

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

“THE TIME OF JACOB’S TROUBLE.”

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“It is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.”—Jeremiah xxx. 7.

God here calls the Jews by the name of Jacob. These were his people in a very special sense, for he had chosen them from among all the nations of the earth, and had brought them near him that they might be his own portion, his inheritance. Yet upon these people he laid many stripes, and visited them with sore chastisements. It is true that they were a sinful people, though they were, in many respects, better than other nations, who were for a long while allowed to go unpunished. Year after year, the heathen prospered in war, and had success in other ways; but as for God’s own people, waters of a full cup were wrung out to them. As soon as ever the Lord had a people, they began to suffer. We learn this very early in their history, for, after Isaac, the child of promise, was born, it was not very long before Ishmael, “he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit.” And, as that persecution began early, it has continued late, for the apostle adds, “Even so it is now.” There is still an enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, and the seed of the woman is made to feel the serpent’s malice; so that, what with a chastising God and a biting serpent, the children of God are pretty sure to be often in trouble; and when, by grace, you see them in their glittering ranks above, and ask, “What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?” this will be the summary of the answer concerning them all, “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” “The sacramental host of God’s elect,” in its march through the world, may be tracked by its own blood. Read both ancient and modern history, and what will you find except an account of the suffering and the triumphs of the people of God? Even to this day, we have to cut a lane through the enemy, and to fight our way to heaven in a stern hand-to-hand conflict. God has not yet prepared

"flowery beds of ease" for any of us, nor shall we be "carried to the skies" in ambulances of luxury. We shall have to fight if we are to reign, and we shall have to suffer if we are ultimately to reach the land of perfect blessedness. This is "the time of Jacob's trouble," even this day, this present life. Thank God it is but a day, and will come to an end; but this is not the time of Jacob's joy. He does have some delights even here, but his great joy is reserved for the hereafter. This is rather the time in which the sinner rejoices, and fattens himself, as for the slaughter; but God's people must expect to find that this is "the time of Jacob's trouble."

But, dear friends, the other truth in our text is equally attested by history: "he shall be saved out of it." How gloriously God's people have been saved all along their line of march! Their camp fires still show their track, and those camp fires have been the burnings of the furnace that God has set up for the trying and purifying of his chosen people. But nowhere have they been destroyed, though everywhere they have been in affliction. They had a very narrow escape from destruction in Haman's day; the enemy thought that he would then utterly cut off the people of God from the face of the earth. Haman thought that he had managed everything so well that his wicked scheme must succeed; the king's mandates had already gone out, and on a certain day all the Jews would be put to death. But you know how Esther, at the peril of her life, went into the king's presence to plead for her nation; and, soon, the new edicts were sent out, and the chosen people put their enemies to death, but they themselves were not destroyed. Haman was hanged on the gallows that he had fixed for Mordecai, for the hated Jew belonged to the seed which cannot be crushed, to the immortal race which can never die out. God's people may be often trodden down, like the grass of the field; but, as the grass springs up again, and even survives the men who tread upon it, so will it be with God's people even to the end. This is "the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." Christ's Church shall live and flourish when her persecutors lie in ignominious graves. Herod thought that he could crush the chosen seed, but he was eaten by worms, while the Church of God still lived on; the tyrant was soon swept away, and so shall all be who lift their puny hands against the people of the Most High.

It would be a very profitable subject, if one had the time to work it out, to see how true this verse is in relation to the Jewish people and to God's own elect ones: "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." But I want, at this time, to get at individuals. You know that God's truth, in Scripture, is like a crystal. You may take a great mass of it; and if you break that crystal into fragments, every little piece will be of the same form, for every division of the crystal is crystallized after the same fashion. In like manner, you can split God's truth up so as to apply it to individuals; and then you can further divide it, and apply it to each separate incident in the life of every man; and it will still hold good, for truth is ever true, and the faithful promise of God is applicable to every part of the Christian's life. I am going to speak

