feel, “Well, now, I really am one of the most efficient teachers here. They must think a great deal of me, or they ought to, at any rate.” Very often, even in the household, when we have done some little thing, we congratulate ourselves upon it, and feel that everybody ought to pat us on the back, and burn a little incense in our honour. Ah, dear friends, if we think anything like this, may the Lord speedily drive it out of us! Such poor creatures as we are, if the Lord would let us be doormats for all his saints to wipe their dirty boots upon, it would be an honour to us. If he only allows us to be hewers of wood, or drawers of water, like the Gibeonites of old,—and if he accepts what we do, it will be all of his grace. **But for us to set up**

on our own account, to live to ourselves, and to want honour and glory for ourselves;—this will never do. We say, of some people, that they are “poor and proud;” and, truly, that is what we are when we begin to boast. Lord, take away our pride; our poverty will not so much matter then!

III. I leave that point, and come, thirdly, to use the psalmist's words in yet another sense. I think that the spirit of my text is A SAFE GUIDE IN THEOLOGY.

When I am going to read the Scriptures, to know what I am to believe, to learn what is to be my creed, even before I open my Bible, it is a good thing to say, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.” This is, to my mind, a test of what is true and what is false. If you meet with a system of theology which magnifies man, flee from it as far as you can. If the minister, whom you usually hear, tries to make man out to be a very fine fellow, and says a great many things in his praise, you should let him have an empty place where you have been accustomed to sit. This shall be an infallible test to you concerning anyone's ministry. If it is man-praising, and man-honouring, it is not of God. The negro said, of a certain preacher in America, “He do make God so great.” I would that it might be said of all of us that our preaching made God great. That plan of salvation that makes man to be somebody, is a wrong one, depend upon it; for he is a nobody, and nothing. That kind of preaching which leaves a great deal for man to do, and tells him he can do it, well, brethren, let those people who are so very good, and strong, and great, go and listen to it; but as for you and me,—at any rate, for the most of us,—we know that, by nature, we are dead in trespasses and sins, that our strength is perfect weakness; and, therefore, the kind of preaching that exalts man does not suit our experience. We do not ask for it, nor do we want it. It will poison those who receive it, for it comes not from God.

This is why I believe in *the doctrines of grace*. I believe in divine election, because somebody must have the supreme will in this matter, and man's will must not occupy the throne, but the will of God. The words of Jehovah stand fast like the great mountains, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” The sovereignty of God is a doctrine which lifts him up high, and therefore do I accept it, and reverently bow before it. According to some men, it seems that salvation is mainly the work of the creature. Christ died for him, but Christ may have died in vain unless he, by something that he does, makes Christ's death effectual. That kind of teaching I do not believe, because it throws the onus of redemption, after all, upon man, and makes him to give efficacy to the redemption of Christ. Nay, verily; but I believe that those, for whom Christ gave himself as a ransom price, shall surely be his for ever; and that he did really redeem them, and needeth not that they add anything to make that everlasting ransom price sufficient and available for their deliverance.

There are some who seem to think that the sinner takes certain

steps towards God before God comes to him; but it is not so. The sinner is dead, and life must come to him from God ere he can stir from the grave, or even have a wish to stir therefrom. And there are some who teach that, after man is saved, he still needs to keep himself and confirm himself in grace; in fact, that his salvation depends upon himself. But it is not so; for he who hath called us, and saved us, has given us gifts which are without repentance, which he will never take back; and having once loved us, he will love us to the end. We are firmly persuaded that he who has begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. From top to bottom, salvation is all of the grace of God. From its first letter, Alpha, to its last letter, Omega, it is all grace, grace, grace. There is no room for human merit, and no room for confidence in self whatsoever; there is room for good works, yet no room for glorifying in them, “for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” You know that jewellers have certain tests by which, if you take them a ring or a coin, they can tell you at once whether it is gold or silver. Here is a test for you to apply, and by it you may tell whether a thing is true or not. Does it glorify God? Then, accept it. If it does not, if it glorifies man,—puts human will, human ability, human merit, into the place of the mercy and the grace of God,—away with it, for it is not food fit for your souls to feed upon. I wish that all Christians were more concerned for the glory of God than they are. Surely, then, they would become sounder in doctrine than many are nowadays.

