

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SWEET STIMULANTS FOR THE FAINTING SOUL.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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"O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."—Psalm xlii. 6.

HERE is a common complaint of God's people; and here are two remedies, which David, wisely guided of God, administers with discretion. Let us direct our meditation in this order; first, *let us talk of the complaint*; and then, secondly, *let us look into the divine medicine-chest, and use the remedies there provided*.

I. LET US TALK OF THE COMPLAINT: "O my God, my soul is cast down within me."

We do not know what was the precise reason why David's soul was cast down. Perhaps it was because he had been driven out of the royal city by his own son,—the son whom he had petted and pampered, and thereby made a rod for his own back. We are pretty sure that he was now denied the privilege of going up to the house of God; he could not now join with the multitude that kept holy day. These two things probably worked together to cast down his spirit,—his absence from the tabernacle, and the cause of that absence.

I am not sure, however, that these two things combined would have been enough to cast down David's spirit, if it had not been for a more bitter ingredient in his cup of sadness. There have been good men, in circumstances similar to David's at that time, who even then could gird up the loins of their mind, and hope to the end. When bitten by that which is sharper than a serpent's tooth,—an ungrateful child, and debarred from the house of God, they have even then been able to stay themselves upon the Lord, and to rejoice in the Most High God. The real reason of the psalmist's distress was, no doubt, that God had, at least to some degree, hidden his face from him, and therefore the flowers of his graces all drooped,

and his joy, which erstwhile did sparkle in the sunlight of God's countenance, was now dim and dark. Troubles may distress the outward man, but they cannot distress the soul of the child of God while he feels the Lord Jehovah to be his everlasting strength. Yea, it sometimes happens that the very pressure, which weighs down the scale of his earthly hopes, tends to lift up the opposite scale of his spiritual peace. As long as God is with him, trials are nought, for he casts them upon Jehovah; but once let God withdraw from him for a while, and he is troubled; that mountain, which seemed to stand fast, begins to rock and shake, and to prove the instability and insufficiency of all mortal grounds of confidence.

The causes of our being cast down are very numerous. Sometimes, it is pain of body; peradventure, a wearing pain, which tries the nerves, prevents sleep, distracts our attention, drives away comfort, and hides contentment from our eyes. Often, too, has it been debility of body; some secret disease has been sapping and undermining the very strength of our life, and we knew not that it was there, while we have been drawing nigh insensibly to the gates of death. We have wondered that we were low in spirits, whereas it would have been a thousand wonders if we had not been depressed. We have marvelled that we have been cast down, whereas the physician would tell us that this was but one of many symptoms which proved that we were not right as to our bodily health. Not unfrequently has some crushing calamity been the cause of depression of spirit. Trial has succeeded trial, all your hopes have been blasted; your very means of sustenance have been suddenly snatched from you; while all your needs have remained, the supplies have been withdrawn from you. At other times, it has been bereavement that has brought you down very low. The axe has been at work in the forest of your domestic joys. Tree after tree has fallen; those from whom you plucked the ripest fruits of sweet society and kindred fellowship have been cut down by the ruthless woodman; you have seen them taken away from you for ever so far as this world is concerned. Or else it may be that you have been slandered,—your good has been evil spoken of, your holiest motives have been misinterpreted, your divinest aspirations have been misrepresented, and you have gone about as with a sword in your bones while the malicious have taunted you, saying, "Where is now thy God?" The cases of depression of spirit are so various that it must be indeed a rare panacea, a marvellous remedy, which would suit them all. Yet, when we come to speak of the remedies mentioned in our text, we shall find them suitable to most of these cases, if not to all;—and to all in a degree, if not to the fullest extent.