to persons who are in trouble, and I thought I would take up a series of trials as illustrated by the life of Jacob,—not so much referring to his descendants, who are here called Jacob, but speaking concerning Jacob himself. He was a much-trying man, and one reason for that was that he had a great deal in him that had to be driven out, and much of it could not be got out of him except with a severe shaking. Abraham, the father of the faithful, was a far grander man in every way; Isaac was of a calm and quiet spirit; but Jacob was naturally a worldly man. He is the father of the Jews, a business man, a scheming man, a man who is determined not to be overreached, but who is perhaps more likely to overreach others. Jacob was too much of a man until God broke him down; he certainly was a man of a very distinct type, and he has perpetuated that type in the whole Jewish nation to this day. I sometimes think that the Jews seem rather to have descended from Jacob than from Abraham; though, of course, they have really come from Abraham, through Jacob. I have already reminded you that Jacob was a man who had great trouble. There was a great deal of husk to that corn, and therefore it needed a good deal of threshing.

I. Now, looking at Jacob's career in detail, I note that he began his life as an individual apart from the family by a trial which must have been a very heavy one, HE HAD TO LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER. It must have been specially painful to him to go away from his mother Rebekah, who had had so much of the handling of him, so much of the making of him, and, I must add, so much of the spoiling of him. And now, because he has treated his brother Esau unfairly, and has robbed him of his blessing, coming before his father with a lie in his right hand, he must quit his home, and go among strangers. Possibly I am addressing some who are now undergoing that experience. To leave home for the first time, whatever your age may be, is usually very painful; some of us have known what it was to lie awake at night, when we had bidden good-bye to father and mother, and were far away from them. Some of you have, perhaps, crossed the sea, and left dear ones behind; and that first night on board ship, away from all you loved, you sobbed yourself to sleep. These changes must come; we cannot always live in the family nest, we must go out of it, and make nests of our own. But when the parting comes, it is often a hard pinch;—not to coarse, rough natures,—but then I do not suppose such people are here. Gentle, kind, delicate souls,—these are they who most feel the separation from those who are dear to them.

In Jacob's case, there was a bitter ingredient which I hope is absent from yours. *The separation came very much as the result of his own fault and his mother's fault.* They must have felt it very keenly when they were caused to part from one another. Their scheming had won the blessing away from Esau; but now they had the shady side of the blessing, and the shady side of a blessing is, for a while, not materially different from a curse; yet, by-and-by, that very shady side becomes itself a marvellous blessing to the soul. When Jacob started off alone upon his weary way, he journeyed on till, at night, he lighted upon a certain place, and took of the stones of that place

for his pillow, for that was "the time of Jacob's trouble." But, ah! dear friends, how sweet was the second part of our text to him! May it be equally precious to you,—“but he shall be saved out of it.” He lies down to sleep, and he is saved out of his troubles as soon as ever he has fallen asleep, for, in his dream, he sees a mystic ladder, the foot whereof is on earth, but the top thereof reaches to heaven,—a marvellous vision of that way by which we shall ascend to God, the Lord himself having first come down to us in the person of his dear Son. It was worth while being away from home, and having such lodgings as that, to have such a dream. Jacob did not mind the cold and heavy night dews, for there was a dew from the Lord that refreshed his spirit. It mattered little to him that the beasts of prey might be round about him, for the angels of God were ascending and descending between him and the throne of the Infinite One. Let it be the same with you also, dear friend. If it be with you “the time of Jacob's trouble” because you are separated from those you love, now get into all the closer union with your God. Now begin to use that ladder, that wondrous means of communication between your immortal spirit and the immortal God. Through Christ Jesus, look up to your Father who is in heaven; carry on a sacred commerce between your soul and the heavenly world, and seek to be spiritually enriched thereby. It would be a blessed thing if you were no longer able to rely upon an arm of flesh, that you might be obliged to come and rest upon the unseen arm of God. It shall be a gainful loss to you to have lost your mother's care, but to have come nearer to the Most High. I grieve, sometimes, when I see how God's people manage to live a great way off from him, and yet appear to be quite comfortable, and to have all that they could wish; but I am glad when any one of them is thrust right out of all hurtful associations, and so is drawn nearer to God; for when God says, “Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate,” if we do not at once obey his command, he has many ways of making us come out, and it may be that we have to come out in a fashion that is exceedingly painful; yet, however trying it is, matters little if we do but get nearer to him. We may even sing,—

“Nearer, my God, to thee,—
 Nearer to thee!
 E'en though it be a cross
 That raiseth me,
 Still all my song shall be,
 ‘Nearer, my God, to thee—
 Nearer to thee!’”