IV. The fourth way of using our text is this. It seems to me to be A PRACTICAL DIRECTION IN LIFE.

You want to know, young man, how to direct your steps aright, and wherewithal to cleanse your way. This text will help you, dear brother, *in the selection of your sphere of service*. You will always be safe in doing that which is not for your own glory, but which is distinctly for the glory of God. Have you two situations offered to you? Are they equally remunerative, or equally difficult? Select that one in which you may hope to glorify God more than you could in the other. This is the voice behind you which says, “This is the way; walk ye in it.” Are you choosing a profession, or seeking an honourable career in life? Then, I pray you, let this text guide you. Adoniram Judson, full of ambition, seeking a great name, met with this text, and rebelled against it; but he says that all his bright visions for the future seemed to vanish as these words sounded in his soul, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.” Are you going to live, young man, to get glory to yourself? It will not do; it will not do. If the Lord loves you, he will not let it be so. “But what, then, am I to do?” you ask. Why, labour so to live, in any calling, that you may bring glory to God in it.

Sometimes, my text will guide you as to which you should choose out of *two courses of action that lie before you*. Did I understand that you have had a little tiff with your brother or sister, and the

question with you is, "What shall I do in this dispute?" Something says, "Go and make it up, and say that you were wrong;" but something else says, "Oh, but you know that we must not always be giving way, and yielding; because some people, if you give them an inch, will take an ell!" So, possibly, you do not know which course to take. Which is the one you do not wish to follow? Why! you do not like to humble yourself. Then, that is the plan you should adopt. What flesh revolts against, your spirit should choose. Say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory. I will do that which will most honour my Lord and Master, and not that which would best please myself."

Or it may be that there are two ways in which you might serve God, and you are rather perplexed about which one to choose. One of them would give you a good share of honour; the other would involve more work, and you would not be likely to get much credit out of it. You really do not know which of the two you ought to choose. I suggest, brother, that the probabilities are that that is the right one for you from which you will get the less credit; at any rate, I am afraid that, if you hold the scales impartially, as you think, your hand will incline just a little to give the preponderance to that which would bring you into fame. Do not do so; school yourself so that you can say, "For my Master's sake alone will I choose that which shall be my course, and I will follow where he leads the way, seeking to give him all the glory." That is a direction post which, I think, will guide you out of many of the perplexities of life.

V. Now, fifthly, and lastly, my text seems to contain within itself
 THE ACCEPTABLE SPIRIT IN WHICH TO REVIEW THE PAST.

Brothers and sisters, *this is the spirit in which to live.* Has God blessed us? Do we look back upon honourable and useful lives? Has our Sunday-school class brought in souls for Christ? Have we been privileged to preach the gospel, and has the Lord given us converts? Then, let us be sure to stick to the text: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." Now, young man, if you are beginning to serve the Saviour, and he has given you success, your conduct in this first time of testing may decide the whole of your future life. "As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise." There are very few men who can bear success; none can do so unless great grace be given to them; and if, after a little success, you begin to say, "There now, I am somebody; did not I do that well? These poor old fogies do not know how to do it; I will teach them;"—you will have to go into the back rank, brother, you are not able to endure success yet. It is clear that you cannot stand praise. But if, when God gives you blessing, you give him every atom of the glory, and clear yourself of everything like boasting, then the Lord will continue to bless you, because it will be safe for him to do so. He is not going to put his treasure, let me tell you, into the leaky vessels of self-exaltation. Nay, nay; he wants good sea-going ships which bear at the masthead the flag on which is inscribed, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory."

Ay, and when the time comes for us to die, *this is the spirit in which to die*, for it is the beginning of heaven. What are they doing in heaven? If we could look in there, what should we see? There are crowns there, laid up for those that fight the good fight, and finish their course; but do you see what the victors are doing with their crowns? They will not wear them; no, not they; but they cast them down at Christ's feet, crying, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." Brother, sister, living, dying, let this be your continual cry. If the Lord favours you, honours you, blesses you, always say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, be the glory." Are you prosperous in business? Do not be proud of your riches. Are you getting on in education? Do not boast of what you know, for there is a great deal more that you do not know. Has God given you a few converts? Do not begin thinking that you are a mighty soul-winner, for there are many more yet to be won. The way up is downward. Your Master descended that he might afterwards ascend, and fill all things; and your way of ascent must be downward, downward, downward, so that you become less, and less, and less. Say, over and over again, "Not unto us, not unto us," till you utterly loathe the idea of human glory, and let the Lord have all the praise.