Let us pass now, from the most obvious, to *the more subtle causes of soul-dejection.* This complaint is very common among God's people. When the young believer has first to suffer from it, he thinks that he cannot be a child of God; "for," saith he, "if I were a child of God, should I be thus?" What fine dreams some of us have when we are just converted! We fancy that we are going to sail straight away to heaven, and to have a prosperous voyage all the way; the wind is always to blow fairly for us, there is never to be

a rough wave, no storm-cloud is to hover over the ship all the day long; and if there are any nights, the stars will be so brilliant that it will be as bright as day. Or, possibly, we imagine that we have come into a country where everybody will be kind to us, where all circumstances will be propitious to us, where everything will tend to nurture our piety, and our own hearts, forsooth, will for ever get rid of legal terrors and perilous alarms. Oh, silly creatures that we are if we dream thus foolishly! We know not what we are born to in our second birth; for, as a man is born to trouble by his first birth, when he is born a second time, he is born to a double share of trouble. Then, he was born to physical and mental trouble; but now that he is born again, he is born to spiritual trouble; and as he shall have new joys, so shall he also have a long list of new sorrows.

All that, however, is unknown to us at the first; and when it comes upon us, it surprises us. Am I now addressing one who is ready to exclaim, "I will give up all hope; I am sure I cannot be a child of God because I am so cast down"? O thou simple soul, the most advanced saints suffer in just the same way! Men who have been for forty, fifty, sixty years, followers of Christ, complain that, sometimes, it is a question with them whether they have ever known Christ at all. There are seasons with them when they would, if they could, creep into any mouse-hole, and hide their heads, rather than be seen among God's people, because they fear that they are hypocrites, and that the root of the matter is not in them. Why, I tell you, young Christians, that the most experienced believers, the men who have great doctrinal knowledge and much experimental wisdom, the men who have lived very near to God, and have had the most rapt and intimate fellowship with their Lord and Saviour, are the very men who have their ebbs, and their winters, and their times when it is a moot point with them whether they do really love the Lord or no. Even the apostle Paul was not exempt from doubts and fears, for he wrote, "We were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears;" and, on another occasion, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." The man after God's own heart, even David,—a man of experience so deep that none of us can fully decipher, much less rival it,—a man of love so fervent that few of us can do more than aspire to catch the hallowed flame,—nevertheless, had to cry aloud, and that very often, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me!"

"But," says one, "this deathlike faintness comes upon me so often; therefore I cannot be a child of God." Ay, but let me tell thee that, possibly, it will come oftener yet; or, should it come more seldom, if thou shalt have weeks of pleasure, or even months of enjoyment, it is just possible that thy doubts will then be doubled in intensity, and thy soul have yet greater trials to experience. So great a Saviour is provided for our deliverance that we must expect to have great castings down from which we need to be delivered. Why, believer, what are one half of the promises worth if we are not the subjects of doubts and fears? Why hath Jehovah given us so many *shalls* and *wills* but because he knew that we should

have so many accursed *ifs* and *peradventures*? He would never have given us such a well-filled storehouse of comfort if he had not foreseen that we should have a full measure of sorrow. God never makes greater provision than will be needed; so, as there is an abundance of consolations, we may rest assured that there will be an abundance of tribulations also. There will be much fear and casting down, to each of us, before we see the face of God in heaven. This disease of soul-dejection is common to all the saints, there are none of God's people who altogether escape it.

Let me go a step further, and say that *the disease mentioned in our text, although it is exceedingly painful, is not at all dangerous*. When a man has the toothache, it is often very distressing, but it does not kill him. There have been some, who have foolishly and peevishly wished to die to escape from the pain, but nobody does die of it. The bills of mortality are not swelled by its victims. And, in like manner, God's children are much vexed with their doubts and fears, but they are never killed by them. They are a great trouble, but they are not like a mortal disease; they are sorely vexatious, but they are not destructive. Why, it is possible for you to have real faith, and yet to have the most grievous unbelief! "Oh!" say you, "how can faith and unbelief live together?" They cannot live together in peace, but they may dwell together in the same heart. Remember what our Lord Jesus said to Peter, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" He did not say, "O thou of *no* faith," but "of *little* faith." Thus there was some faith, though there was also much doubt. So, in the psalmist, there was some faith,—there was, indeed, a great deal of faith,—for he said, "O my God," and it takes great faith truly to say "*my* God." Yet is there not also great unbelief here? Otherwise, would his soul have been cast down at all? But, meanwhile, had he not the yearnings of lively hope in God? If not, would he have dared to say, "Therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar"?