Dear young friend, you who are just now all alone, and in trouble, and have come in here in the hope of receiving some comforting message, I trust that God has meant this part of the sermon to be a word specially for you.

II. Jacob's next trouble was, that HE GOT TO HIS UNCLE LABAN. “*Laban*”—read his name backwards, and it is “*Nabal*.” There was not a great deal of difference between the two men, for they were both of a churlish disposition. Laban was a hard, grinding taskmaster to Jacob; he cheated him whenever he could, robbed him in all manner

of ways, changed his wages when he thought his remuneration was too large; while, by night, the cold devoured the poor shepherd, and by day, the heat was most trying. Yet Laban never had such a faithful servant as his nephew Jacob, and God blessed Laban for Jacob's sake. I really think that I may say of that period in the patriarch's life, "This is the time of Jacob's trouble," for it is a very hard thing to work for an unthankful master, and, after all your trouble and pains, to get no word of gratitude or love. Laban ought to have loved Jacob, for he was both his nephew and his son-in-law; his wives were the daughters of Laban, and their father ought to have been kindly disposed towards him. But both the father and the sons seem to have treated him rather as an enemy than as a friend, so he had hard lines all the while he was with them. Perhaps some of you are saying, "Ah, sir! you do not know how I am circumstanced. Mine is hard and grinding labour; I am bowed down by it, and I seem to have no sympathy whatever, even from those who ought to be kind to me." Well, dear friend, Jacob, you see, went that way, and you may be content to endure, for a while, the same lot as that eminent patriarch. But, truly, it is a bitter grief, and I can understand your saying, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."

Now listen to the second half of our text, and believe that, as it came true to Jacob, it shall also come true to you: "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it;" and he was saved out of it. He might never have left Padan-aram if he had not been forced out of it; and it was his duty to get back, as soon as he could, into the promised land, and there live the separated life. The very hardness of the burdens that were put upon him weaned him from the house of Laban, and made him willing to bear the hardships of a wandering life, which must have seemed little compared with those which he endured with churlish Laban. My dear tried friend, God is working out some great end for you through your troubles; it is good for young people to bear a certain amount of burden,—not that this excuses those who oppress them, and exact more than is right from them; but "it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." I believe that the drinking out of the bitter cup early in life is often followed by a long stretch of peaceful rest, besides teaching us many a useful lesson which, otherwise, we might never have learnt. You would like to have all things arranged according to your own wishes, would you not? And then you would grow up, and be like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; but that is not God's method. You have to be tamed and trained while you are young; you have to bear the yoke; and, oftentimes, you may cry to God because it seems to gall your unwilling shoulders. But then, in after years, you will be of a tender spirit yourself, and so you will be the more ready and able to sympathize with those who are down-trodden and persecuted, and you will often have to bless God for those early afflictions which taught you wisdom, and fitted you to be the helper of others. Be you always more earnest to do your duty than to be at ease. Be more concerned to be right than to be

happy. Be more determined to act uprightly than to secure the rewards of your work. God will lay them up in store for you, and you shall have them in due season. Bear, and forbear, and still bear; remember how the saints of God have often had to endure harsh usage from those who ought to have loved them, and be content to bear the cross which they carried before you.

