



Thru' the  
**PSalms**  
in one year with  
Spurgeon's Treasury of David

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Isaac Ong

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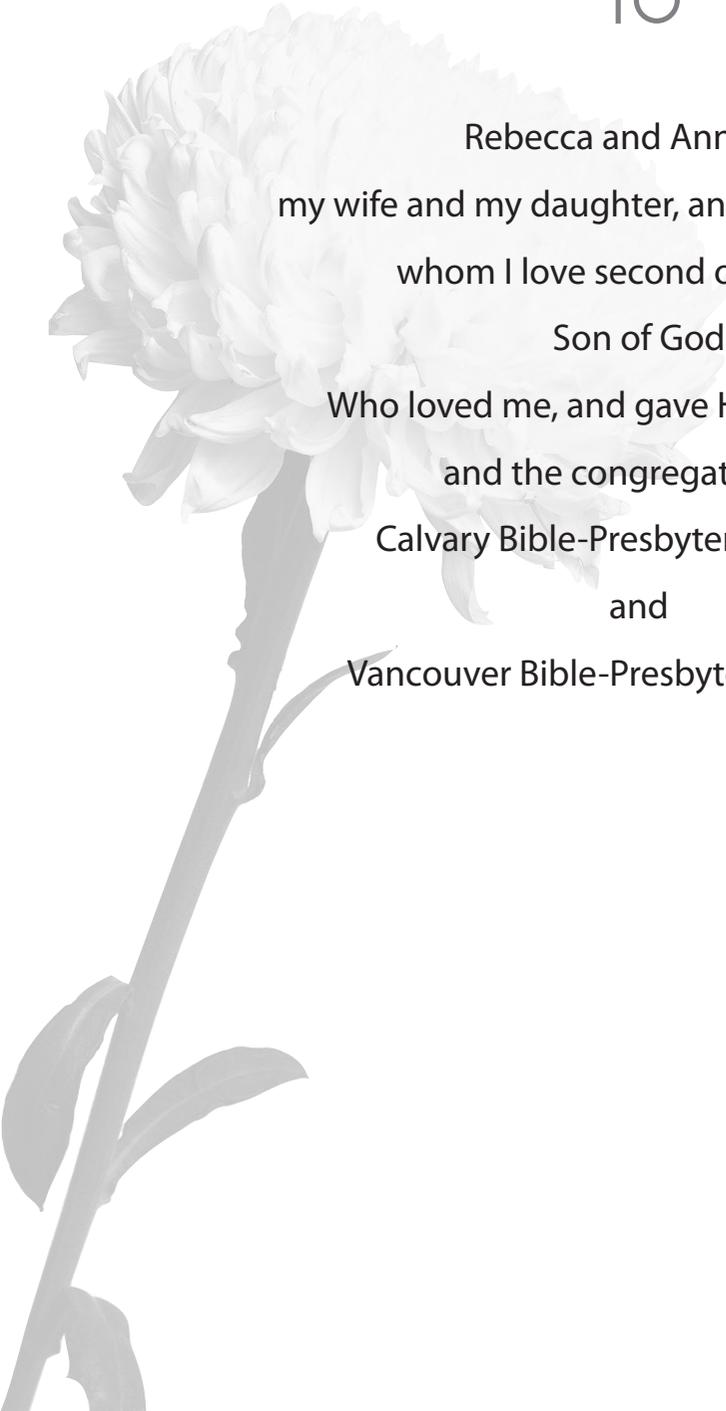
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To

Rebecca and Anna-Joy  
my wife and my daughter, and my best friends,  
whom I love second only to the  
Son of God  
Who loved me, and gave Himself for me;  
and the congregations of  
Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church  
and  
Vancouver Bible-Presbyterian Church.



# Acknowledgements

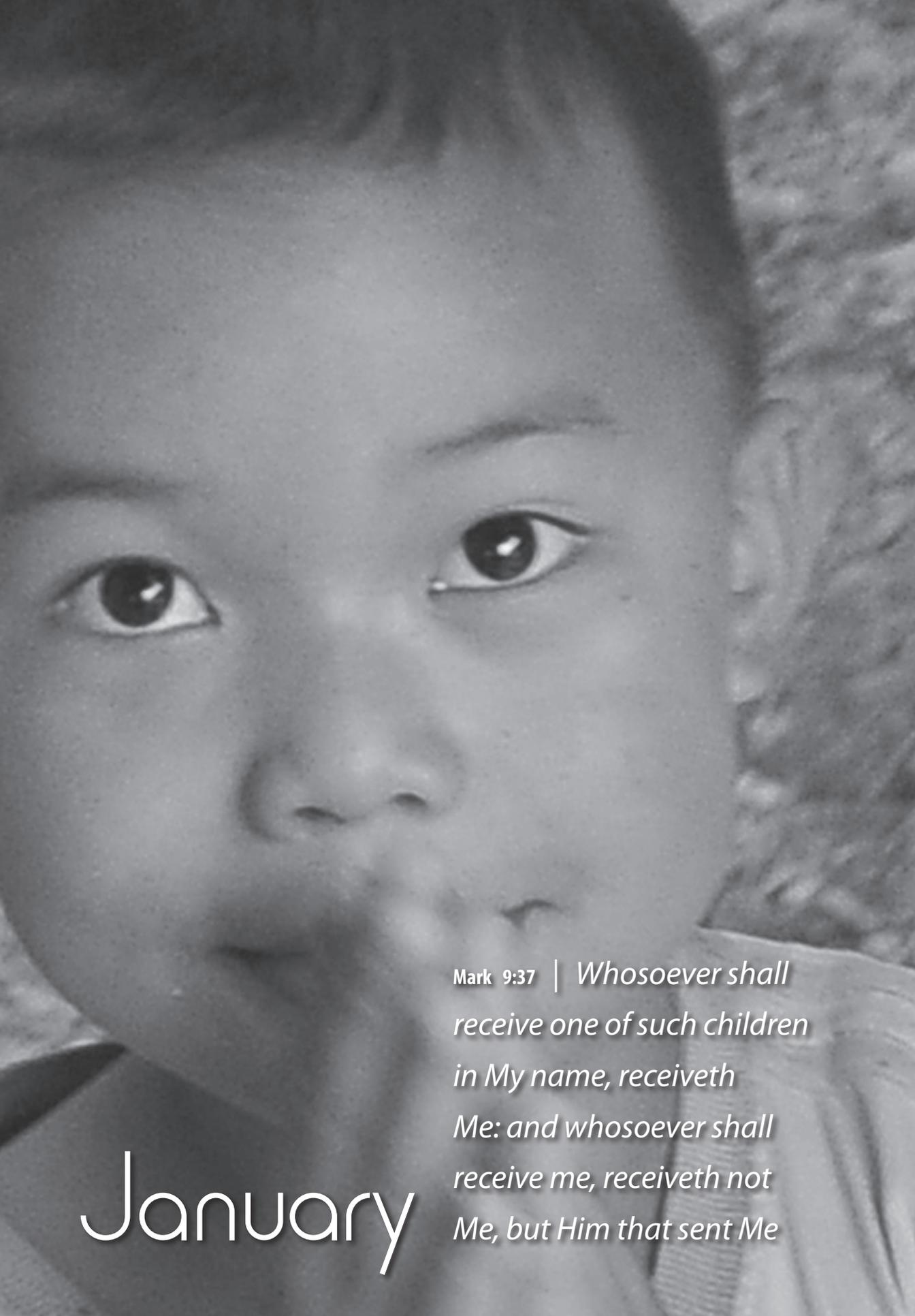
This project first began when I was pastor of Vancouver Bible-Presbyterian Church. Then the LORD laid a burden on my heart to produce a reading guide to encourage the Christians to read the Bible daily. By the grace of God, and with help from my wife, a daily devotional was produced once every two weeks that would cover the 150 Psalms in one year.

I have personally benefitted a great deal from my own reading of Charles Spurgeon's *Treasury of David*, which, in my opinion, is indispensable for anyone who wants to study the Book of Psalms. His insights are like the morning dew that refreshes my soul. I have incorporated Spurgeon's comments in every reading.

In my numerous mission trips over the last few years, I must say that there is no place or people that have warmed my heart more than Thailand and her people. The faces you see in the book are children of Thailand, and the proceeds from this book will go entirely to the Gospel work in North Thailand.

This book would not have been possible without the help of many friends who volunteered their time and talents. Kevyn Lai who designed the cover and book, the team of proofreaders: Dr Bendick Ong, Timothy Loh, Sim Poh Choo, and Grace Tan, and the office staff of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church.

**All glory to God**



Mark 9:37 | *Whosoever shall  
receive one of such children  
in My name, receiveth  
Me: and whosoever shall  
receive me, receiveth not  
Me, but Him that sent Me*

January

***But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. (Psalm 1:2-3)***

The opening psalm contrasts between two men—the godly versus the ungodly. The Bible often presents life's most important choices in the same manner—right or wrong; light or darkness; God or Belial. The way of the godly man is marked by his attitude towards the law of God. Blessed is the man whose “delight is in the law of the LORD” [Ps. 1:2].

A “delight” is something that brings a great deal of satisfaction, gratification and pleasure. CHS: “*His delight is in the law of the LORD!* He is not *under* the law as a curse and condemnation, but he is *in* it, and he delights to be in it as his rule of life; he delights, moreover, to *meditate* in it, to read it *by day*, and think upon it *by night*. He takes a text and carries it with him all day long; and in the night-watches, when sleep forsakes his eyelids, he museth upon the Word of God. In the *day* of his prosperity he sings *psalms* out of the Word of God, and in the *night* of his affliction he comforts himself with *promises* out of the same book.”

But how could one delight in any law? The law demands absolute obedience. In fact, the letter of the law is described as the “*ministration of death*” [2 Cor. 3:7]. It would be easy to delight in God's mercy and love, but the law? Yes, the godly man's delight is in the law of the LORD.

To delight in, and to meditate upon the law of the LORD is to think and ponder about the Word of God. To delight in the law is to delight in the Giver of the law. This is the mark of a man's new birth, of a mind held captive by God, of a heart which beats in rhythm to His will; it is the character trait of a child of God.

The outcome of such a delight is fruitfulness [Ps. 1:3]. The first men to get a flying machine off the ground were the Wright brothers, Orville and Wilbur, in their Wright Flyer in 1903. The plane soared through the skies because the Wright brothers observed the laws of gravity and aerodynamics. Could they have flown the plane if they had ignored these laws? Likewise, the blessedness and fruitfulness of a man's life come from finding delight in his Creator. ■

# 02 Psalm 2:1-6

JANUARY

Vain Imaginations

Jan

***He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. (Psalm 2:4-5)***

When God, through Moses, told Pharaoh to free the Israelites, Pharaoh replied, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go” [Exod. 5:2]. Pharaoh’s defiance is an illustration of man’s hatred against God, a hatred that is both unreasonable and vain.

CHS: “Do you dream that you shall snap to pieces and destroy the mandates of God . . . and do ye say, ‘Let us cast away their cords from us?’ . . . However mad the resolution to revolt from God, it is one in which man has persevered ever since his creation, and he continues in it to this very day. The glorious reign of Jesus in the latter day will not be consummated, until a terrible struggle has convulsed the nations. His coming will be as a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap, and the day thereof shall burn as an oven. Earth loves not her rightful monarch, but clings to the usurper’s sway. The terrible conflicts of the last days will illustrate both the world’s love of sin and Jehovah’s power to give the kingdom to His only Begotten. To a graceless neck the yoke of Christ is intolerable, but to the saved sinner it is easy and light. We may judge ourselves by this, do we love that yoke, or do we wish to cast it from us?”

The LORD laughed in response to man’s vain imaginations. This is the only place in the Bible where God is said to have laughed, but it was a laugh of derision; it was a laugh of displeasure and followed by His judgement [Ps. 2:4-5]. ■

***Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him. (Psalm 2:12)***

No work done for our LORD should be slipshod. No service for Him should be rendered with less than a full heart. Every Christian is to serve the LORD with fear.

CHS: "Let reverence and humility be mingled with your service. He is a great God, and ye are but puny creatures; bend ye, therefore, in lowly worship, and let a filial fear mingle with all your obedience to the great Father of the Ages... There must ever be a holy fear mixed with the Christian's joy... Fear, without joy, is torment; and joy, without holy fear, would be presumption."

As a young boy, Harry Ironside, the famous preacher, apprenticed for a godly shoemaker. The man's shop was a real testimony for Christ in the town. Young Harry's job was to prepare the shoe soles. A piece of cowhide would be cut to measure, and then soaked in water. And Harry was to pound the soles until they were hard and dry. It was a tiresome chore.

In the same town, there was another cobbler, but he never pounded the soles. The man would take the soles, damp as they were and nailed them on. Curious, Harry approached the man, "I notice you put the soles on while still wet. Are they just as good as if they were pounded?"

The man gave a sly snigger and said, "They come back all the quicker this way, my boy!"

Thinking that this "trick" would help his boss, Harry suggested that he should do the same thing. The old man turned to Harry and said, "I do not cobble shoes just for a living. I am doing this for the glory of God. When I meet my Saviour, I do not want Him to say to me, 'You did not do your best with this pair.' I want Him to be able to say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'" ■

***I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about. (Psalm 3:6)***

One of the lowest points in David's life was when he had to flee from Absalom, his own son. Ironically, it was at this depth of despair that he found the LORD's peaceful presence. David was able to sleep when surrounded by his enemies because God was with him.

CHS: "David's faith enabled him to *lie down*; anxiety would certainly have kept him on tiptoe, watching for an enemy...but he, though exposed to many enemies, reclined his head on the bosom of his God, slept happily beneath the wing of Providence in sweet security, and then awoke in safety."

David's deliverance came from no other but God. Salvation belongeth to the LORD. CHS: "Salvation from first to last, in every iota of it, belongs to the Most High God. It is God that chooses His people. *He* calls them by His grace; *He* quickens them by His Spirit, and keeps them by His power."

It is not who you are that saves you—it is Christ.

It is not what you can do that saves you—it is Christ.

It is not even what you can do for Christ that saves you—it is Christ.

It is not your hold on Christ that saves you—it is Christ.

It is not even your faith that saves you.

Though faith is the instrument, it is in Christ's blood and merit that salvation is proffered. ■

***But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for Himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto Him. (Psalm 4:3)***

The third and fourth psalms carry the same theme—God’s deliverance for His people. David was in distress. His enemies [sons of men] were seeking after his life. But David called out to the LORD, knowing God would protect those whom He had chosen.

CHS: “Election is a...glorious and well-attested truth, and one which should comfort the tempted believer. Election is the guarantee of complete salvation, and an argument for success at the throne of grace. He who chose us for Himself will surely hear our prayer. The LORD’s elect shall not be condemned, nor shall their cry be unheard...when you are on your knees, the fact of your being *set apart* as God’s own peculiar treasure, should give you courage and inspire you with fervency and faith...Since He chose to love us He cannot but chose to hear us.”

John G. Paton was a missionary to the New Hebrides in the South Pacific. One day, he found himself surrounded by armed natives. Listen to the story in Paton’s own words: “I then lifted my hands and eyes to the heavens, and prayed aloud for Jesus to bless all my dear Tannese [the natives], and either to protect me or to take me home to glory, as He saw to be for the best. One after another they slipped away from me, and Jesus restrained them once again. Has ever a mother run more quickly to protect her crying child in danger’s hour than the Lord Jesus hasten to answer believing prayer, and to send help to His servants in His own good time and way.” ■

***Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. (Psalm 5:1)***

It matters not how we pray—aloud or silently—but that we pray. There will be times when we do not know how to craft the words, but are left with only the voices of our cries; but God hears us still.

CHS: “Words are not the essence but the garments of prayer...the use of language may prevent distraction of mind, may assist the powers of the soul, and may excite devotion...there may be prevailing intercession where there are no words; and alas! there may be words where there is no true supplication. Let us cultivate the *spirit* of prayer which is even better than the *habit* of prayer. There may be seeming prayer where there is little devotion. We should begin to pray before we kneel down, and we should not cease when we rise up.”

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire; uttered, or expressed —  
 The motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast.  
 Prayer is the burden of a sigh, the falling of a tear —  
 The upward glancing of an eye, when none but God is near.  
 Prayer is the simplest form of speech that infants' lips can try.  
 Prayer the sublimest strains that reach the Majesty on high.  
 Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice returning from his ways,  
 While angels in their songs rejoice, and cry, "Behold, he prays!"  
 Prayer is the Christian's vital breath — the Christian's native air.  
 His watchword at the gates of death, he enters heaven with prayer.  
 The saints in prayer appear as one in word, and deed, and mind,  
 While with the Father and the Son sweet fellowship they find.  
 No prayer is made by man alone; the Holy Spirit pleads;  
 And Jesus, on the eternal throne, for sinners intercedes.  
 O Thou by whom we come to God – the life, the truth, the way!  
 The path of prayer Thyself hast trod; Lord, teach us how to pray!  
 [James Montgomery] ■

***But let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because Thou defendest them: let them also that love Thy name be joyful in Thee. For Thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt Thou compass him as with a shield. (Psalm 5:11-12)***

David had been on the run from his enemies, but he ended the fifth psalm on a joyous note. He turned to God Who was his defender and find joy in his Saviour.

CHS: "Joy is the privilege of the believer...This holy bliss of ours has a firm foundation, for O LORD, we are *joyful in Thee*. The eternal God is the well-spring of our bliss. We love God, and therefore we delight in Him. Our heart is at ease in our God. We fare sumptuously every day because we feed on Him. We have music in the house, music in the heart, and music in heaven, for the LORD Jehovah is our strength and our song; He also is become our salvation...Jehovah has ordained His people the heirs of blessedness, and nothing shall rob them of their inheritance. With all the fullness of His power He will bless them, and all His attributes shall unite to satiate them with divine contentment."

*I looked at the road ahead, and I said, "It's too hard and I am weak."*

*Jesus whispered in my ear, "Take my hand, and I will be your strength."*

*I looked at the treacherous narrow path, and I said, "It's too dangerous."*

*Jesus turned to me and said, "Trust Me, I will guard your steps."*

*I looked at the sky; the day was fading, and I said, "It's getting dark."*

*Jesus held my hand tighter; He said, "I am the light of the world."*

The journey was long; the road was rough; and the light was fading. And when finally I said, "Lord, I can go no farther."

Jesus held me close and whispered, "Look, it is the never ending morn."

*"Yea," said I, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." ■*

***My soul is also sore vexed: but Thou, O LORD, how long? Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for Thy mercies' sake. (Psalm 6:3-4)***

This is the first of the penitential psalms which expresses the sinner's sorrow for his sins. In this psalm, David was overwhelmed by his sense of guilt before God [vv. 1-3], and he was overcome by the loss of God's presence [v. 4]. Because of his sins, the LORD had departed from David. A separation no doubt made more intense because David was a man after God's own heart, so he cried, "O LORD, how long?"

Although David was intensely aware of God's displeasure, he was also conscious of God's loving-kindness—"Oh save me for Thy mercy's sake." That is the sinner's only recourse. Note the number of times the name of Jehovah was invoked in the first five verses. God is ever ready to forgive. He delights in mercy. Upon this blessed truth, David pleaded for the LORD to return.

CHS: "The coming of Christ into the soul in His priestly robes of grace is the grand hope of the penitent soul...Christ's appearance is, and ever has been, the hope of the saints...As God's absence was the main cause of his misery, so His return would be enough to deliver him from his trouble...He knows where to look, and what arm to lay hold upon. He does not lay hold on God's left hand of justice, but on His right hand of mercy. He knew his iniquity too well to think of merit, or appeal to anything but the grace of God...What a plea that is! How prevalent it is with God! If we turn to justice, what plea can we urge? But if we turn to mercy we may still cry, notwithstanding the greatness of our guilt, 'Save me for Thy mercies' sake.'" ■

***Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer. (Psalm 6:8-9)***

David was in great sorrow. "I water my couch with my tears. Mine eye is consumed because of grief..." [vv. 6-7]. But his cries became his prayers. Every tear he shed became a river of grace. Every groan he made ascended to the LORD as prayers.

David was sure of one thing—God would not leave him or forsake him. David expressed that confidence three times within two verses—"The LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer" [vv. 8-9].

CHS: "Is there a voice in weeping? Does weeping speak? In what language doth it utter its meaning? Why, in that universal tongue which is known and understood in all the earth, and even in heaven above...Weeping is the eloquence of sorrow. It is an unstammering orator, needing no interpreter, but understood of all. Is it not sweet to believe that our tears are understood even when words fail! Let us learn to think of tears as liquid prayers, and of weeping as a constant dropping of importunate intercession which will wear its way right surely into the very heart of mercy, despite the stony difficulties which obstruct the way. My God, I will 'weep' when I cannot plead, for Thou hearest the voice of my weeping."

David prayed and he was content to leave the matter in the hands of God. As is often the case, our prayers are accompanied by our ideas about how God should answer them. We expect God to work all things according to our plans. We expect our problems to fade away. However, we must recognize that it is for God's perfect plan and our own good that things do not turn out the way we think they should.

We have to learn to trust that it is good enough that the LORD has heard and will receive our prayers. What is required of us is the faith to commit our ways to Him, and trust that He who hears our cries knows our circumstances, and that He will give grace according to our needs. ■

# 10 Psalm 7:1-9

JANUARY

Judge Me

Jan

***O LORD my God, in Thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me...The LORD shall judge the people: judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me. (Psalm 7:1, 8)***

Cush the Benjamite had slandered David's good name. Perhaps by accusing David of some treasonable plot against King Saul, he had brought some serious charges against David [vv. 3-4]—slanderous words hurt as much as the cuts from a sword.

CHS: "Slander leaves a slur, even if it be wholly disproved. Common fame, although notoriously a common liar, has very many believers. Once let an ill word get into men's mouths, and it is not easy to get it fully out again... Good repute is like the cypress, once cut, it never puts forth leaf again...it is a meanness most detestable to stab a good man in his reputation, but diabolical hatred observes no nobility in its mode of warfare."

Was David perfect? By no means; but in this instance, he was innocent of the crime of which he was charged. Knowing that God is omniscient, David pleaded his case before the heavenly tribunal. Only a man who is sure of his innocence would make such a petition—"Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me."

How deep must be the divine knowledge of the LORD Who tries the hearts of man. How intimate must be the search of the LORD Who sees our secret thoughts and inward affections. How transparent are we before the LORD with Whom "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do"? Keep your life straight so that you would not have to bend your words to defend yourself. With an upright heart, there is no need for superfluous words when a simple prayer to God would suffice. ■

***He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate. (Psalm 7:15-16)***

David brought his personal injuries before the LORD. He pleaded for God's righteousness and justice. God would not turn a blind eye to sin; His holy character would not allow wickedness to go unpunished.

CHS: "Crooked sinners, with all their craftiness, are foiled by the upright in heart. God defends the right. Filth will not long abide on the pure white garments of the saints, but shall be brushed off by divine providence, to the vexation of the men by whose base hands it was thrown upon the godly. When God shall try our cause, our sun has risen, and the sun of the wicked is set for ever. Truth, like oil, is ever above, no power of our enemies can drown it; we shall refute their slanders in the day when the trumpet wakes the dead, and we shall shine in honour when lying lips are put to silence. O believer, fear not all that thy foes can do or say against thee, for the tree which God plants no winds can hurt."

We do not know if David received the justice that he was seeking. From the context of the psalm, it seems likely that at the time of its writing, David's grievances had not been addressed. Nevertheless, David ended the psalm on a high note of exultation: "I will praise the LORD according to His righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the LORD most high" [v. 17]. Cry for justice? Surely we must; but we must continue to live righteously no matter what. It is better for Christians to suffer injustice and maintain our testimony than to join the ranks of the unrighteous and commit the very acts from which we had asked God for deliverance. ■

***When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him? (Psalm 8:3-4)***

One of man's greatest problems is his lack of perspective of himself. The sinner is egocentric. He puts himself at the centre of the universe and thinks that everything else revolves around him. He made God smaller and made himself bigger. David sets the matter right by contrasting the works of God—the planets and stars rest upon His fingers. What about man's work?

Louis XIV of France died after a reign of 72 years. He called himself "the Great". He also proudly declared, "*L'État, c'est moi*" [I am the state]. To dramatise his "greatness", orders were given that the lights of the cathedral be put out except for a special candle set above his golden coffin. But as Bishop Massillon rose to speak, he snuffed out the candle and said, "Only God is great."

CHS: "Pride is one of the distinguishing characteristics of puny man...he is but as a grain of sand to the whole earth, when compared to the countless myriads of beings that people the amplitudes of creation...What, then, is a kingdom, a province...of which we are as proud as if we were the lords of the universe...Oh, the folly of deceived men, to imagine great kingdoms in the compass of an atom, to raise armies to decide a point of earth with the sword!"

Only the name of our LORD is excellent in all the earth. Order is restored, sanity is reestablished when we begin to appreciate the infinite greatness of God and the infinitesimal smallness of our own humanity. Pride gives way to humble adoration when we consider that the LORD has crowned us with glory and honour. ■

***I will praise Thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all Thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in Thee: I will sing praise to Thy name, O Thou most High. (Psalm 9:1-2)***

**H**ow glad and complete were David's praises of God. David's joyful enjoyment of God sets him apart from the reluctant worshipper whose lips may mouth the words, but whose praises of the LORD come with less than a full heart.

CHS: "It is our duty to praise the LORD; let us perform it as a privilege... Praise is to be offered to God alone... There is true praise in the thankful telling forth to others of our heavenly Father's dealings with us; this is one of the themes upon which the godly should speak often to one another, and it will not be casting pearls before swine if we make even the ungodly hear of the loving-kindness of the LORD to us... Daily rejoicing is an ornament to the Christian character, and a suitable robe for God's choristers to wear. God loveth a *cheerful* giver, whether it be the gold of his purse or the gold of his mouth which he presents upon his altar... Songs are the fitting expression of inward thankfulness, and it were well if we indulged ourselves and honoured our LORD with more of them."

David praised the LORD for His deliverance. But his greatest joy was the LORD Himself. David said, "I rejoice in Thee." John Wesley was blessed with a sharp mind, but in his early days, that was his source of pride. One night, Wesley met a man whose only possession was an old worn-out coat. But this man was unusually happy. "And what else do you thank God for?" Wesley said to the man with a touch of sarcasm. Smilingly, the man replied, "I thank Jesus that He has given me my life and being, a heart to love Him, and above all a constant desire to serve Him!" Wesley saw in this man the meaning of true thankfulness and whole-hearted praise.

Many years later, as John Wesley lay on his deathbed, he began to sing a hymn written by Isaac Watts:

*I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,  
And when my voice is lost in death,  
Praise shall employ my nobler power;  
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,  
While life, and thought, and being last,  
Or immortality endures. ■*

***The LORD also will be a Refuge for the oppressed, a Refuge in times of trouble. And they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee: for Thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee. (Psalm 9:9-10)***

David's early experiences in the court of Saul were not happy ones. David was forced to flee Saul's murderous rages. In those days of persecution, David learnt the blessed truth that the LORD was "a Refuge for the oppressed, a Refuge in times of trouble." David trusted the LORD because he knew Him.

CHS: "Ignorance is worst when it amounts to ignorance of God, and knowledge is best when it exercises itself upon *the name* of God. This most excellent knowledge leads to the most excellent grace of faith...By knowing His name is also meant an experimental acquaintance with the attributes of God, which everyone of them anchors to hold the soul from drifting in seasons of peril. The LORD may hide His face for a season from His people, but He never has utterly, finally, really, or angrily, *forsaken them that seek Him*. Let the poor seekers draw comfort from this fact, and let the finders rejoice yet more exceedingly, for what must be the LORD's faithfulness to those who find if He is so gracious to those who seek."

This step of faith is not an easy one. Our feeble faith prompts us to ask, "What if God is not here to help?" After a time of training to hunt, scout and fish, an American native boy was given a final test to prove his adulthood. In the middle of the night, the boy was blindfolded and taken several miles deep into the forest—he was to spend the night there alone. This was the first time he was away from the safety of his loved ones. Every sound in the woods terrified him. The night seemed to stretch into eternity. But as the first rays of light peeked through the trees, he knew that he was not too far from home. Better than that, he saw the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow. It was his father. He had been there all night long. Likewise, our Heavenly Father will never forsake those who trust in Him. ■

***The LORD is known by the judgement which He executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands...Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in Thy sight. Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. (Psalm 9:16, 19-20)***

David was powerless against the slanders and attacks of his enemies. Man is full of deception, but God is truth. Man is full of malice, but God is mercy. Our God is known by what He does. In His dealings with the ungodly, He is always just. He would not give them what they do not deserve. With the righteous, He is always merciful. He would dispense His grace and blessing.

CHS: "So long as our God is God, He will not, He cannot spare the guilty; except through that one glorious way in which He is just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. We must notice, secondly, that the manner of His judgment is singularly wise, and indisputably just. He makes the wicked become their own executioners. 'The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made...' Like cunning hunters they prepared a pitfall for the godly and fell into it themselves: the foot of the victim escaped their crafty snares, but the toils surrounded themselves: the cruel snare was laboriously manufactured, and it proved its efficacy by snaring its own maker. Persecutors and oppressors are often ruined by their own malicious projects... Thus, men may reap their sin in their punishment. They sowed the seed of sin, and the ripe fruit of damnation is the natural result."

David's prayer ends with the confidence in God's victory. He prays that the LORD would prevail; not man—not even David himself. The righteous rejoices in the exaltation of the LORD's name, and the proclamation of His truth—the LORD must arise and prevail. The ensuing blessing to man, if it should come, is merely a happy consequence. ■

***Why standest Thou afar off, O LORD? Why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble? (Psalm 10:1)***

The Psalmist's questions seem to imply that God is a fair-weather friend; that He is the heavenly spectator too far removed from our troubles and afflictions. "Does Jesus care?" the hymn writer asked. The glorious answer can be found in the refrain: "Oh yes, He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief. When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares."

CHS: "The presence of God is the joy of His people, but any suspicion of His absence is distracting beyond measure. Let us, then, ever remember that the LORD is nigh us. The refiner is never far from the mouth of the furnace when his gold is in the fire, and the Son of God is always walking in the midst of the flames when his holy children are cast into them... If we need an answer to the question, 'Why hidest Thou Thyself?' it is to be found in the fact that there is a 'needs be' not only for trial, but for heaviness of heart under trial... God bares the back that the blow may be felt; for it is only *felt* affliction which can become *blest* affliction. If we are carried in the arms of God over every stream, where would be the trial, and where the experience, which trouble is meant to teach us?"

On the day before Joseph Scriven's wedding, his fiancée drowned. Heart-broken, Scriven could find no solace anywhere except in his dearest friend, the Lord Jesus Christ. The tragedy also changed his life. Scriven devoted his life to the mission work in Port Hope, Ontario. Because of his selfless sacrifice, Scriven became known as "Good Samaritan of Port Hope". When Scriven heard that his mother was seriously ill, he wrote to encourage her, and in his letter, he enclosed his newly-composed poem:

*What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.*

What a Friend we have in Jesus indeed. ■

***Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up Thine hand: forget not the humble.  
(Psalm 10:12)***

The “humble” also refers to those who are destitute, downtrodden and despised. However, the bitter pill of affliction is sweetened by the promise that the LORD retains them in His mind. And His thoughts toward the righteous are always thoughts of peace.

CHS: “With what bold language will faith address its God! and yet what unbelief is mingled with our strongest confidence. Fearlessly the LORD is stirred up to arise and lift up His hand, yet timidly He is begged not to forget the humble; as if Jehovah could ever be forgetful of His saints. This verse [v. 12] is the incessant cry of the Church, and she will never refrain therefrom until her Lord shall come in His glory to avenge her of all her adversaries...God is all eye to see, and all hand to punish his enemies...Wanton mischief shall meet with woeful misery, and those who harbour spite shall inherit sorrow...God is the parent of all orphans. When the earthly father sleeps beneath the sod, a heavenly Father smiles from above. By some means or other, orphan children are fed, and well they may when they have such a Father.”

*When my strength is sapped, and the burdens grow heavy*

*—remember: the LORD forget thee not.*

*When streams of gladness have run dry, and treasures lose their shine*

*—remember: the LORD forget thee not.*

*When the world presses in, and “friends” bid an early retreat*

*—remember: the LORD forget thee not.*

*When loved ones bid farewell, and solitude loses its joy*

*—remember: the LORD forget thee not.*

Life, and all that comes with it, is uncertain. However, if we know Christ as our Saviour, we know that He forgets us not. ■

# 18 Psalm 10:16-18

JANUARY

A Heart Prepared by the LORD

Jan

***LORD, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble: Thou wilt prepare their heart, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to hear. (Psalm 10:17)***

The Psalmist had his hands full. He was sinking in distress from the devices of the wicked, the proud, the deceitful, the vain, the oppressor and the godless. Yet his heart was filled with the confidence that “the LORD is King forever”.

