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A Sermon

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“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.”—Ecclesiastes vii. 8.

SOME translators read this passage, “Better is the end of a *speech* than the beginning thereof;” and I doubt not that many of my hearers quite concur in that opinion. You endeavour to be patient when we begin, but as soon as we utter the word “finally” your eyes begin to glisten, for the tedious exercise, you think, will soon be over. And if it be so to the hearers, I grant you it is sometimes so to the speaker. A speaker sometimes finds it difficult to begin, more difficult to continue to edification, and not difficult to come to a close, but often exceedingly pleasant to do so. Well, doubtless, can many a young preacher remember, when he first tried to speak, how much better he felt the end of the speech to be than the beginning; like the young acrobat walking upon a rope on high, who tremblingly launches forth, and timidly puts one foot after the other until he reaches the end of his dangerous task, he was rejoiced to sit down. Far better was the end of the speech than the beginning thereof.

I do not think that is a correct version, or a proper translation, but it is a great truth; for, if a man should speak what is mischievous, it is a good thing when he has done; it is better that he should have done with it than that he should be continuing in his idle and dangerous talk; and if a man speaks well, and is a good ambassador, and has good tidings to deliver, it is better that he should have delivered them and fulfilled his mission. Now you have advanced one stage. You have received a truth on which your souls can feed; and it is better to have received it than not to have received it; and hence the end is better than the beginning.

I think we must take the text as it stands with a grain or two of salt. It is relatively rather than absolutely true. “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.” That is true, or we should not find it in Scripture; but the application of its truth is

particular, not universal. There are some things which are worse in their ending than in their beginning. It is true, I believe, of all things which proceed according to God's order, when God begins them, and God ends them, or when they are begun by God's direction, conducted in God's fear, and ended in God's presence. In such cases, I say the end is better than the beginning; but the text must not be taken to be absolutely and indiscriminately true in *all* cases. With a grain or two of salt, however, I think it is a maxim worthy of Solomon.

"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." Some pictures in nature will illustrate this. We compare the beginning and the end. The sower goes forth, on a damp and drizzling morning, with his handful of precious seed, which he is loth to spare; and as he scatters it, the rough wind blows into his face, and the frost bites his cheek; and, literally, it may be said, that he "sows in tears"; the beginning, therefore, is by no means pleasant. Then comes the harvest home, with the songs and dances of smiling damsels and joyous swains, when the produce of the fields is safely housed; that is the end thereof. I think that everyone can see that the harvest is better than the seedtime. Or a man starts forth upon a long journey. He takes a staff in his hand. He prepares himself to climb yonder crags. The storm will come on, but he must press through it. There will be brooks swollen with the rains, but he must pass through them all. Summoning courage to his aid, he surmounts every obstacle. He comes in all flushed with the healthy exercise. He has climbed yonder crags; he has passed through the brooks; he has braved the storm; and now he comes to the blazing fire to sit down and rest himself, for the journey is over. "Better," says the traveller, "is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof. Toil came, but now toil is sweetened, for I look back upon it, and can take my rest." Or, see the good ship as the dock gates are opened, and she is drawn out into the river. Flags are flying, and everyone cheers those who are about to make a venturesome voyage to the East Indies. See her, however, coming back up the river, well loaded, to go into dock, and ask the captain, who remembers the rough weather as he passed the Cape, and the storm just as he came off the Peninsula, and he will tell you that he likes coming up the river much better than going down. Coming home with his ship well freighted, after a prosperous voyage, he says, with thanks to God, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." One more picture. An army of soldiers goes forth to war. Can you look upon them with pleasure? I know that you crowd the streets, and shout as they march down your thoroughfares; and, truly, it is a thrilling sight to see the stalwart heroes as they go forth to fight their country's battles; but when you think of the number of those brave men who may lie dead on the battle-ground, and how few may ever return. I am sure, to say the least, it is not a pleasurable sight. But when those brave men, who have escaped the storm and crash of battle, return to their native land, and again pass through the streets, they feel, if the spectators do not, that better is the end of war than the beginning

thereof. Someone once said he thought there was never a good war, and never a bad peace; and I believe to a very great extent he was right. Peace is of itself an inestimable blessing, and war in itself, whether just or unjust, is a most terrific scourge. So whether, then, you see the sower in the field, or the traveller starting on his journey, or the voyager launching upon the deep, or the warrior going forth to the fight, you are ready to think that "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." I have given you these four pictures because I shall want to use them as I turn from natural things to more spiritual things.'