III. Now I must pass on to notice Jacob's next trouble. He has got away from Laban, and he starts off with his family, and his flocks and herds. NOW HE RECOLLECTS HIS BROTHER ESAU, whom he had treated so badly; and, behold, he is coming to meet him with four hundred men. Now, if it was "the time of Jacob's trouble" when he was under Laban's power, surely this is even worse than any trial that went before, for will not Esau come with his armed men, and smite Jacob, and destroy the mothers and the children? Is he not full of wrath against him for what he did long ago? And has he not just cause for that wrath? This is indeed "the time of Jacob's trouble." He sends all that belong to him across the brook, and he spends the night in prayer;—not sweet and tranquil prayer such as it is our privilege often to enjoy, but we read, "There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." We generally lay the stress upon the thought that Jacob wrestled with the angel. No doubt he did, but the Bible does not say so; it says, "There wrestled a man with him." There was a great deal in Jacob that needed to come out, and this angel came and wrestled with him in order to get it out; and Jacob's victory was not won until the angel had touched the hollow of his thigh so that he should always need to lean upon a staff even till he died. His weakness had been proved, and he had been overcome, and then it was that he overcame, and became a prevailing prince, having power with God and with men. But, oh, that was a dark night for Jacob! Try to put yourselves into his position, when, even in his prayers, he was disturbed, "and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." His heart, surely, must have been ready to break within him, yet the whole of our text is true of that memorable night, "This is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it." And was he not? Ah, yes! and the joys of Peniel shall ever exceed the sorrow with which the wrestling of Peniel is commenced. When he went, halting upon his thigh, to join his family, his grief was gone, and his fear was removed. God had appeared to him, so all would be well, all was safe, all must be right, for God had heard his cry, and he had obtained the blessing. He was delivered out of his trouble, but how strangely it came about! When Esau came, he was full of love. Instead of war being in his heart, sweet words were upon his lips. If he had not altogether forgiven Jacob, yet, at any rate, he was willing to say nothing about the past, and he spoke like a true and noble brother. This is a truth which we often forget, that God has absolute power over men's hearts. You say that somebody is going to sell you up; that is more than he can do unless God lets him. Somebody threatens to do a very dreadful thing to you, and you feel that you are quite in his power. Yes, but so is that man quite in God's power, and God can turn him whichever way he likes. You are afraid to meet him,

you say. Well, just pluck up courage, and go to him, and you shall perhaps find that he is now your friend,—the very person that you have looked upon as your worst enemy. This has frequently happened. God, who struck down Saul of Tarsus when he was about to destroy the saints at Damascus, is quite as able to strike down the most violent person when he is about to do mischief to any of his children. Never mind about Esau, be you more concerned to give up what the angel intends to wrestle out of you, and to hold him fast, and say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." God will speak to Esau, and he will take care of you; and you shall yet go on your way rejoicing.

IV. Jacob goes on till he gets to Succoth, and he is so pleased to be quiet, and at rest, that HE SEEMS TO FORGET HIS GOD, for he builds a house for himself, and booths for his cattle, and does not continue to live the wandering life that he should. Therefore God soon sends him a trouble. His sons, in the most brutal manner, destroy the men of Shechem, taking them at unawares, and murdering them, so that Jacob's name was made to stink, as he said, among all the tribes; and any one of those tribes was quite able to come and destroy him, and if they had combined, they would have swept him and his family off the face of the earth. Jacob is very much afraid concerning this, and now, I think, when he is going into the midst of the Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land are justly indignant against his sons, we may again say, "This is the time of Jacob's trouble." It is a trouble and no mistake. There might be some sentimentalism about his sorrowing on leaving home; there might be some compensation for his hard treatment by Laban; we may suppose that there was too much suspicion of Esau in his third trouble; but now this is a real trial: "I shall be destroyed, I and my house." "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." And, oh! how wonderfully was he saved out of it, for the Lord put a fear on all the people round about. He seemed to say to them, "Touch not mine anointed;" and though willing enough to fall upon Jacob, and to slay his wives and children, and take his property, they let them all alone. It is truly marvellous how God can make our enemies to be at peace with us. There are more people than Daniel who have slept in the lions' den,—ay, and found soft pillows on the lions' manes, and slept soundly there amongst them. "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me," said Daniel; and often have others of God's servants felt that they have been delivered in the same way. I remember a poor man, who used to preach, and who, in a sermon, once gave a description of Daniel in the lions' den. He said, "I do not think the painters make the lions look as fierce as they really were. In most of the pictures, they look as if they could not possibly have eaten Daniel, they are so meek and mild, as if they had padlocks on their jaws; but they were real lions, and hungry lions, too, as was proved by the way in which they ate up Daniel's enemies." He said he believed that, when Daniel was thrown into the den, they all came rushing towards him to devour him, but an angel flew down from heaven, and just said to them, "Hush!" and they all lay as still as