CHS: The LORD “has granted the desire of His humble and oppressed people, has defended the fatherless, and punished the heathen who trampled upon His poor and afflicted children. Let us learn that we are sure to speed well, if we carry our complaint to the King of kings. Rights will be vindicated, and wrongs redressed, at His throne. His government neglects not the interests of the needy, nor does it tolerate oppression in the mighty. Great God, we leave ourselves in Thine hand; to Thee we commit Thy church afresh. Arise, O God, and let the man of the earth—the creature of a day—be broken before the majesty of Thy power. Come, Lord Jesus, and glorify Thy people. Amen and Amen.”

Adam Clarke [1762-1832] once pointed out the wonderful “economy of the grace of God: God prepares the heart; [then He] suggests the prayer; [then He] hears what is prayed; and [finally, He] answers the petition.” What a comfort to know that the humble never prays in vain because God prepares the heart of the righteous to pray, and then He hears the prayer. What a blessed assurance to know that while the wicked seeks to sow the seeds of doubt, God has promised that our prayers will never be choked. O, if we would only pray! ■

***If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?  
(Psalm 11:3)***

**A**t the first sign of danger, the advice from David's friends was to flee. However, in David's case, to run from danger is a flight from the refuge of God. Where can one find more security than in the arms of God?

CHS: "When Satan cannot overthrow us by presumption, how craftily will he seek to ruin us by distrust! He will employ our dearest friends to argue us out of our confidence, and he will use such plausible logic, that unless we once for all assert our immovable trust in Jehovah, he will make us like the timid bird which flies to the mountain whenever danger presents itself... Doubtless the perils which encompassed David were great and imminent; it was quite true that his enemies were *ready to shoot privily* at him...but what were all these things to the man whose trust was in God alone? He could brave the dangers, could escape the enemies, and defy the injustice which surrounded him. His answer to the question, 'What can the righteous do?' would be the counter-question, 'What cannot they do?' When prayer engages God on our side, and when faith secures the fulfillment of the promise, what cause can there be for flight, however cruel and mighty our enemies?... There is no such word as 'impossibility' in the language of faith; that martial grace knows how to fight and conquer, but she knows not how to flee."

What can we do against the tide of anti-Christianity? What should the righteous do when Bible-truths are ridiculed, when traditional values are derided, when God's laws are undermined? Answer: continue to be righteous. The worst thing we can do is capitulate and flee to the mountains. ■

***The LORD is in His holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven: His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men. (Psalm 11:4)***

**"F**lee as a bird to the mountains!" To flee is an act of distrust. To flee to the mountains is a decision of unthinking desperation. The mountains are a poor second choice when the Creator of the mountains keeps a watchful eye on His beloved. So David looked to the Holy Temple instead.

CHS: "The heavens are above our heads in all regions of the earth, and so is the LORD ever near to us in every state and condition. This is a very strong reason why we should not adopt the vile suggestions of distrust. There is one who pleads His precious blood in our behalf in the temple above, and there is one upon the throne who is never deaf to the intercession of His Son. Why, then, should we fear?...Satan has doubtless desired to have us, that he may sift us as wheat, but Jesus is in the temple praying for us, and how can our faith fail? What attempts can the wicked make which Jehovah shall not behold?... The eternal Watcher never slumbers; His eyes never know a sleep...God sees each man as much and as perfectly as if there were no other creature in the universe. He sees us always...I may rest assured that He will not suffer me to perish while I rely alone on Him."

The well-known hymn, "His Eye is on the Sparrow," was penned by Civilla Martin after she met the Doolittles in the spring of 1905. Mrs. Doolittle had been bedridden for some 20 years. Mr. Doolittle himself was a paraplegic. But their joy in Christ was evident in their lives. When asked about the secret of their joy, Mrs. Doolittle replied, "If His eye is on the sparrow, then I know He watches me." ■

***Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. (Psalm 12:1)***

**"Help, LORD!"** This is the simplest and shortest prayer. This is a S.O.S. cry unto our Saviour. Personally, this is my most uttered prayer. Prayers need not be long. Our Lord Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for shrouding their false pretences with long prayer [Matt. 23:14]. Prayers need not be eloquent. We do not need to "talk better" to be heard by God. But prayers need to be offered up in faith. "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" [Matt. 21:22].

CHS: "A short but sweet, suggestive, seasonable, and serviceable prayer; a kind of angel's sword, to be turned every way, and to be used on all occasions... 'Help, LORD,' is a very useful ejaculation which we may dart up to heaven on occasions of emergency, whether in labour, learning, suffering, fighting, living, or dying. As small ships can sail into harbours which larger vessels, drawing more water, cannot enter, so our brief cries and short petitions may trade with heaven when our soul is wind-bound, and business-bound, as to longer exercises of devotion, and when the stream of grace seems at too low an ebb to float a more laborious supplication."

We can ask God for any need. Moses asked for mercy. Elijah asked for rain. David asked for deliverance. Solomon asked for wisdom. Hezekiah asked for extension of life. Rachel asked for a son, as did Hannah. Bartimaeus asked for sight. The adulterous woman asked for forgiveness. The centurion asked for healing. Paul asked for grace. The thief on the cross asked to be remembered. We can ask God in any way. Solomon prayed long at the dedication of the Temple. Peter prayed short but loud, "LORD, save me!" Hannah prayed in silence. Mary Magdalene prayed in tears. Paul and Silas prayed with singing. Samuel prayed as a boy. Simeon continued to pray until he saw the LORD's salvation. Beloved, prayer is but a simple cry in faith. ■

# 22 Psalm 12:5-8

JANUARY

Preservation of the LORD

Jan

***Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, Thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. (Psalm 12:7)***

The words of God are as true and pure as refined silver. "For all the promises of God in Him [Christ] are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" [2 Cor. 1:20]. The Word of God has been tried and found flawless. Its veracity is the basis for our faith. Its trustworthiness is our comfort in affliction. Its authority is the power behind our preaching.

CHS: "To fall into the hands of an evil generation, so as to be baited by their cruelty, or polluted by their influence, is an evil to be dreaded beyond measure; but it is an evil foreseen and provided for in the text. In life many a saint has lived a hundred years before his age, as though he had darted his soul into the brighter future, and escaped the mists of the beclouded present: he has gone to his grave unreverenced and misunderstood, and lo! as generations come and go, upon a sudden the hero is unearthed, and lives in the admiration and love of the excellent of the earth; preserved for ever from the generation which stigmatised him as a sower of sedition, or burned him as a heretic. It should be our daily prayer that we may rise above our age as the mountain-tops above the clouds, and may stand out as heaven-pointing pinnacle high above the mists of ignorance and sin which roll around us."

David began with this prayer: "Help, LORD!" He asked for deliverance and God's answer to him was: "Thou shalt keep them, O LORD!" Why did God answer David's prayer? It is certainly not because of any intrinsic goodness in David. God answered because He had promised. Thus saith the LORD, and it stood for eternity. ■

***But I have trusted in Thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation. (Psalm 13:5)***

**H**ow long, LORD?" David asked this question four times. This repeated cry was a sign of his utter despair. David felt that his troubles would never end, and He saw no hand of deliverance from God. "Has God forgotten about me? Has the Almighty turned His face away?" David's circumstances seemed to have clouded his mind and shaken his faith. Can the omniscient God forget? Would the loving God abandon His own?

David had a brief respite from his distress to catch a glimpse of the LORD. What a change that made! CHS: "Lo, the rain is over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds is come. The mercy-seat has so refreshed the poor weeper, that he clears his throat for a song...He is sure of his faith, and his faith makes him sure; had he doubted the reality of his trust in God, he would have blocked up one of the windows through which the sun of heaven delights to shine. Faith is now in exercise, and consequently is readily discovered; there is never a doubt in our heart about the existence of faith while it is in action...All the powers of his enemies had not driven the Psalmist from his stronghold. As the shipwrecked mariner clings to the mast, so did David cling to his faith; he neither could nor would give up his confidence in the LORD his God. O that we may profit by his example, and hold by our faith as by our very life!"

Did David's circumstances change? Unlikely. There is, however, one definite change—his countenance. He looked to the LORD and rejoiced in His salvation. The LORD had "dealt bountifully" with David. God did not forget David. Neither will He forget you. ■

***The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. (Psalm 14:1)***

If a man is convinced that there is no God when there actually is one, he is mistaken, and seriously so. But the “fool” of Psalm 14 is not merely mistaken; neither is he deficient in intelligence. The fool here knows there is a God but chooses to believe and behave as if there is none. This is the reason for his moral bankruptcy [vv. 1-3].

CHS: “If the affections were set upon truth and righteousness, the understanding would have no difficulty in settling the question of a present personal Deity, but as the heart dislikes the good and the right, it is no wonder that it desires to be rid of that Elohim, who is the great moral Governor, the Patron of rectitude and the Punisher of iniquity. While men’s hearts remain what they are, we must not be surprised at the prevalence of skepticism; a corrupt tree will bring forth corrupt fruit...The spread of mere intellectual enlightenment will not diminish their number, for since it is an affair of the heart...Let the preacher aim at the heart, and preach the all-conquering love of Jesus, and he will by God’s grace win more doubters to the faith of the gospel than any hundreds of the best reasoners who only direct their arguments to the head.”

Can Christians be fools? Certainly! When Christians are hearers of the Word and not doers, they behave just like fools. Cyril of Alexandria, an early Church father, described some Christians as sun worshippers. They behaved as followers of Christ when the light was shining, when their deeds could be seen; but when the nights came or behind closed doors, they became atheists and lived as they desired. ■

***LORD, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. (Psalm 15:1-2)***

**W**ho is able to dwell in the presence of the thrice holy God? To this question, the Psalmist gives the criteria: one with upright character, honest speech, honourable conduct, godly values, irreproachable integrity and compassionate liberality.

Does that mean a man who has all of the above can go to heaven without the saving grace of Christ? No! CHS: "On the grounds of law no mere man can dwell with God, for there is not one upon earth who answers to the just requirements...Without the wedding-dress of righteousness in Christ Jesus, we have no right to sit at the banquet of communion."

A man is saved by grace. But a saved man must also be seen by his graces. The Psalmist is merely describing the fruits of the man made righteous by Christ Jesus. Such a man is like a superstructure of truth and faith built upon the hidden foundation of our Lord Jesus. The belief is proved by the behaviour; the creed by the conduct; the talk by the walk.

CHS: "Walking is of far more importance than talking. He only is right who is *upright* in walk and *downright* in honesty...His faith shows itself by good works, and therefore is no dead faith. God's house is a hive for workers, not a nest for drones. Those that rejoice that everything is done for them by another, even the Lord Jesus, and therefore hate legality, are the best doers in the world upon gospel principles. If we are not positively serving the Lord, and doing His holy will to the best of our power, we may seriously debate our interest in divine things, for trees which bear no fruit must be hewn down and cast into the fire." ■

***The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot. (Psalm 16:5)***

This psalm is a *michtam* of David. Some take “*michtam*” to mean “engraving”, as if the Psalm was inscribed on a pillar. Others say that it means “gold”. Whatever the meaning, there is no debate that this psalm carries a precious and central truth of the Christian faith — the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This might be the reason why it was quoted by the apostles Peter and Paul [Acts 2:25-31; 13:35-37].

The Psalmist uses three names of God: Firstly, “God” [*EI*], which means the Mighty One; and He Who is our Refuge; secondly, “LORD” [*Jehovah*] which means “I AM THAT I AM”. This is God’s covenant name for His chosen people; and lastly, “Lord” [*Adonai*], and by this name, the Psalmist confesses that God is his Master. By these names, the Psalmist expresses his complete submission to, and security in, God.

CHS: “Content beyond measure with his portion in the LORD his God, he had not a single desire with which to hunt after other gods; his cup was full, and his heart was full too; even in his sorest sorrows he still laid hold with both his hands upon his Father, crying, ‘My God, my God;’...We, too, can make our boast in the LORD; He is the meat and the drink of our souls. He is our portion, supplying all our necessities, and our cup yielding royal luxuries; our cup in this life, and our inheritance in the life to come. As children of the Father Who is in heaven, we inherit, by virtue of our joint heirship with Jesus, all the riches of the covenant of grace; and the portion which falls to us sets upon our table the bread of heaven and the new wine of the kingdom. Who would not be satisfied with such dainty diet? Our shallow cup of sorrow we may well drain with resignation, since the deep cup of love stands side by side with it, and will never be empty.” ■

***Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. (Psalm 16:11)***

Verse 10 is a prophecy on the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. We know its accuracy because we live after this historical fact. But consider David. What faith he had in God, when seeing all men around him dying, he still expressed the same hope of resurrection and the abundant joy in God's presence.

CHS: "To bring His chosen to eternal happiness was the high ambition which inspired Him, and made Him wade through a sea of blood...For *quality* there is in heaven joy and pleasures; for *quantity*, a fullness, a torrent whereat they drink without let or loathing; for *constancy*, it is at God's right hand, Who is stronger than all, neither can any take us out of His hand; it is a constant happiness without intermission: and for *perpetuity* it is for evermore. Heaven's joys are without measure, mixture, or end."

Where is joy found? Joy is certainly not found in rejecting Jesus. Neither is joy found in wealth or pleasures. Solomon can attest to that. Although he had it all, he had concluded that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

Where then can we find real joy? In Christ alone — in His presence is fullness of joy. Sadly, many Christians think of this as in the future, and they lug through this life joylessly. The reason being, they have not known Christ as they should. Billy Sunday, the famous baseball-player-turned-evangelist once preached that "the trouble with many men is that they have got just enough religion to make them miserable. If there is no joy in religion, you have got a leak in your religion." ■

***Thou hast proved mine heart; Thou hast visited me in the night; Thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. (Psalm 17:3)***

This is the prayer of a righteous man, whose lips are without deceit, whose life is open, and whose heart God knows through and through. The test of a man's true character is what he does when he is alone [or thinks he is].

CHS: It is as if the Psalmist had said, "LORD, Thou hast entered my house at all hours; and Thou hast seen me when no one else was nigh; Thou hast come upon me unawares and marked my unrestrained actions, and Thou knowest whether or not I am guilty of the crimes laid at my door.' Happy [is the] man who can thus remember the omniscient eye, and the omnipresent visitor, and find comfort in the remembrance. We hope we have had our midnight visits from our Lord, and truly they are sweet; so sweet that the recollection of them sets us longing for more of such condescending communing."

If the Psalmist was careful about his ways, he was even more careful about his words. CHS: "Oh those sad lips of ours!...The number of diseases of the tongue is as many as the diseases of all the rest of the man put together... Hands and feet one may bind, but who can fetter the lips? Iron bands may hold a madman, but what chains can restrain the tongue?...Those who have to smart from the falsehoods of others should be the more jealous over themselves; perhaps this led the Psalmist to register this holy resolution; and, moreover, he intended thereby to aver that if he had said too much in his own defence, it was not intentional, for he desired in all respects to tune his lips to the sweet and simple music of truth." ■

***I have called upon Thee, for Thou wilt hear me, O God: incline Thine ear unto me, and hear my speech. Shew Thy marvellous lovingkindness, O Thou that savest by Thy right hand them which put their trust in Thee from those that rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of Thy wings. (Psalm 17:6-8)***

David was an experienced "PRAY-er". He called upon the LORD often and he had never been disappointed. Now in his hour of extreme need, David asked for God's "marvellous loving-kindness". David was not asking God for ordinary mercies but for special favours to meet his circumstances. The basis for David's asking was that he is the apple of God's eye.

CHS: "No part of the body [is] more precious, more tender, and more carefully guarded than the eye; and of the eye, no portion more peculiarly to be protected than the central apple, the pupil...The all-wise Creator has placed the eye in a well-protected position; it stands surrounded by projecting bones like Jerusalem encircled by mountains...Thus, Lord, keep Thou me, for I trust I am one with Jesus, and so a member of His mystical body...for I am Thine offspring, and Thou hast a parent's love in perfection."

In Hebrew, "the apple of the eye" literally means "the little man in the eye". If you stand close enough to a person and look into his eye, you will be able to see your reflection in the person's eye. Similarly, our LORD is so close to you that you are the little man in His all-seeing eyes.

A man was cruising down the Potomac River when he heard a fellow traveller singing the hymn, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul". He recognised the voice from one night some 20 years ago. The man was then fighting for Confederate States Army in the American Civil War. That night, he had his rifle aimed at the heart of a Union soldier. Just as he was about to pull the trigger, the words "Cover my defenseless head with the shadow of Thy wing" broke the silence of the night. The singer's life was spared. His prayer in song was heard. The LORD hid him under the shadow of His wings. ■

***As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness. (Psalm 17:15)***

David's outlook on life was radically different from "men of the world". Their stakes were driven deep into this world. Their treasures were earth-bound. Their dreams were temporal. Their labours would be in vain. But David says, "As for me..." As for David, he looked for a better home with labour not in vain, with treasures incorruptible and undefiled.

CHS: "I neither envy nor covet these men's happiness, but partly have and partly hope for a far better.' To behold God's face and to be changed by that vision into His image, so as to partake in His righteousness, this is my noble ambition; and in the prospect of this I cheerfully waive all my present enjoyments. My satisfaction is to come; I do not look for it as yet. I shall sleep awhile, but I shall wake at the sound of the trumpet; wake to everlasting joy, because I arise in Thy likeness, O my God and King! Glimpses of glory good men have here below to stay their sacred hunger, but the full feast awaits them in the upper skies. Compared with this deep, ineffable, eternal fulness of delight, the joys of the worldling are as a glowworm to the sun, or the drop of a bucket to the ocean."

David Livingstone is God's pathfinder into the heart of Africa. He left for Africa as a missionary doctor in 1840 at the age of 27. On his fifty-ninth birthday, Livingstone wrote in his journal, "My Jesus, my King, my Life, my All; I again dedicate my whole self to Thee. Accept me and grant, O gracious Father, that ere this year is gone, I may finish my task. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen, so let it be."

A year later, Livingstone died on his knees praying. The highest possible honour was given at his death. He was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey; but without his heart—it was buried in Africa. ■

***I will love Thee, O LORD, my Strength. The LORD is my Rock, and my Fortress, and my Deliverer; my God, my Strength, in whom I will trust; my Buckler, and the Horn of my Salvation, and my High Tower. (Psalm 18:1-2)***

Psalm 18 is a thanksgiving psalm. It is also the song of David [2 Sam. 22], and it is most probably his last one. Nearing the end of his life, David's thoughts returned to God's love and mercies. In his early years serving under Saul, David had seen God's hand of deliverance. The LORD never failed David. What could David do but respond, "I will love Thee, O LORD!" This first verse is not found in 2 Samuel 22; nevertheless, Spurgeon said that it was a "most precious addition, placed above all and after all to form the pinnacle of the temple, the apex of the pyramid. Love is still the crowning grace."

CHS: "[*I will love Thee, O Lord!*] is intensely forcible, the love is of the deepest kind. 'I will love heartily, with my inmost bowels.' Here is a fixed resolution to abide in the nearest and most intimate union with the Most High. Our triune God deserves the warmest love of all our hearts. Father, Son and Spirit have each a claim upon our love. The solemn purpose never to cease loving naturally springs from present fervour of affection, it is wrong to make rash resolutions, but this when made in the strength of God is most wise and fitting."

The feeble strength that David could muster to love God was more than reciprocated by the LORD. From his one expression of love for the LORD, David poured forth a gush of praise; God was not just David's LORD, He was also David's immovable Rock, his Fortress impregnable, his faithful Deliverer, his all-sufficient Strength, his unyielding Buckler, his certain Horn of Salvation [defense], and his ever-standing High Tower. ■



Matthew 18:3 | *Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*

February

***He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. (Psalm 18:11)***

The tragedy of mortality, the floods of ungodly men, the snares of death, the sorrows of hell—any one of these would have been enough to throw us into depression. And when they come in a united force, even David felt its weight of despair. In his distress, David cried unto the LORD. But did the LORD hear? Would He deliver me? Would the LORD prove Himself true?

The LORD not only responded, but He did so in unmistakable ways—He descended in a mighty display of earthquakes, storms and lightnings. These are poetic terms depicting the wrath of God. The language here resembles closely, God's descent upon Mount Sinai at the giving of the Ten Commandments [Exod. 20:18].

CHS: "The storm thickened, and the clouds pouring forth torrents of rain combined to form the secret chamber of the invisible but wonder-working God. 'Pavilioned in impervious shade,' faith saw Him, but no other eye could gaze through the '*thick clouds of the skies*.' Blessed is the darkness which encurtains my God; if I may not see Him, it is sweet to know that He is working in secret for my eternal good. Even fools can believe that God is abroad in the sunshine and the calm, but faith is wise, and discerns Him in the terrible darkness and threatening storm."

*God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm.  
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take...  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace  
Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face.  
[William Cowper] ■*

***They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; He delivered me, because He delighted in me. (Psalm 18:18-19)***

**T**he LORD moves mountains and sends lightnings. What can He do for me? He also took me; He drew me out of the waters; He delivered me; He brought me forth into a large place. Note David's use of the first person pronoun.

CHS: "Sweet is pleasure after pain. Enlargement is the more delightful after a season of pinching poverty and sorrowful confinement. Besieged souls delight in the broad fields of the promise when God drives off the enemy and sets open the gates of the environed city. The Lord does not leave His work half done, for having routed the foe He leads out the captive into liberty. Large indeed is the possession and place of the believer in Jesus, there need be no limit to his peace, for there is no bound to his privilege."

The LORD is not a miser of mercy; in Him, you will find a multitude of His tender mercies. He is not a grudging giver of His grace; where sin abound, His grace did much more abound. He is a not penny-pincher of His peace; His peace passes all understanding. The LORD has given us His only Son, "shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" [Rom. 8:32]. What is a large place anyway compared to the love that God has given us through our Lord Jesus.

Why does the LORD deliver me? Because He delights in me! Why does the LORD delight in me? This is the mystery of sovereign grace of which no finite mind can understand. The love of God—its magnitude and depth—is not a matter for comprehension. Just receive it with grateful thanks. ■

***For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. (Psalm 18:21)***

**W**as David presumptuous in claiming that the LORD had rewarded him for his righteousness? What about his sin with Bathsheba? What about his engineering of Uriah's death? Could David honestly say that his hands were cleaned, that he was upright?

There was no pride in David's words if we understand that his righteousness was given to him. Before the holy God, even the best of man is a filthy sinner. However, with his heart purified by the LORD, David could say without any hypocrisy that he was upright. While the redeemed man would humbly acknowledge that he is a sinner, it would be false modesty to deny the work of grace in his heart.

David further asserted his righteousness in two ways; CHS: "There is '*I have*' and '*I have not*,' both of which must be blended in a truly sanctified life; constraining and restraining grace must each take its share. The words of this verse refer to the saint as a traveller carefully keeping to '*the ways of the LORD*,' and '*not wickedly*,' that is, designedly, wilfully, persistently, defiantly forsaking the ordained pathway in which God favours the pilgrim with His presence. Observe how it is implied in the expression '*and have not wickedly departed from my God*,' that David lived habitually in communion with God, and knew Him to be his own God, Whom he might speak of as '*my God*.' God never departs from His people, let them take heed of departing from Him."

The best defence for your righteousness is to acknowledge the LORD as your God. Echo David's confident claim — I am righteous because I am saved by grace Eph. 2:8-9). I am upright because I stand by grace [Rom. 5:2]. I have kept the ways of the LORD and I have not departed from Him because I am sustained by His grace [2 Cor. 12:9]. ■

***For Thou wilt light my candle: the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness. (Psalm 18:28)***

The Latin phrase “*quid pro quo*” literally means “which for what”. It is the idea of compensatory exchange—one thing for another. Our mercy is rewarded by God’s mercy. God will be upright to those who have shown themselves upright [Ps. 18:25]. This principle must be taken in the context of a believer. God will deal with us according to our character. The merciful, upright and pure will always have the God of mercy, uprightness, and purity to defend and support them.

If we walk in the light as our Lord Jesus is in the light, God will “enlighten our darkness”. CHS: “Even the children of the day sometimes need candle-light. In the darkest hour light will arise; a candle shall be lit...it will be our own candle; yet God Himself will find the holy fire with which the candle shall burn...truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun; and even so the presence of the Lord removes all the gloom of sorrow, and enables the believer to rejoice with exceeding great joy. The lighting of the lamp is a cheerful moment in the winter’s evening, but the lifting up of the light of God’s countenance is happier far. It is said that the poor in Egypt will stint themselves of bread to buy oil for the lamp, so that they may not sit in darkness; we could well afford to part with all earthly comforts if the light of God’s love could but constantly gladden our souls.”

The Old Testament Tabernacle comprised of four layers of covering—embroidered curtains and three separate coverings made from goats’ hair, rams’ skins, and badgers’ skins. When the high priest entered the holy place, the source of light was the golden lampstand. But that was the only light that he needed. Likewise, in this world of spiritual darkness, our only hope is that the LORD will enlighten our darkness. ■

***Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation: and Thy right hand hath holden me up, and Thy gentleness hath made me great. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip. (Psalm 18:35-36)***

**A**s for God, He is...

David called upon God in his distress. Note the LORD's response to David's cry for help. The LORD gave strength. He made David's ways perfect. He kept David from slipping. He armed David for battle. He protected David with His shield of salvation. He made David great.

As for God, He is perfect. He is faithful. His works are complete.

As for us, we are...in the LORD, our ways are also made perfect [Ps. 18:32]. In the LORD, we are made great [v. 35].

How can that be? Consider our Christ—the Perfect—Who clothed Himself with flesh and blood so that we may be clothed with His perfection. CHS: "It is God's making Himself little which is the cause of our being made great. We are so little that if God should manifest His greatness without condescension, we should be trampled under His feet; but God, Who must stoop to view the skies and bow to see what angels do, looks to the lowly and contrite, and makes them great...David ascribes all his own greatness to the condescending goodness and graciousness of his Father in heaven. Let us all feel this sentiment in our own hearts, and confess that whatever of goodness or greatness God may have put upon us, we must cast our crowns at His feet, and cry, '*Thy gentleness hath made me great.*'"

The LORD strengthens, keeps and protects. He also enlarges our steps, meaning to say that we need not be fearful of difficult paths and stumbling rocks. Not because the LORD has promised to remove these obstacles from our lives, but that He has promised that He will never allow us to slip. ■

***For Thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: Thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. (Psalm 18:39)***

**A**rmed with God's strength, trained by the King and protected by His shield of salvation, David expected no less than total defeat of his enemies. The boastful display of the enemy forces crumbled like a sandcastle when the tides came. And the enemies fled from David like dust scattered by the winds. But the victory was not David's, it was God's.

CHS: "It is impossible to be too frequent in the duty of ascribing all our victories to the God of our salvation. It is true that we have to wrestle with our spiritual antagonists, but the triumph is far more the LORD's than ours. We must not boast like the ambitious votaries of vainglory, but we may exult as the willing and believing instruments in the LORD's hands of accomplishing His great designs."

God's perfect ways will lead to perfect victory. On the cross, our Lord Jesus cried, "It is finished." The perfect sacrifice of our Lord Jesus gives us the perfect victory over sin and death. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?... But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ [1 Cor. 15:55, 57].

A seminary professor was walking to the library when he saw an elderly janitor reading his Bible. Curious, the theologian asked the janitor what he was reading. The old man looked up and said, "The Book of Revelation".

Surprised, the professor asked if the man understood what he was reading. "Sure, I do," assured the man.

"What does it say?"

The old janitor replied, "It says that Jesus is going to win." He is right, and so will all who believe in Christ Jesus—"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" [1 John 5:4]. ■

***The LORD liveth; and blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted. (Psalm 18:46)***

Psalm 18 is the fourth longest psalm in the Psalter. It was composed after the death of Saul, and in this psalm, David rehearsed the ups and downs of his life. He remembered the times when his life was in danger, when he had to seek refuge among the enemies, and even feigned madness. Through it all, David praised the faithfulness of the LORD. He begins and ends the psalm with this thought—"the LORD is my Rock" [vv. 2, 46]. David had been through some treacherous paths, but with the LORD, he was always walking on solid ground.

CHS: The LORD "is the ground of our hope, and let Him be the subject of our praise. Our hearts bless the LORD, with holy love extolling Him. Jehovah lives, my Rock be blest! Praise be the God Who gives me rest!...As our Saviour, the Lord should more than ever be glorified. We should publish abroad the story of the covenant and the cross, the Father's election, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's regeneration. He Who rescues us from deserved ruin should be very dear to us."

Augustus Toplady was walking in the country when a fierce storm forced him to seek refuge under the cleft of a rock. While he was waiting for the storm to pass, he saw in his prevailing situation, a picture of his spiritual refuge in Christ Jesus. With this blessed thought, he began to pen the words to the hymn, *Rock of Ages*.

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee;  
Let the water and the blood, from Thy wounded side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure, save from wrath and make me pure. ■*

***The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. (Psalm 19:1-2)***

NASA launched its New Horizons space exploration programme on 19 January 2006. Its mission is to reach Pluto in 2015. The scientists are hopeful that the discoveries will tell them more about the beginning of the solar system. Are science and the Bible on opposing sides? They are not, and should not be, for both are God's revelations.

CHS: "Let not science and...[the Christian faith] be reckoned as opposing citadels, frowning defiance upon each other, and their troops brandishing their armour in hostile attitude. They have too many common foes ... ignorance and prejudice, in passion and vice, under all their forms...Let the one [science] be the outer and other [godly devotion] the inner court. In the one, let all look, and admire and adore; and in the other, let those who have faith kneel, and pray, and praise. Let the one be the sanctuary where human learning may present its richest incense as an offering to God, and the other the holiest of all, separated from it by a veil now rent in twain, and in which, on a blood sprinkled mercy-seat, we pour out the love of a reconciled heart, and hear the oracles of the living God."

The Latin Vulgate translates Proverbs 1:7 as "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge [*scientiae*]: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." The greatest scientists in the history of mankind were believers in Christ. Blaise Pascal, who invented the first calculator; Isaac Newton, who discovered the law of gravity; and James Maxwell, who formulated the laws of electromagnetism, were Christians whose studies in science did not challenge their faith but, instead, strengthened it.

Robert Jastrow, founder of NASA's Goddard Institute, commented on the antagonistic views of his colleagues towards the Bible: "[The scientist] **has lived by his faith in the power of reason...He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.**" ■

***Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. (Psalm 19:12-13)***

David uses five words—law, testimony, statutes, commandment, and judgement—to describe the Word of God. He also gives six descriptions of the Word, and six things that it can do [vv. 7-9]. But there is only one thing that we can do with regard to God's law—obey it. Keeping the Word of God is the only way to a sanctified life.

David warns about the secret faults that grow into presumptuous sins and eventually culminate in one great transgression. CHS: "Presumptuous sins are peculiarly dangerous. All sins are great sins, but yet some sins are greater than others. Every sin has in it the very venom of rebellion, and is full of the essential marrow of traitorous rejection of God...The presumptuous sins of our text are the chief and worst of all sins; they rank head and foremost in the list of iniquities...Secret sin is a stepping-stone to presumptuous sin, and that is the vestibule of 'the sin which is unto death.'"

We tend to look at our lives in single snapshots. An occasional sin does not seem like a great deal, but when we consider the sins together over a life time, and the whole picture changes. I was given some photographs of the New Orleans skyline before Katrina hit the American gulf coast. The pictures were taken using time-lapse photography—a technique that compresses a series of events into one single frame. The time-lapse technique created a web of dramatic lightning bolts streaking across the sky. Likewise, our sins may appear to us insignificant and sporadic, but God sees our sins from start to end, and they add up to a display of utter sinfulness. ■

# 10 Psalm 20

FEBRUARY

Remember the LORD's Name

Feb

***We will rejoice in Thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners: the LORD fulfil all thy petitions...Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. (Psalm 20:5, 7)***

The twentieth and twenty-first psalms are known as royal psalms, so called because they were composed to be sung by the people asking for God's blessings upon their king. Psalm 20 is also a prayer psalm: the people prayed for the king [vv. 1-5], David affirmed his trust in God [vv. 6-9], and the petition was repeated again.

The people prayed for God's help and strength upon their king; they also prayed for David's success. Above all, they prayed for David's spiritual well-being, that his sacrifices would be accepted by God. This prayer item was immediately followed by the musical notation, *selah*, which many have taken to mean "meditation". What an encouragement it must be for King David as he paused to contemplate the prayers of his people for him. Note David's response: "Now I know..." Did he not know before? Of course he did, but David was doubly assured by the people's prayer.