As a church, we can look back upon many years of spiritual prosperity; but we must still sing, "*Non nobis, non nobis, non nobis, Domine.*" We can bless and magnify the Lord for unity, and peace, and concord, and perpetual increase and success in all the works of our hands. Glory be unto the Lord for it; but, as Paul shook off the viper from his hand into the fire, so would we shake off everything that looks like attributing success to ourselves, even to our prayers, our tears, our devotion. Let all the glory be given to God alone, for—

"To him all the glory belongs."

Now I finish by saying that perhaps there is someone here, who is longing to be saved, and the only thing that stands in his way is that he will not come to this point, and say, "Not unto us, not unto us." Ah, my friend! you want to be a little somebody; you want to do something, or be something. Brother, *be nothing*; for then shall Christ be your All-in-all. Recollect that the end of the creature is the beginning of the Creator. When you have done with every other confidence, then you can have confidence in God. The Lord bless you to this end, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM CXV.

This is one of the Hallel Psalms which were sung by the Jews at the feast of the Passover. It is highly probable that they were sung by our Lord on that memorable night when he instituted the sacred feast which is to be the perpetual memorial of his death, "until he come." They have, however, a message for us who are now gathered together here.

Verses 1, 2. *Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?*

They talk about what he did when he brought his people up out of Egypt; but they tauntingly ask, "Where is now their God?" Thou art not dead, O God! Nor art thou even waxing weak; wilt thou not let the heathen know that they are resisting thee in vain?

3. *But our God is in the heavens:*

Where they cannot see him. But that is just where he should be—in his own royal pavilion, seated upon his own throne,—out of gunshot of all his enemies,—where he can survey the whole world, where he is dependent upon none, but absolutely supreme over all: "Our God is in the heavens."

3. *He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.*

What a grand sentence that is! After all, his eternal purposes are continually being fulfilled. His decrees can never fail to be accomplished. He is not a thwarted and defeated God,—not one who has to wait upon his creatures to know their pleasure; but "he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." How absolute and unlimited those words are! "Whatsoever he hath pleased." He hath willed it, and he hath done it. As for the heathen who say, "Where is now their God?" we may ask, in holy derision, "Where are *their* gods, and what sort of gods are they?" The psalmist gives the answer.

4. *Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.*

Mere metal,—called precious metal, yet, if made into idols, no better than any other metal. This shows the amount that a man will spend upon making to himself a god that is no god; but what a fool he is to do so! How can a man call that a "god", which did not make him, but which he himself made? "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands."

5. *They have mouths, but they speak not:*

I want you to notice how the psalmist seems to have an image before him, and he points first to its head, and mocks at its different parts; and then he points to its hands, and its feet, and he utters scathing sarcasms about the whole person of the idol god.

5--7. *Eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.*

"They have mouths." To carry out their idea of God, the makers of idols have given them mouths; but they cannot speak through them, they are dumb. Shall a man believe a dumb thing to be a god? The idols cannot communicate anything to him; it is not possible for them to speak any word of encouragement, or threatening, or promise: "They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they." Some idols had precious gems placed in their heads, to appear like eyes; but they cannot see through them, for they are blind. Is it not a solecism,—a contradiction, to speak of a blind god? What a blind man must he be who worships a blind god! "Eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears." Some Indian idols certainly have ears, for they have elephants' ears, monstrous lobes; and I think, perhaps, the psalmist was referring to such ears as those. "They have ears," he says, "but they hear not." Then what is the use of their ears? You cannot communicate anything to them; so, why do you utter prayers to a thing that cannot hear what you say? Why do you present praises to images that know not what you are saying? "They have ears, but they hear not."

"Noses have they." I note the grim sarcasm of this remark of the psalmist; it reminds me of Elijah's taunting words to the prophets of Baal,

“Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.” The ancient Hebrews were not accustomed to treat idolatry with any kind of respect; they poured all sorts of ridicule upon it. Nowadays, we are expected to speak very respectfully concerning all false religions, and some philosophers and divines tell us that there is something good in them all; and they say that modern Papistry, with its gods many, and its rotten rags and cast clouts, which they call relics, is to be treated very delicately. Perhaps someone asks, “Is it not a religion?” Yes, a religion for fools; but not for those who think. “Noses have they, but they smell not.” Their devotees fill the room with the smoke of incense; they burn sweet spices before the idols, but their nostrils are not thereby gratified.