The fact is, we are the strangest mixture of contradictions that ever was known. We never shall be able to understand ourselves. God knows us altogether; but we shall never, at least in this life, completely comprehend ourselves. You remember that verse about the holy women at the sepulchre of Christ; after they had heard the angel's message, "they departed quickly from the sepulchre *with fear and great joy*." What a strange mixture! On the one hand, we have the golden fruit of joy; and on the other hand, the black fruit of fear. So it makes a kind of checker-work; there are blacks and whites, joys and sorrows, bliss and mourning, mingled together. The highest joy and the deepest sorrow may be found in the Christian; and the truest faith and yet the most grievous doubts may meet together in the child of God. Of course, they only meet there to make his heart a battlefield; but there they may meet, and his faith may be real while his doubts are grievous.

I would remark, yet further, that not only is it possible for a man thus to be cast down, and yet to have true faith all the while, but *he may actually be growing in grace while he is cast down*; ay, and he

may really be standing higher when he is cast down than he did when he stood upright. Strange riddle! but we, who have passed through this experience, know that it is true. When we are flat on our faces, we are generally the nearest to heaven. When we sink the lowest in our own esteem, we rise the highest in fellowship with Christ, and in knowledge of him. Someone said, "The way to heaven is not upward, but downward." There is some truth in the saying; though it is upward in Christ, it is downward in self; as Dr. Watts sings,—

"The more thy glories strike mine eyes,
The humbler I shall lie."

The inverse is equally true; the humbler I lie at my Saviour's feet, the more his glories strike mine eyes. This very casting down into the dust sometimes enables the Christian to bear a blessing from God which he could not have carried if he had been standing upright. There is such a thing as being crushed with a load of grace, bowed down with a tremendous weight of benedictions, having such blessings from God that, if our soul were not cast down by them, they would be the ruin of us. It is a good thing for us, sometimes, when fears affright us, and prosperity distresses us. Some of you may not understand what I am saying, you will not until you have this experience of which I have been speaking; but it doth so happen that bitters often do cleanse and sweeten the spiritual palate of God's children, while there are sweets which make their mouth full of bitters. I know that I have myself had songs in the night after I have had groanings during the day; and, often, a salutary blow from God's loving hand, though it has made me smart, has cured me of some other far more baneful smart. Where kisses wounded, blows have healed.

The Christian life is a riddle, and most surely are God's people familiar with that riddle in their experience. They must work it out before they can understand it. So I say again that this casting down is consistent with the most elevated degree of piety. Depression of spirit is no index of declining grace; the very loss of joy and the absence of assurance may be accompanied by the greatest advancement in the spiritual life. Mark you, if it continues month after month, and even year after year, then it is a sign of great weakness of faith; but if it cometh only occasionally, as clouds pass over our sky, it is well. We do not want rain all the days of the week, and all the weeks of the year; but if the rain comes sometimes, it makes the fields fertile, and fills the waterbrooks; and after the shower has fallen, and the sun shines out again, it puts a new brightness upon the face of nature, and makes the birds clear their throats, and sing a new song. The earth never looks so beautiful as when she riseth up like one that hath laved his face in the brook, and, in the shining water, showeth the freshness of her verdure, and telleth of the wondrous skill with which God hath been pleased to adorn her. Even so is it with the Christian when he cometh forth from great and sore troubles, his harp retuned, his psaltery vocal with praise, and his lips gratefully confessing to his God, "Thou hast increased my greatness, and comforted me on every side."

Painful as is this disease of soul-dejection, it is often very helpful to our spirit when we are obliged to cry, with David, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me." To be cast down, is often the best thing that could happen to us. Do you ask, "Why?" Because, when we are cast down, it checks our pride. We are very apt to grow too big; it is a good thing for us to be taken down a notch or two. We sometimes rise so high, in our own estimation, that, unless the Lord took away some of our joy, we should be utterly destroyed by pride. Were it not for this thorn in the flesh, we should be exalted beyond measure.