CHS: "The most dreaded war-engine of David's day was the war chariot, armed with scythes, which mowed down men like grass: this was the boast and glory of the neighbouring nations; but the saints considered the name of Jehovah to be a far better defence...Chariots and horses make an imposing show...yet the discerning eye of faith sees more in an invisible God than in all these. Alas, how many in our day who profess to be the LORD's are as abjectly dependent upon their fellow-men or upon an arm of flesh in some shape or other, as if they had never known the name of Jehovah at all. Jesus, be Thou alone our Rock and Refuge, and never may we mar the simplicity of our faith."

To remember the name of the LORD is to remember the Person behind that Name, His reputation, character and authority. Our hope is in Him, and He alone saves. ■

***For Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness: Thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever.  
(Psalm 21:3-4)***

The twentieth and twenty-first psalms come as a pair. The former is a prayer; the latter is the answer. The people asked for strength, and God provided [Ps. 20:2, 21:1]. They asked for success, and God gave the king his heart's desire [Ps. 20:4, 21:2]. They petitioned, and the LORD had not withheld their requests [Ps. 20:5, 21:2]. In fact, God "preventest him with the blessings of goodness." The word "preventest" means "go before."

CHS: "The Father is so willing to give blessings through His Son, that instead of His being constrained to bestow His grace, He outstrips the Mediatorial march of mercy...Before Jesus calls the Father answers, and while He is yet speaking He [the Father] hears...The love of Jehovah is not caused by the Redeemer's sacrifice, but that love, with its blessings of goodness, preceded the great atonement, and provided it for our salvation...Mercy, in the case of many of us, ran before our desires and prayers, and it ever outruns our endeavours and expectancies, and even our hopes are left to lag behind."

The larder was bare in George Muller's orphanage. It was breakfast time, but there was no food. Muller led the children in a thanksgiving prayer, "Dear Father, we thank Thee for what Thou art going to give us to eat." As he finished, there was a knock on the door. The local baker had delivered some bread. Then there was a second knock. It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. He said he would like to give the children the milk so he could empty the cart and repair it. When we pray, the mercies of God go before us to provide what He knows is best for us. ■

***For they intended evil against Thee: they imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform. (Psalm 21:11)***

The war on terror is unlike other wars in history. The enemy combatants do not wear uniforms. They are experts in camouflage and concealment. They fight for ideology and not territory. In the same way, the enemies of God are not fighting for possessions but for the souls of men. Beware. Be alert. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" [Eph. 6:12]. Put on the whole armour of God!

The phrase "intended evil" literally means "to stretch". The enemies of God would go to great lengths to devise evil against the righteous, just like the hunter who sets up many snares to catch his prey; but their plans would fail.

CHS: Evil men "have the wickedness to *imagine*, and the cunning to *devise*, and the malice to *plot* mischief, but blessed be God, they fail in ability; yet they shall be judged as to their hearts, and the will shall be taken for the deed in the great day of account. When we read the boastful threatenings of the enemies of the gospel at the present day, we may close our reading by cheerfully repeating, '*which they are not able to perform*! The serpent may hiss, but his head is broken; the lion may worry, but he cannot devour: the tempest may thunder, but cannot strike...the devil and all his allies retire in dismay from the walls of Zion, for the LORD is there."

The enemies are not able to perform. One could imagine David saying these words without flinching; David did not fear the enemy because his heart was full of hope in God. It is one thing to know that God is present; it is quite another thing to know that He is there for you when you are surrounded by your foes. ■

***My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? (Psalm 22:1)***

This psalm is appropriately named by some as “The Psalm of the Cross”. The first verse was one of seven sayings that our Saviour made when He was on the cross.

CHS: “**Why**: what is the great cause of such a strange fact as for God to leave His own Son at such a time and in such a plight? There was no cause in Him, why then was He deserted? **Hast**: it is done, and the Saviour is feeling its dread effect as He asks the question; it is surely true, but how mysterious! It was no threatening of forsaking which made the great Surety cry aloud, He endured that forsaking in very deed. **Thou**: I can understand why traitorous Judas and timid Peter should be gone, but *Thou*, my God, my faithful Friend, how canst Thou leave me? This is worst of all, yea, worse than all put together. Hell itself has for its fiercest flame the separation of the soul from God. **Forsaken**: if Thou hadst chastened I might bear it, for Thy face would shine; but to forsake me utterly, ah! why is this? **Me**: Thine innocent, obedient, suffering Son, why leavest Thou *me* to perish? A sight of self seen by penitence, and of Jesus on the cross seen by faith will best expound this question. Jesus is forsaken because our sins had separated between us and our God.” [Emphasis mine.]

The separation between the Father and the Son must have been equally heart-wrenching for both. The perfect unity is destroyed by divine resolve—the sovereign will of the Father and the submissive will of the Son. Why would God the Father forsake His beloved Son? For what purpose? For whose benefit? It is for our sake that the Father did this. “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” [2 Cor. 5:21]. ■

***But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. (Psalm 22:6)***

God revealed Himself as I AM THAT I AM [Jehovah]. Our Lord Jesus applied this divine title to Himself several times in John's Gospel. I am the Bread of life [6:48], Light of the world [9:5], Door [10:7], Good Shepherd [10:11], the Resurrection [11:25], the Way [14:6], the Vine [15:5]. But in this psalm, He is a worm—"despised and rejected of men" [Isa. 53:3].

CHS: "How could the Lord of glory be brought to such abasement as to be not only lower than the angels, but even lower than men. What a contrast between 'I AM' and 'I am a worm' yet such a double nature was found in the person of our Lord Jesus when bleeding on the tree. He felt Himself to be comparable to a helpless, powerless, down-trodden worm, passive while crushed, and unnoticed and despised by those who trod upon Him. He selects the weakest of creatures, which is all flesh; and becomes, when trodden upon, writhing, quivering flesh, utterly devoid of any might except strength to suffer. This was a true likeness of Himself when His body and soul had become a mass of misery — the very essence of agony — in the dying pangs of crucifixion. Man by nature is but a worm; but our Lord puts Himself even beneath man, on account of the scorn which was heaped upon Him and the weakness which He felt, and therefore He adds, '*and no man.*'"

The *kenosis* of Christ refers to His humiliation. He Who was equal with God, took several steps down into humanity. He made Himself of no reputation. He took the form of a servant. He was made in the likeness of men. He was found in fashion as a man. He humbled Himself. He became obedient unto death. He died on the cross. Our Lord went as low so that sinners who were at the lowest depths might know Him, and be exalted with Him. ■

***Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.  
(Psalm 22:11)***

The assaults upon the Psalmist's faith came fast and strong. The attacks were more frequent and prolonged. David compared the enemies to the bulls of Bashan which were known for their size, strength and ferocity. The attacks against David were relentless, and there was neither reprieve nor rescue in sight. With his strength waning, David cried out to the LORD—"Be not far from me."

CHS: "This is the petition for which he has been using such varied and powerful pleas. His great woe was that God had forsaken him, his great prayer is that He would be near him. A lively sense of the divine presence is a mighty stay to the heart in times of distress...There are two 'fors' [in this verse] as though faith gave a double knock at mercy's gate; that is a powerful prayer which is full of holy reasons and thoughtful arguments. The nearness of trouble is a weighty motive for divine help; this moves our heavenly Father's heart, and brings down His helping hand."

David's prayer should not be taken that the LORD had left him. On the contrary, it was a cry to reaffirm in David's heart the abiding presence of God. The LORD has promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." [Heb. 13:5b]. In Greek, there are five negatives used in this short sentence. A literal translation would read this way, "No, I will not leave thee; no, neither will I not utterly forsake thee."

This promise is made to those who are patiently bearing affliction or persecution for Christ's sake. It may be applied to the righteous who may be going through suffering or adversity of any kind. When crises set in, when human help is in vain, look to the LORD, trust in Him, and call out to Him for He is always near. ■

# 16 Psalm 22:16-21

FEBRUARY

Deliver Me

Feb

***Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. (Psalm 22:20-21)***

Crucifixion is a cruel penalty. It brings death deliberately, second by second. The crucified man is nailed to the cross, with his hands outstretched. His only support was perhaps a little platform for his nail-pierced feet. To breathe, he would have to heave himself, working against the pain, and twisting his joints out of place [v. 14]. With such excruciating pain, it would not be strange if his heart failed [v. 14]. Exposed to the elements, the man suffers thirst [v. 15]. To add insult to pain, this punishment was carried out in the open—"they look and stare upon me." The Psalmist also described the enemies of God as animals—bulls of Bashan [v. 12], lions [vv. 13, 21], dogs [vv. 16, 20], unicorns [v. 21]. There seemed to be a circus atmosphere surrounding the death of our Saviour.

CHS: "Here he marks the more ignoble crowd, who, while less strong than their brutal leaders, were not less ferocious, for there they were howling and barking like unclean and hungry dogs. Hunters frequently surround their game with a circle, and gradually encompass them with an ever narrowing-ring of dogs and men. Such a picture is before us. In the centre stands, not a panting stag, but a bleeding, fainting man, and around him are the enraged and unpitying wretches who have hounded him to his doom. Here we have the 'hind of the morning' of whom the psalm so plaintively sings, hunted by bloodhounds, all thirsting to devour him. *The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me...*this is not the only occasion when professed churches of God have become synagogues of Satan, and have persecuted the Holy One and the Just."

The story of our Lord Jesus did not end at the cross. The people saw crucifixion as an instrument of punishment; Jesus saw it as one of reconciliation. They wanted Him to die; He did and brought life. God took the worst thing that man could do to His Son, and changed it into the best thing He could do for man. ■

***The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek Him: your heart shall live for ever. (Psalm 22:26)***

Psalm 22 begins with a despairing cry, and continues through the first 21 verses with David praying for deliverance. The turning point comes in verse 22, with a call to praise God and to glorify Him.

Although David writes in the first person, he is but the shadow of this glorious psalm. The light that casts the shadow is our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord did not cry out in vain, nor was God the Father indifferent to His cries. "For He [God the Father] hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the Afflicted [God the Son]; neither hath He [the Father] hid His face from Him [the Son]; but when He [the Son] cried unto Him [the Father], He heard" [v. 24].

The Son cried; the Father heard; and sinners are redeemed. The righteous should neither be afraid nor ashamed of praising God. Note the public nature of David's praise [v. 22]. "My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear Him" [v. 25].

What was David's praise? The spiritual banquet prepared for souls. CHS: "Mark how the dying Lover of our souls solaces Himself with the result of His death. The spiritually poor find a feast in Jesus, they feed upon Him to the satisfaction of their hearts; they were famished until He gave Himself for them, but now they are filled with royal dainties. The thought of the joy of His people gave comfort to our expiring Lord... Your spirits shall not fail through trial, you shall not die of grief, immortal joys shall be your portion. Thus Jesus speaks even from the cross to the troubled seeker. If His dying words are so assuring, what consolation may we not find in the truth that He ever liveth to make intercession for us! They who eat at Jesus' table receive the fulfilment of the promise, 'Whosoever eateth of this bread shall live for ever.'"

Who shall qualify to sit at this heavenly table? The meek. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" [Matt. 5:5]. ■

***They shall come, and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this. (Psalm 22:31)***

**"H**e hath done this!" The climax of Psalm 22 parallels the climax on the cross: "It is finished!" The robe of righteousness is wholly the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is not a stitch of your good works or not a knot of your religiosity. It is all Christ's!

An unbeliever was arguing with his Christian friend on the absurdity of a religion that requires nothing from the devotee. The Christian finally turned to his friend and said, "There is a great difference between your religion and mine."

The man nodded in agreement, "What do you think is the difference?"

The Christian replied, "Your religion is to do and live. Mine is to live because it has already been done."

CHS: "Sovereign grace shall bring out from among men the blood-bought ones. Nothing shall thwart the divine purpose. The chosen shall come to life, to faith, to pardon, to heaven. In this the dying Saviour finds a sacred satisfaction. Toiling servant of God, be glad at the thought that the eternal purpose of God shall suffer neither let nor hindrance... 'It is finished.' Salvation's glorious work is done, there is peace on earth, and glory in the highest. 'It is finished,' these were the expiring words of the Lord Jesus, as they are the last words of this Psalm. May we by living faith be enabled to see our salvation finished by the death of Jesus!"

*For nothing good have I, Whereby Thy grace to claim,  
I'll wash my garments white, In the blood of Calvary's Lamb.  
Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe;  
Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.  
[Elvina Hall] ■*

***The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (Psalm 23:1)***

Psalm 23 is perhaps the best known portion in the Holy Scripture. Millions of people have read and even memorised this beloved psalm. Thousands of pages have been written about this psalm, with thousands more written just on the first line alone—Jehovah is my Shepherd.

The contrast in the first verse cannot be greater. One end is the eternal God, Jehovah—the great I AM THAT I AM; and on the other end is man, whose life is as brief and frail as the grass in the field. Yet He is our shepherd.

CHS: “David had himself been a keeper of sheep, and understood both the needs of the sheep and the many cares of a shepherd. He compares himself to a creature weak, defenceless, and foolish, and he takes God to be his Provider, Preserver, Director, and, indeed, his everything. No man has a right to consider himself the LORD’s sheep unless his nature has been renewed, for the scriptural description of unconverted men does not picture them as sheep, but as wolves or goats. A sheep is an object of property, not a wild animal; its owner sets great store by it, and frequently it is bought with a great price. It is well to know, as certainly David did, that we belong to the LORD... ‘The LORD is my shepherd;’ if he be a Shepherd to no one else, he is a Shepherd to *me*; he cares for *me*, watches over *me*, and preserves *me*. The words are in the present tense. Whatever be the believer’s position, he is even now under the pastoral care of Jehovah.”

Sometimes we worry about our future—our needs, our children, and a whole host of other things. But there should neither be room for doubt nor cause for fear when we have the LORD as our shepherd. We may not know what lies in the future, but it is enough to know that the LORD is our Good Shepherd. “The LORD is my shepherd”—in Him, we have perfect salvation; “I shall not want”—in Him, we have perfect satisfaction. ■

***Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.  
(Psalm 24:3-4)***

David may have written Psalm 24 when he brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem [2 Sam. 6]. Perhaps the tragic incident involving Uzzah was still fresh on David's mind when he asked who was able to stand in the holiness of the LORD. Answer: only a man with clean hands and a pure heart.

"Clean hands" refers to one whose deeds are holy; whereas "pure heart" describes the man's internal motivations. It is important that a man's external conduct be right, but it is even more important that his motives and thoughts are pure.

CHS: "Outward, practical holiness is a very precious mark of grace. To wash in water with Pilate is nothing, but to wash in innocency is all-important. It is to be feared that many professors have perverted the doctrine of justification by faith in such a way as to treat good works with contempt; if so, they will receive everlasting contempt at the last great day. It is vain to prate of inward experience unless the daily life is free from impurity, dishonesty, violence, and oppression. Those who draw near to God must have 'clean hands'...But 'clean hands' would not suffice, unless they were connected with 'a pure heart.' True religion is heart-work... the very life of our being lies in the inner nature, and hence the imperative need of purity within. There must be a work of grace in the core of the heart as well as in the palm of the hand, or our religion is a delusion."

Robert Murray McCheyne, the Scottish preacher, when writing to his good friend on the occasion of his ordination as a missionary, noted, "In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God." ■

***Remember, O LORD, Thy tender mercies and Thy loving-kindnesses; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to Thy mercy remember Thou me for Thy goodness' sake, O LORD. (Psalm 25:6-7)***

Psalm 25 is composed in the form of an acrostic; every line begins with each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This psalm does not have one particular theme; rather, it comprises a series of random thoughts about God. An aged and perhaps more contemplative David, it seemed, was recalling the blessedness of being a child of God. One such train of thought was the LORD's tender mercies and loving-kindnesses throughout his days. What a blessed assurance to know that our LORD knows exactly what to remember, and what to forget.

CHS: "We are usually tempted in seasons of affliction to fear that our God has forgotten us, or forgotten His usual kindness towards us; hence the soul doth as it were put the LORD in remembrance, and beseech Him to recollect those deeds of love which once He wrought towards it...Those offences which we remember with repentance God forgets, but if we forget them, justice will bring them forth to punishment. The world winks at the sins of young men, and yet they are not so little after all; the bones of our youthful feastings at Satan's table will stick painfully in our throats when we are old men. He who presumes upon his youth is poisoning his old age. How large a tear may wet this page as some of us reflect upon the past!"

David asked God to remember him, not according to his sins, but according to God's mercy. In Hebrew, the same word is translated as "loving-kindnesses" [v. 6]. God's mercy is also His love.

Note that the sins of David's youth were more than covered by God's tender mercies and loving-kindnesses, for they had been ever of old, meaning to say that they are from eternity to eternity.

There is never a time when God's grace and mercy is not available to the redeemed. God's love is constant, unchanging and unceasing. That is why no one who waits on Him shall be ashamed. ■

***Mine eyes are ever toward the LORD; for He shall pluck my feet out of the net. (Psalm 25:15)***

**M**an is essentially egocentric. He is interested in himself—self-indulgence [preoccupation with one's desires], self-absorption [preoccupation with one's ego], self-pity [preoccupation with one's disappointments], and self-esteem [preoccupation with one's ability]. There are some people who are so preoccupied with themselves that they do not even look at the needs of others. Do you know that the difference between a clear glass [that allows a man to look into the world] and a mirror [that places the focus of a man on himself] is just a thin layer of silver?

Truly it is only by the converting power of the Holy Spirit that a man's gaze turns from himself to our Lord Jesus Christ; and to his neighbours.

CHS: "The writer claims to be fixed in his trust, and constant in his expectation; he looks in confidence, and waits in hope. We may add to this look of faith and hope the obedient look of service, the humble look of reverence, the admiring look of wonder, the studious look of meditation, and the tender look of affection. Happy are those whose eyes are never removed from their God. 'The eye,' says Solomon, 'is never satisfied with seeing,' but this sight is the most satisfying in the world."

"My eyes are ever toward the LORD" refers to more than just visual images. Where a man beholds and looks forward to represent his love, longings, and loyalties, the Psalmist's only hope is the LORD - "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" [Heb. 12:2a].

Note where the Psalmist looks; and where his feet land. When we look to our Lord Jesus, it matters not where our feet land. As we look to our Lord, He is also looking at us, and when our feet are caught in the net, He will be there to pick us up. The Lord will deliver us from the cunning devices of the devil, and even from ourselves. ■

***Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins.  
(Psalm 25:18)***

**A**t the back of every big truck is a warning sign that reads, "If you cannot see my mirror, I cannot see you." For the Christian, we are told to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith [Heb. 12:2a]. This exhortation to look to our Lord is for our own good. It is only when we have our eyes fixed on Him that we have the assurance that He is looking at us.

Our Lord Jesus had sent His disciples ahead to Bethsaida on the other side of Galilee while he retreated for prayer. When the disciples were sailing across the sea, they were caught in a storm. Without the Master with them, they feared for their lives. But while they were battling to save their lives, our Lord Jesus "saw them toiling in rowing ... [and] He cometh unto them" [Mark 6:47-48]. Our Lord looked upon their afflictions.

CHS: "...note yet more the submissive and believing spirit of a true saint; all he asks for is, 'LORD, look upon my evil plight;' he does not dictate, or even express a complaint; a look from God will content him, and that being granted he asks no more. Even more noteworthy is the way in which the believer under affliction discovers the true source of all the mischief, and lays the axe at the root of it."

No affliction of the body can be worse than the affliction of sin upon the soul. CHS: "'Forgive all my sins,' is the cry of a soul that is more sick of sin than of pain, and would sooner be forgiven than healed. Blessed is the man to whom sin is more unbearable than disease...[it] shall not be long before the LORD shall both forgive his iniquity and heal his diseases."

David asked the LORD to look kindly upon his afflictions, but he did not dictate what God should do. It is up to God's sovereign will to deliver. However, in the matter of sin, David knew what the LORD will do—forgive all his sins. If we carry our sorrows to our LORD, even more so, we must carry our sins to Him because every one of them must be forgiven. ■

***Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide. Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. (Psalm 26:1-2)***

**H**ow would you like to stand under the searching eye of God, under which “there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested” [Mark 4:22a]. David knew that he, who hoped in the LORD, would not be ashamed. He willingly placed himself under God’s light. “Judge me...examine me...prove me...try my reins and my heart.” David was asking the LORD to determine whether the evidences of his faith were genuine, whether his testimony was authentic. David had nothing to hide.

David was not concerned with his reputation among men. Reality has shown that no matter how good we are, our foes will always have something bad to say about us. David’s concern was God’s thoughts about him. Reputation is what men think you are. Integrity and character is what God knows you to be. CHS: “[David] held integrity as his principle, and walked in it as his practice. David had not used any traitorous or unrighteous means to gain the crown, or to keep it; he was conscious of having been guided by the noblest principles of honour in all his actions with regard to Saul and his family. What a comfort it is to have the approbation of one’s own conscience! If there be peace within the soul, the blustering storms of slander which howl around us are of little consideration.”

Integrity means wholeness. It means that your heart is not at odds; your allegiance is not divided. The opposite of integrity is duplicity — to be divided in one’s mind and heart. Such a man is “unstable in all his ways” [James 1:8]. Our LORD demands us to make a choice. “Choose you this day whom ye will serve” [Josh. 24:15a]; “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him” [1 Kings 18:21]; “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other...Ye cannot serve God and mammon” [Matt. 6:24]. You cannot love God and the world at the same time [1 John 2:15]. God made man with one heart for a reason—to love Him and Him alone. ■

***LORD, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth. (Psalm 26:8)***

**D**avid is transparent before God. He walked in God's truth. He hated what God hated. He was innocent before God. David published and broadcast his faith [v. 7]. He demonstrated his faith in God first and foremost by his love for God's house.

CHS: "Into the abodes of sin he would not enter, but the house of God he had long loved, and loved it still. We were sad children if we did not love our Father's dwelling-place. Though we own no sacred buildings, yet the church of the living God is the house of God, and true Christians delight in her ordinances, services, and assemblies. O that all our days were Sabbaths!...In His church where God is held in honour at all times, where He reveals Himself in the glory of His grace, and is proclaimed by His people as the LORD of all!"

Not too long ago, a theologian claims that the modern man wants to be spiritual but he does not want organised religion, meaning the church. To the Reformers, such an aversion to a Bible-preaching church is unbiblical.

John Calvin wrote that if a Church preached the gospel reverently, "no man may with impunity spurn her authority, or reject her admonitions, or resist her counsels...revolt from her, and violate her unity" [*Institutes*, Book VI.1.10]. He added that all who alienate themselves from the church would be regarded as "traitors and apostates".

When the Eiffel tower was built for the World Expo, the majority of the Parisians considered it an eyesore. They wanted it torn down. Today, the Eiffel tower is one of the architectural wonders of the modern world. Likewise, our Lord Jesus built the Church, defended, prayed and died for it. To the world, the Church, as it stands, is an antiquated institution. But one day, when Christ returns, the true glory of the Church will be seen. ■

***The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)***

From the reading of this psalm, we know that David was going through some very challenging times. While the external circumstances in David's life might not have been rosy, the internal condition of his spirit was hopeful. David reveals the secret of sustaining faith in troubling times – a faith that is expressed in the most personal terms.

The LORD is certainly not one of many lights. The LORD might have been someone else's light. The LORD was also not the light. None of these statements was good enough for David until he states emphatically – "the Lord is my light...my salvation...the strength of my life."

CHS: "Salvation finds us in the dark, but it does not leave us there; it gives light to those who sit in the valley of the shadow of death. After conversion our God is our joy, comfort, guide, teacher, and in every sense our light; He is light within, light around, light reflected from us, and light to be revealed to us. Note, it is not said merely that the LORD gives light, but that He 'is' light; nor that He gives salvation, but that He is salvation; He, then, who by faith has laid hold upon God has all covenant blessings in his possession. Every light is not the sun, but the sun is the father of all lights."

Here we see that David's personal faith is also his preserving faith. When God saves us, He will also keep us. If God has done the most difficult thing, which is salvation, He will also do the lesser ones. God who "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

And it is David's preserving faith that helped in his persevering in the faith. David's enemies were powerful and numerous. One puritan preacher says that "experience breeds hope and confidence", but it must be qualified that it is not. But David's confidence was neither in his own ability, nor did his hope rest upon his own strength. His hope and confidence were founded upon God's faithfulness. David had a record of God's faithfulness, and so must we. ■

***One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in His temple. (Psalm 27:4)***

This twenty-seventh psalm consists of a hymn of holy confidence [vv. 1-6] and a prayer based on that confidence [vv. 7-14]. David expresses his trust in God Who is his light. In Him, he will never fear the darkness of despair and death. David also sings of the LORD'S salvation because he knows that the LORD will always deliver him. David praises God for His strength, and that is his basis for fearlessness.

David's confidence in the LORD was the reason for his one desire—to dwell in the house of the LORD. The place of God's abode meant many things to David, and he used several names to describe it: house, temple, pavilion and tabernacle. The last description was the most accurate because the temple then had not been built; God's house was just a tent. But the physical building was of little consequence—David's real desire was to be in the presence of the Almighty. David was like the son with one singular desire—longing for home and the presence of his father.

CHS: "Divided aims tend to distraction, weakness, disappointment. The man of one book is eminent, the man of one pursuit is successful. Let all our affection[s] be bound up in one affection, and that affection set upon heavenly things."

Our desires are only as good as our deeds. Desires are but dreams if they are not accompanied by a holy determination to make them come true. A man wishes he could pray more fervently; he wishes that he could serve more faithfully; he hopes to read the Bible more frequently; yet these wishes remain empty and unfulfilled unless he works them out in his life.

David's desire was to behold the beauty of God, to inquire and to be protected. Likewise, in our worship, we must focus entirely on God's greatness, grace and glory [for He is our Salvation]; to be enlightened in the Truth [for He is our Light]; and to be comforted in afflictions [for He is our Strength]. ■

***I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD. (Psalm 27:13-14)***

David's confidence in the LORD was also the consolation of his prayer [27:7-14]. We must not mistake David's continual pleas as signs of his desperation. Neither was David absorbed in self-pity when he called upon the LORD. Rather, his repetitions were his earnest pleadings to God because the LORD was the One Whom David could totally trust. David cried as if his closest kin had deserted him, but not God. Jehovah would not abandon His own.

The abandonment of David by his friends and families was not all bad because the experience drew him near to God. When your friends would neither lend a sympathetic ear or a helping hand, there is God Who would answer. When you are let down, there is God to take you up.

But like David, we must learn to trust the goodness of God. CHS: "Faintness of heart is a common infirmity...Faith...[is the tonic to the soul that] prevents fainting. Hope is heaven's balm for present sorrow...We must believe to see, not see to believe; we must wait the appointed time, and stay our soul's hunger with foretastes of the LORD's eternal goodness which shall soon be our feast and our song."

We must also learn to wait. In Hebrew, it literally means "to bind together". To wait on the LORD means to bind yourself together with Him. Picture yourself as a weak and frail strand, but you are being weaved into the strong cord of the Almighty. Like David, we would have fainted, but we must learn to wait on the LORD, and He will strengthen your heart. As the LORD told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness" [2 Cor. 12:9a]. ■

***Unto Thee will I cry, O LORD my Rock; be not silent to me: lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit. Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto Thee, when I lift up my hands toward Thy holy oracle. (Psalm 28:1-2)***

From David's prayer, we get the sense that there is imminent danger coming upon him. We do not know David's dire circumstances, but we can surmise that if David was praying that the LORD be not silent to him, then it must mean that the LORD had been silent for a while. And the divine silence aggravates David's sufferings to the point where he said that he was "like them that go down into the pit." But David never stopped praying, and he never stopped trusting. Prayer is not an exercise in futility, nor is it an excuse for resignation.

CHS: Some people pray as a matter of formality and are "content without answers to their prayers, but genuine applicants [pray-ers] cannot; they are not satisfied with the results of prayer itself in calming the mind and subduing the will...When God seems to close His ear, we must not therefore close our mouths."

God's silence to our prayer is itself an answer. It could mean that we have prayed amiss. It could also mean that we are to wait because "the trying of your faith worketh patience...that ye may be perfect and entire" [James 1:3-4]. God's silence, then, is not a sign to stop praying, but a signal to pray on!

*Pray on, when rough and dark your pathway,  
And you cannot see the light;  
When every spark of hope has vanished,  
And bright day has turned to night.  
Pray on, for God doth surely hear you,  
Noting well each sad request;  
Pray then in faith, truly believing  
That He always gives what's best.  
[Adam Baum] ■*



Mark 10:14 | *Suffer the little  
children to come unto Me,  
and forbid them not: for of  
such is the kingdom of God*

March

# Psalm 28:6-9

## My Strength and My Shield

01

MARCH

***The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him. (Psalm 28:7)***

**T**he LORD heard David's prayer, and he was helped. Credit must be given to David. He was persistent in his praying, and he was also profuse in his praise and thanksgiving—"therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him" (v. 7). Are you a thankful person?

Psalm 28 is written in the first person account with the exception of the eighth verse, where David includes the righteous into the picture. God who was David's strength and shield is also ours. The LORD Who was David's deliverer is also our saving strength. Praise the LORD that He treats us no less than He had treated David because we are also His anointed.

CHS: The LORD "infuses strength into us in our hour of weakness...Dependence upon the invisible God gives great independence of spirit, inspiring us with confidence more than human...David found both sword and shield in his God. The LORD preserves His people from unnumbered ills; and the Christian warrior, sheltered behind his God, is far more safe than the hero when covered with his shield of brass or triple steel."

The LORD works in our lives in numerous ways. Sometimes, He is our shield. As a shield, the LORD stands in front of us and stops the fiery darts of afflictions and temptations so that we never feel their pernicious blows. As our shield, our LORD delivers us from the dangers so that we never have to go through them.

At other times, the LORD is our strength. In those times, the LORD allows us to go through the trials. However, He stands beside us to bear us up in our weakness so that we would never fall. In either case, we would emerge as better people with our faith strengthened, and our hope assured. ■

***Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. (Psalm 29:1-2)***

This is a psalm of pure praise unto the LORD. David paints a portrait of Jehovah. This revered name of God is used in every verse of this psalm. Jehovah refers to God as the self-existent One, Who in Himself possesses essential life and eternal existence. Jehovah also distinguishes God as the One Who made the covenant with Israel (Exod. 3:15). What can the mighty do in the presence of Jehovah? The only appropriate thing to do is to worship but not by our own imagination but in the beauty of holiness.

CHS: *"Worship the LORD, bow before Him with devout homage and sacred awe, and let your worship be such as He appoints." In the Old Testament, the attire of the priesthood was itself an emblem of God's beauty and holiness. The worship system was one that was a feast to the people's senses.*

God made everything beautiful (Eccl. 3:11), and He deserves the best that we can give Him. We ought to do all things well—our singing of the hymns, our reading of the Scriptures. However, it is not the spirit of beauty that God is concerned about but the spirit of holiness.

Our worship should not be encumbered with lifeless ornamental formality. The towering cathedrals with stained glass windows, and the echoing chants of priests clothed in coloured vestments add a pomp and mystic beauty to the worship, but God's holiness must shine through the external beauty. His holiness is not seen in the bricks and mortars and the religious trappings. His holiness is seen in the lively stones which are His people. We are the ornaments of holiness that add to the beauty of worship.

CHS: *"Our worship is spiritual, and the architecture of the house and the garments of the worshippers are matters of no importance; the spiritual beauty of inward purity and outward holiness being far more precious in the eyes of our thrice holy God." It is this which God seeks, and with this He will be pleased. ■*

***The LORD will give strength unto His people; the LORD will bless His people with peace. (Psalm 29:11)***

The LORD is powerful, and His might is seen in the works of nature—the turbulence of the oceans, the destruction of forests, the eruption of volcanoes, and the shaking of the earth. All these were done by the voice of the LORD (Ps. 29:3-9). The writer of *Hebrews* tells us that—“The worlds were framed by the word of God” (Heb. 11:3). The LORD spoke, and it was so. The Word of God is an unchangeable decree. Hence David said, “The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever” (v. 10).

CHS: “Power was displayed in the hurricane...that power is promised to be the strength of the chosen. He who wings the unerring bolt, will give to His redeemed the wings of eagles; He who shakes the earth with His voice, will terrify the enemies of His saints, and give His children peace.”

But the voice of the LORD, which reverberates in the heaven and on earth, also resonates in the hearts of individual persons. The LORD called Abraham. He spoke to Moses. He called Samuel and the prophets. He whispered to Elijah in a still small voice. Our Lord Jesus called Lazarus out of the grave. He called Saul of Tarsus. Our Lord is the good shepherd who “calleth His own sheep by name” (John 10:3).