possible at the prophet's feet. No doubt it was something like that; and, sometimes, when the enemies of God's people are most infuriated, he seems to say to them, "Hush!" and they cannot touch them. Why did not the Romanists burn Luther? I never could make that out. If I had been the Pope, I think I should have settled him off somehow or other; yet nobody could touch Luther. They made short work of John Huss and Jerome of Prague; but, even when the princes and prelates had Luther before them at the Diet of Worms, they did not destroy him. It could not be, for God meant that Luther should die in his bed, notwithstanding all the rage of the enemy. Therefore, if it be a time of trouble with us, let us rest and be quiet, for surely we shall be saved out of it.

V. Was this the end of Jacob's trouble? Oh, dear no! All his life he must have troubles of one sort or another. HE HAS A DEAR SON WHOM HE PETS, and he has made for him a coat of many colours, such as young princes wear. This young man is different from all his brothers; he has a gentle spiritual nature. God has spoken to him, and wrought upon him most graciously. The Lord is evidently with him, and his father's heart goes out to the young dreamer, and he dotes upon him. You know the story of how his brothers, after a while, bring Joseph's coat dipped in blood, and hold it up before the poor old father, and they say, "This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no." Oh! this—*this* is "the time of Jacob's trouble." All those other troubles are nothing at all compared with this one, which will surely break the old man's heart. Joseph! dear Joseph! worth more than all the others, is taken away, "an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces." Jacob will go to his grave sorrowing because his beloved Joseph is taken away from him. Now tell it out to the ends of the earth, "This is the time of Jacob's trouble." If any of you have had a favourite child, and you have allowed all the tendrils of your heart to entwine themselves about it, and if that child is suddenly taken away, it leaves a mark upon the heart that will never be erased in time. I have known the father, if he has been an ungodly man, become rebellious against God; from that time forth, there is a bitterness infused into his unbelief that was never there before; and even a gracious man has gone sorrowfully and sadly all his days after some dear child has been taken away,—a child of so much promise,—a child who was so gracious, and who seemed to be such a help to the father, and likely to lift the family up to a better condition of things. Yet, Joseph is gone; and this is "the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." And was he not? It took a long time for him to see it; but when he wept on Joseph's neck, and when he saw him as the second ruler over all the land of Egypt, and when Joseph came down to him, and brought his two sons, and Jacob said, "I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed;"—then did he know that God had delivered him out of his trouble, and multiplied the blessing exceeding abundantly above what he asked or even thought.

Now, dear friends, if this is your case, be satisfied about the dear child whom the Lord has called home to himself. "Ah!" say you,

"there is no mistake about it; I know that my child is dead." Yes; but I also know that your child is alive. Come, shall we quarrel over it? You say that he is dead, I say that he lives. God knows that that dear one, taken away in infancy, or taken away as a gracious child, lives. Did you ever notice that passage which says that God gave Job twice as much as he had before? "Yes," you say, "but he did not give him twice as many children, did he? He gave him exactly the same number again, did he not? Then how did he give him twice as much as he had before?" Why, because those first ones that were dead were still his. You know how Wordsworth puts it, "We are seven." Though some were gone, yet they were still seven; and Job counted all those that were gone as his, and then with the others he did have twice the number in his family that he had before. So, beloved, count your dear ones as though they were still with you, and wait patiently till you meet them again. Refrain from undue weeping, for they shall come again from the land of their captivity. Thy dead ones shall live again. Mother of mortals, thou didst well to weep; but thy children live, so thou art the mother of immortals; then, why canst thou sorrow? Dry thine eyes, and bless God that thou hast another link with heaven, and that thou hast helped to fill the choirs that, day without night, circle the throne of God with hallelujahs.