I. Let me use this general principle to-night, in the first place, TO SOOTHE YOUR REGRETS.

This year has all but gone. 1864, then, must soon be numbered with the things that were. Perhaps someone says, "Would to God that I had this year to live over again! I have missed many opportunities of doing good, or, when I have availed myself of them, I have not served my God as I could have desired. I have another year less in which to serve the Church, the world, and my God. I have spent another of my talents, and have so much fewer to put out to usury for my Lord and Master." Now, do not regret, dear friend, that the year has passed. It should be rather to you, if you are a believer in Christ, a subject for congratulation. Would you wish to have the year over again, when in sober silence you meditate upon the subject? You have had some sorrows this year. You are like the sailor I spoke of just now; you have passed through some storms. Weather-beaten mariner, wouldst thou like to have the storms of this year over again? Dost thou remember that dreadful night when the ship was driven so fearfully by the tempest, or the time when thou wast cast upon the rocks, and wouldst thou like to endure the same again? I see thee shake thy head, and say, "No; thank God we weathered that storm, but we don't want it again." And, Christians, as you think of the losses, crosses, sufferings, and bereavements which you have had during this year, can you feel any regrets that it is gone? Must not each one of you say, "I thank God that stormy voyage is over, and I have not those tempests to endure"?

How many snares have you escaped during the past year? In looking back, must you not observe that your feet have sometimes almost gone, and your steps have well nigh slipped? There have been times when sin had almost tripped you up, when the world had almost taken you in its trap, and when the devil had all but wounded you in a mortal part. You are like a sailor who remembers the rocks by which he has sailed, and the quicksands from which he has escaped. Would you wish to run such risks again? Do you wish, sailor, to go again over the bar at such a low tide, or to be drifted so unpleasantly near that rock as almost to grate against it? "No," says he; "having escaped those dangers, I am thankful that they are over, and have no wish to have them over again." And are you not grateful, Christian, that another year of temptation has gone for ever, and that the arrows, that Satan has shot at you this year, he can shoot at you no more for ever? Those sword-cuts we

received, which threatened to be mortal, we shall never have to dread again; they are gone: and when I say they are gone, it is implied that their mischief and their power to hurt are gone for ever.

But there is another side to this matter. What a multitude of mercies you have enjoyed this year! How good God has been to us!

“When all thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys;
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise.”

Those of us who have travelled in Switzerland, or in other countries where the views are glorious to look upon, would not wish that we had never seen them; on the contrary, we are glad that our eyes have feasted on those sunny prospects. And you, too, Christian, cannot regret that you have seen God's mercies, but you will thank God that it has been your privilege to have enjoyed such favours. There is another reason, then, why you should not regret that the year has passed. I address myself to some who are growing grey. I know there is a tendency in your minds to regret that so many years have gone; but, my dear brethren and sisters in the Lord, if you should do so, I think you would be guilty of a folly unworthy of a believer with such a long experience. Take John Bunyan's picture of the Christian's progress. He describes Christian as starting on his pilgrimage to the Celestial City with a burden on his back that presses him down, wringing his hands for fear, and running because he is afraid that he will be destroyed in the City of Destruction. He has not gone a day's journey before he is up to his neck in the Slough of Despond, and floundering in the mire: this is the beginning of the pilgrimage, but see the end; he has come to the river, he dips his foot into it, and though it is chill and cold, it does not stay him. When he gets midway in the river, how does Bunyan picture him? The angels beckon him from the other side, those very angels whose voices he had heard ringing clear and sweet across the stream when he wandered in the groves of Beulah, and sat among the spices there; and now he reaches the bank on the other side, and, leaving his sins, his doubts, his infirmities his mortality behind, his disembodied spirit goes up to the celestial land, and angel attendants conduct him to the pearly gates of the golden-paved city. Oh! infinitely better is the end of a spiritual life than the beginning. Contrast the Slough of Despond with the Celestial City, and human intellect cannot fail to see how much better, how infinitely better, the end is than the beginning.