“The LORD will give strength unto His people.” Consider this blessed thought: The God of creation is also your God. The God Who rules the storms with devastating power is the God Who gives us strength. There is no reason to fear that His strength cannot support us.

The LORD will bless you with peace. There is nothing for us to fear in the tempest and trials of life. The LORD will cover us with His peace as we ride through the storms. ■

***For His anger endureth but a moment; in His favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. (Psalm 30:5)***

The title of this psalm—*A Psalm and Song at the dedication of the house of David*—hardly fits its content. The psalm is more a personal song of thanksgiving. There are two scenarios in the first six verses. First, it seemed that David had been restored from a serious physical illness. He had been brought to the very doors of death only to be spared, and David thanked the LORD for healing him and keeping him alive (vv. 2-3).

Second, it could also be that David had been spiritually sick; that he had sinned against the LORD. But now he praised the LORD for His righteous wrath was tempered with His gracious mercy.

CHS: God's judgements are short, "and they are removed as soon as real penitence sues for pardon and presents the great and acceptable sacrifice... God puts up His rod with great readiness as soon as its work is done; He is slow to anger and swift to end it."

David compares God's wrath to a moment. Literally, it means a very short time—the time taken for a drop of tear to dry up. Man's sorrow is compared to the wayfaring stranger who stays for the night.

God's anger is but a moment, but His favour is life, and life more abundant and eternal. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. We can count God's wrath in hours, but we measure His favour by eons.

In every break of morn, as we see the light of the morning sun peeking through the darkened horizon, we praise God for His gift of life and His favour. To be sure, the day will fade and night will set in again. It is only a foretaste. Yet there will come one day when we shall close our eyes for the night and awake to the eternal morn, and in the presence of the Sun of righteousness that shall never fade. ■

***Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness. (Psalm 30:11)***

Psalm 30 is a psalm of contrasts. The enemies put David down; God lifted him up. David was brought down to the grave, but he was kept alive. God was angry, yet in His favour was life. David wept in the night, but the morning brought joy and salvation. Are these changing circumstances part of David's changing fortunes? Are these the ebb and flow of life that is beyond our control? Absolutely not! God's hands are on the rudder as David confesses: "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness" (Ps. 30:11).

David ascribed his blessedness to the LORD's favour. Likewise, we must learn to regard each day of our lives as another page of evidence to our testimony of God's faithfulness.

CHS: "God takes away the mourning of His people; and what does He give them instead of it? Quiet and peace?...a great deal more than that... He makes their hearts to dance at the sound of his name. He takes off their sackcloth. [He clothed them with gladness.]...This is better than to wear garments of silk or cloth of gold...Many a poor man wears this heavenly apparel wrapped around his heart...such a man need not envy the emperor in all his pomp."

"Glory be to God" is the song that David sang, and it should be the song of every believer because in Christ, we have been given a sense of full forgiveness, enriched with His spiritual nature, and filled with all His fullness. How can one sing in throes of pain and suffering? Well, turn back a few pages of your life, re-read the goodness of God in time past, recall His loving-kindness, and re-sing again the hymns of His faithfulness. And you will echo with David, "I will give thanks unto Thee forever." ■

***Into Thine hand I commit my spirit: Thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth. (Psalm 31:5)***

David opens this psalm with a bold statement of trust. He follows up with several pictures of God as the basis for His trustworthiness. God is our Rock (vv. 2-3). He is our Fortress, and house of defence (v. 3).

David makes two statements about God being his Rock. One is a prayer—"Be Thou my strong Rock" (v. 2); and the other is an affirmation—"for Thou art my Rock" (v. 3). The question is asked: if David knew that God was his Rock, why did he have to pray for it? Charles Spurgeon puts this as the logic of the heart. We know God to be many things because the Bible tells us so, but we do not know Him to be Who He really is until we take Him as a part of our personal experience. The Bible tells us that God is omnipotent; and if so, in times of weakness, we must pray for His strength. The Bible tells us that God is omnipresent; and if so, in times of loneliness, we must pray that He will be with us.

First, we know God (Thou art my Rock); then we pray God to be what we know to be true about His relationship with us (Be Thou my Rock). Third, we must act upon what we know to be true about God—"Into Thine hand I commit my spirit" (v. 5a). You will recognise that these are the last words spoken by our blessed Saviour while He was on the cross.

CHS: These words "have been frequently used by holy men in their hour of departure...Observe, the object of the good man's solicitude in life and death is not his body or his estate, but his spirit...if this be safe, all is well... He commits it to the hand of his God...All things are safe in Jehovah's hands."

Many Christian martyrs had used the same words. John Hus was burned at the stake for defying the Pope. Before he was set aflame, the priest said to him, "We commit your soul to the devil." Hus replied, "I commit my spirit into Your hands, Lord Jesus Christ; my spirit which You have redeemed." The basis for this death-defying confidence is that our redemption has been accomplished by the God of Truth. ■

***But I trusted in Thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God. My times are in Thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. (Psalm 31:14-15)***

Today's reading represents the second wave of David's troubles. He begins with a plea—"Have mercy upon me, O LORD." What were his troubles? He was in the crosshairs of his enemies. There was a conspiracy to take his life. Furthermore, he was shunned by his neighbours and friends. His loved ones avoided him like the plague. He was left alone to bear the reproach of his enemies. David was consumed by grief. He was physically weak and emotionally drained. David was like a broken vessel. But he trusted in the LORD because "Thou art my God!" (v. 14).

CHS: Despite the "afflicting circumstances, David's faith maintained its hold... [David] proclaimed aloud his determined allegiance to Jehovah. He was no fair-weather believer, he could hold to his faith in a sharp frost, and wrap it about him as a garment fitted to keep out all the ills of time."

David's confidence did not fail. He believed that God was his Father and Friend; and that God was still on the throne. If there was no one man who could help him, there was God! Was the Almighty David's last resort? No. He began the psalm declaring his trust in the LORD (v. 1). Jehovah was David's only resort. As he had committed his spirit to the Redeemer, so he now committed his times into the hands of the sovereign God.

What a blessed assurance to know that our times are in God's hands. There can be no better plan than to know our LORD is the Captain of our souls.

*I know not, but God knows;  
Oh, blessed rest from fear!  
All my unfolding days  
To Him are plain and clear.  
Each anxious, puzzled "Why?"  
From doubt or dread that grows,  
Finds answer in this thought:  
I know not, but He knows.  
(Annie Johnson Flint) ■*

***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.  
(Psalm 31:23-24)***

David writes in the first person until the nineteenth verse when he switches to the third person plural. In doing so, David encourages us to learn from his experience. God is good not only to David but to all who fear Him. The LORD was not only David's refuge, but He "preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer" (v. 23).

God's goodness is all-inclusive. His love extends to all. Our only appropriate response is to love Him in return.

CHS: "A most affecting exhortation, showing clearly the deep love of David to his God: there is the more beauty in the expression, because it reveals love towards a smiting God... To bless him who gives is easy, but to cling to him who takes away is a work of grace... If saints do not love the LORD, who will? Love is the universal debt of all the saved family: who would wish to be exonerated from its payment? Reasons for love are given, for believing love is not blind."

We do not love God by our own initiative. Our love for God is a response—"We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God, not we, is the initiator. God's love is directed towards the faithful, and He preserves them. In other words, God's love never ends. Hence, our love for God should neither be incidental nor fragmentary.

Our Lord Jesus came to Peter and asked, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" (John 21:15). This question was repeated thrice. Peter, who had earlier denied the Lord, replied in muted tones, "Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee." As an exercise of self-examination, replace Simon's name in the verse with yours. What would your answer be?

Peter's life was forever changed that day, and so should ours. We can never love God too much. Our love for God must be a life-long and life-changing commitment. Our love for Him must be an accurate reflection of His love for us. ■

***Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.  
Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and  
in whose spirit there is no guile. (Psalm 32:1-2)***

**A**lthough the occasion for this penitential psalm was not stated, David referred to an event in his life which left him spiritually dry (vv. 3-4). The anguish of his spirit and the guilt of his conscience were the result of his sin.

David used three words for sin: transgression (rebellion), sin (to fall short), and iniquity (corruption). This three-fold description of the sinner does not leave him much hope. Indeed, there is no hope without God. However, He responds with three words to deal with man's sin: forgiven (lifted up), covered (overwhelmed), and not imputed (not counted). The point is that our sins are more than matched by God's grace. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20b).

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious tho't!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!  
(Horatio Spafford)*

Thus, it makes perfect sense for the sinner to turn to God, and the outcome is the greatest beatitude in the Bible—"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

CHS: "Blessedness is not in this case ascribed to the man who has been a diligent law-keeper... but rather to a lawbreaker, who by grace most rich and free has been forgiven. Self-righteous Pharisees [men] have no portion in this blessedness. Over the returning prodigal... a full, instantaneous, irreversible pardon of transgression turns the poor sinner's hell into heaven, and makes the heir of wrath a partaker in blessing." Our sins are covered by Christ, "whose atonement is the propitiation, the covering, the making an end of sin."

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." This is the state in which every man must find himself. But the blessing comes as a result of knowing who we are, as Augustine of Hippo wrote, "The beginning of knowledge is to know oneself to be a sinner." It culminates in the knowledge that God forgives and covers and does not regard us according to our sins. He looks at the cross, and sees His Son, and we are accepted in the Beloved. ■

***Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. (Psalm 32:7)***

David acknowledged his sins before God. He made no attempt to hide them (v. 5); not that he could if he had tried. Instead, David confessed his transgressions to the LORD.

However, David did hide something—he hid himself under the grace of God. And he encourages us to do the same. Call upon and draw near to God for He is our hiding place—the Refuge for our souls. The LORD is David’s cover and yours as well.

*Jesus the Lord laid His glory aside,  
Sinners to save and make whole,  
Freely He died our transgressions to hide,  
What is He worth to your soul?  
(James Rowe)*

“What is He worth to your soul?” — This question is worth our serious consideration because the efficacy of the blood of the Lamb must be applied to every heart individually. It is good to know that the LORD is David’s hiding place, but is He also your Refuge?

CHS: “Personal claims upon God are the joy of spiritual life. To lay our hand upon the LORD with the clasp of a personal ‘my’ is delight at its full... See what honest confession and full forgiveness will do! The gospel of substitution makes Him to be our Refuge who otherwise would have been our Judge.”

God is our hiding place, but that does not mean that we should continue to live under the shadow of our sins, trapped in our sorrowful past. Rather, we are to emerge from the fountain of grace as new creatures in Christ, singing the praise of our blessed Saviour. The Lord Himself shall fill our lives with songs of deliverance. Note that it is not a single hymn, but a repertoire of praise. It is not a solo, but a choir of the redeemed. A redeemed man is also a rejoicing man in the company of others who share the same hope. ■

***Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright... For the word of the LORD is right; and all His works are done in truth. (Psalm 33:1,4)***

This psalm is a song of worship and praise—a psalm for all people and for all times for “praise is comely for the upright.” “Comely” means “appropriate.” Praising God should be the believer’s nature.

As God’s people, we must praise Him. We have the best reason to praise Him because we have been redeemed. We have the most reasons to praise Him because of the multitude of His tender mercies. We are most qualified to praise Him, because we have been sanctified. The quality of our praise is measured by the music not from our lips, but from our hearts. There is no better hymn than that sung by the redeemed.

CHS: “Joy is the soul of praise. To delight ourselves in God is most truly to extol him, even if we let no notes of song proceed from our lips. That God is, and that he is such a God, and our God, ours for ever and ever, should wake within us an unceasing and overflowing joy. To rejoice in temporal comforts is dangerous, to rejoice in self is foolish, to rejoice in sin is fatal, but to rejoice in God is heavenly.”

The Christian’s praise of God must be spontaneous. It must also be beautiful; God’s people must play and sing skilfully, not to impress men, but to please God (Eccl. 9:10). Our LORD deserves our best effort.

The Christian’s praise must be loud (v. 3). Charles Wesley had seven rules for congregational singing, and they include:

Rule Four: “Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sing the songs of Satan.”

Rule Seven: “Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself, or any other creature... [let] your singing be such as the LORD will approve here, and reward you when He cometh in the clouds of heaven.” ■

***Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance. (Psalm 33:12)***

The Psalmist was writing specifically about the nation of Israel. The Israelites were to be “a holy people unto the LORD thy God... to be a special people unto Himself” (Deut. 7:6). In fact they were to be a “kingdom of priests” (Exod. 19:5-6). The state of Israel was not to be measured by her material achievements, but by her spiritual relationship with the LORD.

CHS: “Israel was happy in the worship of the only true God... While others grovelled before their idols, the chosen people were elevated by a spiritual religion which introduced them to the invisible God, and led them to trust in Him. All who confide in the LORD are blessed in the largest and deepest sense, and none can reverse the blessing.”

We spent some seven years in Canada. She is one of the few countries in the world that has “God” in her national anthem. In fact, an earlier version of *O Canada* has more specific references of God.

*O Canada! Our fathers' land of old  
Thy brow is crown'd with leaves of red and gold  
Beneath the shade of the Holy Cross  
Thy children own their birth  
No stains thy glorious annals gloss  
Since valour shield thy hearth.  
Almighty God! On Thee we call  
(1906 version)*

Today, Canada is anything but Christian. As a nation turns away from God in search of gold, she soon forgets her history and denies her heritage. And so she has been deprived of God's blessings.

How shall we think of ourselves? Paul reminds us that “our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). While we walk on this earth, we must not forget that we are chosen to be “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet. 2:9) to shine as lights in this world of darkness. ■

***Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. (Psalm 33:18-19)***

The Psalmist was mindful of the watchfulness of the LORD. The LORD looks; He beholds (vv. 13-14, 18). The LORD sees from heaven. He sees the “sons of men... [and] all the inhabitants of the earth.” The LORD considers all their works so that “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). The LORD sees all, but He Himself is not seen.

Man’s sight, on the other hand, is limited. We cannot see beyond our field of sight. And what we cannot see, we either disregard or fear. For this reason, some people do not consider the consequences of their sinful actions; whereas there are others who are trapped in inaction for fear of the consequences.

To the sons of men, the all-seeing God is indeed the One to be feared. The LORD sees everything. He sits on the throne of heaven as the all-knowing Judge, and He quietly observes the doings of man. He knows not only the works of our hands but also the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

To the God-fearing man, God is a source of consolation. “Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy” (v. 18).

CHS: “They who fear God need not fear anything else; let them fix their eye of faith on Him, and His eye of love will always rest upon them... Dost thou not hope in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus? Then the Father’s eye is as much upon thee... These gentle words, like soft bread, are meant for babes in grace, who need infants’ food.”

The LORD is not passive. The God of love is not indifferent. And what the LORD sees with His eyes, His hands will do—to discipline, to deliver, to provide, and to save. Thus, like the Psalmist, we must rest confidently upon the LORD — to wait, to trust, and to rejoice even as we hope in Him. ■

***I will bless the LORD at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. (Psalm 34:1-2)***

David was fleeing from King Saul, and he was forced to seek refuge amongst the Philistines. But they recognised David as the man who had killed Goliath. To disarm the Philistines' mistrust, David pretended to be mad. This incident was a low point in David's life. But in the depths of David's despair, we see the depths of God's mercy and love. Charles Spurgeon gives an interesting outline to this psalm: verses 1-10 is a hymn, and verses 11-22 is a sermon.

David begins with a personal adoration of God. "I will bless...my soul shall boast." CHS: "What scope there is for holy boasting in Jehovah! His person, attributes, covenant, promises, works, and a thousand things besides, are all incomparable, unparalleled, matchless... he who writes these words of comment has nothing of his own to boast of, but much to lament over, and yet none shall stop him of his boast in God so long as he lives."

Praising God should be instinctive to Christians. What we delight, we freely and openly proclaim. We praise God because we love and delight in Him. But our praises are not merely an expression of our delight in God—they are also an inherent part of our love for Him. Our love for and our praises of our LORD are not separate parts sewn together; rather, it should be a seamless garment interwoven with love and praise.

David began with personal praise, but his boasting of the LORD could not be contained in himself. It was not long before he asked others to praise the LORD with him. Believers ought always to declare the goodness of God so that others may be confirmed in their trust in a faithful God. Corporate worship is instinctively natural for God's people.

Praises that flow freely also overflow. The fragrance of our praises should also induce others to enter into the sanctuary of worship. Live so that Christ may be praised. ■

***O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. O fear the LORD, ye His saints: for there is no want to them that fear Him. (Psalm 34:8-9)***

**P**rove the LORD! This is David's challenge. Speaking from experience, David says, "I know God to be true and good. He has delivered me from my enemies. He has provided for me. And you can know it too!"

CHS: "Make a trial, an inward, experimental trial of the goodness of God. You cannot see except by tasting for yourself; but if you taste, you shall see... *that the LORD is good*... There is a banquet [of spiritual blessings but]... they will be all unknown to you except you make the blessings of grace your own, by a living, inward, vital participation in them... Faith is the soul's taste; they who test the LORD by their confidence always find Him good."

To "taste" (v. 8) means "to eat a little for the purpose of finding out what a thing is and passing judgement on it". The wise woman "*perceiveth* [tasted] that her merchandise is good" (Prov. 31:18). In Psalm 34, it is used to describe the testing of our faith in God by experience.

There is really no way to know the promises of God except by living out His Word. The veracity of God's Word is proved by our obedience. The sureness of God's promises is proved by our faith in them. We will never know God's blessings until we prove His goodness by our submission.

There are people who think that problems arise when believers take the Word of God too literally. On the contrary, I believe that the problem with the church and individual Christians is that we do not take God's Word literally enough, especially His commands.

"All the promises of God in [Christ] are yea, and in Him Amen" (2 Cor. 1:20). Taste and see that the LORD is good. Taste not and stay spiritually impoverished. ■

***The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all. (Psalm 34:18-19)***

David was not a blind optimist. From his life experiences, he knew the dangers and challenges that the righteous has to face. The godly will cry because of the trials in their lives. There will be times when our hearts are broken, and occasions when our spirits are discouraged. We will be afflicted. But consider David's assurances: when we cry, the LORD hears (v. 15); when we are tested, the LORD delivers (v. 17); when our hearts are broken, the LORD draws near (v. 18); and when we are afflicted, He rescues. (v. 19)

CHS: "Scripture does not flatter us like the story books with the idea that goodness will secure us from trouble; on the contrary, we are again and again warned to expect tribulation while we are in this body. Our afflictions come from all points of the compass... [But] Jehovah shall lead His redeemed scatheless and triumphant. There is an end to the believer's afflictions, and a joyful end too... The same LORD Who sends the afflictions will also recall them when His design is accomplished."

David was a believing realist. He knew that "man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). The reality of life is that this world is cursed. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. Our faith in God does not exempt us from the trials of life; in fact as Christians, we must expect more. "If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (1 John 3:13).

Genuine faith is a magnet for many afflictions, but genuine faith also sustains us. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (v. 19). Christian, count the number of afflictions in your life. Count the number of times God has delivered you. The fact that you are counting now is proof of God's mercy and goodness. ■

***Plead my cause, O LORD, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. (Psalm 35:1)***

**P**salm 35 is an imprecatory psalm. It is a psalm in which David calls on the LORD to pour down His wrath upon the wicked. Many people cannot understand how these “curses” could be acceptable to God. We must look at the imprecatory psalms not as a call for private vengeance against our enemies, but a public vindication of God’s righteousness. The Psalmist has identified himself with God and His cause that he regarded the enemies of God as his own, and he prays to God to justify Himself by judging those who deny Him and disobey His laws.

When David prays, “Plead my cause, O LORD,” his prayer is right only if his cause is right. CHS: “Every saint of God shall have this privilege: the accuser of the brethren shall be met by the Advocate of the saints. *“Fight against them that fight against me”...oppose Thy strength to their strength.*”

This is a three-part Psalm. David paints three pictures to portray this spiritual battle, of which the first is a petition for deliverance (vv. 4-10)—he calls on the LORD to come to his aid, picturing the LORD as a mighty warrior.

“Plead my cause, O LORD.” To “plead” means to “strive.” David is asking the LORD to undertake his cause against those who had risen up against him. It is quite certain that David could not manage his own cause against his foes; and hence, he pleads with God to come to his aid. What a sure defense!

Our battle is spiritual (Eph. 6:12), and our enemy is no less ruthless. He is the roaring lion and the accuser of our brethren (1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:10). But we have our Lord Jesus as our Advocate; “He is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1-2). The battle has been fought and won, and all that remains is for us to call Him Who is able and willing to save. ■

***I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother. (Psalm 35:14)***

From the battlefield, David brings us into the law court. The threat now is not to David's life but to his character. The enemies were external but they were David's "friends". When they were sick, David prayed for them. When they were in need, David provided for them. David loved them as a son would love his mother.

CHS: "The mother usually wins the deepest love, and her loss is most keenly felt: such was David's grief. How few professors [believers] in these days have such bowels of compassion...[An irony because] under the gospel there should be far more tender love than under the law." If only believers were more loving and compassionate, we might be far more useful for the LORD.

"I behaved myself..." David walked uprightly in his dealings with his friends. By his conduct, David gave no cause for them to turn against him. But they did! Note the downward spiral of the ungrateful person. First, they rejoiced at David's adversities. Next, they exploited David's problems for their own gain. They came together not to oppose. Third, they were relentless in their attacks against David.

David's friends were ungrateful. Ingratitude is a characteristic of spiritual immaturity. Babies do not appreciate what parents do for them. They have short memories. Their concern is not what you did for them a while ago, but what you are doing for them now. To the ungrateful person, the past is meaningless; the present is the opportunity to exploit more; and the future is the problem of the next generation.

Conversely, one who is mature and grateful will be deeply appreciative of those who laboured with and for one in the past. He is thankful for those who laboured in the present, and mindful to provide for those who will be labouring in the future. ■

***Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me: neither let them wink with the eye that hate me without a cause. (Psalm 35:19)***

**L**et not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me" (v. 19). The word "wrongfully" means "falsely", and it should properly describe David's enemies and not their rejoicing. Literally, David is saying that his "false enemies" are rejoicing over his adversities.

We know what false friends are, but what are false enemies? False enemies are those people who have no real cause to oppose David. They are those enemies who hate David for no reason. The only reason for their rejoicing was in David's predicament. His troubles became the material for their jokes. A Chinese saying goes: the enemy is one who rejoices at your calamities and delights in your crises.

Furthermore, David's enemies "wink with the eye". This is an expression of malice. It is a gesture of mischief. The wink is used to disarm a person's guard, before stabbing him when he is caught off-guard.

CHS: "The winking of the eye was the low-bred sign of congratulation at the ruin of their victim, and it may also have been one of their scornful gestures as they gazed upon him whom they despised. To cause hatred is the mark of the wicked, to suffer it causelessly is the lot of the righteous."

Hatred against the Christian does not need a reason. It comes with being a child of God. Our Lord says, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Our response is two-fold: first, that we should be mindful never to allow our conduct to justify that hatred; and "if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Pet. 4:16). ■

***Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause: yea, let them say continually, Let the LORD be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of His servant. (Psalm 35:27)***

It is difficult enough to suffer as a result of injustice. It is an additional humiliation if our enemies rejoice over our failures. David's enemies had been successful in causing his downfall. They rejoiced at David's sufferings (vv. 15-16). Now they rejoiced at his defeat as well (vv. 19, 24, 26). David's enemies were gloating at his pain, "Aha, aha, our eye hath seen it" (v. 21). What did David's enemies see? They saw the success of their false accusations.

However, there is someone who saw and knew of the evil schemes. David prayed, "This Thou hast seen, O LORD" (v. 22). The LORD also saw. He knew the truth. He knew that David was falsely accused. And thus the LORD would plead David's cause and vindicate His servant. CHS: "The day is coming when shouts of victory shall be raised by all who are on Christ's side, for the battle will turn, and the foes of truth shall be routed."

David was not alone in his sufferings. There were others who recognised that David was the LORD's servant. CHS: "We can have no nobler title than 'servant of God', and no greater reward than for our Master to delight in our prosperity. What true prosperity may be we are not always best able to judge. We must leave that in Jesus' hand; He will not fail to rule all things for our highest good."

Can Christians pray for God's judgement upon our enemies? There are three important points to consider. First, such prayer is never for our private vengeance, but for the vindication of God; second, self-examination must precede such prayer. David asked the LORD to judge him (v. 24); and third, David asked the LORD to plead his cause, and left the matter in the hands of God. The LORD says, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay" (Rom. 12:19b). How and when are all in the LORD's hands. ■

***Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; Thy judgements are a great deep: O LORD, Thou preservest man and beast. (Psalm 36:5-6)***

**W**hat is the root problem of man? He has no fear of God. This describes the man who has neither reverence for God nor regard for His will. Such a man acts without any restraint from the laws of God. When man rejects God, he also loses the only true reference point for life. At the same time, he sets himself up as the final arbiter of morality—"he flattereth himself in his own eyes" (v. 2a).

From that point on, it is a downward slide. In the first four verses, there are eleven descriptions of the ungodly man: he is a transgressor; he rejects God in his heart; he has no fear of God; he is proud; he is blind to his own sins; his words are deceiving; he rejects wisdom; he fails to do good; he thinks of evil; he sets himself to do evil; and he has no aversion to evil. Note the progression of evil from the rejection of God to ceasing to do good, then to doing evil and finally to hardening of his heart.

The wickedness of man is no match for the goodness of God. There is no man so wicked that God, by His sovereign will, cannot save. CHS: "Divine mercy abides in its vastness of expanse, and matchless patience, all unaltered by the rebellions of man. When we can measure the heavens, then shall we bound the mercy of the LORD. Towards His own servants especially, in the salvation of the Lord Jesus, He has displayed grace higher than the heaven of heavens, and wider than the universe."

David describes God's attributes in the superlatives. His mercy is in the heavens; His faithfulness reaches the clouds; His righteousness is like the mountains; His judgements reach into the deep—so that He might preserve His creation (vv. 5-6). ■

***For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light.  
(Psalm 36:9)***

The wicked has no idea that when he rejects God, he rejects His blessings. On the other hand, those who put their trust in God will enjoy His loving-kindness. David mentions four ways in which the righteous is blessed.

He shall be “abundantly satisfied” (v. 8a). The phrase means “to be filled with water.” It is the picture of a man who was thirsty and hungry but had drunk and eaten till he was utterly satisfied.

He shall be filled with God’s pleasures (v. 8b). The word “pleasure” is “*eden*” in Hebrew. David was looking back to the days before the fall, when man’s greatest pleasure was the fellowship he had with his Creator. This is the picture of reconciliation. To the righteous man, reverence to God is a delightful occupation.

He shall have life from the Fountain of life. CHS: “From the LORD, as from an independent self-sufficient spring, all creature life proceeds, by Him it is sustained, through Him alone can it be perfected. Life is in the creature, but the fountain of it is only in the Creator. Of spiritual life, this is true in the most emphatic sense; ‘it is the Spirit that quickeneth,’ and we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God.”

He shall see light. The source of light is the LORD. The wicked man has lost his bearing. The righteous finds his by looking to the LORD. There is no other source of real light and truth but God. By looking to God, we know who God is and who we are. There are some people who change their ways when they see the light; but there are others who feel the heat and continue on their own paths. Which are you? ■

***Delight thyself also in the LORD; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass. (Psalm 37:4-5)***

To those who dread old age, here is a word of encouragement from Robertson McQuilkin. He wrote, “God has planned the strength and beauty of youth to be physical. But the strength and beauty of age is spiritual. We gradually lose the strength and beauty that is temporary so we’ll be sure to concentrate on the strength and beauty that is forever.”

Psalm 37 is the beautiful testimony of a godly old man. Perhaps, David pens this as his final will and testament, and he leaves behind a wealth of spiritual lessons—truths that will bring us spiritual success and contentment.

The first step to God’s formula of finding lasting contentment is to “fret not...neither be thou envious” (v. 1). The grass may seem greener on the other side, but it will “soon be cut down.” The temporal nature of worldly wealth is nothing compared to the eternal inheritance that God has prepared for us. Moses understood this principle, and he chose “to suffer affliction... than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25).

Step two: Trust in the LORD and do good. CHS: “Faith cures fretting...Faith has clearer optics to behold things as they really are...True faith is actively obedient. Doing good is a fine remedy for fretting. There is a joy in holy activity which drives away the rust of discontent.”

Step three: Delight in the LORD (v. 4). This simply means the LORD becomes our number-one-desire. We worship Him not for the gifts that He has given, but above all for Who He is to us. When we are completely submerged in Him, then surely His desires shall be ours as well.

Step four: Commit our way to the LORD (vv. 5-6). “Commit” has the idea of rolling a heavy burden from ourselves and laying it upon the LORD:

*Rolled away, rolled away, rolled away.  
Ev’ry burden of my heart rolled away.  
Ev’ry sin had to go ‘neath the crimson flow.*

Every one of these steps is an imperative. There is no other way to spiritual success. ■

***But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. (Psalm 37:11)***

There is a quiet repose that the LORD gives to the righteous. In the face of injustice, the righteous rests in the LORD (v. 7). He keeps still and silent (Ps. 46:10). He refrains from anger (v. 8). This is the temperament and character of the meek man. And our Lord says, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

CHS: "Above all others they [the meek] shall enjoy life. Even if they suffer, their consolations shall overtop [exceed] their tribulations. By inheriting the land is meant obtaining covenant privileges and the salvation of God. Such as are truly humble shall take their lot with the rest of the heirs of grace, to whom all good things come by a sacred birthright."

What does it mean to be meek? There is a farcical organisation known as DOORMATS, which stands for "Dependent Organisation of Really Meek And Timid Souls," and their motto is "The meek shall inherit the earth, if that's okay with everybody."

Does being meek mean being a doormat? No. The meek person is one who knows himself to be poor in spirit. Moses was a meek man (Num. 12:3), but he was not always so (Exod. 2:12; Num. 20:11-12). But he was meek in that when he was maligned, he kept silent. His meekness was shown in his acceptance of what God had ordained, including his enormous disappointment of being shut out of the Promised Land.

Meekness, for a child of God, means submitting to God knowing that it is the LORD Who orders all things. What He sends, we accept in faith even if it hurts, knowing that the LORD's will is perfect. It requires more strength, fortitude and faith to be meek.

The meek shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. Meekness produces peace because the meek person no longer struggles against circumstances and people for what seems to be his rights. ■

***A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. (Psalm 37:16)***

The wisdom of godliness is at odds with the wisdom of worldliness. The worldly man promotes doing evil; whereas the godly man exhorts doing good. One admires might; the other approves meekness. The world devises evil; the LORD delights in peace. The world craves for riches; the godly is contented with the little that the LORD provides.

CHS: "The little of one good man is contrasted with the riches of many wicked, and so the expression is rendered the more forcible. There is more happiness in the godly dinner of herbs than in the [feasting of profane sinners]... A man's happiness consists not in the heaps of gold which he has in store. Content finds *multum in parvo* [much in little] while for a wicked heart the whole world is too little."

Implied in David's wise advice is the ability of the righteous to distinguish between things of enduring value and those of passing worth. David is not extolling poverty as a virtue; neither does he think that wealth is a vice. But it is better to have little of this world's goods with righteousness, than to have the riches of this world with ungodliness.

*He that is down needs fear no fall,  
He that is low, no pride;  
He that is humble ever shall  
Have God to be his guide.  
I am content with what I have,  
Little be it or much;  
And, LORD, contentment still I crave,  
Because Thou savest such.  
Fullness to such a burden is  
That go on pilgrimage;  
Here little, and hereafter bliss,  
Is best from age to age.  
(John Bunyan) ■*

***The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in His way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with His hand. (Psalm 37:23-24)***

**W**hat is a good man? Ask the world, and you will get a myriad of answers. Man's definition of goodness differs because the world has no objective standard of goodness. The Psalmist's definition of a good man is one whose steps are ordered by the LORD. In the Bible, the adjective "good" is in italic, meaning that it is supplied by the translators, but not originally written in the original text. However, David's point is unmistakable; a man is good because he delights in the LORD.

When a man delights in the LORD, his steps will be ordered by the Almighty; meaning that the course of his life will be guided by the LORD. A man whose life is ordered is assured of God's favour, but he is not exempted from trials. There will be times when he stumbles and falls. There will be times of disappointments.

CHS: "Sorrow may bring us to the earth, and death may bring us to the grave, but lower we cannot sink, and out of the lowest of all we shall arise to the highest of all...With His own hand, God upholds His saints... Even in our falls the LORD gives a measure of sustaining. Where grace does not keep from going down, it shall save from keeping down...It is not that the saints are strong, or wise, or meritorious, that therefore they rise after every fall, but because God is their helper, and therefore none can prevail against them."