Besides, when this downcasting comes, it sets us to work at self-examination. That religion, which had begun to be a matter of form and ritual to us, becomes a thing to be considered in deeper earnest; we look at it as a real thing because of our real doubts. Often, I am sure, when your house has been made to shake, it has caused you to see whether it was founded upon a rock. While your ship had nothing but fine weather, you sailed along too presumptuously; but when the storm threatened, then it was that you reefed your sails, and turned to your chart to find your latitude and longitude, fearing that there might be danger ahead. So you get good to your soul by being made to examine yourself. A great loss in business has sometimes helped a man to become rich; for he has been more careful in his dealings afterwards. He has begun to change a system of trade which, perhaps, might have brought him to insolvency, and thus his business has been put upon a firmer footing than before. Even so, this downcasting of spirit, by leading us to search ourselves, may help, in the end, to make us all the richer in grace. When our soul is cast down within us, we begin to have closer dealings with Christ than we had before. A long continuance of calm induces listlessness. There is a way of being wanton towards Christ. We begin to think that we can do without him; we imagine that we have such a store of ready money that we can trade on our own account. But when gloomy doubts arise, we go back to the place where our spiritual life commenced, and we sing again,—

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling."

There is such a tendency, in all the branches of the living and true Vine, to try to bring forth fruit without deriving nourishment from the stem; so the Lord, every now and then, takes away the visible flowing of divine consolation, in order that we may consciously realize our entire dependence upon him. When you and I were little boys, and we were out at eventide walking with our father, we used sometimes to run on a long way ahead; but, by-and-by, there was a big dog loose on the road, and it is astonishing how closely we clung to our father then. You remember how John Bunyan depicts that trait in the character of the children who went on pilgrimage with their mother, Christiana. "When they were come up to the place where the lions were, the boys that went before were glad to cringe behind, for they were afraid of the lions; so they

stepped back, and went behind. At this their guide smiled, and said, 'How now, my boys, do you love to go before when no danger doth approach, and love to come behind as soon as the lions appear?' Just so is it with our doubts and fears. We run so far ahead that we lose sight of Christ; frightful things alarm us, and then we flee back again to the shadow of his cross. This experience is good and healthful for us.

One other benefit that we derive from being cast down is, that *it qualifies us to sympathize with others*. If we had never been in trouble ourselves, we should be very poor comforters of others. It would do most physicians good if they were required, occasionally, to drink some of their own medicine. It would be no disadvantage to a surgeon if he once knew what it was to have a broken bone; you may depend upon it that his touch would be more tender afterwards; he would not be so rough with his patients as he might have been if he had never felt such pain himself. Show me a man who has never had a trial, and I will show you a man who has no heart. Above all things, save me from the man who has never had any trouble all his life; let me not go into his house, or be near him anywhere else. If I am sick, let him not even pass by my window, lest his shadow should fall upon me, and make me worse; for he must be a cold-hearted, unsympathetic man, if he has never known a trial, and has never had to pass through the furnace of affliction. I know that, whenever God chooses a man for the ministry, and means to make him useful, if that man hopes to have an easy life of it, he will be the most disappointed mortal in the world. From the day when God calls him to be one of his captains, and says to him, "See, I have made thee to be a leader of the hosts of Israel," he must accept all that his commission includes, even if that involves a sevenfold measure of abuse, misrepresentation, and slander. We need greater soul-exercise than any of our flock, or else we shall not keep ahead of them. We shall not be able to teach others unless God thus teaches us. We must have fellowship with Christ in suffering as well as fellowship in faith. Still, with all its drawbacks, it is a blessed service, and we would not retire from it. Did we not accept all this with our commission? Then we should be cowards and deserters if we were to turn back. These castings down of the spirit are part of our calling. If you are to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ, you must endure hardness. You will have to lie in the trenches, sometimes, with a bullet lodged here or there, with a sabre-cut on your forehead, or an arm or a leg shot away; where there is war, there must be wounds, and there must be war where there is to be victory.