Take this picture as a further illustration of the same point: Moses, at the beginning of his spiritual career, is seen killing an Egyptian, and burying him in the sand.—just like a young Christian, full of zeal, but having little prudence. There is the beginning of his public career. And now I think I see the old man of 120 years, firm of step, with an eye as clear and piercing as an eagle's, standing up to address the people whom he has carried, as a nursing mother, in his arms; and, having done this, leaving Joshua,

his familiar servant, and all others behind, he began to climb to the top of Pisgah. He has mounted to its loftiest crag, and, leaning over, he begins to take a full view of the Promised Land. He sees the palm trees of Jerusalem and Zion, and his eye lingers on Bethlehem; he catches glimpses of the blue sea afar off, and the goodly land of Lebanon; and as he looks, one scene melts into the other, and he sees the face of God, for God himself has come down, and his spirit is taken away with a kiss. As to his body, it is buried where no man knoweth; but as to his soul, it is with God for ever. Truly, in the case of Moses, better was the end than the beginning, and such shall be the spiritual end of every man of God who, with the simplicity and faith of Moses, can put his trust in God.

I think this is sufficient to soothe all your regrets. Instead of being sorry that these years have passed, thank God for it, and be glad.

II. I shall now use this general principle to endeavour to STAY YOUR FOREBODINGS.

It may be that many of you are in darkness,—darkness which may be felt. You find it very difficult to accept the truth that God is a God of love, and one who cares for you. You are, however, only at the beginning,—the beginning of the ways of providence. Your poor faith is ready to be staggered by the sufferings you endure, and unbelief prophesies ten thousand things to fill your soul with doubts and alarms; but the end of all this shall be better than the beginning. Many Christians have more trials in the earlier part of their spiritual life than they ever will have afterwards. “It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.” You must not consider, because the sun is just now under a cloud, that he will always be there. It was a little child who said, when there was an eclipse, “Father, the sun is put out.” It was only a child who said that; no man thought so. Let thy ripen experience correct the childishness of thine unbelief. God only hides his face to show it more clearly by-and-by. The end shall be better than the beginning. Have you not often seen a day which, early in the morning, was heavy with fog and rain? As it came on, we waited patiently and anxiously, for we wished for fine weather; but those incessant drops of rain still fell. We looked to the wind quarter and to the rain quarter, we looked with hope and then with fear, but the drops fell unceasingly, and there seemed to be no chance of intermission; and yet, ere noon has come, we have seen the sun shining brightly, and we have heard the birds singing more sweetly, and it has been fair weather after rain. Take that morning as a prophecy to your poor, doubting, troubled soul of what your path in life will yet be. You shall yet see that the end is better than the beginning.

Take one picture as an illustration, and then I will leave this point. Poor Joseph has been slandered by his mistress, his character is under serious imputation, he is put into the round house by Potiphar, he is a prisoner, and must have prisoner's fare; and yet I wot that Joseph had never sat upon the throne of Egypt if he had not been put into the dungeon. You must “stoop to

conquer," and, like gold, you must be put in the burning coals that you may be refined; but you shall soon come out, and like that gold, when you shall glitter with purity, you shall know that "better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof."

III. And now let us use this simple statement of the text to ENCOURAGE OUR FAITH.

The way of sense is to get everything now; the way of faith is to get everything in God's time. The worldly man lives on the present; the Christian lives on the future. It will always greatly strengthen faith if we, according to God's Word, look not so much at present appearances, as at the issue of our lives, which is to make amends for all the toils and disappointments we experience at the commencement of our career. So surely as God has called you to be a partaker of the kingdom, you must renounce the pleasures of this present world. Look at your Lord and Master; look at his beginning. "He was despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Remember Gethsemane's bloody sweat, and Gabbatha's terrible flagellation, and Golgotha's mount of doom. This is the beginning. Would you see the end?