The good man rises from his adversities but not by his own strength or determination. The purpose of trials is not to harden our hearts but to strengthen our faith. By his falling and by God's upholding, the good man is made better, and the better man made perfect. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations...the trying of your faith worketh patience... let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect..." (James 1:2-4). ■

***The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgement. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide. (Psalm 37:30-31)***

The whole thirty-seventh Psalm is a comparison between the wicked and the godly. It is inevitable that David should deal with both the evil and blessing of the tongue. The tongue is a tool. What comes from a tongue depends on how it is used.

Aesop, the famed fabulist, told the story about a donkey which found a lion's skin. He tried it on, strutted around, and frightened many animals. Soon a fox came along, and the donkey tried to scare him, too. But the fox, hearing the donkey's voice, said, "If you want to terrify me, you'll have to disguise your bray." The moral of the story is that clothes may hide a man, but his words will betray his true nature.

CHS: "The mouth betrays the heart. Good men, as a rule, speak that which is to edifying, sound speech, religious conversation, consistent with the divine illumination which they have received. Righteousness is wisdom in action, hence all good men are practically wise men, and well may the speech be wise...He advocates justice, gives an honest verdict on things and men, and he foretells that God's judgements will come upon the wicked, as in the former days. His talk is neither foolish nor ribald, neither vapid nor profane. Our conversation is of far more consequence than some men imagine."

One woman once came to Billy Sunday and told him candidly that she had a foul temper. But she also assured the evangelist that she would blow in one short minute. Billy Sunday looked at her, and said, "So is a shotgun, it blows everything to pieces in a few short seconds."

David gives us another pearl of wisdom: the source of good speech is the heart. The righteous speaks wisely because the law of God is in his heart. When a man's heart is held captive to the Word of God, so will his tongue. ■

***Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. (Psalm 37:37)***

The excellence of a person's character is seen in greater contrast when juxtaposed with the wicked. The former is marked for salvation; whereas the latter is reserved for destruction. This is natural law; "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). With ample personal experience, David invites us to "mark the perfect man," meaning to behold the man who is righteous in the eyes of the LORD.

CHS: "Good men are men of mark, and are worth our study. Upright men are marvels of grace, and worth beholding...The man of peace has an end of peace. Peace without end comes in the end to the man of God. His way may be rough, but it leads home. With believers it may rain in the morning, thunder at midday, and pour in torrents in the afternoon, but it must clear up ere the sun goes down."

"The end" is the reality that every man has to face. What kind of "the end" depends on what you do in the present. The Christian race is not a 100-metre sprint where the starting can make the difference between a loser and a winner. Instead, the Christian race is a marathon, which calls not for a quick burst of speed but a persevering effort to the end.

The end of the righteous man is peace. The Hebrew word for peace (*shalom*) encompasses far more than its English equivalent. "Peace" is used in the Bible to describe a man who has complete well-being, physical as well as spiritual. Such a man is one who has reconciled with God, is sustained by His grace, and whose hopes rest solely in Him. ■

***There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. (Psalm 38:3)***

The title of the thirty-eighth psalm suggests that David wrote this lament as a reminder of a terrible sin in his past. David begins with a prayer that the LORD would temper His divine wrath with mercy. Although David did not specify the particular sin, it is clear that he keenly felt the effects of that sinful experience. Sin leaves its terrible effects on the body, mind, and soul.

CHS: "Mental depression tells upon the bodily frame; it is enough to create and foster every disease, and is in itself the most painful of all diseases. Soul sickness tells upon the entire frame; it weakens the body, and then bodily weakness reacts upon the mind. One drop of divine anger sets the whole of our blood boiling with misery...No soundness and no rest are two sad deficiencies; yet these are both consciously gone from every awakened conscience until Jesus gives relief."

Sin wreaks its havoc not just on the sinner but also on those around him. A man sins, but the effects of his sin extend its deadly grasp to others. It is like a disease that spreads. In the 1300's a few Italian merchant ships returned from China carrying the bubonic plague. Within a few days, the deadly disease spread; and within five years, one third of Europe's population was wiped out.

If the psalm had ended at the eighth verse, it would have been depressing for the sinner. But in his sinful state, David also knew that God's ear was not deaf to his cries for mercy. This is the proper way to appeal to God. We can neither demand for mercy nor claim it, but we certainly can ask or cry for it. And those who cry to God earnestly and humbly will never go away from the throne of grace empty-handed. ■

***LORD, all my desire is before Thee; and my groaning is not hid from Thee. (Psalm 38:9)***

In the darkness of the sin, and the ravages of its effects upon the body, mind, and soul, David looks to the LORD. In the ninth verse, we see the beginning of David's second prayer. The humble cry—"LORD"—acts like a key that opens the fountain of God's divine mercy that flows from the throne of grace.

It is not the eloquence of the lips but the contrition of the heart that impresses God. The best prayers are those spoken from a broken heart. It chimes like music, reaching to the courts of heaven.

"LORD, all my desire is before Thee." By this, David means that his desires are transparent to the LORD. The LORD knows David's brokenness, and He is the only One Who could heal and restore.

CHS: "Blessed be God, He reads the longings of our hearts; nothing can be hidden from Him; what we cannot tell Him He perfectly understands. The Psalmist is conscious that he has not exaggerated, and therefore appeals to heaven for a confirmation of his words. The good Physician understands the symptoms of our disease and sees the hidden evil which they reveal, hence our case is safe in His hands...Sorrow and anguish hide themselves from the observation of man, but God spies them out. [There is] none more lonely than the broken-hearted sinner, yet hath he the LORD for his companion."

*His faithfulness fails not; it meets each new day  
New guidance for every new step of the way;  
New grace for new trials, new trust for old fears,  
New patience for bearing the wrongs of the years,  
New strength for new burdens, new courage for old,  
New faith for whatever the day may unfold;  
As fresh for each need as the dew on the sod;  
Oh, new every morning the mercies of God!  
(Annie Johnson Flint) ■*

***For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin. (Psalm 38:18)***

**D**avid's soul was sick with sin, and he described these feelings of guilt in graphic terms. But the only recourse for sin is humble confession.

CHS: "The slander of his enemies he repudiates, but the accusations of his conscience he admits. Open confession is good for the soul. When sorrow leads to hearty and penitent acknowledgment of sin it is blessed sorrow, a thing to thank God for most devoutly...It is well not so much to bewail [express] our sorrows as to denounce the sins which lie at the root of them. To be sorry for sin is no atonement for it, but it is the right spirit in which to repair [go] to Jesus, Who is the reconciliation and the Saviour."

The concept of a man being "sorry for sin" is almost alien to the modern mind. The world's intention is to turn sin on its head and remove the sinner's personal responsibility for his sin. Today sin is often defined as a disease; an error in judgement; or even the result of freedom of choice, of youthful indiscretion, or of midlife crisis. Some people even describe sin as a necessary evil, only to realise that, as sin becomes more and more necessary, it also become less and less evil.

What is sin? Susannah Wesley, the godly mother of Charles and John Wesley, gives this wise definition: "If you would judge of the lawfulness or the unlawfulness of pleasure, then take this simple rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, and takes off the relish of spiritual things—that to you is sin."

There is nothing heavier than the burden of sin, but there is nothing sweeter than God's forgiving grace. 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9). ■



Psalm 149:2 | *Let Israel rejoice  
in Him that made him:  
let the children of Zion be  
joyful in their King*

April

***LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. (Psalm 39:4)***

**P**salm thirty-nine invites us to consider the meaning of life. What is the end of man's life? The Westminster Divines state eloquently that man's chief end (purpose of life) is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. The prerogative of glorifying and enjoying God is to know Him. Knowing God—Who He is and what He has done—puts us in the proper framework of knowing our end (the destination of life), and that includes the brevity and frailty of our lives.

CHS: "The Psalmist would know more of the shortness of life, that he might better bear its transient ills [present adversities], and herein we may safely kneel with him, uttering the same petition. That there is no end to its misery is the hell of hell; that there is an end to life's sorrow is the hope of all who have a hope beyond the grave... They who see death through the LORD's glass, see a fair sight, which makes them forget the evil of life in foreseeing the end of life."

"LORD, make me to know mine end" reveals David's impatience over God's apparent lack of help in his hour of need. Can it be fair that a life so brief be crowded with so much pain? Before we criticise David for his indulgence in self-pity, we must also examine our own hearts, and how prone we are to do the same.

Look at the brevity of life this way: "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:16b-17). That life on earth is brief is our consolation for pain for we know it is only temporary; that life is brief makes it incumbent upon us to live life for the glory of God. ■

***When Thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, Thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity. (Psalm 39:11)***

Samuel Beckett, the Irish playwright, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for a new form of drama that elevated the “destitution of modern man”. Beckett was known for his pessimism of the human condition. In one of his most famous plays, *Waiting for Godot*, a man was waiting for another man (Godot), whom he did not know, and whose coming he was not sure. It was an uncertain and vain wait.

The sinner’s life is just as futile without God. But by His sovereign grace, God comes into the sinner’s life, removes the glitter, exposes his hopelessness, and shows him a better way.

CHS: “As the moth frets the substance of the fabric, mars all its beauty, and leaves it worn out and worthless, so do the chastisements of God discover to us our folly, weakness, and nothingness, and make us feel ourselves to be as worn out vestures, worthless and useless. Beauty must be a poor thing when a moth can consume it and a rebuke can mar it. All our desires and delights are wretched moth-eaten things when the LORD visits us in His anger ... He [man] is unsubstantial as his own breath, a vapour which appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away.”

If life is brief, and its achievements are worthless, how then shall we live? This is what Amy Carmichael prayed when she remembered that homeless lady she saw as a young girl: “My God, who has committed to my care Thy ransomed one (that lady) lest I be scattered here and there and she be gone. Give me to hold me firmly to my trust; let all that would distract me be as dust. ‘Thy life for hers’—O solemn, urgent word. Lest I forget, my sense of values waver, or be blurred, or overset by other things, take me and purge and bend each power and purpose to one single end. Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth Thee, O LORD, my God. Give clearness, lest some by-way tangle me. Where Christ hath trod, there would I tread, nor ever turn aside, lest she be missing for whom Christ hath died.” ■

***I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. (Psalm 40:1-2)***

For preaching God's Word, Jeremiah was thrown into the dungeon. There was no water in the dungeon, only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud (Jer. 38:6). The mud must have been so terribly thick that it took 30 men to pull Jeremiah out of the dungeon. David was also in a horrible pit. The pit, however, is merely a picture of some debilitating sin in his life—his sin with Bathsheba; his unholy alliance with the Philistines; his years as a fugitive of Saul's court. Whatever they might be, David could not pull himself out of his miry mess; he could only cry to God and wait. The LORD answered.

CHS: "The Redeemer's work is done. He reposes on the firm ground of His accomplished engagement [finished work]...What a comfort to know that Jesus our LORD and Saviour stands on a sure foundation in all that He is and does for us ... He is forever and eternally able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him."

For a man who is stuck in quicksand, the more he struggles, the more he sinks; this picture should not be foreign to us. In such a situation, help must come from outside. When we cry, God hears, and He dispatches His help, not with a multitude of men but only His Son; not with temporal relief but with the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. When God helps, He does not merely lift us out from the pit. He sets our feet upon the rock and directs our going. And as an added measure of His love, He gives us a new song to sing His praise. ■

***I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, Thou knowest. (Psalm 40:8-9)***

“**I** delight to do Thy will.” This should be the desire of every born-again Christian. But how does one fulfill that desire? How can we know God’s will? How should we do God’s will? Answer: the will of God is found in His law, and doing the will of God is the same as obeying the Word of God.

CHS: “Herein is the essence of obedience, namely, in the soul’s cheerful devotion to God: and our Lord’s obedience, which is our righteousness, is in no measure lacking in this eminent quality. Notwithstanding His measureless griefs, our Lord found delight in His work, and for ‘the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame’...No outward, formal devotion was rendered by Christ; His heart was in His work, holiness was His element, the Father’s will His meat and drink.”

The Pharisees observed the letter of the law. But while they kept the law’s minutiae, they erred in one vital point—they had the wrong motivation. They kept the law, but they did not love it. They obeyed the law, but it was a burden. To delight in doing God’s will is more than a mechanical response. It is not just about doing, but also about the delight that accompanies it. Where there is no heart, there can be no delight; and without delight, there can be no acceptance before God.

The only way to delight in the law of God is to submerge ourselves in it. It is not easy to carry two gallons of water over our heads because of the weight of the water. But when we are completely submerged in a pool of water, we do not feel the weight of water over us because we are in it. Likewise, when we delight in Christ—the One Who fulfills the law—we also delight in His law. ■

***But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinketh upon me: Thou art my Help and my Deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God. (Psalm 40:17)***

The fortieth Psalm ended the same way it began, with the Psalmist lamenting his despair and rejoicing in God's deliverance. He was cast into a horrible pit and forsaken, but the LORD brought him out and set his feet upon a rock. At the end, the Psalmist was poor and needy and forgotten, but the LORD thought about him.

David's life had been a series of troubles interspersed with brief moments of respite. Ironically, it was in those times of trials that David was especially sensitive to the LORD's presence with him.

CHS: "The LORD's thoughts of us are a cheering subject of meditation, for they are ever kind and never cease. His disciples forsook Him...but Jesus knew that Jehovah never turned away His heart from Him, and this upheld Him in the hour of need...His unmoved confidence stayed itself alone on God. O that all believers would imitate more fully their great Apostle and High Priest [our Lord] in His firm reliance upon God, even when afflictions abounded and the light was veiled."

Frank Graeff was a minister in Philadelphia. His ready smile and cheerful attitude earned him the nickname "Sunshine Minister". But a series of heartbreaks drove Pastor Graeff into the valley of depression. His misery compounded when he thought of his unhappiness. But the words of 1 Peter 5:7 came to him—"He careth for you." From this simple promise, Graeff wrote the hymn *Does Jesus Care?* The refrain gives the resounding affirmation:

*O yes, He cares—I know He cares,  
His heart is touched with my grief;  
When the days are weary,  
The long nights dreary,  
I know my Savior cares. ■*

***Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and Thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. (Psalm 41:1-2)***

The forty-first Psalm opens with a benediction—blessed is the man who considereth the poor. Such a man bears the mark of divinity for it is the LORD Who thinketh of the Psalmist when he was poor and needy (Ps. 40:17).

To “consider” means to be mindful of, to care for, to give attention to; —like the Samaritan who cared for the man who had been robbed and left for dead. Contrast this with the attitude of the Levite and the priest who were indifferent and uncaring.

CHS: “The joy of doing good, the sweet reaction of another’s happiness, the approving smile of heaven upon the heart, if not upon the estate; all these the niggardly [miserly] soul knows nothing of. Selfishness bears in itself a curse, it is a cancer in the heart; while liberality is happiness... In dark days we cannot rest upon the supposed merit of almsgiving, but still the music of memory brings with it no mean solace when it tells of widows and orphans whom we have succoured [helped], and prisoners and sick folks to whom we have ministered.” The promise is not that the merciful person will have no trouble, but that his mercy will be compensated by the LORD in full and even some more. For the man who considers others, the LORD will consider him.

There are seven things that God will do for the one who is merciful: He delivers him from trouble; He preserves; He keeps him alive; He blesses; He will not forsake him to the enemy; He strengthens; and He restores—a seven-fold return for a kind thought, or deed, or word. ■

***And as for me, Thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before Thy face for ever. (Psalm 41:12)***

When friends meet, they greet one another with “How are you?” The Jews wish one another with “peace” (*shalom*). But when a man asks, “When shall so and so die?” surely such an enquiry must be done out of malice. Imagine David’s despair when he discovered that his closest friends were actually his worst enemies (v. 9).

But in times of trouble, David always cast his eyes on the LORD, trusting that the LORD would deliver him. David was cast down and debased, and the LORD raised him up and repaid his enemies (v. 10). David was disowned and defeated, but the LORD showed him favour and silenced his enemies (v. 11). David was looked down by his enemies, but the LORD set David before His face.

CHS: David “rejoiced that he lived under the divine surveillance; tended, cared for, and smiled upon by his LORD; and yet more, that it would be so world without end. To stand before an earthly monarch is considered to be a singular honour, but what must it be to be a perpetual courtier in the palace of the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible?”

When David said he was set before the face of the Almighty, he did not mean that he had seen God, for God is a Spirit and is invisible. What David saw was God’s love for him. David saw the everlasting love of God working all things to his favour.

This psalm begins with a beatitude and appropriately ends with a doxology—“Blessed be the LORD God of Israel.” The LORD is also the covenant God; His favour is not David’s alone, but to all whom God has elected. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:27-29). ■

***As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1-2)***

The forty-second and forty-third psalms are to be taken as one unit. The context for this pair of psalms seems to point to the Psalmist's absence from the temple. He wrote about remembering the LORD from the "land of Jordan... [and] the hill Mizar" (v. 6). This means that the writer was heading east away from Jerusalem.

What was the Psalmist doing away from the holy city? Perhaps he belonged to that group of people who were being deported from Jerusalem. Away from home and God, the Psalmist compared himself to a deer that thirsted from the chase of the predator. The question that seized his mind was: "When can I worship God again?"

CHS: "He who loves the LORD loves also the assemblies wherein His name is adored... David was never so much at home as in the house of the LORD; he was not content with private worship; he did not forsake the place where saints assemble, as the manner of some is... After his God, his Elohim (his God to be worshipped, who had entered into covenant with him), he pined ... He would see his God and be seen of him; this is worth thirsting after!"

Behold the hart that comes to the water brooks. It quenches its thirst, but the water is free and abundant. So is saving grace, which flows from Calvary. Jesus told the woman, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst" (John 4:13-14a).

When shall I come? Now! How shall I come? With true sincerity. We can worship God with imperfect liturgy, but we cannot worship Him with imperfect hearts. How often shall I come? As oft as you have need; it all depends on how thirsty your soul is. ■

***O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles. (Psalm 43:3)***

Depressed? What do you do? Most people turn to chemicals—drugs, alcohol, Prozac—that would numb their senses; whereas others resort to thrills—gambling, extra-marital affairs—that would excite them instead. But the darkness of depression returns when the effects of the drugs wear off, when the thrills subside, and new and more intense highs are required.

David was depressed. He was surrounded by an ungodly nation and betrayed by a deceitful and unjust man (v. 1). These words seem to describe David's state of being during the time of Absalom's rebellion, when David was driven from his home and his throne. When David looked back, he realised that his sinful past had caught up with him. When he looked around, David saw the betrayal of his friends. When he looked forward, he asked himself how much farther he could go—he was past his prime. Looking at his plight then, it was no wonder that David was depressed.

What did David do? He sought not Prozac but trusted in prayer. Not the bottle but the Bible. Not wallowing in self-pity but worshipping the Saviour. David looked to the LORD, and His light dispels the darkness; His presence dispatches the joy.

CHS: "We seek not light to sin by, nor truth to be exalted by it, but that they may become our practical guides to the nearest communion with God: only such light and truth as are sent us from God will do this, common light is not strong enough to show the road to heaven, nor will mere moral or physical truths assist to the holy hill; but the light of the Holy Spirit, and the truth as it is in Jesus, these are elevating, sanctifying, perfecting; and hence their virtue in leading us to the glorious presence of God ... [the righteous'] longing to be away from the oppression of man always leads him to sigh more intensely for communion with God." ■

***We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of old. (Psalm 44:1)***

The forty-fourth Psalm begins with a recollection of the history of Israel, and of God's hand of providence upon the nation. Those were the glorious days when God's power was wondrously displayed so much so that when the Canaanites heard of the God of Israel, their hearts fainted.

God's power never expires. Note the changes in pronouns: first, from the third-person to the first-person—what He did for the fathers (vv. 1-3), He also did for the sons (vv. 4-5); then, from the plural to the singular—what He did for people (vv. 4-5), He will also do for the individual (v. 6).

How did the sons know that it was the LORD Who delivered their fathers? How can your children know that it is God Who has blessed you? The father must tell.

CHS: "Godly fathers are, both by the order of nature and grace, the best instructors of their sons, nor can they delegate the sacred duty. It is to be feared that many children of professors could plead very little before God of what their fathers have told them. When fathers are tongue-tied religiously with their offspring, need they wonder if their children's hearts remain sin-tied? Just as in all free nations men delight to gather around the hearth, and tell the deeds of valour of their sires 'in the brave days of old,' so the people of God under the old dispensation made their families cheerful around the table, be rehearsing the wondrous doings of the LORD their God. Religious conversation need not be dull, and indeed it could not be if, as in this case, it dealt more with facts and less with opinions."

Sharing with our children—how God has blessed the labour of our hands—helps to make both us and them humble and thankful people. ■

***But Thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies. (Psalm 44:9)***

If the first eight verses of this psalm are a hymn of victory, the subsequent verses are a lament—it is like a train that has been moving along the scenic mountain route suddenly plunging into the ravine. The recollection of God's deliverance and blessings seems to serve as a prelude to despair. "But Thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us...But Thou hast cast off, and put us to shame" (vv. 7, 9). What a drastic and despairing change!

CHS: "It seemed to the mourner that Jehovah had grown weary of His people and put them away in abhorrence...Alas! For a church and people when the LORD in the active energy of His Spirit withdraws from them, they want no greater shame or sorrow. He will not cast away His people finally and totally, but many a church has been left to defeat and disgrace on account of sin, and therefore all churches should be exceedingly watchful lest the like should happen to themselves. Poverty and distress bring no shame on a people, but the LORD's absence takes from a church everything which can exalt and ennoble."

Will God ever desert a Christian? No, though sometimes it seems that way from man's perspective. Such a time is described by the Puritans as "the dark night of the soul". David Brainerd, pioneer missionary to the American Indians, described in his journal one such night. On January 14, 1743, Brainerd wrote, "I was deprived of all sense of God," but he added, "This taught me the absolute dependence of a creature upon God the Creator, for every crumb of happiness it enjoys." The Christian's life is not all bright and cheery; there will be dark nights, but God is more faithful than our emotions. We can trust Him at all times. ■

# 12 Psalm 44:17-26

APRIL

The LORD Knows

Apr

***Shall not God search this out? For He knoweth the secrets of the heart. (Psalm 44:21)***

The omniscience of God should come as a caution to us because He knows our every thought. "The ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He pondereth all his goings" (Prov. 5:21). The LORD sees and knows that which man tries his best to conceal and disguise. Nothing escapes the LORD whose eyes "are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). If the righteous should forsake God and turn to idols, would God be silent? Shall He not know? (vv. 20-21)

The omniscience of God is also a consolation because God knows when we are misunderstood by men. It is this second sense that the Psalmist claims that God "knoweth the secrets of the heart" (v. 21). The LORD knows that the Psalmist is suffering because of his faith (v. 22).

CHS: The LORD "is acquainted with the inner workings of the mind, and therefore this could not have escaped Him. Not the heart only which is secret, but the secrets of the heart, which are secrets of the most secret thing, are as open to God as a book to a reader. The reasoning is that the LORD Himself knew the people to be sincerely His followers, and therefore was not visiting them for sin; hence, then, affliction evidently came from quite another cause."

The puzzle is this: if God knows the secrets of our hearts and hurts, why does He not help? Is God asleep? Has He forgotten? (vv. 23-24). These are questions of which the Psalmist receives no answers. He could only humbly trust in God's loving-kindness. We must know the love of God the same way. We may never know God's purposes for our present trials, but we can be sure of His unfailing love. "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). ■

***My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. (Psalm 45:1)***

**"A** Song of loves" is the title of this psalm. It is composed for the occasion of a royal wedding. As we read the psalm, we have to imagine the proceedings of such a wedding—the music that fills that cathedral, the sights and scents of the flowers, the glory of the bridegroom-king, and the purity of his bride.

The identity of the royal couple is not revealed, but the Psalmist is also using the occasion to look ahead and heavenward to the eternal King Who will return for His purchased Bride. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord...for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation...with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (Isa. 61:10-11).

The glories that he saw were enough to inspire the King's poet to write, "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer." But the words that come from the lips and flows from the pen are only as good as the heart. CHS: "Heartless hymns are insults to heaven...A good heart will only be content with good thoughts. Where the fountain is good, good streams will flow forth...It is a sad thing when the heart is cold with a good matter, and worse when it is warm with a bad matter, but incomparably well when a warm heart and a good matter meet together."

The word "inditing" means to "boil over"; the idea is that the heart is filled with emotions of love to overflowing. In musical performances, the audience will know whether a singer is producing sounds mechanically or if his heart is also involved. When the heart is engaged, the work will have an added quality. That is how our work for the Lord should be — a heart-work. ■

***So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy LORD; and worship thou Him. (Psalm 45:11)***

The Psalmist describes the excellence of the Bridegroom-King by the fragrance of His garments; they are of “myrrh, and aloes, and cassia” (v. 8). The eighth verse inspired the hymn “Ivory Palaces”. The composer, Henry Barraclough, was the pianist for Evangelist Wilbur Chapman; and based his lyrics on Chapman’s sermon outline. The refrain from the hymn reads:

*Out of the ivory palaces,  
Into a world of woe,  
Only His great eternal love  
Made my Savior go.*

This is the sacrifice and grace of our Lord Jesus for sinners; that “though He was rich, yet for your [our] sakes He became poor, that ye [we] through His poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6-7). What does the LORD require of us? “So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy LORD; and worship thou Him” (v. 11). As His redeemed, we are “to love Him, and to serve the LORD [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul” (Deut. 10:12). Anything less than whole-hearted love would be ingratitude.

CHS: “Whole-hearted love is the duty and bliss of the marriage state...The Church [Christians] must forsake all others and cleave to Jesus only, or she [we] will not please Him nor enjoy the full manifestation of His love. What less can He ask, what less may she [we] dare propose than to be wholly His?...No great [true] and lasting revival of religion can be granted us till the professed lovers of Christ [we] prove their [our] love by coming out from an ungodly world.”

Our blessed Saviour stepped out of the ivory palace into a sinful world to save us from it, and we who are bound for the ivory palace must forsake all else to make Him our only object of desire. ■

***The King's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold...I will make Thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise Thee for ever and ever.  
(Psalm 45:13, 17)***

As the bride enters the royal palace, she is the centre of attention; every eye is focused on her. She is not only splendidly dressed in gold, but she is also "all glorious within" (v. 13). "Within" can be understood in two ways. Firstly, it speaks of the bride's inner graces (1 Pet. 3:3-4); and secondly, it describes her private testimony, meaning to say that she is glorious even within the privacy of her own home, when no one is looking.

Without a doubt, the bride in this Psalm is the picture of the Church—the bride of Christ. The Church must be glorious not just in outward piousness but also inward holiness. And Christians must shine not just in the midst of a thousand other lights, but in the darkened world. We are to be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye [we] shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

By this testimony of holiness, the name of our Lord Jesus will be made known and remembered forever. CHS: "His name is His fame, His character, His person; these are dear to His people...Names renowned in one generation have been unknown to the next, but the laurel [name] of Jesus shall ever be fresh, His renown [fame] ever new. God will see to this; His providence and His grace shall make it so. The fame of Messiah is not left to human guardianship; the Eternal [God] guarantees it. All down the ages the memories of Calvary shall glow with inextinguishable light ... [and nothing shall] dim the glory of the Redeemer's fame."

For now, it seems that the glory of the church is dimmed and the praises of God are somewhat muted, but the glory is not seen because the world is blind, and the praises not heard because it is deaf. But happy are we who join in the happy song on earth; happier still when we see our Saviour face to face. ■

***Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. (Psalm 46:10)***

**M**artin Luther based his hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” on Psalm 46. It was said that whenever Luther was discouraged, he would ask his companions to join him in singing this psalm.

God alone is our refuge and strength. This is God’s unique role. There is no one and nothing that we can look to for our protection. Wealth and status can never afford us absolute security. Families and friends are at best our feeble and temporal supports. God alone is our “very present help in trouble.”

When the world is turned upside down, when mountains are carried into seas, when the waters roar, when our foundations are shaken, God alone is our Helper amid the flood.

So when “our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe,” Christians will do well to remember that “the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” (v. 7) When the world is reeling in chaos, Christians must be still and know that He is God.

CHS: “Sit down and wait in patience...Acknowledge that Jehovah is God... Since none can worthily proclaim His nature, ‘let expressive silence muse His praise.’”

What does it mean to “be still”? This “activity” is not as easy to do in our fast-paced life; for the go-getter, it is impossible to be still. Idlers take “be still” to mean doing nothing. To the pious ones, it means to live a contemplative and reclusive life; to the fatalists, it is to be resigned to their fate. The phrase “be still” means “to let the hands down” but not for reasons of indolence or impotence; but trust.

“Be still, and know that I am God” means to “trust God” because He is the One Who alone is able to cause “the wars to cease” and calms the storms in our lives. ■

***Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of His holiness. (Psalm 47:6-8)***

Only Jehovah is the “great King over all the earth” (vv. 2, 7). There is no king greater than Jehovah. Egypt’s pharaohs, China’s emperors, Rome’s Caesars, tyrants, dictators like Belshazzar, were all “weighed in the balances, and art found wanting” (Dan. 5:27). Neither is there any earthly kingdom that stands forever. Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome, they were all world powers; and so was the Soviet Union, but no world power did or ever escape the inevitable downfall. Only Jehovah is the “great King over all the earth.”

And that glorious day will soon come when “every knee should bow ... every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10-11). It is this blessed hope that the Psalmist exhorts the redeemed to sing—a command that is repeated five times (vv. 6-7).

CHS: “Never let the music pause. He never ceases to be good, let us never cease to be grateful... Let Him have all our praise... Jesus shall have it all. Let His sovereignty be the fount of gladness... Let all hearts that own His sceptre sing and sing on forever, for there is everlasting reason for thanksgiving while we dwell under the shadow of such a throne.”

There is a sense to the claim that one day every man will be a believer. One day all knees will bow, and all tongues will confess. The critical distinction is the location at which we make this confession: will it be in the torments of hell or before the throne of holiness? The homage we pay, will it be in reverence or in regret? And the confession of our lips, will it be songs of joy or the groans of judgement? ■

***Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. (Psalm 48:1-2)***

Psalm 48 is known as a Song of Zion for its references to the city of God (vv. 1, 2, 8, 11-13), however, its real focus is the praising of God. The Psalmist was profuse in his praise because he saw that the LORD had chosen to reside among His own people. It harked back to the time when the children of Israel were travelling to the Promised Land, and the LORD said, “And let [the people] make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Exod. 25:8).

The beauty and joy are not inherent in the physical environs of Mount Zion; it is surrounded by higher mountains offering more scenic views. But Zion was beautiful and she became the “joy of the whole earth” simply because the LORD was there. Zion was beautiful because of the beauty of the LORD. One writer compares this to the *kenosis* [self-humiliation] of the Old Testament—the beauty of the LORD’s condescension to dwell with His people.

CHS: God is great in His city, “and should be greatly praised there. If all the world beside renounced Jehovah’s worship, the chosen people in His favoured city should continue to adore Him, for in their midst and on their behalf His glorious power has been so manifestly revealed...[Likewise,] in the church, the LORD is to be extolled though all the nations rage against Him. Jerusalem was the peculiar abode of the God of Israel...the centre of prescribed worship, and even thus is the church the place of divine manifestation.”

However, there is an even greater condescension. Jehovah Who inhabits eternity will also dwell with the man who “is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa. 57:15). Every repentant sinner is an earthen vessel that holds the treasure, even “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6-7). ■

***Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death. (Psalm 48:13-14)***

**T**he LORD lent His beauty to Zion. He also watched over the holy city for its security. When it was attacked, the LORD was at hand to deliver (v. 7). The people were not oblivious of God's mercy. They had heard and seen (v. 8). Now in their worship, they were thinking of the LORD's loving-kindness (v. 9).

Having seen, heard, and contemplated the LORD's goodness, it would be remiss for His people to keep these blessed thoughts to themselves without publishing them. God's people must seize every opportunity to speak of His goodness. CHS: "The security of the people of God is not a doctrine to be kept in the background, it may be safely taught, and frequently pondered."

The Psalmist urged the people to walk about Zion, to mark the goodness of God upon the city, consider her palaces, and to tell it to the next generation (vv. 12-13).

What is the message for our sons and daughters? "For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death" (v. 14). The idea is that the LORD will be our guide; that He will never forsake us; and that He will accompany us faithfully to the end even unto death.