II. I shall not say more about our being cast down. I have probably said sufficient about the disease, so now let us open the great medicine-chest, and examine THE TWO REMEDIES here mentioned: "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, and from the hill Mizar."

The first remedy for soul-dejection is, *a reference of ourselves to God*, as David says, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me:

therefore will I remember thee." If thou hast a trouble to bear, the best thing for thee to do is not to try to bear it at all, but to cast it upon the shoulders of the Eternal. If thou hast anything that perplexes thee, the simplest plan for thee will be, not to try to solve the difficulty, but to seek direction from heaven concerning it. If thou hast, at this moment, some doubt that is troubling thee, thy wisest plan will be, not to combat the doubt, but to come to Christ just as thou art, and to refer the doubt to him. Remember how men act when they are concerned in a lawsuit; if they are wise, they do not undertake the case themselves. They know our familiar proverb, "He who is his own lawyer has a fool for his client;" so they take their case to someone who is able to deal with it, and leave it with him. Well, now, if men have not sufficient skill to deal with matters that come before our courts of law, do you think that you have skill enough to plead in the court of heaven against such a cunning old attorney as the devil, who has earned the name of "the accuser of the brethren," and well deserves the title? Never try to plead against him, but put your case into the hands of our great Advocate, for, "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." So, refer your case to him; he will plead for you, and win the day. If you should attempt to plead for yourself, it will cause you a vast amount of trouble, and then you will lose the day after all.

Often, when I call to see a troubled Christian, do you know what he is almost sure to say? "Oh, sir, I do not feel this,—and I do fear that,—and I cannot help thinking the other!" That great *I* is the root of all our sorrows, what I feel, or what I do not feel; that is enough to make anyone miserable. It is a wise plan to say to such an one, "Oh, yes! I know that all you say about yourself is only too true; but, now, let me hear what you have to say about Christ. For the next twenty-four hours at least, leave off thinking about yourself, and think only of Christ." O my dear friends, what a change would come over our spirits if we were all to act thus! For, when we have done with self, and cast all our care upon Christ, there remains no reason for us to care, or trouble, or fret. That saying of Jack the Huckster, which I have often repeated,—

"I'm a poor sinner, and nothing at all,
But Jesus Christ is my All-in-all;"—

describes the highest experience, though it is also the lowest. It is so simple, and yet so safe, to live day by day by faith upon the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me; to be a little child,—not a strong man, but a little child, who cannot fight his own battles, but who gets Jesus to fight them for him; to be a little weak one, who cannot run alone, but who must be carried in the arms of the good Shepherd. We are never so strong as when we are weak, as Paul wrote, "When I am weak, then am I strong;" and we are never so weak as when we are strong, never so foolish as when we are wise in our own conceit, and never so dark as when we think we are full of light. We are generally best when we think we are worst; when we are empty, we are full; when we are full,

we are empty; when we have nothing, we have all things; but when we fancy that we are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," we are like the Laodiceans, and know not that we are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Oh, for grace to solve these riddles, and so to live, day by day, out of self, and upon the Lord Jesus Christ!

Let me give you an illustration; it is the easily-imagined case of a poor old woman, who has no money of her own, but who has a rich friend, who says to her, "Come to my house every Saturday, and I will give you so much for a regular allowance; and if there is anything beside that you need, I will pay for it; all your wants shall be supplied." He does not give her a large sum of money to keep by her, for she might not know how to spend it wisely, or she might be robbed of it, but he gives it to her week by week. One Saturday morning, the old lady is full of fear and alarm. If you happen to call upon her just then, you will hear her complaining, "I have not a farthing in the world; I have just spent my last sixpence. I have no money in the bank, no houses from which I can collect the rent; I have nothing but these few things that you see here, how am I to live with only this?" If you did not know anything more about the woman, you would sit down, and pity her, would you not? As it gets to be nearly twelve o'clock, she says, "I must be going." You ask, "Where?" She replies, "I am going to my friend who tells me to go to him every Saturday, and he will give me all I need." "Why!" you exclaim, "you silly old soul, you have been telling me all this tale of want, and exciting my pity, when you are really a rich woman; just because you do not happen to have it in hand, you have been telling me this pitiful story, which really is not true." In like manner, when I see an heir of heaven sitting down, and mourning and weeping because he has not got this, and he has not got that, and when I turn to the Scriptures, and read, "All things are yours; . . . and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's;" and I find promises like this, "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive;" or this, "The Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly;"—if I do not say this to the one who is murmuring without cause, I say it to myself, for I have often been as foolish as the old woman of whom I spoke just now, "O thou foolish self, how slow of heart thou art to believe! how foolish thou art to be thus sitting down, and bemoaning thine own emptiness, when Christ is thine, with all his boundless fulness, when the Father's love, and the Spirit's power, and the Saviour's grace, are all engaged to bring thee safely through thy trials, to rid thee of thy troubles, and to land thee triumphantly in heaven!" Be of good cheer, then, tried and depressed believer, and apply this sacred remedy to thyself, remember the Lord, refer thy case to him, and look to him for all that thou needest.