"The head that once was crown'd with thorns,
Is crown'd with glory now."

The mighty Victor drags death and hell at his triumphant chariot wheels; he mounts his Father's throne; and, amidst the acclamations of men and angels, he sits down for ever, and all his enemies shall be made his footstool. This is the end, or rather, this is the beginning of the end, for the splendours of the millennium, the second advent, and the eternal honours which shall be cast at Jesu's feet, these are the end. How much better is the glorious end than the sorrowful beginning! "As he is, so are we also in this world." You must take the manger, or you shall never take the throne; you must have the cross, or you shall never wear the crown; you must be despised and rejected, or you shall never be accepted and crowned; you must wade through the mire, or you shall never walk the golden pavement. Cheer up, then, poor Christian! Let this truth be a stay to your soul just now, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof."

I will give you two illustrations, and then leave this point. You see that creeping worm, how contemptible is its appearance! You wish to sweep it away; that is the beginning of the thing. You see that insect with gorgeous wings playing in the sunbeams, sipping at the flower bells, and full of happiness and life; that is the end thereof. That worm, that caterpillar, that maggot, if you will, is yourself; and you are to be content with that until you are wrapped up in the chrysalis of death; but you cannot tell what you shall be after death. All that we know is that, when Christ shall appear, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Be content to be like him, a worm, a caterpillar, in the beginning, that, like him, you may be satisfied when you wake up in his present likeness.

Again, you see that rough-looking diamond; it is put upon the

wheel of the lapidary. With much care he begins to turn it, and to cut it on all sides. It loses much,—much that seemed to itself costly. Do you see it now? The king is to be crowned, the diadem is put upon the monarch's head with the trumpet's joyful sound. There is a glittering ray which flows from that diadem, and it comes from that very diamond which was cut just now by the lapidary. You, Christian, may venture to compare yourself to such a diamond, for you are one of God's jewels; and this is the time of the cutting process. You must endure it. Be of good courage, and murmur not. Let faith and patience do their perfect work. In the day when the crown shall be set upon the head of "the King eternal, immortal, invisible," one ray of glory shall stream from you, for you shall be his. "Thou shalt be mine," saith the Lord, "in the day when I make up my jewels."

IV. Have patience with me, in the next place, while I use my text to suggest action

It is very clear that we cannot have an ending if we have not a beginning. However bright our end might be, we can never know it experimentally unless we begin. The text, therefore, suggests the question to each one of us, "Have I begun? Has God begun with me?" The beginning may be dark and gloomy, but you can never have a bright ending without it. I know the beginning will involve the sacrifice of many pleasures, and the giving up of friends,—“pleasures” and “friends” so called; but you cannot have an ending with the saints of God in heaven unless you have a beginning with the poor and afflicted of his family on earth. I wonder whether there are some with whom God will begin now. It will be a blessed thing if he should begin with you; but it will be a far more blessed thing for you when he comes to the end. It will be so blessed, if you should to-night be led by the Holy Spirit to direct your eye with faith to Christ, that the very angels before the throne shall have a merrier Christmas because of your conversion.* Can I be mistaken in that notion? Did not our Lord Jesus Christ say, concerning the shepherd who had found his sheep which was lost, “When he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours,” (who are they but the angels, who are the friends and neighbours of Christ in heaven?) “saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.” In heaven they sing more sweetly and with a more joyful song when sinners turn from the error of their ways. I wonder whether to-night will be a time for “beginning” with some of you. Oh! if the Spirit of God is now teaching you your sinfulness, if you feel that you are lost and ruined, I have to remind you that, on the cross of Calvary, there hung a bleeding Saviour, and that—

“There is life for a look at the Crucified One;”—

and the moment thou dost glance at him by faith, the good

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,791, “A High Day in Heaven.”

beginning comes to thee. But, oh! it were vain for fancy to attempt to describe the ending, when the angel convoy shall bear thy ransomed spirit upward to be beatified for ever, and to be full of eternal life and joy, in the presence of Jesus Christ thy Lord and Saviour. May God begin thus with some of you to-night!