We need nothing more for this life than this confident assurance that we have the Eternal God as our guide, and that He will never leave us nor forsake us. When our lives and decisions reflect that whole-hearted commitment to, and our confidence in our Saviour, we are making a bold declaration of faith to our children, and this will surely leave a lasting impression upon the hearts of the next generation. ■

***They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (Psalm 49:6-7)***

Psalm 49 is a wisdom psalm. Biblical wisdom does not refer to head knowledge but living skills. The Psalmist's concern here is the believer's skill in handling wealth, and it is a skill that man in every station of life must acquire (v. 2). Recently in a survey on the top ten issues facing today's Christian families, the number one concern is materialism. One commentator coined the term "affluenza" and defines it as the heart disease of wanting more without assessing the true value of "things" in life. Materialism/covetousness, it seems, remains a persistent and universal problem for Christians.

The foolishness of trusting in riches comes from the obvious truth that it cannot save a man from death. Leo Tolstoy told the story of a rich farmer who wanted more land. One day, the man came to know about an unusual offer for land. For 1,000 rubles, he could buy all the land he could walk in one day, but he had to be back at his starting point by dusk. The farmer was walking before sunrise, and by midday, he was tired, but he kept going. Soon the man realised that his greed had taken him too far beyond the starting point and he quickened his steps to get back on time. The man staggered across the line just before the sun disappeared, and he collapsed and died from sheer exhaustion. The rich farmer's servant dug a hole six feet by three feet for his shallow grave. The title of Tolstoy's story was: *How much land does a man need?*

CHS: "Poor fools, to be content with such a rotten confidence... With all their riches, the whole of them put together could not rescue a comrade from the chilly grasp of death... Let them weigh their gold in the scales of death, and see how much they can buy therewith from the worm and the grave." ■

***Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish. This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. (Psalm 49:12-13)***

All men die: the wise, the fool, the prince as well as the pauper. Two friends were once discussing the day's news. One man asked the other, "Did you know that the police found a homeless man who died on the corner main street last night?"

"Did they find anything on him?"

"Only a bag of dirty rags. That was everything he had."

His friend said, "Did you read the obituary? The town's millionaire also died last night."

"How much did he leave behind?"

The man replied, "Everything that he had."

Death is a great equalizer. CHS: Man "is but a lodger for the hour, and does not stay a night: even when he dwells in marble halls his notice to quit is written out ... The hero of the hour lasts but for an hour. Sceptres fall from the paralysed hands which once grasped them, and coronets slip away from skulls when the life is departed."

Throughout history, kings and princes sought to perpetuate their own memory by building statues of, and naming cities after themselves (v. 11). But the statues only served as convenient perches for the birds, and the monuments were soon forgotten. The irony is that the only piece of real estate that may be remembered are the graves that bore their names. And even that, very few people are interested in the tombs except for a few die-hard archaeologists.

"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you." (John 6:27). It is better to find one's name in the Book of life than to find your name in the history books. Labour not to be known of men but of the LORD. ■

***For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. (Psalm 49:17)***

This world's riches can be stolen by thieves; they are eaten by rust and moths. This world's honour is just as vain and fleeting. The Bible gives this warning: do not put your trust in "uncertain riches" (1 Tim. 6:17). A wise man will heed Job's counsel, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). The truth is that we "brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7).

CHS: Man "has but a leasehold of his acres [on his land], and death ends his tenure. Through the river of death man must pass naked. Not a rag of all his raiment, not a coin of all his treasure, not a joy of all his honour, can the dying worldling carry with him...Patents of nobility are invalid in the [grave]...Hell knows no aristocracy." And heaven has no room for earthly honours.

*Out of the life, I shall never take  
Things of silver and gold I make  
All that I cherish and hoard away  
When I leave these things on earth must stay.  
Will the Great Judge find when my task is through  
That my soul has gathered some riches, too?  
Or at the last it will be mine to find  
That all I had worked for was left behind.  
(Unknown)*

Martin Luther had the right view of life's riches and honours. He wrote, "I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess." Christian, relax your hold on earthly things, and put them in God's hands. They will be safe there. ■

***He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people. Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice. (Psalm 50:4-5)***

Citizens of the world, beware! All who have ears to hear, listen! God has given the trumpet call to awaken and be warned. His pure light has shone so that every speck of sin is laid exposed. He has spoken so that none can claim ignorance. The purpose of His calling is that “He may judge His people” (v. 4).

The righteous and holy God must also necessarily be a God of judgement. One of the purposes of judgement is to separate the truth and the false. The Lord Jesus describes the time of harvest when the reapers shall separate the wheat from the tares (Matt. 13:30). In His sermon from Olivet, Jesus says when He comes in His glory, He shall separate the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25:31-33).

CHS: “Gather out the wheat...Let the...elect people, known by my separating grace to be My sanctified ones, be now assembled in one place. All are not saints who seem to be so—a severance must be made; therefore let all who profess to be saints be gathered before My throne of judgement, and let them hear the word which will search and try the whole, that the false may be convicted and the true revealed.”

The LORD thunders from heaven throughout the whole earth — “Gather My saints!” Who are the saints? The saints are the consecrated ones who have made a covenant with God by sacrifice. What is the sacrifice? The sacrifice refers to the vicarious atoning work of our Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God.

The Christian’s hope is that our Lord “shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31). Will you be among the gathered? ■

***Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High: And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. (Psalm 50:14-15)***

The headline in the Canadian newspaper, *National Post*, once read, "Belief is strong, but the pews are empty." This report is based on a poll that shows that one in ten Canadians believe they have been in the presence of God, and religious beliefs among Canadians remain as strong but "there's a huge gap between those who believe and those who belong."

Most people do not go to church because they do not like institutionalised religion and the rituals. Religious rituals are not bad in themselves. God did not disapprove sacrifices and burnt offerings (v. 8)—they reminded the people of God and what He had done for them.

However, when the people are more concerned with the rituals than they are about their relationship with God, then He disapproves of such empty worship.

CHS: "No longer look at your sacrifices as in themselves gifts pleasing to Me, but present them as the tributes of your gratitude; it is then that I will accept them, but not while your souls have no love and no thankfulness to offer Me. . . Not for want of bullocks on the altar was Israel blamed, but for want of thankful adoration before the LORD. She excelled in the visible, but in the inward grace, which is the one thing needful, she sadly failed."

God rebukes the mechanically religious, but He also disapproves of the fuzzy spiritualist. Most people who do not go to church often say that they would rather be spiritual than religious. They prefer God and not the church. They prefer to privatise their faith, which is but the worship of self. Any "religion" that replaces God with rituals is condemned, and so is any spirituality that substitutes the self in the place of God. ■

***Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God. (Psalm 50:23)***

**F**rancois Fenelon was the court preacher for King Louis XIV of France. One Sunday morning, when the king arrived at the royal chapel for the regular service, no one else was there but the preacher. King Louis demanded to know where the rest of the people were. Fenelon replied, "Your majesty, I had published that you would not be coming to church today, in order that you might see who serves God in truth and who flatters the king."

A hypocrite is an actor, a person pretending to be someone he is not; a person who is and is not depending on the time of the day and who he is with. God rebukes the hypocrite as the wicked who declares His law, but hates instruction (vv. 16-17). The hypocrite is the wicked man who sits in judgement of his brother (v. 20).

Our Lord describes the hypocrite as the man with a beam in his own eye and castigating his brother for a mote in his (Matt. 7:3-5). Jesus also rebuked the Pharisees for their empty ritualism and their religious hypocrisy (Matt. 23). The cause of hypocrisy is holy speaking; the cure is holy living.

CHS: "Holy living is a choice evidence of salvation. He who submits his whole way to divine guidance, and is careful to honour God in his life, brings an offering which the LORD accepts through his dear Son; and such a one shall be more and more instructed, and made experimentally to know the LORD'S salvation...[God's blessings is promised] not to ceremonies, not to unpurified lips...but to grateful hearts and holy lives."

God demands that our faith should not be merely spoken from our lips but also shown in our lives. ■

***For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest. (Psalm 51:3-4)***

The story behind the fifty-first psalm is a familiar one. It is King David's lament after the prophet Nathan had confronted him about his adultery with Bathsheba. The sin was especially egregious for several reasons: first, David was already married with several wives, but because of his covetousness, he had taken another man's only wife; second, that man was Uriah, David's trusted general; and third, to cover up his sin, David had arranged for Uriah to be killed on the battlefield. However, David's worst sin was that he had despised the commandment of the LORD and had "given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme" (2 Sam. 12:14).

David's sin was in itself a wicked act not just against Uriah, but against God. David was a man after God's own heart, and yet it was this very heart that David grieved. So David rightly confessed, "against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned."

CHS: "The virus of sin lies in its opposition to God... All of his [David's] wrong doing centred, culminated, and came to a climax, at the foot of the divine throne... The penitent's heart was so filled with a sense of the wrong done to the LORD Himself, that all other confession was swallowed up in a broken-hearted acknowledgment of offence against Him... [Only] a child of God cares for the eye of God... [Only a child of grace] reflects a fearful guilt upon every evil act... [for only he remembers] that the God whom we [he] had offended was present when the trespass was committed."

Every sin is first and foremost an offense against God and His holy standards. Since it was against God that David had sinned, it was to God that David pleaded for mercy (v. 1). In David's prayer of confession, we are reminded that only God has the power to forgive sins. ■

***Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalm 51:7)***

**W**ith the stain of sin upon his soul, David comes to God and humbly asks for cleansing of sin. He uses three verbs to describe this cleansing—purge, wash, and blot (vv. 7, 9).

“Purge me with hyssop.” Hyssop is a small plant that is found growing out of the crevices of walls (1 Kings 4:33). In the Old Testament, the hyssop was used as a brush to sprinkle blood. Hyssop thus symbolized ceremonial cleansing under the Law (Lev. 14). The first record of its use in the Bible is at the first Passover (Exod. 12:22).

David, however, was not appealing to the Law or God’s justice; neither was he counting on the rituals. David knew that under the law, there was no forgiveness for his sins, so he wisely asked for God’s mercy. David was alluding to that great deliverance of God when He passed over the houses and saved the first born of Israel. When he asked God to purge him with hyssop, David was asking God to pass over him on the basis of the blood of Another who was innocent. The efficacy of this cleansing is not found in the blood of animal offerings (v. 16), but in that of the perfect Lamb of God. “Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

CHS: “Nothing but blood can take away my blood-stains, nothing but the strongest purification can avail to cleanse me. Let the sin-offering purge my sin. Let Him who was appointed to atone, execute His sacred office on me; for none can need it more than I.”

David’s prayer is yet another proof that he was the man after God’s own heart. Despite his sins, it was his faith that allowed him to see in the blood sufficiency to purge them away. Despite his innate corruption (v. 5), David was able to rejoice in the hope of perfect purity in his heart (v. 10). ■

***Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)***

There are several steps that a sinner must take to be reconciled to God. He confesses his sins (vv. 1-4); he pleads for cleansing (vv. 5-9); and he prays for restoration of fellowship (vv. 10-13).

David asks God to create in him a clean heart (v. 10). He was not asking for an old heart made better but an altogether new one. The word "create" means to cause something that was not there before to exist (Gen. 1:1). It is creation *ex nihilo*. In other words, David was asking for nothing but a miracle.

To have "a clean heart" means that David's heart which had been corrupted is now made right; that his heart may be pure, his affections holy, and his desires undefiled. This creation of a new heart could only come by the power of the Creator.

CHS: "Salvation is a marvellous display of supreme power; the work *in* us as much as that *for* us is wholly of Omnipotence. The affections must be rectified first, or all our nature will go amiss. The heart is the rudder of the soul, and till the LORD take[s] it in hand, we steer in a false and foul way."

Salvation is the act of grace by which the sinner's heart is cleansed by the blood of Christ. Sanctification is the necessary next step of salvation, and the only way by which the redeemed sinner can keep his heart clean is to be in the presence of the Almighty (v. 11). Having understood the impact of sin upon his heart and the consequent separation from God, David acknowledges that without God, he cannot live a holy life. ■

***The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Psalm 51:17)***

If sacrifices were enough, David would have offered them to God. But he knows that the LORD has no pleasure in empty and heartless sacrifices. Mere external offerings, however costly, will never impress God. The sinner's heart is what He truly desires. David understood that true religion is the faith of the heart, and the love for God that flows from it.

For the sacrifice to have meaning and value, it must be accompanied by a broken and contrite heart. CHS: "A broken heart' is an expression implying deep sorrow, embittering the very life...A heart crushed is a fragrant heart. Men contemn [despise] those who are contemptible in their own eyes, but the LORD seeth not as man seeth. He despises what men esteem, and values that which they despise. Never yet has God spurned a lowly, weeping penitent... Bullocks and rams God desires not, but contrite hearts He seeks after."

In the covenant of grace, where the sacrifice has been made on our behalf by our blessed Saviour, the brokenness and contrition of the heart is the mark of true evangelical repentance. The truly repentant sinner will never boast of what he has done or what he will do—only what Christ has done for him.

David was wise to come to God with a broken heart for what value is there in a sinful heart? It is the broken heart that God takes and moulds for His use.

*The LORD will happiness divine  
On contrite hearts bestow;  
Then tell me, gracious God, is mine  
A contrite heart, or no?  
Oh make this heart rejoice or ache;  
Decide this doubt for me;  
And if it be not broken, break—  
And heal it, if it be!*  
(William Cowper) ■

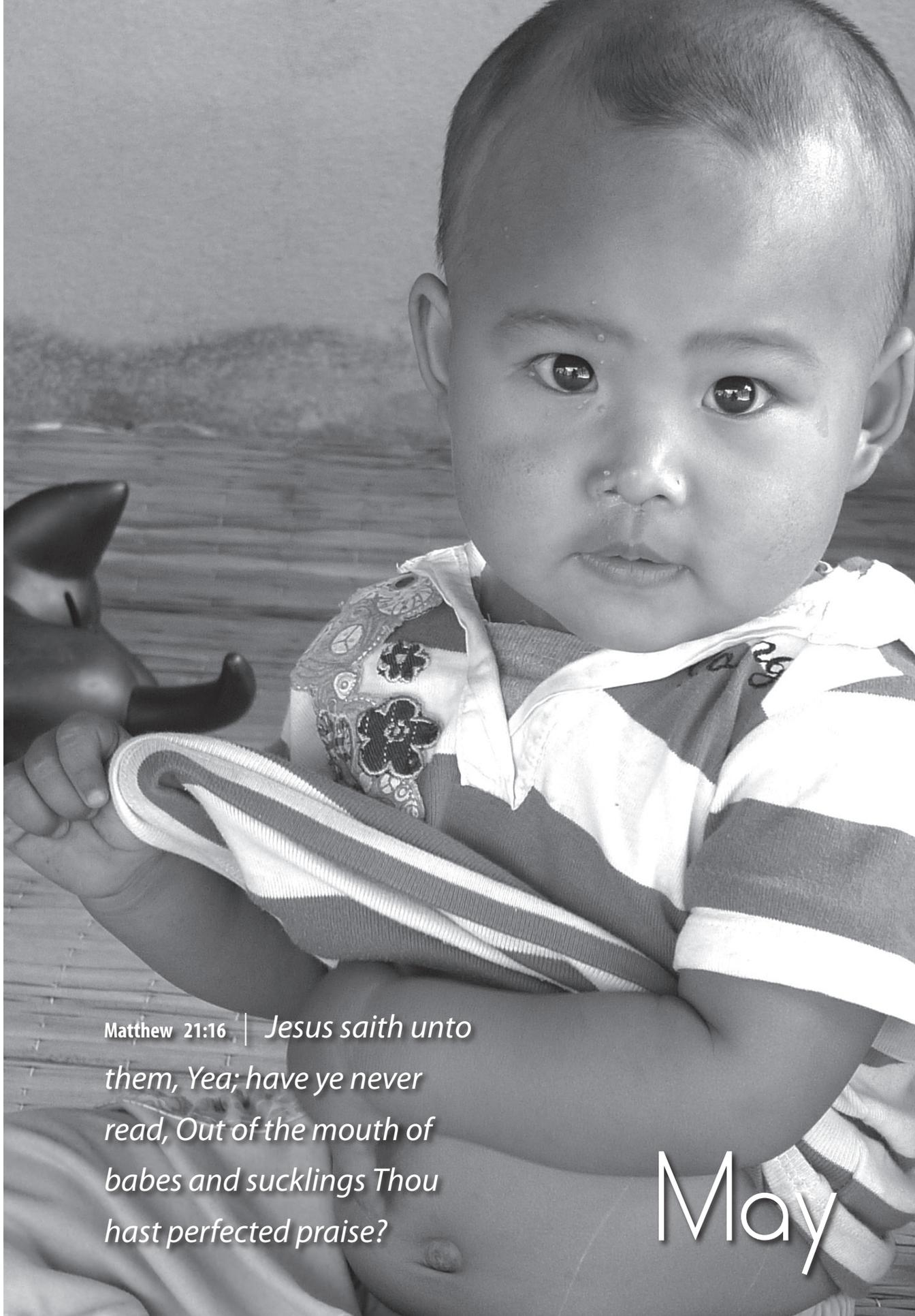
***Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever. (Psalm 52:7-8)***

David was forced to flee from Saul's murderous plot, and he came to Nob, where Ahimelech was the high priest. But David was spotted by Doeg, the chief shepherd of Saul (1 Sam. 21:7). Doeg seized the opportunity to win the king's favour by telling Saul about the whereabouts of David, and the so-called treason of Ahimelech (1 Sam. 22:9-10).

In a fit of anger, Saul ordered that Ahimelech and the priests of Nob be killed, and Doeg was the willing henchman. What was the price for Doeg's favour with Saul? The lives of 85 priests and their families! (1 Sam. 22:18-19)

CHS: "The great vainglorious man. He found a fortress, but not in God; he gloried in his might, but not in the Almighty...The substance he had gathered, and the mischiefs he had wrought, were his boast and glory. Wealth and wickedness are dreadful companions; when combined they make a monster." Evil and error form a vicious cycle—one perpetuates the other. Paul warns about the love of money being "the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10). The evil of covetousness will lead a man away from God, and the errors of his ways will lead him to the evil of covetousness.

The wicked man boasts in his own abilities, but the godly is like a green olive tree in the house of God. The olive tree is one of the hardiest trees. It may last for hundreds of years, and it thrives even in the most severe summer droughts. The olive tree is a symbol for perseverance and productivity. What more the olive tree that is in the house of God and nourished by Him. This is the picture of the righteous man, his circumstances notwithstanding, he trusts in the mercy of God and remains fruitful for Him. ■



Matthew 21:16 | *Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?*

May

***God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (Psalm 53:2-3)***

Psalms 14 and 53 are almost identical. That a psalm is repeated marks its importance, and the need for our attention. Spurgeon suggested that David wrote the fourteenth Psalm when he was young and the fifty-third when he was old, but the lesson remains the same. If our age advanced from 14 to 53, we shall find the doctrine of this psalm more evident than in our youth.

The blind says in his heart that there is no God. The implication is that what he sees indicates otherwise. A medical expert on congenital blindness said that to give back sight to a congenitally blind person is more the work of an educator than of a surgeon. For such a person to meaningfully see, he needs more than the power of sight. He also needs to configure his mind and rightly interpret what he sees.

Likewise, it is not enough for a man to know that there is a God. He must also rightly interpret and apply the reality of God in his life—his relationship with God; and his sins in light of what God says about them.

The problem with the fool is that he is spiritually blind and morally indifferent. He looks and sees not, and so he acts as if there is no God. Tragically for the sinner, he is not the judge of what is right and true. On the contrary, he is the accused standing in the court of the righteous Judge. And His verdict is conclusive: “there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Is there hope then for the sinner? CHS: “The LORD did not look for great grace, but only for sincerity and right desire, but these He found not. He saw all nations...and all hearts in all men...but He saw neither a clear head nor a clean heart among them all...The fallen race of man, left to its own energy, has not produced a single lover of God or doer of holiness, nor will it ever do so. Grace must interpose, or not one specimen of humanity will be found to follow after the good and true.” ■

***Behold, God is mine helper: the LORD is with them that uphold my soul. (Psalm 54:4)***

**B**oth the fifty-second and fifty-fourth psalms cover a difficult and dark period in David's life. David's brief stopover at Nob led Saul to order the massacre of Ahimelech and the priests. After Nob, David escaped into the wilderness of Ziph. But again David's whereabouts were reported to Saul by the Ziphites (1 Sam. 23:19-20). Thus, Saul was able to move against David. The Ziphites betrayed David a second time when he was hiding in the hills of Hachilah (1 Sam. 26:1).

It seems David could not even find a hiding place in the wilderness. So David looked to the One Who is his sure refuge and faithful friend. David's prayer brings to mind Joseph Scriven's well-known hymn.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a Friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our ev'ry weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

CHS: "The reigning LORD, the great Adonai is in the camp [with David]... [David] was very confident...his heart was on the LORD's side that he was sure God was on *his* side...It is a great mercy to have some friends left us, but a greater mercy still to see the LORD among them...Our friends stand for nothing till the LORD sets Himself as a great unit in the front of them."

It is good to have friends to rally around us in difficult times. Gideon had 300 men when he battled the Midianites. David had 600 men with him. Daniel had only three in Babylon. The number of friends, however, is inconsequential, when the LORD is there to help me and uphold those who comfort me. As a matter of fact, we really need Him Who promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us. ■

***And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest. (Psalm 55:6-8)***

The fifty-fifth Psalm continues with the theme of David's betrayal. His worst enemies were not outside the gate; they were closer than he thought. David was clearly distraught—he mourned; his heart ached; he was terrified and overwhelmed by horror. David wished that he could take to the skies like a dove.

CHS: "A storm was brewing, and, like a dove, he would outfly it and reach a calmer region. Swifter than the storm-cloud would he fly, to avoid the deluge of rain, and the flash of the lightning. Alas!...[There are no wings strong and swift enough to escape the storm, and he] must tarry here and feel the tempest."

David could not fly away. He did not have the wings of a dove; and even if he did, he could not fly above the storm. Like David, there are times when you may have thought of leaving it all behind and getting away from it all, and hoping you will find rest somewhere else.

But there are two things to consider before you are tempted to leave it all behind too. First, no one can leave it all behind especially if it is a problem that you carry in your heart. No matter where you go, that heart problem goes with you. Second, what is rest to you? The Bible reminds us that rest is not a place on a map, but the presence of God in your heart (Phil. 4:7), and as the hymn reminds us, there is no better refuge from the storm than to be near to our Lord.

*There is a place of quiet rest,  
Near to the heart of God.  
A place where sin cannot molest,  
Near to the heart of God.  
(Cleland McAfee) ■*

***But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company. (Psalm 55:13-14)***

No treachery is worse than betrayal by a family member or friend. Julius Caesar was betrayed by Marcus Junius Brutus, one whom Caesar favoured like his own son. Roman historians said that Caesar fought back the attackers until he saw Brutus with his dagger drawn, then he ceased to struggle; instead Caesar pulled his friend close to him and asked the famous question, “You too, Brutus?”

David was betrayed by Doeg (Ps. 52) and the Ziphites (Ps. 54), but in this psalm, David writes about the betrayal by one of his closest friends. To compound David’s grief, the betrayer was David’s equal, meaning to say that he was David’s spiritual mate. This was a person with whom David had shared his heart and mind. They were brothers in the LORD, had prayed for one another and had worshipped together; the spiritual bond was supposedly stronger than any ties of natural friendship.

One particular person came to mind—Ahithophel. He was David’s advisor till he switched sides and aided Absalom in his conspiracy against David (2 Sam. 15:31).

CHS: “Religion had rendered their intercourse [friendship] sacred, they had...communed on heavenly themes. If ever any bonds ought to be held inviolable, religious connections should be. There is a measure of impiety, of a detestable sort, in the deceit which debases the union of men who make profession of godliness. Shall the very altar of God be defiled with hypocrisy? Shall the gatherings of the temple be polluted by the presence of treachery?”

Like Moses who was silent when Aaron and Miriam spoke against him, David took no action except to call upon the LORD (v. 16). Hypocrisy and treachery are best left with God, and it is He Who will deliver and vindicate. ■

***As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice. He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me: for there were many with me. (Psalm 55:16-18)***

David was afflicted by his enemies day and night (v. 10), but he was able to resort to the LORD in prayer morning, noon and night. The verse does not mean that David had three specific prayers; it was an expression of his total communion with God. They that love the LORD will call upon Him often, even more so in times of crisis.

CHS: "Seasons of great need call for frequent seasons of devotion. The three periods chosen are most fitting; to begin, continue, and end the day with God is supreme wisdom. Where time has naturally set up a boundary, there let us set up an altar-stone. The Psalmist means that he will always pray; he will run a line of prayer right along the day and track the sun with his petitions. Day and night he saw his enemies busy, and therefore he would meet their activity by continuous prayer."

Georg Neumark was on his way to enrol at the university in Königsberg when he was robbed of everything. He returned home hoping that his friends would help him, but none would. He was penniless and friendless, yet his trust in God did not fail. Neumark found great strength in God's promises. He prayed earnestly for God's help. The answer came in the form of an unexpected appointment as tutor for a rich family. God's deliverance prompted Neumark to compose one of his best-known hymns, "If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee".

*If thou but suffer God to guide thee  
And hope in Him through all thy ways,  
He'll give thee strength, whate'er betide thee,  
And bear thee through the evil days;  
Who trust in God's unchanging love  
Builds on the rock that naught can move. ■*

***What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee. In God I will praise His word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. (Psalm 56:3-4)***

David spent several years in the wilderness fleeing the murderous hatred of Saul. At one time he was forced to seek refuge with the Philistines in Gath, which was also the hometown of Goliath (1 Sam. 17:4). David was pushed into the centre of enemy territory. He was alone. He was also afraid. Of all places, why did David flee to Gath?

CHS: "David was no braggart, he does not claim never to be afraid, and he was no brutish Stoic free from fear because of the lack of tenderness. [David was no ignorant fool]...He saw the imminence of his peril, and was afraid... It is a blessed fear which drives us to trust. Unregenerate fear drives from God, gracious fear drives to Him. If I fear man I have only to trust God...To trust when there is no cause for fear, is but the name of faith, but to be reliant upon God when occasions for alarm are abundant and pressing, is the conquering faith of God's elect."

The Bible has many "beware" warnings (Phil. 3:2; 2 Pet. 3:17). It is pride and blind courage for Christians to go about life without fear. However, it is also foolish to let fear paralyse you into inaction.

Fear is one of these things that is designed to make us feel that we need a God, and to lead us to Him. It is better for man to confess his fear and trust in God than it is for him to fight his fear and trust in himself.

David was afraid of the Philistines in Gath, but he reminded us that the time of fear is also the time for faith; when you are afraid of what man will do to you, it is the most opportune time to trust in God. "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe" (Prov. 29:25). ■

***Thou tellest my wanderings: put Thou my tears into Thy bottle: are they not in Thy book? When I cry unto Thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me. (Psalm 56:8-9)***

David was on the run from his enemies. These constant threats to his life and the daily dangers that he faced exerted a strain on David's body and soul. While his friends might see the physical burdens upon David, only the LORD is fully aware of the sorrow upon David's soul.

CHS: "Every step which the fugitive [David] had taken when pursued by his enemies, was not only observed but thought worthy of counting and recording. We perhaps are so confused after a long course of trouble, that we hardly know where we have or where we have not been, but the omniscient and considerate [compassionate] Father...remembers all in detail; for He has counted them over as men count their gold, for even the trial of our faith is precious in His sight."

As a further reminder of his sorrows, David asked the LORD to collect his tears in a bottle. Tear bottles (lachrymatories) were commonly used in ancient middle-eastern societies. The Romans also had a custom where mourners at a funeral would fill small glass vials with tears and placed them in the tombs as symbols of love and respect.

David's lachrymatory was special; it was not *any* bottle, it was *Thy* bottle—God's bottle. David's words remind us that God keeps a record of our pain and suffering, and that He always remembers our sorrows. What a blessed thought indeed to know that the LORD Who knows the number of hair on our head also knows the number of tears that we shed; that He Who creates also cares; that He Who redeems also remembers. The LORD is not a distant deity but He is One Whose heart is touched with our grief. ■

***Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast. (Psalm 57:1)***

**T**he historical setting of the fifty-seventh psalm puts David at the cave in Adullam (1 Sam. 22), where he began to attract a following. Although he was no longer alone, David's problems were far from over. This psalm, as with the preceding one, begins with David's prayer for God's mercy, but with a big difference.

In the fifty-sixth psalm, David prays for God's mercy because of the oppression of his enemies (Ps. 56:1). In Psalm 57, David prays for God's mercy because he trusts in the LORD. The difference is that David was no longer hiding from his enemies—he was hiding in the LORD. David's trust in God is a lesson for us. While he was hiding in the cave, he did not call the cave his place of refuge. David's true and sure refuge is in God.

CHS: "How can the LORD be unmerciful to a trustful soul? Our faith does not deserve mercy, but it always wins it from the sovereign grace of God when it is sincere... Not in the cave alone would he [David] hide, but in the cleft of the Rock of Ages. As the little birds find ample shelter beneath the parental wing, even so would the fugitive [David] place himself beneath the secure protection of the divine power."

The "wings of God" is a picture of His covenantal protection over His beloved (Exod. 19:4; Deut. 32:9-11). Charles Wesley was preaching in the fields of the parish of Killyleagh, County Down, Ireland, when he was attacked by men who did not approve of his doctrines. He sought refuge in a farmer's house. In that hiding-place, with the cries of his pursuers all about him, Wesley wrote the hymn.

*Jesus, Lover of my soul, Let me to Thy bosom fly,  
While the nearer waters roll, While the tempest still is high!  
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide; Till the storm of life is past.  
Safe into the haven guide, O receive my soul at last!*

True security is not the absence of calamities but in knowing where to find refuge during those calamitous times. Like David, when our lives are overcast with trials and testings, we must flee to God and hide under the shadow of His wings. ■

***My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. (Psalm 57:7)***

To have one's soul among the lions, one's feet in danger of being snared, one's life in constant peril would have caused many to have a disheartened and despairing heart, or even worse, a denying heart. But not David—instead of a fainting heart, his heart is fixed!

CHS: "One would have thought he [David] would have said, 'My heart is fluttered,' but no, he is calm, firm, happy, resolute, established...[He was resolved to trust, serve, and to praise God]...It is surely well with thee, if thy once roving heart is now firmly fixed upon God and the proclamation of His glory."

A fixed heart is an established heart. David's heart was firm and steadfast. His heart was firm and decided. He did not waver in his purpose. He did not doubt God's mercy or goodness. Even when he was standing in the midst of trouble, he was standing firm.

A fixed heart is also a prepared heart. When Joshua wanted to build a memorial of stones, he called "the twelve men, whom he had *prepared*" (Josh. 4:4). When Samuel led in the revival of Israel, he asked the people to put away the idols and "*prepare* [their] hearts unto the LORD, and serve Him only" (1 Sam. 7:3).

But a fixed heart is more than just a man's resolute determination. David's heart was not fixed upon the strength of his mind or the tenacity of his will. His fixed heart was in response to God's faithfulness. Because God is faithful, there is every reason for David to be faithful to God's faithfulness. Because God's heart is ever tender towards the righteous, therefore there is every reason for our hearts to fix upon His love in every situation in life. ■

***Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth. The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. (Psalm 58:2-3)***

In this psalm, David calls for God's judgement upon the wicked, and these were not common wickedness—they were "wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). David was speaking out against the corrupt rulers—judges who were guilty of injustice.

CHS: "Those very men who sat as judges, and pretended to so much indignation at the faults...[of others, but] were in their hearts perpetrating all manner of evil...They were deliberate sinners, cold, calculating villains. As righteous judges ponder the law, balance the evidence and weigh the case, so the malicious dispense injustice with malice aforethought in cold blood."

The wicked are described as those who conceive sin in their hearts and carry out the evil with their hands. What they have executed in public was the result of what they have plotted in private. Their outward appearance belies a sinister heart.

The wicked "weigh the violence". The idea of weighing is a picture of the administration of justice. The symbol of justice is a lady blindfolded with a sword in her right hand and the scales in her left. In the case of the wicked, the very symbol of justice is merely a façade for their evil.

David's words prove that sin is a disease that afflicts every heart regardless of position and power. Man in all his glory is depraved. He is born in sin (v. 3), and he will grow in sinfulness. Even David acknowledged that he was conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5). We should be reminded that we too are sinners who need a Saviour. ■

***The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth. (Psalm 58:10-11)***

True justice can only be found in the courts of heaven. David prayed that the LORD would undertake for him, so that righteousness will prevail. David used several pictures to describe what God would do—the toothless lion, the blunt arrow, the fast flowing waters, the shrivelling slug, and the stillborn child. The LORD would come upon the wicked like a whirlwind. These images portray the swift and sure destruction of the wicked.