David's other remedy for his soul, when it was cast down within him, was *the grateful remembrance of the past when, by the Lord's tender mercies, it was lifted up*: "therefore will I remember thee

from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." Look up your old diary; many of you have grey hairs, so your note-books go back a long way. Let us read one or two of the entries. Why, here is a bright page! Though the one preceding it is black, and full of sorrow, this page is bright with joy, and jubilant with song. What do I read? I see written here,—

"I will praise thee every day!
Now thine anger's turn'd away,
Comfortable thoughts arise
From the bleeding sacrifice."

You wrote that verse in your diary just after you had found the Saviour, and your sins had been forgiven you for his sake. Well, then, although your harp is now unstrung, and you are not praising your Lord to-day, I pray you to remember that hour when first you knew his love, and to say, "If I had never received more than that one mercy from him, I must bless him for it in time, and bless him for it throughout eternity." Here is another page in your diary; I see that you had been enduring some temporal trouble, and that your earthly friends had forsaken you; but that, in the middle of your trouble, just where I might have expected to find these words, "I am utterly cast down, for God hath forsaken me," I find written here,—

"When trouble, like a gloomy cloud
Has gather'd thick and thunder'd loud,
He near my soul has always stood,
His loving-kindness, oh, how good!"

Do you think that he is not standing by your side now? If there is a loud thundering, and if there be a thick darkness, will he leave you? Surely these reflections upon what you have experienced in the past should lead you to trust in Christ for the present; and, as you bethink yourself of all his dealings with your soul, you may well say,—

"Can he have taught me to trust in his name,
And thus far have brought me to put me to shame?"

God forbid that we should ever think that he was so cruel as to enlighten, and comfort, and cheer, and help us so long, and then leave us at last to sink and to perish!

In this diary of thine, I also find one sweet record which is a great contrast to thy present sad and gloomy state; thou must have had a vision of Christ crucified, for thou hast written,—

"Here I'll sit for ever viewing
Mercy's streams, in streams of blood;
Precious drops! my soul bedewing,
Plead ~~and~~ claim my peace with God.

"Truly blessed is this station,
Low before his cross to lie;
While I see divine compassion
Floating in his languid eye."

Yet you, who have been at the foot of the cross, are afraid that you will be cast away at the last! You have known the sweetness of Jesu's love, yet you are cast down! He has kissed you with the kisses of his lips, his left hand has been under your head, and his right hand has embraced you, yet you think he will leave you at last in trouble to sink! You have been in his banqueting-house, and you have had such food as angels never tasted, yet you dream that you shall be cast into hell! Shame upon you! Pluck off those robes of mourning, lay aside that sackcloth and those ashes, down from the willows snatch your harps, and let us together sing praises unto him whose love, and power, and faithfulness, and goodness, shall ever be the same.

If there are any here who are strangers to all these things, I can only wish that they might even know our sorrows, in order that they might have an experience of our joys to treasure up in remembrance. Believers in Jesus are not a miserable crew; they have songs to sing, and they have good reason to sing them; they have enough to make them blessed on earth, and to make them blessed for ever and ever.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM CXIX. 17—28.