VI. Is Jacob through with his troubles yet? No; no; no. He has got out of one trouble, but he has got into another.

"A Christian man is never long at ease;
When one trouble's gone, another doth him seize,"—

which, if it is not good poetry, was written by John Bunyan, and is good sound truth. JACOB'S NEXT TIME OF TROUBLE AROSE THROUGH A FAMINE IN THE LAND. The death of Joseph, as his father thought, seemed a dreadful thing; but a famine of bread, that will kill the whole family, is a great deal worse trouble. There is nothing to eat, so what will become of them all? There is corn in Egypt, however; and the good old man sends his sons down there to buy food. And on the back of that comes another trouble, for when they return home, they say that the lord of the land will not let them have any more corn unless they take Benjamin with them. But Jacob cannot spare Benjamin; and, depend upon it, this is the last ounce that will break the camel's back. Says the old man, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me." This, *this* is "the time of Jacob's trouble." Surely, he is now in the very depths of it. But Benjamin must go, notwithstanding all that his father may say; Jacob must part with his last idol, and God will make us part with our last idols, too. Therefore mind what you set up in your house as idols, for it is written, "The idols he shall utterly abolish."

That was "the time of Jacob's trouble," but the Lord delivered him out of it. You need not that I should stay to tell you how sweetly the Lord was working on Jacob's behalf all the while. Joseph was in Egypt to keep the whole family alive in the time of famine; Benjamin came back all right, and they all went down into Egypt, and sojourned there. And just as surely as Jacob was delivered, so shall

you be. When the worst comes to the worst, then the best of the best will come. When the whole staff of bread seems broken, then shall you find this promise true, "Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure."

VII. Well, that is the end of Jacob's trouble, unless I add what I hardly think I dare call a trouble. JACOB HAD TO GATHER UP HIS FEET IN THE BED, AND TO DIE. I do not think that it was a trouble to him. The few and evil days of his pilgrimage were now over, and he was to meet his fathers, and his fathers' God. Yet still, it matters not who we are, if we look only at the earthly side of death, it is a trouble to die. No one can go down into the disembodied state without having some sort of fear. The immortal tenant, however badly lodged, still seems to love the house of clay. But whether it was a trouble to Jacob, or not, certainly he was saved out of it. He dies with benedictions on his lips, and he falls asleep to awake in glory, and there to sit down with Abraham and Isaac, at the feast of everlasting blessedness. It was well with Jacob, and it shall be well with you who believe in Jesus. You also shall say, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord;" and that salvation will come at the right time. You have tarried till the fourscore years are ended; you are getting somewhat weary amidst the toil and infirmities of a body that is inclining to the tomb. Be of good courage. To such as you are,—

"It is not death to die."

If you are in Christ, you shall fall asleep in him, and then you shall be "for ever with the Lord."

But perhaps there is some poor soul here saying, "I have not got any comfort out of the sermon, because all my trouble is about my sin. I have not lost a child, I am not suffering through a famine; my great sorrow is concerning my sin, my sin, my sin. It haunts me; it eats like a canker into my spirit; it withers all my joys; it turns my life almost into a hell." I know where you are, dear friend, for I have been that way myself. "This *is* the time of Jacob's trouble." There is no trouble like genuine conviction of sin. Racks, scorpions, death,—these are troubles to be laughed at, as compared with the weight of guilt pressing on the conscience, and the sight of an angry God, and the fear of the wrath to come. "This is the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." The Lord Jesus Christ has come to save just such as you are. To you he extends his pierced hand; he waits to receive you just as you are. Look to him; look to him; look to him, ye lost and ruined. Look and live, for in a look at him there is life for you. Your trouble is great, but you shall be saved out of it. What though your sins were more numerous than the stars, and each one more weighty than the world? Do but look to him; take your eyes off yourself, and fully gaze on him who his own self bare your sins in his own body on the tree. Dost thou trust him? Then thou art saved; thy sin is gone; it is buried in his sepulchre. God has forgiven thee all thy transgressions for Jesus' sake. Go thou on thy way rejoicing. "This is the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." God bless you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM XXXI.