As for the righteous, he “shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.” This is not a description of his relishing in the death of the wicked, nor is it a picture of his vindictiveness and bloodthirstiness. The horrid end of the wicked must be seen in context of their evil deeds. The imagery of the feet in the blood speaks of total victory. In the end, the righteous will be vindicated.

CHS: “The godly are not after all forsaken and given over to their enemies; the wicked are not to have the best of it, truth and goodness are recompensed in the long run... All men shall be forced by the sight of the final judgement to see that there is a God, and that He is the righteous ruler of the universe.”

In the end, two things will be clear. First, God will prevail. Sinners may try to thwart His rule and do away with His laws. But in His time, truth, righteousness and justice will prevail. Second, there is a reward for the righteous. The hope for the righteous sufferer is that God knows, and while we may contemplate the mysteries of the present, by faith we can rejoice knowing God is still on the throne. ■

***Because of his strength will I wait upon Thee: for God is my defence. The God of my mercy shall prevent me: God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies. (Psalm 59:9-10)***

The fifty-ninth psalm relates the incident in David's life when King Saul had sent his men to kill his son-in-law (1 Sam. 19:11). The enemies of David were powerful, violent, crafty, organised and relentless. By his own strength, David was no match for them—his only recourse was a simple prayer to God to deliver him (vv. 1-2), for God was his defence.

CHS: "[My persecutor is strong; for]...this very reason I will turn myself to Thee, and leave my matters in Thy hand. It is a wise thing to find in the greatness of our difficulties a reason for casting ourselves upon the LORD...God is my High Place, my Fortress, the place of my resort in the time of my danger. If the foe be too strong for me to cope with him, I will retreat into my Castle [Fortress], where he cannot reach me."

David uses this episode in his personal life to highlight two important points about God. First, God is our defence. Just as God protected David from Saul, so will the Almighty cast His cloak of protection over the righteous. Second, God's mercy precedes the righteous. The word "prevent" means to "go before". The omniscient God sees in the future and He sends forth His mercy ahead of us so that in every situation His all-sufficient grace will be equal to the task.

How blessed it is to know that the LORD not only marches with us into life's battle, but that He also marches ahead of us. How blessed it is to trust in the Lord of hosts Who is not only our defence but also our victory. ■

# 13 Psalm 59:11-17

MAY

Lest We Forget

May

***Slay them not, lest my people forget: scatter them by Thy power; and bring them down, O LORD our shield. (Psalm 59:11)***

While David prayed that God would consume the enemies (v. 13), he also asked that the judgement of the wicked be gradual and not immediate; he asked God to “slay them not.” There is a two-fold purpose for God to withhold His judgement.

First, He allows the wicked to prosper so that the righteous may know the destructive consequences of sin, the same way Cain was made to roam the earth as living proof of God’s justice and the evil of sin. Besides, if God nips every sin in the bud, the righteous will never know what it is to be “the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation” (Phil. 2:15).

CHS: “To sweep away the plotters all at once were to end the great drama of retribution too abruptly. Let the righteous be buffeted a little longer, and let the boasting oppressor puff and brag through his little hour, it will help keep Israel in mind of the LORD’s justice...It were a pity for good men to be without detractors, seeing that virtue shines the brighter for the foil of slander [in affliction]. Enemies help to keep the LORD’s servants awake. A lively, vexatious devil is less to be dreaded than a sleepy, forgetful spirit which is given to slumber.”

Second, God allows evil to rear its ugly head so that it may serve as a solemn reminder to the righteous; lest we forget the Life on Calvary that was given for our sakes.

*King of my life, I crown Thee now—Thine shall the glory be;  
Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow, Lead me to Calvary.  
Lest I forget Gethsemane, Lest I forget Thine agony;  
Lest I forget Thy love for me, Lead me to Calvary.  
(Jennie Hussey) ■*

***Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. That Thy beloved may be delivered; save with Thy right hand, and hear me. (Psalm 60:4-5)***

The historical background to the sixtieth psalm is found in 2 Sam. 8:1-14. This lament psalm was composed at a time when David was beginning to enjoy some success in establishing his kingdom. In the midst of victory, there were disappointing setbacks and troubles which caused David to think that God was angry and had abandoned them (v. 1).

David described the troubles as earthquakes that shook the land. His plea to God to "heal the breaches" implies that there were perhaps internal strife and discontent among his own people. Internal disunity poses a greater threat than external foes. Solomon says that "a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city" (Prov. 18:19a), and the work of the Gospel is often grounded by a few contentious members.

How does disunity arise? The problem often lies in human envy and pride. Disunity in the church is caused by sinners idolising other sinners; discord arises because believers regard men's private opinions as on par with God's revealed truth. The only antidote for disunity is to look unto our Lord Jesus and to rally around the banner of God's truth.

CHS: "The Lord has given us the standard of the gospel, let us live to uphold it, and if needful die to defend it. Our right to contend for God, and our reason for expecting success, are found in the fact that the faith has been once committed to the saints, and that by the Lord Himself."

Godly Christians are God-fearing. Those who fear Him will also have a holy hatred for schism. As members of the body of believers, we must "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together [not against one another] for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27b). The church will be for the better when believers learn to march behind the banner of God's truth. ■

***Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. Through God we shall do valiantly: for He it is that shall tread down our enemies. (Psalm 60:11-12)***

**A** discouraged David called out to God, “Save with Thy right hand, and hear me.” And the LORD spoke in His holiness, giving a list of names of the various places (vv. 6-8). These places were a reminder of God’s past faithfulness as well as a promise of His future blessings. God promised that He would give David the land—a covenant that He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But who would help David, and how would the victory be achieved? Answers: God and his faith in Him.

CHS: God, “help us to overcome the disasters of civil strife and foreign invasion; save us from further incursions from without and division within... We have painfully learned the utter impotence of armies, kings, and nations without Thine help. Our banners trailed in the mire have proven our weakness without Thee but...[victory is sure] now that Thou hast come to our rescue.”

Our help is in God alone. Man’s good intentions and temporal aid may help to lighten the load, but true and lasting help must come from above. It is by the grace of God that we are able to gather strength for life’s battle. Our help is in God alone, and that is why we must, as David did, ask the LORD in faith.

*His banner over us is love,  
Our sword the Word of God.  
We tread the road the saints above  
With shouts of triumph trod.  
By faith, they like a whirlwind’s breath,  
Swept on o’er ev’ry field.  
The faith by which they conquered death  
Is still our shining shield.  
(John Yates)*

It is faith in God that is the victory that overcomes the world! Biblical faith is neither blind optimism nor simply positive thinking—it is the believing and doing of God’s Word. Biblical faith is also not leaving it all to God—while the LORD sends His help, we must do valiantly (v. 12). ■

***From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I; For Thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in Thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of Thy wings. (Psalm 61:2-4)***

In 1871, as Christians gathered at a YMCA convention in Pennsylvania, news came of a financial crisis that caused a panic throughout the country. The whole convention was beset with gloom as most of the delegates were businessmen, and they had lost a great deal of money in the economic downturn. Also present was Erastus Johnson who wrote the words to the hymn "The Rock that is Higher than I." William Fischer composed the music, and the hymn became the signature hymn of the convention:

*Oh! Sometimes the shadows are deep,  
And rough seems the path to the goal,  
And sorrows, sometimes how they sweep—  
Like tempests down over the soul.  
O then to the Rock let me fly!  
To the Rock that is higher than I.*

David was caught in a difficult predicament when he cried unto the LORD. His plea revealed that he was fully aware of his own failures and frailty. His strength was waning; he was drowning in a sea of troubles; and he needed to find a place of refuge for his weary soul. The only place that he could plant his feet was upon the Rock that was higher than he was.

CHS: "I see Thee to be my refuge, sure and strong; but alas! I am confused, and cannot find Thee; I am weak, and cannot climb thee. Thou art so steadfast, guide me; Thou art so high, uplift me... A Saviour would have been of no use to us if the Holy Spirit had not gently led us to Him, and enabled us to rest upon Him."

The Christian's comfort is that we can never be so far from God that He could not hear our prayers, and there is no heart so depressed that God's presence cannot cheer. Like David, even when we think that we are at the end of the earth, when we cry out to Him, He will hear. ■

***Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us. (Psalm 62:8)***

In this psalm, David's words show that he trusts God exclusively. This absolute trust is very evident in the Hebrew text—6 of the 12 verses begin with the Hebrew word for "alone" or "only" (vv. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9). The emphasis of *alone* is important to our understanding of the Christian faith. God *alone* is David's object of faith. God *alone* and no one else is David's help. God *alone* and *always* is David's trust. As one Puritan preacher says, "They trust not God at all who trust not Him alone."

In describing God only as his Rock (vv. 2, 6), David was drawing upon his own experience. He knew that while the rocks provided some momentary protection, it was God Who was his real refuge. Hence he said, "Trust in Him at all times."

CHS: "Faith is an abiding duty, a perpetual privilege. We should trust when we can see, as well as when we are utterly in the dark...God at all times deserves our confidence. We at all times need to place our confidence in Him. A day without trust in God is a day of wrath, even if it be a day of mirth."

Trusting God is not our holding on to Him. True faith is knowing that God holds on to us. It is not the strength of our will but the submission of our heart. To trust God, as David says, is to pour out your heart before Him. The idea is to entrust God with all our heart's sorrows, fears and desires. There is no sorrow that He could not relieve; no fear that He could not deliver; and no desire that He could not satisfy. It is this confidence that invites us to cast all our care upon Him, for He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). ■

***Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity. (Psalm 62:9)***

Our Lord Jesus told the disciples that the people in the world exercise lordship over one another: the great ones over the lowly ones; the mighty over the weak; the well-read over the illiterate. But where are the wise and noble in the eyes of God? In the eyes of God, the best of man is at best a man.

Alexander Maclaren translates the ninth verse as “*Only vanity are the sons of the lowly, a lie are the sons of the lofty.*” CHS: “Men of low degree are *only* vanity, nothing more. They are many and enthusiastic, but they are not to be depended on; they are mobile as the waves of the sea, ready to be driven to and fro by any and every wind; they cry ‘Hosanna’ today, and “Crucify Him” tomorrow...Men of high degree are a lie. We gain little by putting our trust in the aristocracy [elite]...How wretched is that poor man who puts his trust in princes. The more we rely upon God, the more shall we perceive the utter hollowness of every other confidence.”

David had been at both ends of the social strata; he was a poor shepherd and a fugitive before he became king. He had seen life at both ends, so he could declare with certainty that the life a man has without God—whether he is poor or rich—is total futility. When they are measured, they are always found wanting, and lighter than vanity. The lesson for us is that we should neither fear nor idolise man because there is nothing that man can do to us to keep us away from God. Conversely, there is also nothing he can do to us to bring us to Him. Only Christ is man’s hope. ■

***O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary. (Psalm 63:1-2)***

The title of this psalm puts David in the wilderness of Judah. There were two periods in David's life that he was in the wilderness—when he was fleeing from Saul, his king; and when he was fleeing from Absalom, his son. In both cases, David's life was in peril (v. 9). Being driven from Jerusalem and the temple explains David's longing for God.

David yearns for fellowship with the LORD like the wanderer who thirsts for water after days in the desert. But David seeks more than just the spiritual water that could quench his parched soul—he seeks the very fountain of the soul. Note David's claim (Thou art my God) and therefore also his desire (my soul thirsteth for Thee).

CHS: "Possession breeds desire. Full assurance is no hindrance to diligence, but is the mainspring of it...It is with ardent desire that I [David] seek[s] after Him whom I [he] know[s] to be my [his] own...He will not wait for noon or the cool eventide; he is up at cockcrowing [dawn] to meet his God. Communion with God is so sweet that the chill of the morning is forgotten, and the luxury of the couch is despised."

David would seek God as the first thing in the day. God first in his plans and purposes, God first in all things, God first in his thoughts, God first in his desires and God first in his life is Solomon's advice to the young person, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (Eccl. 12:1a).

The early seeking is not merely a reference to the time of the day but it also describes the supreme desire of the seeker. He who truly seeks God seeks for Him at the earliest opportunity and seeks with passion. Jonathan Edwards writes that "there is no true religion where there is no religious affection...If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart." ■

***When I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches. Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice. (Psalm 63:6-7)***

Even as David dwells in his present precarious circumstances, he recalls the past with delight and rejoicing. However, he is not rejoicing because of his past successes—he rejoices because the subject of his recollection is God. “When I remember Thee...and meditate on Thee in the night watches.” The Jews divide the night into three watches of four hours each, and even though the night grows darker with each passing hour, and the shadows cast a more boding evil, David finds peace in God’s unfailing faithfulness.

David had a song in the night. CHS: “Night is congenial, in its silence and darkness, to a soul which would forget the world [and whose thoughts dwell on heaven]...We read of beds of ivory, but beds of piety are better far. Some revel in the night, but they are not a tithe so happy [a fraction as happy] as those who meditate in God.”

When we face difficulties, we sometimes forget God’s past faithfulness. Thus “I remember Thee” is a good practical principle for Christians. From time to time, we need to stop along life’s road and look back. The purpose is not to look back with regret at our past failures; neither is it to look back with self-gratification at our past successes. The purpose of looking back is to see the faithfulness of our travelling Partner. When we consider the past, we will realise that we do not walk alone, but that our Lord is with us at every bump on the road—every turn, every detour, and every incline. Our confidence is that our Lord has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us, and He will continue to direct our every step. ■

# 21 Psalm 64:1-6

MAY

Hide Me, LORD

May

***Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity. (Psalm 64:1-2)***

**M**ore dangerous than the open enemy is the hidden foe. David, who was not afraid of Goliath, was terrified by the adversary who lurked in the dark, and who planned and executed in secret. David's concern was not unjustified—he could not possibly know the secret counsel of his enemies, neither could he keep a continuous vigil on them. The only Person that David could call upon for protection was the all-seeing and all-knowing God.

CHS: "When their secret counsels break forth into clamorous tumults, be Thou still my preserver. When they think evil, let Thy divine thoughts defeat them; and when they do evil, let Thy powerful justice overthrow them... Let me be out of reach of their cruel hand, and even out of sight of their evil eye."

There is a second danger to this hidden enemy, namely his choice of weapon; it is neither the sword nor the arrow but his tongue and words. To kill with a sword, the attacker must come near to David. To kill with an arrow, the enemy must at least have David in his sight. Not so with hateful words spoken from a malicious tongue. Poisoned words can be hurled at a great distance and still damage a person's name. No doubt David was the subject of many a wicked rumour.

The only defense of the maligned saint is our Saviour. CHS: "The LORD knows how to give His people peace, and when He wills to make quiet, He is more than a match for all disturbers, and can defeat alike their deep laid plots and their overt hostilities." ■

***And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of His doing. The righteous shall be glad in the LORD, and shall trust in Him; and all the upright in heart shall glory. (Psalm 64:9-10)***

**G**et even! This is the unbeliever's response when attacked—return force with force. Not so with the Psalmist. He sought God's protection; he also trusted the LORD to intervene on his behalf. God's ways against the wicked is truly poetic justice. He turns the arrows upon the enemy, and causes them to trip over their own words. The LORD more than punishes; He has a lesson to go with His punishment.

To the wicked, the lesson is that the Almighty will not be mocked by the arrogance of the wicked. The sinner will reap what he has sown. "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:8a).

To the sinner, God's just and fearsome wrath is a call for repentance—a summon to consider the power of God and to fear Him.

To the righteous, God's victory over the wicked is a matter for rejoicing and a resolve to trust in His goodness. When the LORD shows Himself to be a friend of holiness and an enemy to sin, the choice as to which side we should stand is clear—we will trust Him!

CHS: "The victory of the oppressed shall be the victory of all upright men; the whole host of the elect shall rejoice in the triumph of virtue. While strangers fear, the children are glad in view of their Father's power and justice. That which alarms the evil, cheers the good. LORD God of mercy, grant to us to be preserved from all our enemies, and saved in thy Son with an everlasting salvation." ■

***Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple. (Psalm 65:4)***

“Praise waiteth for Thee” (v. 1). The Psalmist regards his praises to God as a joyful duty, and he approaches it with earnest delight. Hence, his worship is not haphazard honour but prepared praise. His worship is focused; its theme specific. To worship God is in itself a blessing, but the man who knows the reasons for his worship enjoys a double measure of it.

For the Psalmist, his reason is that he is being drawn nigh to God. CHS: “We are chosen of God, according to the good pleasure of His will, and this alone is blessedness... Since we cannot and will not come to God of ourselves, He works graciously in us, and attracts us powerfully; He subdues our unwillingness, and removes our inability by the almighty workings of His transforming grace... [We] are made nigh by the blood of His Son, and brought... into intimate fellowship... to become dwellers in the divine household... Behold what manner of love and blessedness the Father has bestowed upon us that we may dwell in His house.”

David describes God’s choosing (election) as a blessing. Yet there are many people who regard election as a spite on man’s free-will. They would rather believe that it is the sinner who has the final say in the matter of his eternal destiny. Many want to know about election of God before they come to the God Who elects. But no man by his own wisdom can reason out the mystery of God’s election. It is coming to God by faith first that we may know. Look to Jesus first, come as you are, hide yourself in Him, and as surely as you believe, you will know the blessings of being chosen. ■

***Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness; and Thy paths drop fatness. (Psalm 65:11)***

Count the blessings of our loving God, name them one by one—He sets the mountains in their places; He controls the tempests of the seas; He calms the turmoils of the heart; He visits the earth with His goodness and floods it with His love.

*We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land,  
But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand...  
All good gifts around us are sent from heav'n above;  
Then thank the LORD, O thank the LORD for all His love.*

CHS: "The harvest is the plainest display of the divine bounty, and the crown of the year. The LORD Himself conducts the coronation, and sets the golden coronal [crown] upon the brow of the year...[The expression can also] mean that God's love encircles the year as with a crown; each month has its gems, each day its pearl...The providence of God in its visitations makes a complete circuit, and surrounds the year."

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). God alone is the One Who is able to send the refreshing rain into every parched soul and brings the warm sunshine into every cold heart. The times of refreshing is in His hands. It is God Who blesses, and wherever He goes, wherever His feet land, He leaves behind His goodness and the sweetness of His grace. It naturally follows that if we walk in His path, we will also find the gems of His blessings all along life's way. ■

***He ruleth by His power for ever; His eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves. (Psalm 66:7)***

The Psalmist begins with an invitation to the whole world to praise God. No man can truly worship God alone or silently because the exultant worshipper would not be able to reserve his praises to himself; neither can he contain his joy. So the Psalmist calls, "Make a joyful noise unto God...Sing forth the honour of His name...All the earth shall worship Thee, and shall sing unto Thee; they shall sing to Thy name" (vv. 1-4).

Music in worship, thus, is a natural outflowing of the believers' joy. There is a difference between the world's music which expresses man's emotions and the spiritual songs which are focused on the LORD. The Psalmist invites the world not just to sing but to "come and see the works of God: He is terrible [awesome] in His doing toward the children of men" (v. 5). The awesomeness of God is most evident in His governance; and most fearsome to the stubborn rebels—"He ruleth by His power for ever...let not the rebellious exalt themselves."

CHS: "His hand rules and His eye observes...He oversees all and overlooks none...The proudest have no cause to be proud...[If] they could see themselves as God sees them, they would shrivel into nothing...The Omnipotent ruler is also an Omniscient observer. O proud rebels [sinners], remember that the LORD aims His arrows at the high soaring eagles, and brings them down...'He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree'...[If we know Him, we would humble ourselves at His feet]."

The omnipotent and omniscient God is also eternal—He rules forever. God neither sleeps nor slackens. His dominion extends from age to age. To the wicked, this is cause for fear; to the righteous, God's eternal rule is the promise of victory. ■

***O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of His praise to be heard: Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved. (Psalm 66:8-9)***

It is one thing to raise one's voice and sing; but it is quite another thing to be able to sing meaningfully. "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" (1 Cor. 14:15b). The unbelievers could only behold the wonderful works of God; the righteous, however, are recipients of His grace. We not only see from afar, we also experience, at first-hand, God's holding of our souls and guarding of our steps.

CHS: "At any time the preservation of life, and especially the soul's life, is a great reason for gratitude, but much more when we are called to undergo extreme trials...Blessed be God, Who...put our souls into possession of life... Living and standing is the saint's condition through divine grace. Immortal and immovable are those whom God preserves...God is able to make the weakest to stand fast, and He will do so."

Christians must realise that the way to glory is not a short-cut. The LORD will bring us into the net (v. 11a), where our lives will be at the mercy of our enemies. He will bring afflictions to us (v. 11b) so that our strength will be tested. The righteous will be put through the mill of humiliation, where the adversaries will sift us as wheat (v. 12). We will be made to pass through burning flames and raging floods.

*Some thru the waters, some thru the flood,  
Some thru the fire, but all thru the blood;  
Some thru great sorrow, But God gives a song,  
In the night season and all the day long.  
(G. A. Young)*

But He will lead us away from the mire and away from the clay, until He brings us into a "wealthy place" (v. 12), and this is not just a place of material abundance but one where there is fullness of joy and peace—only to be found in God's blessed presence. ■

***If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me. (Psalm 66:18)***

Prayer is the Christian's privilege—our lifeline to God's grace. The Christian is exhorted to ask, seek, and knock. But many have asked in futility; they have sought but they found not; and they have knocked in vain. The reason: sin stands in the way of the prayer of the unrepentant sinner.

"If I regard iniquity in my heart" literally means "If I have seen iniquity in my heart." This describes the person who prays with a wicked end in view, who cherishes sin in his soul, who purposes to commit the sin again, who is unwilling to abandon his wicked ways. This is the person who prays because he wants to maintain a façade of godliness, but in whose heart harbours secret sins. With his lips, he prays with pious words, but with his hands he perpetrates all manner of evil works. Would the prayer of a man who desires that God be an accomplice in his sin be heard?

CHS: "Nothing hinders prayer like iniquity harboured in the breast; as with Cain, so with us, sin lieth at the door, and blocks the passage. If thou listen to the devil, God will not listen to thee. If thou refusest to hear God's commands, He will surely refuse to hear thy prayers...For God to accept our devotions, while we are delighting in sin, would be to make himself the God of hypocrites."

The man whose prayers are not heard by God is like a man whose air supply has been cut off. Many do not know or care because they are dead and numb to the frequent unanswered prayers. But to the sensitive soul, the fact that God could turn a deaf ear to our prayers is the best motivation for us to examine our lives and forsake our sins. ■

***God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us; That Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations. (Psalm 67:1-2)***

**T**he sixty-seventh psalm begins with the Aaronic blessing (Num. 6:24-26). The Psalmist entreats the LORD to shine His face upon the righteous. When God turns His face away from people, it is an indication of His wrath. But when He shines His face, it speaks of His favour. And the chief blessing of God which we should yearn for is His tender mercy.

CHS: "Forgiveness of sin is always the first link in the chain of mercies experienced by us. Mercy is a foundation attribute in our salvation. The best saints and the worst sinners may unite in this petition. It is addressed to the God of mercy, by those who feel their need of mercy, and it implies the death of all legal hopes or claims of merit."

God's blessing makes life not only possible but also enjoyable. But His blessings are not meant to be privately enjoyed by His people. Rather, the blessings of God are tokens of His favour so that His "way may be known upon the earth."

Note that the Psalmist supposes that there is the way of God and the way that is not of God. Solomon tells us that the way which seems right to man "the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). The way of God, on the other hand, leads to life and blessings. But God does not bestow His blessings arbitrarily; there are certain rules by which He acts. The point is that from observing God's blessing to His people, the unbelievers may know of God's sovereign grace and acknowledge Him as their God. The other lesson is that through the blessedness manifested in the Christian parent's life, our own household may be acquainted with the way in which God deals with His people. ■

# 29 Psalm 68:1-6

MAY

The Heavenly Father

May

***A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in His holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: He bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land. (Psalm 68:5-6)***

The sixty-eighth psalm is a battle hymn. The words of this psalm have been adopted by many generals throughout history including Oliver Cromwell and Henry of Navarre. Henry was the Protestant leader of the French Huguenots. In 1589, they were surrounded by the armies of the Catholic League at the town of Dieppe. Fog had set in and prevented Henry from using his artillery against the enemies. On the brink of defeat, Henry rallied his troops with the singing of Psalm 68. The fog lifted and the Huguenots were able to break through the enemy forces.

This is the same battle hymn that Christians need to sing as we call upon God to fight for us. Arise, God, and drive away the enemies. CHS: "Our glorious Captain of the vanguard clears the way readily... He has but to arise, and they flee, He has easily over thrown His foes in days of lore (the past), and will do so all through the ages to come."

Blessed is the man whose enemies are also God's enemies, then can we be sure of our victory. God is the mighty conqueror. He is also the Father to the fatherless, a judge to the widows—this is one of the most tender titles of God for there is nothing more helpless than the orphans and no one more despised than the destitute widows. But blessed also is the man who has God as his Father. The Almighty who is able to destroy powerful armies is also tender enough to reach down to the weak and despised. More powerful than the destruction of armies by His power is the manifestation of His love towards sinners. God condescended to take the place of the parent in one case, and to be the protector in the other. ■

***The LORD gave the word: great was the company of those that published it. (Psalm 68:11)***

**L**et God arise"; "Let God take the lead." With God at the head of the procession, the effects were unmistakable—the earth trembled, the heavens shook, the wilderness moved, but God's people were never lost because He went before them; they were never in want because He provided for their needs. So it is for the Christian—with God at the centre of our lives, we can be sure that He has prepared His goodness for us.

In the light of God's mercy, the response from His people ought to be spontaneous. "The LORD gave the word: great was the company of those that published it." In this context, the company refers to the chorus of women who raised their voices as their men came home victorious.

CHS: "The women ran from tent to tent and roused their lords to battle. Ready as they always were to chant the victory, they were equally swift to publish the fact that the battle-note had been sounded...O for the like zeal in the church of today, that, when the gospel is published, both men and women may eagerly spread the glad tidings of great joy."

The idea here is not that only women published the Word of God, rather, as was the practice in ancient days, the men were cheered by the women as they went out to war, and they were greeted by the women upon their victorious return. But, as Spurgeon recognises, the verse has an importance beyond the original context. The church today is in desperate need not of pulpiteers, but of men and women, young and old who are willing to join the great company of those who publish the Word of God. ■

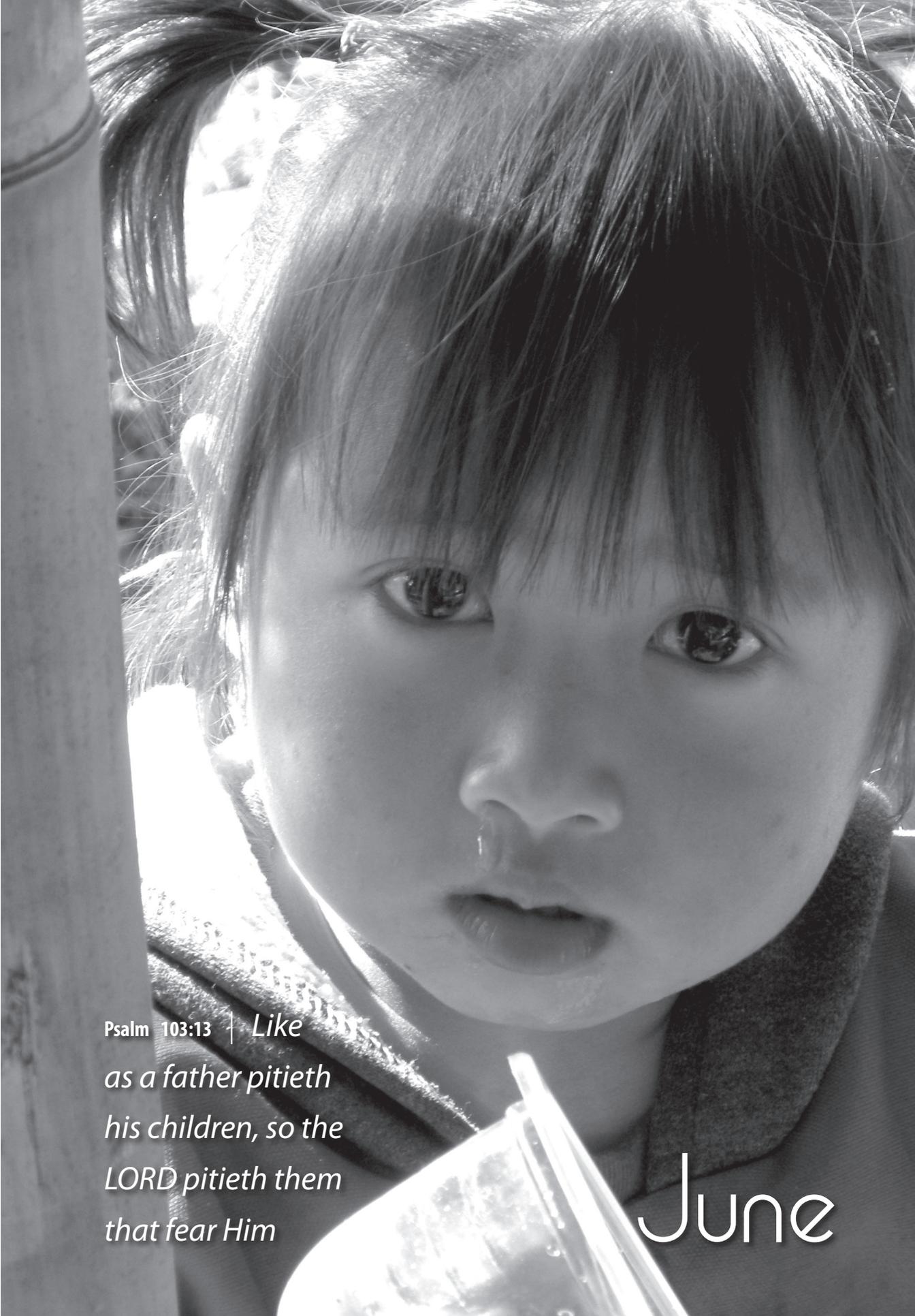
***Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them. Blessed be the LORD, Who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. (Psalm 68:18-19)***

The geography of Israel is littered with numerous mountain ranges. The highest mountain is Mount Hermon to the north, which stands over 9,000 feet. What about Mount Zion? It is certainly nothing when compared to the size and magnificence of Hermon, but Zion is "the hill which God desireth to dwell in" (v. 16). Yet this is the *modus operandi* of God. He is not impressed with greatness, neither is He impressed with numbers (vv. 17-18). Instead, the LORD chooses "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise...the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty...things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Cor. 1:27-28).

It is no shame to be a fool for Christ, a weak instrument in His mighty hand. CHS: "A multitude of the sons of men are the willing captives of Messiah's power...Jesus leads forth from the territory of His foe a vast company...of converts as the trophies of His mighty grace. From the gracious character of His reign it comes to pass that to be...[a captive of Christ is to be free from the captivity of our sin...He puts death to death, entombs the grave, and leads captivity captive."

Happy is the man who has the LORD as his yoke because it is easy and His burdens are light. Happy is the man who is held captive by God because the conqueror of our soul is also the God of our salvation. Thus wrote George Matheson of such a total and sweet surrender:

*Make me a captive, LORD, and then I shall be free.  
Force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.  
I sink in life's alarms when by myself I stand;  
Imprison me within Thine arms, and strong shall be my hand. ■*



Psalm 103:13 | *Like*  
*as a father pitieth*  
*his children, so the*  
*LORD pitieth them*  
*that fear Him*

June

***The LORD said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring My people again from the depths of the sea: That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same. They have seen Thy goings, O God; even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary. (Psalm 68:22-24)***

The picture of God as the mighty conqueror is the Christian's hope; it is also the unrighteous' horror. The victory of Christ must necessarily mean the utter defeat of His enemies. David describes God's victory over the foes in horrific terms—He crushed their heads, and He dipped His feet in the blood of His enemies.

CHS: "Vengeance shall be awarded to the oppressed people, and that most complete and terrible... So overwhelming should be the defeat of the foe that dogs should lick their blood... Terrible is the God of Israel when He comes as a Man of war, and dreadful is the Christ of God when He bares His arm to smite His enemies."

The destruction of the enemies was further contrasted with the rejoicing of God's people (vv. 25-27). As a general principle, Christians must never rejoice over God's vengeance over His enemies because we, but for the grace of God, deserve the same.