V. And now, to close,—THE TEXT SUGGESTS A MOST SOLEMN ENQUIRY, and the enquiry for each one of us is this,—If my life were to come to an end to-night, would my end be better than my beginning? I said, when I began, that my text must have some salt with it, and here I must use the salt. There are some things that are best in the beginning and worst at the end. There is, yonder, the sinner's feast. Bring in the dishes; fill the goblets with sparkling wine; drink deep, and sing right merrily. The lute and the harp are there, and the feasters stand up, and shout, and sing. But what is that I see? As the night wears away, and the morning light streams in through the windows, "who hath woe? who hath redness of the eyes?" Truly, the end of such feasts is worse than the beginning. And in that ward of foul disease where they seem to sweep together the rank refuse of what once was beauty, exceeding fair to look upon, truly we learn the lesson that, in some cases, the end is worse than the beginning. Beware, thou that goest to the house of strange women, lest thou find that the end thereof is infinitely worse than the beginning. Stay thy feet ere they enter there, lest thou go like a bullock to the slaughter, or a fool to the stocks. And if that one walk be so notoriously worse in the end than it is in the beginning, such likewise is every walk of sin. See the avaricious man as he accumulates money. Look at the beginning of it; he puts out his money to interest, and makes out his bonds, and takes security for debts, and calls houses and streets after his name; and then see the end of it. The old man is haggard and wan. He cannot count his wealth, yet he fears he will die in the workhouse. And when he thinks in those intervals when his senses come back, and he realizes his own self, it is ever with the shuddering thought, "I must part with you, my treasures; I must part with you all, and go back to my mother earth as naked as I came into it." So that, you see, there are times when the ending of a thing is a great deal worse than the beginning.

Someone will doubtless say, "I am not like these men; I am neither debauched nor avaricious." Well, I will take you at the best. Here is your beginning; you are a respectable attendant at a place of worship; you go because others go, not because your heart is right with God. This is your beginning. I will suppose that, for the next twenty or thirty years, you will be spared to go on as you do now, professing religion as far as outward attendance upon the means of grace will make a profession, but having no heart in the matter. Shall I show you your end? Be hushed and silent, tread softly, for I must show you the deathbed of such an one as yourself. Let us gaze upon him gently. Let us not disturb him. A clammy sweat is on his brow, and he wakes up, and cries, "O God, it is hard to die!" He says to his friends, "Did you send for my minister?" "Yes, he is coming." The minister comes, and the

poor fellow says to him, "Sir, I fear that I am dying." "Have you any hope?" "I cannot say that I have any. I shall have to stand before my God; oh, pray for me!" The prayer is offered for him with sincere earnestness, and the way of salvation is for the tenth thousandth time again put before him; but before he has grasped the rope, I see him sink. Shall I picture the scene further? I may put my finger upon those eyelids, for they will never see anything here again. But where is the man, and where are the man's true eyes? Christ said, of the rich man, "In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments;" and it is so with this man; but why did he not lift up his eyes before? Because he got so accustomed to hear the gospel that his soul went to sleep under it. He cannot sleep now, "being in torments." There is no sleep in hell. Oh, what a blessing sleep would be if it could enter the habitation of the damned! Alas! if any of you should lift up your eyes there, what a sight you will behold! Here, if you drop off to sleep, and wake up in the Tabernacle, you see the faces of attentive listeners hearing words of mercy; there, when first you lift up your eyes, you will gaze into visages more marred with pain than any you have ever seen before; and if you ask them the cause of their awful grief, and why agony, as with a red-hot ploughshare, has made such deep furrows in their cheeks, they will tell you that you need not ask them, for you will soon learn the reason yourself. I cannot picture it. Let the Saviour's own words tell you the terrible truth: "The rich man cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." There is a frightful meaning in those words. May you never have to spell it out by the red light of Jehovah's wrath!