Verse 17. *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.*

O Lord, I am thy servant; yet, I pray thee, do not pay me wages according to my deserts, but according to the greatness of thy mercy, "deal bountifully with thy servant." Little mercy will not be enough for such great sins and such great needs as mine. Deal very generously with thy poor servant who is so full of necessities, "that I may live;" for, if thou wilt only let me live, it will be of thy bounty, since I deserve not even that boon. Only to have my life still spared, shall be regarded by me as a great favour from thee. I want not to live to please myself, for that would not be living at all, but "that I may live, and keep thy word." A holy life is the only true life, the only life that is really worth having; and he that hath it hath been dealt bountifully with by his God. I commend this verse to each servant of the Lord as a prayer that may be continually presented to him.

18. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

This is one of the first parts of God's bountiful dealings with us. There is no mercy that is so great as mercy to one's own person, to one's own eyes, for instance, which are such essential parts of ourselves. Lord, when thou art dealing bountifully with me, I do not ask for riches, but I do ask that my eyes may be opened. I do not ask thee to give me more than thou hast given in thy Word, but I do ask for opened eyes with which I may perceive what thou hast put there, else the beauties of thy Word may be useless to me by reason of my blindness. This blessed Book teems with marvels; it is a world of wonders. It records many miracles, but every page of it is itself a miracle, and a mass of miracles; yet we must have them revealed to us, or we shall not discover them. Revelation itself must be revealed to every man individually by the Spirit of God, or else he will never see it.

19. *I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.*

Humane men deal kindly with exiles; God has commanded us to be generous to strangers, and he will certainly be so himself. Lord, because

of thy love, I find myself like an exile among the sons of men ; but be not thou thyself strange to me. What should I do, in this world, without thee, and without thy Word? "Hide not thy commandments from me."

20, 21. *My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times. Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.*

God cannot bear the proud ; it is very seldom that they can bear one another ; and if proud men loathe pride as they see it in others, you may rest assured that the good and great God will not endure it. How sternly he rebuked it in the angels that kept not their first estate ! How he rebuked it in Pharaoh ! All through history, it may be seen how God has been continually abasing the proud, and giving grace to the humble.

22. *Remove from me reproach and contempt ; for I have kept thy testimonies.*

He had lived honestly and uprightly, and yet men slandered him. Was there ever a man upon earth, who was good and true, who was not slandered ? God himself was slandered in paradise by the old serpent, and the Lord Jesus was constantly being slandered by wicked men, so can any of us hope to escape the envenomed tongue of the slanderer ? Yet it is very painful, and we may well pray to be delivered from it, especially if we can add, with the psalmist, "for I have kept thy testimonies."

23. *Princes also did sit and speak against me : but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.*

Sometimes, men can bear what the commonalty say ; but to have the great ones of the earth speaking against them, is thought by some to be very hard. The psalmist says, "Princes also did sit and speak against me." What did he do under such circumstances ? Did he rise up in anger, and answer them ? Or did he sit down, and consider how he could defend himself against them ? Far from it : "Thy servant did meditate in thy statutes." He seems to say, "I did not think it was worth my while to leave the Scriptures, even for a moment, so as to speak to them ; but I went on studying thy Word, and left them to say what they pleased." We shall be wise if we do likewise.

24. *Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.*

While these princes were taking counsel against the psalmist, he also went and took Counsel's advice against them ; but that Counsel's advice was the advice of the Word of God. He stuck to the Scriptures. Little as he had of them, yet that little he greatly prized. The Pentateuch furnished him with five inspired Counsellors to whom he resorted in his time of need. Let us imitate his example, especially as we have the complete Canon of revelation to advise and counsel us.

25—28. *My soul cleaveth unto the dust : quicken thou me according to thy word. I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me : teach me thy statutes. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts : so shall I talk of thy wondrous works. My soul melteth for heaviness : strengthen thou me according unto thy word.*

The Word of the Lord is available for quickening, teaching, and strengthening. As Paul wrote to Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." May that gracious Spirit, who inspired it, ever teach us its inner meaning !