“They have hands,” says the psalmist; their makers give them hands, “but they handle not.” They cannot even receive the offerings presented to them. They cannot stretch out their hands to help their votaries. They are without feeling,—so the original tells us; yet they have hands, but they are useless. “Feet have they, but they walk not.” They could not even mount to their shrines by themselves, they must be lifted there, and fastened with nails into their sockets. One of the saddest sights to my mind,—too sad to be ludicrous,—is to see a Popish chapel, as I have often seen it, when the verger is up on the top of the altar, taking down the various images, and dusting the dolls. He, of course, pays them no sort of reverence, but dusts them as your servant does the things in your bed-chamber or your drawing-room. Yet these are the things that will be worshipped when the bell rings in an hour’s time,—these very things that have been dusted, and treated in this fashion, just like ordinary household ornaments. “Feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.” Their priests pretend that, by a kind of sacred ventriloquism, they make an articulate muttering; but the psalmist very properly says, “Neither speak they through their throat.” They cannot whisper, they cannot even mutter; they cannot make even as much noise as a beast or a bird can; for they are lifeless and useless.

8. *They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.*

That is to say, they are as stupid and doltish as the idols they make. If they can bow down and worship such things as these, surely the worshippers are fitted for the gods, and the gods for the worshippers. Now, brethren, recollect that there is a spiritual idolatry that is very much in vogue nowadays. Certain “thinkers”—as they delight to call themselves, whose religion is known as “modern thought”,—do not accept the one living and true God as he reveals himself in the Old and the New Testaments; but they make a god out of what they are pleased to call their own consciousness. Truly, their idols are reason and thought,—the work of men’s brains. Their god does not hear prayer, because it would be absurd, they say, to suppose that prayer can have any effect on Deity. Their god has little or no regard for justice; according to them, you may live as you like, but all will come right at last. They hold out a “larger hope” that the wicked will all be restored to God’s favour; if that should be the case, there would be no justice left upon the face of the earth or in heaven either.

All this is false. A god that a man can comprehend is not really a god at all. A god that I could excogitate from my own brain must, of necessity, be no god. There can only be the one God who is made known to us by divine revelation. God must be infinitely greater than the human mind; he must be beyond our utmost conception,—of whom we can know but little compared with what he really is, and that little he must himself reveal to us. Beware, I pray you, of a god that you make for yourself.

Take God as you find him in this Book, and worship him; otherwise, you will find that there may be mental idols as well as idols of silver, and gold, and wood, and stone.

"The God of Abraham praise." "The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob," "the God of the whole earth shall he be called;" the God that led his people out of Egypt, the God of Sinai is the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and "this God is our God for ever and ever." Ours is no new religion; it is the religion of Jehovah worship, and to this we will cling, whoever may oppose.

9—11. *O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield.*

The first of this set of sentences seems to me to be addressed by way of exhortation, but the second is a sort of soliloquy in which the psalmist, having exhorted others to trust, says, "Well they may trust, for God is both their active and their passive Helper: their help and their shield." O you who know him, and love him, you who are of the house of Israel, however other men may turn aside to idols, keep yourselves steadfast to Jehovah, and trust in him even when he is mocked and ridiculed! O ye who are his ministers, the house of Aaron, specially devoted to his service, you know him best, and you should trust him most! O all of you, proselytes of the gate, who are not of the seed of Israel, still fear Jehovah, and trust in him, for he is your help and your shield!

12. *The LORD hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron.*

He had been mindful of Israel, and this guaranteed that he would still bless his people. "The times are dark and cloudy," the psalmist seems to say, "but by his ancient mercies, our faith is established, and our hope encouraged."

13. *He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great.*

Now little ones, look out for the blessing that is meant for you: "He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great." Those who have but little faith, little joy, little grace, little growth, yet still he will bless.

14—16. *The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children. Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth. The heavens, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.*

This may in part account for the fact that he is not known, and not honoured among men. He is himself in heaven; and, for a while, he has left men to follow their own devices. Hence it is that they have set up false gods. But, whatever others may do, or not do, let us praise the name of the Lord.

17. *The dead praise not the LORD,*

No song comes up from that dark charnelhouse, no praise ascends to God from those that are asleep in the grave. The living among them praise him in heaven, but "the dead praise not the Lord."

17, 18. *Neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD.*

"Praise the Lord," that is "Hallelujah." The Psalm could not end with a better note than that; so may all our lives end, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.