"Ye sinners, seek his grace,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of his cross,
And find salvation there."

Ere this last Sabbath of the year closes, I pray that the Lord may come down in mercy, and visit those who have not yet received Christ that of them it may be truly said, "Better is the end of this year than the beginning thereof." God grant it, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM CXVI.

We have read this Psalm many times, and have often felt it to be a photograph of our own spiritual experience: but we will, on this occasion, read it from one special point of view. Please notice that this Psalm is exceedingly full of the letter I. Cast your eye down the page, and you will be struck with the number of times in which the first person singular appears. Well, then, let us read the Psalm with this view, and each of us for himself or herself say "I" as the psalmist did if the Holy Spirit shall enable us to do so.

Verse 1. *I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.*

If this double declaration is true, it turns the reading of the Psalm into a devout spiritual exercise for each one of us who can rightly adopt the psalmist's language. But can each one of us truthfully say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee"? If I can honestly say, "I love the Lord," then I can give the reason for the love that is in me. It is because he has loved me with an everlasting love, and because he has manifested that love, among many other ways, in hearing "my voice and my supplications."*

2. *Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.*

"Whatever others may do or may not do, I will call upon him as long as I live, and I have a good reason for doing so, 'Because he hath inclined his ear unto me.' He has stooped from his throne in heaven to hearken to my feeble accents. He has bowed himself in his majesty to listen to the appeal of my misery. I was brought down very low in my sorrow, but the Lord brought his ear down as low as my lip: 'He hath inclined his ear unto me;' and because he has done that, therefore my heart is inclined unto him, and I will call upon him as long as I live."

3. *The sorrows of death compassed me,*

"They formed a ring around me, from which I could see no way of escape. I was like a wounded stag that is surrounded by fierce dogs."

3. *And the pains of hell gat hold upon me:*

"The dogs of hell had fixed their cruel teeth in my throat so that it seemed impossible for me to escape from them."

3. *I found trouble and sorrow.*

"When I searched for something better, I only found still more trouble and sorrow. I had enough of them without finding any more; but the more I looked for anything else, the more trouble and sorrow I found." This is a very graphic description of the state of heart in which some of us have been more than once. We have seen no way of escaping from it, and we have been in great distress because we could not discover any way of alleviating our grief:

4. *Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.*

Do you remember, dear friend, when you prayed such a prayer as that,—short, sharp, sincere, pointed, personal, out of the depths of your soul? Then, let your recollection of that prayer have so gracious an influence upon your heart that, in the remembrance of the past mercy, when the Lord heard and answered your supplication, you may find a well of present gratitude.

5. *Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.*

Listen to that blessed little sentence, those of you who are full of sin, and who are therefore afraid that God will cast you away for ever: "Our God is merciful."

6. *The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me.*

There is here, first, a general doctrine; and, then, there is a particular proof and application of it. It is true, in a general sense, that the Lord preserveth the simple-hearted ones who have learned to trust in him; but, in particular, you or I, if saved by his grace, can say, with the psalmist, "I was brought low, and he helped me." There is a little book of medicine,

* See *The New Park Street Pulpit*, No. 240, "Prayer Answered, Love Nourished."

which Mr. John Wesley brought out, and he put to some of the recipes the word "Proved." He had evidently tried the medicine, and proved it to be efficacious in his own case. In a similar fashion, we can often put, in the margin of our Bibles, concerning the Word of the Lord, "Proved." We have tried it, and proved it, and therefore we also can personally say, "The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me."

7. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

Cannot we also, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, speak well of our God to-night? If any of us have been wandering at all from his presence, and so have lost the conscious sense of his love, let us come back to him at once. We cannot be happy anywhere else. God has spoiled you and me, beloved, for the world; so we must be happy in him, for we can never be satisfied anywhere else. Only in our God can our joy be full. Come back then, my soul, come back to thy Lord: "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee."* He is thy true Noah; thou canst find no real rest anywhere else; therefore return unto him even as the dove flew back to the ark with weary wing after wandering over the wild waste of waters.

8. *For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.*

"I have had a trinity of deliverances,—my soul saved from eternal ruin, my eyes delivered from the greatest grief of all, and my life saved from sinful stumbling: 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from failing.'" This testimony is far in advance of that given in Psalm lvi. 13, where David says, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

9. *I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.*

"I will not walk before some great man so as to seek to please him. I will not walk before my fellow-believers so as to be merely looking for their approbation. But 'I will walk before the Lord.'" This is the best way of living, so let it be yours and mine, beloved. Let each of us say, "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living?"

10. *I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted:*

I call your attention again to the repeated use of the letter-word "I." Three times in this one verse we have that little personal pronoun, and I want you each one to take this whole Psalm to yourself so far as it is suited to your case, to make a soliloquy of it while we are reading it: "I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted."

11, 12. *I said in my haste, All men are liars. What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?*

I expect that we have all of us said, in our haste, some things that we had better not have said. They may have been true; yet, for all that, it was a pity that we uttered them. Yet I am glad that the psalmist, although he said, "All men are liars," did not dwell upon that unpleasant truth, but speedily turned from unreliable man to his ever-reliable God. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" If all men are liars, if all earthly comforts fail us, if all human dependences disappoint us, our God will not do so. Let us leave the broken cisterns without even grumbling at them, or having bitter feelings concerning them; and let us turn to God, and let this be the question put by each one of us, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?"

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,758, "Return unto thy Rest."

I suggest, dear friends, that we do each of us personally put this question to ourselves, "What shall I render unto the Lord? What can I do for Jesus? What can I give to God? What is there, at this particular time, that I can devise for the glory of God in order to manifest my love to him?" Peradventure, in this house to-night, there may be the conception—perhaps, the birth—of some high and noble enterprise for God. If this question shall be pressed home upon some ardent spirit here, there may be the first thoughts, in this house of prayer, of some far-reaching ministry which shall be a means of blessing to many lands through all the ages that are yet to come. God grant that it may be so! What shall I, a young man just beginning life, render unto the Lord? What shall I, a man in the full strength of his manhood, render unto the Lord? What shall I—a man far advanced in years, mature and ripe for heaven, and soon to be taken there,—render unto the Lord? Whoever I am, let me make haste to answer the question, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?"*

13, 14. *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.*

There never was a better time than the present, and there never was a better place than this, for some holy resolve concerning consecrated service for the Master.

15. *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*

They are themselves at all times so precious to the Lord that everything about them is very dear in his esteem, and they are never more precious than in their deaths.† We constantly have some of the very choicest of the Lord's saints going home to their Father; and when the Lord takes any of them home to himself, it becomes those of us who are left to try to do all the more for our God. Let some of us be baptized for the dead, let us press forward to fill the gaps in the ranks of the armies of God, and do all that lies in our power to win the victory for his righteous cause.

16. *O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.‡*

Still read this Psalm very personally,—you especially who have had godly mothers. Say, "I am a born slave,—born of one who was thy slave, for I delight to use even such a hard name as that. I am God's servant, born of one of God's servants: 'the son of thine handmaid.'" I like to remember that it was so in my own case, and I can truthfully say to the Lord, "I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid."

"Thou hast loosed my bonds," by making me to feel the bonds of thy grace. There is no liberty like complete subjection to God. The greatest freedom of thought is to think only God's thoughts; and the highest freedom of living is to live according to the rule of holiness in the ways of the Most High.

17—19. *I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. In the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.*

And we do and will praise him at this time, and for ever and ever.

END OF VOLUME LIII.

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 910 (double number), "Overwhelming Obligations."

† See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,036, "Precious Deaths."

‡ See *The New Park Street Pulpit*, No. 382, "Personal Service."