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.

This Psalm was meant to be sung, therefore it was dedicated to the chief musician; yet it is a Psalm of which at least half is very sorrowful. All our hymns were not meant to be joyous ones; God permits us to take a wide range in our psalmody, and to express the feelings of our heart whatever they may be. You will see here and there the light of Christ shining on this Psalm. If it does not shine on him, at any rate he shines on it.

Verse 1. *In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust;—*

Is that true of you, dear friends? Never take your trust upon trust, but be quite sure that you do trust in God; if it is so, avow it, and never be ashamed to say, "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust;"—

1—3. *Let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.*

See how logical David is with his "for" and "therefore." It is the very essence of prayer to be able to urge pleas with God, and to say to him, "Do it for this reason," or, "Therefore, do it for such another reason." I would that we all of us studied more fully this blessed art of pleading with God, bringing forth sound arguments as we approach him.

4. *Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength.*

How sweetly and blessedly he pleads! "'Thou art my strength.' I cannot get out of this net, I am entangled in it; but thou canst pull me out, for 'thou art my strength.'"

5. *Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.*

This is a blessed prayer,—a holy resolution, which we may use every day in the week all through our lives.

6. *I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD.*

"In Jehovah." David had no patience with those who trusted in gods of wood and stone; he knew very little indeed of that spurious charity which leads some men to speak respectfully even of idolatry. David was "a good hater"; and there is something gracious about that when the thing hated is really hateful, and something which ought to be hated.

7. *I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy:—*

David makes the cymbals clash together: "I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy:"—

7. *For thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities;*

It is said to be the highest wisdom to know yourself; but, to my mind, it is a much better thing for God to know you. You may know yourself, and fall into despair; but if God knows you, and you know God, there is abundant room for you to hope in his mercy.

8. *And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a large room.*

"Thou hast given me a broad place to live in, and thou hast given me abundance to eat there." So David praises and blesses his God; but now

see how the note falls. From the highest point of the scale he suddenly descends to the very lowest. "We spend our years as a tale that is told;" and such a tale is sometimes very joyful, and anon it is full of woe.

9, 10. *Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing:*

Sighing is better than sinning any day. Though we may deplore that our life melts away in sighs, it is better that it should go so than that it should be wasted in sins.

10, 11. *My strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance: they that did see me without fled from me.*

He was in such a sorry plight that men would not own him. They were afraid that they should be disgraced by being found in his company. It is a sad condition for a man of God, like David, to be found in, for others to be afraid to be seen speaking to him.

12. *I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel.*

An old pot, flung on the dunghill, as of no further use.

13, 14. *For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. But I trusted in thee, O LORD:*

Now the strain will mount again. It is faith that tunes the royal singer, so that he rises to heights of joy though just now he had sunk so low.

14, 15. *I said; Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand:*

He had put his spirit there: "Into thine hand I commit my spirit;" and now he says, "My times are in thy hand."

15—19. *Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake. Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave. Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous. Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee;*

If he was not tasting of it just then, he blessed God that it was laid up for him, put by in store.

19, 20. *Which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.*

What a blessing that is,—to be separated from the noise and strife and the malignant calumny of wicked men! God has a blessed way of keeping his servants away from all such evils.

21, 22. *Blessed be the LORD: for he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city. For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee.*

"If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." The psalmist was full of doubts, and he said, "I am cut off;" but, nevertheless, God heard the prayer of his poor mistrusting servant, and brought him out of his distresses.

23, 24. *O love the LORD, all ye his saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.*