No doubt, the language is explicit and strong, but the acts of the enemies were also vile. After all, they have hated the Lord of the universe and showed their contempt for Him by committing wickedness. Hence, it is important to see the rejoicing of the righteous in this context. The stake of the spiritual battle is nothing less than the hearts and minds of God's people. We cannot fully appreciate the need for the crushing defeat of sin until we recognize the pernicious nature of the evil one. Neither can we ever fully appreciate the Christ of Calvary unless we regard sin with absolute contempt. ■

***Rebuke the company of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people, till every one submits himself with pieces of silver: scatter Thou the people that delight in war. (Psalm 68:30)***

David prays for God to summon His strength and scatter the people that delight in war—a picture of a defeated army in disarray. CHS: “God’s people were peacemen, and only desired the crushing of oppressive nations, that war might not occur again. Let the battles of peace be as fierce as they will; heap coals of fire on the heads of enemies, and slay their enmity thereby...Devoutly may we offer this prayer, and with equal devotion, we may bless God that it is sure to be answered, for ‘He breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder, He burneth the chariot in the fire.’”

The God Who scatters the unrepentant sinners is also the One Who causes the princes of Egypt and Ethiopia to stretch out their hands unto Him. The outstretched hand is an act of supplication and submission to God. This is also the gesture of lasting peace.

Lasting peace is not achieved by an occasional defeat of the enemies because the heart of man is constantly at war with God. Lasting peace can only be achieved when the enemies of God humble themselves to the Almighty, when the very weapons of war are replaced by the instruments of peace, when the heart that is at enmity with God embraces His love, and the sinner becomes His friend. Lasting peace—God’s peace—is not attained by man’s forced submission to the Almighty; rather, it is the drawing of the sinner by the grace of God for “no man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (John 6:44a). So we echo with David asking God to summon His strength, soften the sinner’s hardened heart, and draw us to Himself. ■

***To Him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old; lo, He doth send out His voice, and that a mighty voice. Ascribe ye strength unto God: His excellency is over Israel, and His strength is in the clouds. (Psalm 68:33-34)***

The sixty-eighth psalm begins with a prologue, asking God to arise and lead His army into war. It ends with an epilogue with a praise to God for what He has done, “Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the LORD” (v. 32).

However, man’s praise is but a chorus. The main aria is carried by God Himself. The eternal God Who rides the highest heavens sends out His voice. He will declare His own majesty. CHS: “Was there a thunder-clap just then heard in heaven? Or, did the poet’s mind flash backward to the time when from the heaven of heavens the voice of Jehovah broke the long silence and said, ‘light be; [‘let there be light,] and light was. To this hour, the voice of God is power. This gospel, which utters and reveals his word, is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Our voices are fitly called to praise Him whose voice spoke us into being, and gives us the effectual grace which secures our well being.”

The wicked may boast of their own strength, but the Christian would rather acknowledge the power of God. CHS: “When even His voice rends the rocks and uproots the cedars, what cannot His hand do?...Let us never by our doubts or our daring defiances appear to deny power unto God; on the contrary, by yielding to Him and trusting in Him, let our hearts acknowledge His might. When we are reconciled to God, His omnipotence is an attribute of which we sing with delight.”

If this psalm were set to music, David’s final words will crescendo to a crashing *fortissimo*—the God Who is holy; the God Who dwells in the heavens; the God Who keeps His covenant with Israel; and finally the God Who is blessed. Our only appropriate response is “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10-11).■

***I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me (Psalm 69:2).***

The sixty-ninth psalm contains the essential elements of lament, imprecatory and Messianic psalms. It is a lament because David clearly was in despair over the persecution by his enemies. It is an imprecatory psalm because David called upon God to punish his oppressors (vv. 22-28). The psalm ends with more than God's deliverance but the promise of God's glorious redemption through the Messiah. This is one of the most quoted psalms in the New Testament, and it is all relating to the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The attention in the opening verse is focused on David's sad situation. He was overwhelmed with problems that were not of his own doing and beyond his capabilities. David could not stand; he was sinking. CHS: "Everything gave way under the sufferer; he could not get foothold for support...The sorrow gathers even greater force...[they] were first within, then around, and now above him."

I remember the time when a group of us was crossing a river as part of a military training. My life-jacket had a leak, and in mid-stream, I felt myself sinking. I kicked with my legs, trying to keep my head above the water, but I was weighed down by all my equipment. There was no standing and I was only sinking. Adversities of life do the same to us. The harder we try, the worse it seems to get, to the point where we can only cry out, "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul" (v. 1).

The only help must come from above. Praise the Lord that He is our Saviour. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee..." (Isa. 43:2). Look to Jesus for He is willing and able to save. ■

***I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children. For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon me. (Psalm 69:8-9)***

There are times when we are rejected and despised because of our own foolishness and sin. While we may try to hide our sins, God knows (v. 5). It is far better to confess our weakness of flesh before God and men than to live a life of pretense. We must never allow our lives to be used as an example of how-not-to-be. Let it not be said of you that here is the person who is a Christian in name only.

However, there are also times when we are rejected because we take a stand for the truth. To be despised by our enemies is to be expected. To suffer the rejection of our loved ones—to be a stranger in your own home—is truly the bitter pill.

CHS: "What pangs must have smitten thy loving heart to be thus forsaken by those who should have loved thee, defended thee, and, if need be, died for thee...As David's brethren envied him, and spake [spoke] evil of him, so our Lord's relatives by birth were jealous of Him, and His best beloved followers in the hour of His agony were afraid to be known as having any connection with Him...May none of us ever act as if we were strangers to Him; never may we treat Him as if He were an alien to us: rather let us resolve to be crucified with Him, and may grace turn the resolve into fact."

To you who bear the name of Christ and who suffer for His sake, He whispers this promise, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:11-12a). ■

***And hide not Thy face from Thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily. Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies. (Psalm 69:17-18)***

The world will continue to mock at our Lord Jesus. He is the theme for many blasphemous books, films, and paintings. His name is used as profanity. He is the "song of drunkards." To the true disciple, Jesus is the glorious name, the sweetest name, and the name above all names.

So while the world mocks at Jesus, we call unto Him. Why? Because "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12b). Only Jesus saves. Only Christ is able and willing to deliver. This is the blessed truth that calls us to prayers.

David knew the power of prayer, so when he was sinking in the mire of life's adversities, he pleaded, "...hear me speedily" (v. 17). Desperate times calls for more earnest and more urgent prayers.

Prayer is calling upon God not because we are good but because He is. Prayer is putting ourselves into God's care not because we deserve it but because He is full of mercy. True prayer is drawing near to God, pleading for Him to turn His blessed face upon us, and not to hide Himself from us but to draw near to us. In times of trouble, David first prayed not much to be delivered from it, but more that God would draw nigh to his soul (v. 18).

CHS: "The near approach of God is all the sufferer needs; one smile of heaven will still the rage of hell...It shall be redemption to me if Thou wilt appear to comfort me. This is a deeply spiritual prayer, and one very suitable for a deserted soul. It is in renewed communion that we shall find redemption realised." ■

***Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. (Psalm 69:20)***

It is natural for a person to seek for consolation when he is hurting. In trying moments, we all look for a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, or a silent sympathy. David looked for someone who would come alongside to encourage him, but “there was none”. He looked for comforters, but he found none. The loneliness makes the gall of reproach even more bitter, and his heart even more broken than it already was. This was certainly true of our blessed Saviour in the closing hours of His earthly ministry. When he found the three beloved disciples sleeping, our Lord asked, “What, could ye not watch with me one hour?” (Matt. 26:40).

CHS: “The heaviness of our Lord in the garden is expressed by many and forcible words in the four gospels, and each term goes to show that the agony was beyond measure great; He was filled with misery...Not one to say Him a kindly word, or drop a sympathetic tear. Amongst ten thousand foes there was not one who was touched by the spectacle of His misery; not one with a heart capable of humane feeling towards Him...His dearest ones had sought their own safety, and left their Lord alone.”

The stories of Gethsemane and Calvary are the accounts of loneliness. Our Lord knew that He was to be deserted by friends. He was “touched with the feeling of our infirmities”. He was in all points tempted like as we are. He knew that He was to be in need of comforters and yet could find none. He knew the bitterness of a broken heart and it is upon this assurance that we know we will not be lonely in times of betrayal; Our Lord knew the pain of desertion, and hence His promise—“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5b).■

***The humble shall see this, and be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God. (Psalm 69:32)***

**J**ob says, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). Who among us is not born of a woman? The certainty of suffering comes with the fall of man. We know this to be true from our own life experience, and if that is what life is all about, it would be depressing indeed; but it is not.

David had a broken heart (v. 20), but in Christ, he had a living one, and he was not afraid to make it known. CHS: "Grateful hearts are ever on the lookout for recruits, and the rejoicing Psalmist discerns with joy the fact that other oppressed and lowly men observing the LORD's dealings with His servants are encouraged...[in] their own tribulations. The standing consolation of the godly is the experience of their LORD...His triumph has secured ours...He foresaw the comforts which would flow to us from His conflict and conquest... It would have been useless to seek if Jesus' victories had not cleared the way, and opened a door of hope...but our hope is a living one, our faith is living, our love is living, and our renewed nature is full of a vitality which challenges the cold hand of [despair and] death..."

As long as we breathe, we inhale that which sustains life and also that which shortens it. In this world, the blessing of life comes with the curse of pain and evil. Jesus says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b). The promise for the Christian is that defeat and despair will not have the final word. The final word belongs to the redeemed, and it is a song of victory in Christ. ■

***Let all those that seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee: and let such as love Thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified. (Psalm 70:4)***

**H**elp is the one-word prayer which cannot be further simplified. There is also no refined way of calling for help. The one who needs it musters all his strength and makes known his need not once but repeatedly. Like David, we must call upon God earnestly. Note the sense of urgency with which he begins and ends his prayer—"Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O LORD...make haste unto me, O God: thou art my help and my deliverer; O LORD, make no tarrying" (vv. 1, 5).

Like David, we must come to God recognising our own weakness. For it is in our weakness that God is magnified. CHS: "All true worshippers, though as yet in the humble ranks of seekers, shall have cause for joy. Even though the seeking commences in darkness, it shall bring light with it...Those who have tasted divine grace, and are, therefore, wedded to it...these shall not only feel joy, but shall with holy constancy and perseverance tell abroad their joy, and call upon men to glorify God."

There are two forms of magnification. We can magnify by using the microscope, which makes a small thing appear larger than it really is. Or we can magnify by using the telescope, which makes a distant thing appear nearer. It is the latter that aptly describes the Christian's desire to magnify God. The Almighty Creator is the "high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15). As I write, Charles Wesley's hymn—*And Can It Be*—was playing in the background. When the world sees the work of grace in our lives, there can only be one response—"Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou, my God shouldst die for me?" Not I, but Christ be magnified always! ■

***For Thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: Thou art my trust from my youth. (Psalm 71:5)***

The seventy-first psalm is the Christian's biography from his youth to old age; and the theme of his life is God's faithfulness. Like the Psalmist, we can trust the LORD because He has proved Himself to be faithful; He alone is our hope.

CHS: "God Who gives us grace to hope in Him, will assuredly fulfil our hope, and, therefore, we may plead it in prayer. His name is 'Jehovah, the hope of Israel!...As He cannot be a false or failing hope, we may expect to see our confidence justified...David had proved his faith by notable exploits when he was a youth and ruddy; it was to him a cheering recollection, and he felt persuaded that the God of his youth would not forsake him in his age."

"Thou art my trust from my youth" also speaks to Christian parents, who have the responsibility to nurture their children's faith. Paul said of Timothy that from a child he has known the Holy Scriptures through the instruction of his grandmother and mother.

New to town, Little Johnny was invited to Sunday School by the Preacher. "What do they teach in that Sunday School?" asked Johnny. The minister said that they taught Bible stories about Jesus.

"Do they teach any math at Sunday School? If they do, I'm not coming!" the boy said. Merely a toddler, Johnny had determined that he had enough of math to last his whole life. This should give us cause to consider how many of our children who have seen our brand of the Christian faith had concluded they have had enough of it for their lives. ■

***Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. (Psalm 71:9)***

There is no retirement for the Christian life on this side of heaven. We are to run the race and finish the course. We are called to persevere in fighting the good fight and keeping the faith. A man might have been faithful to God from his youth up, but there are no free passes in his old age. His zeal for God at the dawn of his life is not a license for indulgence in his evening years. Faith is the race that ends when we go into the welcoming arms of our Saviour, and hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

David was worried that when he was aged, when his faculties failed, his strength sapped and his enthusiasm ebbed, and when he could no longer be as active in serving the LORD, he would be cast off.

CHS: "Old age robs us of personal beauty, and deprives us of strength for active service; but it does not lower us in the love and favour of God. An ungrateful country leaves its worn-out defenders to starve upon a scanty pittance, but the pensioners of heaven are satisfied with good things...To be forsaken of God is the worst of all conceivable ills...[but the redeemed should be] clear of that [such] grievous fear."

The best ministry of the aged Christian is the testimony of his faith. When our hands are too weak to labour for our Lord, our lips must never stop praising Him. As the Psalmist says, "I will hope continually, and will yet praise Thee more and more" (v. 14).

Polycarp was given a choice—renounce Christ and bow down to Caesar, or be thrown to the lions. But the Bishop of Smyrna said, "Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and He has done me no wrong. How can I now blaspheme my Lord Who saved me?" Like Polycarp, we may be weak in our strength, but we must always be strong in our faith. ■

***I will also praise Thee with the psaltery...My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto Thee...My tongue also shall talk of Thy righteousness all the day long. (Psalm 71:22-24)***

**“I wish...”** There are some who look back at their lives, and they think of the things that they had and lost; and there are others who think of missed opportunities and the things that they could have done but did not. “I wish...” are the saddest words that a man can utter. To these people, the present offers nothing except the opportunity to complain. Not so with the Psalmist. He lived without regrets. He looked at his past, and remembered God’s goodness; and he saw only reasons for rejoicing—for the future of the redeemed is one of endless hope.

CHS: “Love so amazing calls for sweetest praise. David would give his best music [to the Saviour]...It shall be no weariness to me [us] to praise Thee. It shall be a delightful recreation, a solace, a joy...Till men are redeemed, they are like instruments out of tune; but when once the precious blood has set them at liberty, then are they fitted to magnify the LORD Who bought them. Our being bought with a price is a more than sufficient reason for our dedicating ourselves to the earnest worship of God our Saviour...[our] theme shall be Thy way of justifying sinners, the glorious display of Thy righteousness and grace in Thy dear Son...Others talk of their beloved, and they shall be made to hear of mine [ours].”

The theme of the seventy-first psalm is God’s faithfulness. God is faithful (1 Cor. 1:9), and this is the hymn that we must sing with our lips and our lives.

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;  
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be...  
Great is Thy faithfulness, LORD unto me. ■*

***In His days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. (Psalm 72:7)***

The seventy-second psalm is a royal psalm. It is also a prayer by David for his son, Solomon, but it also describes the eternal King. Charles Hodge says that “the subject of the psalm must be a divine person. His kingdom is to be everlasting, universal, secures perfect peace with God and goodwill among men.” Who but Christ can fulfill such a grand mission?

The first character of His divine kingdom is righteousness (vv. 1-4), and where there is true righteousness, peace prevails. CHS: “Where truth and uprightness are on the throne, the best of men prosper most...He [Jesus] is known as the true Melchizedek, king both of righteousness and peace. Peace based upon right is sure to be lasting, but no other will be. Many a so-called holy alliance...[failed because] craftiness formed the league, perjury established it, and oppression was the design of it; but He will ordain perpetual peace, and men shall learn war no more. The peace which Jesus brings is not superficial or shortlived; it is abundant in its depth and duration.”

Dear reader, men have labored for peace, but men’s engineered peace is both fleeting and fragile. The peace of our Lord, on the other hand, flourishes in our hearts in all other circumstances. As our Lord said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27a). Our Lord is not merely the provider of peace, but He is peace Himself. To you who have found the righteousness of God through His Son, we have the peace with God (Rom. 5:1) as well as the peace of God (Phil. 4:7) because He is the Prince of Peace. ■

***For He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in His sight. (Psalm 72:12-14)***

The kingdom of our Lord is righteous (vv. 1-3), eternal (vv. 5-7) and universal (vv. 8-11). In his hymn based upon Psalm 72, James Montgomery wrote

*Kings shall fall before Him, and gold and incense bring;  
All nations shall adore Him, His praise all people sing;  
To Him shall prayer unceasing, and daily vows ascend;  
His kingdom still increasing, a kingdom without end.*

Throughout history, men have dreamt and tried to create a better society. Plato formulated his ideas in *Republic*; Thomas More in *Utopia*. Politicians tried it; Franklin Roosevelt named his plan the New Deal, Lyndon Johnson called his the Great Society. Individuals such as Robert Owen also attempted such social experiments. In 1825, the wealthy Scotsman bought a town in Indiana and named it New Harmony with the promise of starting a utopian society. It lasted two short years before his ideal society disintegrated.

There is only one society that promises enduring peace and compassion. CHS: "Here is an excellent reason for man's submission to the Lord Christ; it is not because they dread His overwhelming power, but because they are won over by His just and condescending rule. Who would not fear so good a Prince, Who makes the needy His peculiar care, and pledges Himself to be their Deliverer in times of need?"

Our Lord will deliver the needy, spare the poor, redeem the soul of the oppressed. Justice, mercy and peace will prevail when Christ takes His seat on David's throne. It will be a kingdom of universal righteousness and blessings, and it is our future! ■

***Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen. (Psalm 72:18-19)***

The formula for prosperity is righteousness. "In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble" (Prov. 15:6). However, this biblical precept has been turned on its head. The world seeks riches instead of righteousness, and many "that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare; ... they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

When Christ is honoured in your life, you will be blessed (v. 17). This blessing is beyond gold and silver. This is a blessing of belonging to the family of God Who owns the world and the fullness thereof (Ps. 24:1).

With such blessedness comes the doxology. CHS: God's blessings "call for profound gratitude, and emotion of heart, than for an exercise of the understanding; they are rather to be used for adoration than for exposition. It is...the climax of our prayers; to behold Jesus exalted King of kings and Lord of lords. He has done great wonders such as none else can match...His name shall be blessed; His name is glorious, and that glory shall fill the whole earth. For so bright a consummation our heart yearns daily, and we cry 'Amen, and Amen.'"

Christians, see the order of God's kingdom. He rules over all in righteousness so that no one is denied—not even the poor and needy—and peace and prosperity prevail. It is a perfect society that will be realised on that day in Christ Jesus. This royal psalm is also a prophecy of the Christian's hope. "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). ■

***For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (Psalm 73:3)***

The seventy-third psalm marks the beginning of the third book (Psalms 73-83) of the Psalter. It was composed by Asaph, a member of the tribe of Levi who had been appointed by David to be responsible for worship music (1 Chron. 6:39).

In this psalm, Asaph asked one of life's most perplexing questions—why do the righteous suffer? Asaph looked at the world and what he saw bothered him. He saw the prosperity of the wicked and the poverty of the righteous. He saw the strength of the evil doer and the weakness of God's people.

Life can be, and is, very difficult for the godly. In Asaph's mind—and ours—the wicked should get their just deserts and only the godly should prosper. One word describes Asaph's attitude—envy.

CHS: "His eye was fixed too much on one thing; he saw their present, and forgot their future, saw their outward display, and overlooked their soul's discomfort. Who envies the bullock his fat when he recollects the shambles? Yet some poor afflicted saint has been sorely tempted to grudge the ungodly sinner his temporary plenty."

What Asaph saw did not square up with what he knew to be true (v. 1), and his envy nearly caused him to backslide (v. 2). Wrapped with self-pity and filled with resentment, Asaph questioned God, and he nearly became one of those whom he envied. It was only the goodness of God that kept him from slipping into unbelief. This is sustaining grace!

Faith in God's goodness is a challenge; that is why many have departed from it to put their trust in uncertain riches. Yet faith yields its best reward because without faith, it is impossible to please God; and we who come to "God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). Better to pray that God help us with our unbelief than reject Him totally. ■

***And they say, How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. (Psalm 73:11-12)***

When Asaph saw the prosperity of the wicked, it was not so much his lack of understanding that gave rise to his unhappiness. There are many things in life for which we have no answers, but few rouse such frustration as that which we perceive to be unjust. Asaph was angry with God because he thought that God was not treating the godly the way he thought they should be treated. Instead, the wicked were rich, healthy and arrogant.

CHS: "They flatter themselves that their oppressions and persecutions are unobserved of heaven...Boasting of their own knowledge, they yet dare to ask...If there be a God, is He not too much occupied with other matters to know what is going on upon this world?...[Such] is the insanity of the graceless theists of this age; theists in name...but atheists in practice..."

Does God know about the sacrilege of the wicked? And does He care about the sufferings of the righteous? Our Lord knows and He cares, but He does not always reveal. A young man was on vacation with his friends. Within a short time, he had spent all the money that his father had given him. He wrote to his father for some more, but his father decided to teach his son the lesson of faithful stewardship so he decided not to respond. The young man's friends offered reasons for his father's silence, but he told them, "I know my father loves me. He has a reason. I will know when I get home. He will tell me himself."

This is the attitude that the believer must have towards our Heavenly Father. Life holds many unanswered questions. We do not know a lot of things for His ways are higher than our ways (Isa. 55:9). There is, however, one thing that we know—"Truly God is good...to such as are of a clean heart" (v. 1). ■

***If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of Thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. (Psalm 73:15-17)***

Asaph was facing serious struggles concerning his faith. He confessed that he had cleansed his heart in vain, and that he was plagued and chastened. Indeed, what is the value of sanctification if it offers no rest for our struggles? Every believer would have walked through these dark alleys of doubt and depression.

Should we vocalise our spiritual discontent? Ought we murmur against God? Asaph gives this wise advice, "If I say...I should offend against the generation of thy children." Asaph was conscious of his words lest they offend others. Man's weakness is that we tend to speak too soon and too much, and our words become a snare for the young and impressionable. This sensitivity to others is a virtue that God's people must cultivate. As Christians, we must be mindful of our words. We must be careful that we do not say or do anything that would weaken another person's confidence in God.

When we do not know what to say, the best thing to do is to pray and to go into the sanctuary of God. CHS: "His mind entered the eternity where God dwells as in a holy place, he left the things of sense for the things invisible, his heart gazed within the veil, he stood where the thrice holy God stands. Thus he shifted his point of view, and apparent disorder resolved itself into harmony."

"Until I went into the sanctuary of God..."—God has an open invitation for us to His throne of grace. However, we will remain spiritually destitute until we come to that fountain where His mercy flows. It is in the sanctuary of God that we will understand it all. It is when we draw near to God that we see life—its up's and down's—as He has determined it. And our only conclusion then will be that He is good. ■

***Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. (Psalm 73:25-26)***

When Asaph drew near to God, he saw life from His perspective—the only true perspective. His conclusion: he was foolish and ignorant. He had allowed bitterness to rule his heart. He behaved like a beast with no sense of God’s divine calling in his life. He judged life’s happiness by the gratification of his flesh. Asaph’s sin was not unique. The riches of the world continue to pose a major distraction for many Christians.

Thank God that the spiritual balance was restored in Asaph’s life. In his foolishness, he did not lose his faith. He recognised that God had sustained him. When Asaph’s faith failed, God held him fast. Let us pray that God will also similarly sustain our faith, for other than God, whom can we safely trust?

CHS: Asaph “turned away from the glitter which fascinated him to the true gold which was his real treasure. He felt that his God was better to him than all the wealth, health, honour, and peace, which he had so much envied in the worldling; yea, He [God] was not only better than all on earth, but more excellent than all in heaven...No longer should his wishes ramble, no other object should tempt them to stray; henceforth, the Everliving One should be his all in all.”

Shortly before his death, Charles Wesley used the twenty-fifth verse as a text for his last hymn:

*In age and feebleness extreme,  
Who shall a helpless worm redeem?  
Jesus, my only hope Thou art,  
Strength of my failing flesh and heart:  
O could I catch one smile from Thee,  
And drop into eternity!*

Our flesh will continue to fail, and our bodies will weaken, but not God and certainly not our faith that is found upon the LORD Who is our strength and portion for ever. ■

***Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased of old; the rod of Thine inheritance, which Thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein Thou hast dwelt. (Psalm 74:2)***

The historical context of this psalm is the destruction and desecration of the temple (v. 7). The Psalmist begins with two questions that strike at the very heart of Who God is. "Has God cast away His people forever?" "Will the Shepherd destroy the sheep of His fold?" In other words, is it possible that God is unfaithful and unforgiving? Is He unloving and uncaring?

The wailing tone of this lament rises with the magnitude of God's anger. Grief and despair can sometimes give way to impiety and doubt. When the fire of God's wrath gets too intense, the recourse is not in self-righteous justification, but a humble pleading of His mercy, "Remember Thy congregation."

CHS: "Let us put Him in remembrance...Can He desert His blood-bought and forsake His redeemed? Can election fail and eternal love cease to flow? Impossible. The woes of Calvary, and the covenant of which they are the seal, are the security of the saints...His church is His kingdom, over which He stretches the rod of sovereignty; will He allow His possessions to be torn from Him? God's property in us is a fact full of comfort: His value of us, His dominion over us, His connection with us are all so many lights to cheer our darkness. No man will willingly lose his inheritance, and no prince will relinquish his dominions; therefore we believe that the King of kings will hold His own, and maintain His rights against all comers."

What should we ask the LORD to remember? Certainly not our sins or our tainted works of "righteousness". Our best plea is that we belong to Him. Our Lord has purchased us. We are His inheritance. The logic is unassailable. Surely God Who has redeemed us with the life of His beloved Son would never nullify His work by casting us off forever. Christ is our hope of eternal security. ■

***We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. (Psalm 74:9)***

The enemies were vicious in their attempt to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. They went on a rampage, putting their axes to every pillar in the temple (vv. 5-6), and razing the temple to the ground (v. 7). After the enemies were done, the temple was reduced to a heap of rubble. Sin leaves a similar trail of destruction in the life of a Christian. Sin brings defeat, humiliation, and reproach. Sin emboldens the enemies' attacks upon God's people. Worst of all, God appeared to be silent at the time when the people needed Him most.

CHS: "No Urim and Thummim blazed on the High Priest's bosom, and no Shekinah shone from between the cherubim...We, too, as believers, know what it is to lose our evidence and grope in darkness; and too often do our churches also miss the tokens of the Redeemer's presence, and their lamps remain untrimmed...[No more prophet. No more revelation.]...It is ill with the people of God when the voice of the preacher of the gospel fails, and a famine of the word of life falls on the people."

The silence of God is in itself a judgement. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11). It is a terrible thing to be without God's Word. Sadly today many people, including Christians, put themselves under this judgement. It is not that we cannot have access to the Holy Scriptures; neither is there a lack of opportunities or resources to study the Word of God. The tragic part is that we do not value the Word of God as we should; we have allowed the cares and distractions of this world to rob us of that one good and needful thing—the Word of life. ■

***The day is Thine, the night also is Thine: Thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: Thou hast made summer and winter. (Psalm 74:16-17)***

Standing in the midst of the temple ruins, Asaph cried, “For God is my King of old” (v. 12). In the verses that follow, Asaph gave a quick overview of God’s miraculous and merciful interventions in the past. The blessed truth is that God has not failed in the past and He will not fail now; God has not failed His people of old and He will also not fail you.

CHS: “Thou art not restricted by times and seasons. Our prosperity comes from Thee, and our adversity is ordained by Thee. Thou rulest in the darkness, and one glance of Thine eye kindles it into day. LORD, be not slack to keep Thy word, but rise for the help of Thy people. . . Both light and the light-bearer are of Thee. Our help, and the instrument of it, are both in Thy hand. There is no limit to Thy power; be pleased to display it and make Thy people glad. . . dispel[ling] our gloom.”

Asaph saw God’s deliverance in defeat—His salvation in the people’s sufferings. Asaph saw revival in the ruins. This is faith—“the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is the knowledge of the certainty of our hope even when we cannot see it.

God is in control. He has prepared the light and the sun. He has established all the boundaries of the world. He has made the seasons. Nothing is the result of chance; all things—good and bad—are by His design; so that even when calamities visit us, when it appears that we have been abandoned, we know that God is good. This is the anchor of our hope. ■

***Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O LORD, and that the foolish people have blasphemed Thy name. O deliver not the soul of Thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of Thy poor for ever. (Psalm 74:18-19)***

Psalm 74 brings us from a sorrowful lament (vv. 1-11) to confident praise (vv. 12-17) to thankful confession (vv. 18-23). When it appears that you have been forgotten, the best response is to call on God to remember (vv. 18, 20, 22-23). Not that God ever forgets, but that the prayer is a reminder to us that He is faithful.

Remember the LORD because of the contempt of the enemy. Their strength stands in contrast to our weakness; their pride in contrast to our powerlessness. They are uncontrollable in their violence; they behave like wild beasts; we, in contrast, are as weak as the turtledove. But this is our best plea yet.

CHS: "Thy poor church is weak and defenceless as a dove, but yet her adversaries cannot touch her without Thy permission; do not give them leave to devour her, consign her not to the merciless fangs of her foes. She is Thy dove, Thy turtle, Thy favoured one, do not cast her to her enemies. Be merciful, and preserve the weak...They [We] look to Thee for everything, for they [we] are very poor...do not turn Thy back on them [us] for long...Turn Thou unto them [us], and visit Thine afflicted. In such pleas we...[must join in] when at any time we are sorely tried, and the LORD's presence is hidden from us."

The humble turtledove is a name of endearment for God's covenant people. We are His turtledove (v. 19). Our life and well-being are wrapped up in His covenant. A covenant is a contract between two parties, but not this covenant. God's covenant describes His choosing and calling, without any say on our part. This is the only reason why this covenant can neither be broken nor altered. Even though we may be lacking in faith, God "abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). ■

***For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another. (Psalm 75:6-7)***

God is on the throne. Providence is His eternal and universal work. He will judge the wicked, and He will deliver the redeemed, all in His time. The LORD puts His blessed name upon all His wondrous works. As the words to Maltbie Babcock's hymn reads:

*This is my Father's world.  
O let me ne'er forget  
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,  
God is the ruler yet.*

CHS: "There is a God...and things happen not by chance. Though deliverance be hopeless from all points of the compass, yet God can work it for His people; and though judgement comes neither from the rising [n]or the setting of the sun...yet come it will, for the LORD reigneth...Even now He is actually judging. His seat is not vacant; His authority is not abdicated; the LORD reigneth evermore."

Yet the wicked and foolish will be defiantly ignorant. They speak and act with impunities until their iniquities be full; then they will drink of the cup of the wrath of God. The LORD reigns, and yet there are times when we, believers, defer to the world, either out of fear or for its favours.

Promotion comes not from the east, or west or south; it does not come from the human plane. This does not mean that we should not work hard and be the best at what we do. Rather, this is a warning against self-exaltation. The world's honours are transient and vain, and to befriend the world so that we may be accepted as one of its own is folly.

True promotion comes from God, and it comes from the work of declaring and praising God. This should be the occupation of every Christian regardless of your field of work. Make this your life's mission, and you can be sure that you will be exalted. ■

***In Judah is God known: His name is great in Israel. In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place in Zion. (Psalm 76:1-2)***

The seventy-sixth psalm is a victory psalm. It has been used throughout church history by Christians to praise God for His deliverance. In 1588, it was sung in English churches to celebrate the defeat of the Spanish Armada. The Pilgrims named their first settlement in Massachusetts, Salem, because the second verse says that God's tabernacle is in Salem, and if it was good for God, it would be good for them as well.

God is known in Judah. CHS: "To be known, in the LORD's case, is to be honoured: those who know His name admire the greatness of it. Although Judah and Israel were unhappily divided politically, yet the godly of both nations were agreed concerning Jehovah their God; and truly whatever schisms may mar the visible church, the saints always 'appear as one' in magnifying the LORD their God."

God is known in Judah. It is true that the whole creation bears the fingerprint of God (Rom. 1:20); however, it is in Judah that He is worshipped. This statement focuses on the exclusiveness of the Gospel. Only in Judah can God be known. Only in Christ is God revealed. Our Lord Jesus told Philip, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9. See also 1 John 5:20). Do you *know* God or do you just know about Him?

God is known in Judah. This statement also emphasises the function of the church. Our duty as Christians is to exalt God, and make His Name known. "O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph" (Ps. 47:1). If not the church, where else could God be known? If not the redeemed, who else would make Him known? As God's people, we must have this as our primary goal—to know Him and to make Him known. ■

***Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain. (Psalm 76:10)***

According to the US Institute of Mental Health, phobias are the most common form of anxiety disorders. Man suffers from all sorts of fears – agoraphobia (fear of open spaces), claustrophobia (fear of enclosed spaces), arachnophobia (fear of spiders), etc. These phobias have debilitating effects on their sufferers. However, there is one fear that all man must have—the fear of God. “Thou, even Thou, art to be feared” (v. 7a).

God alone is to be feared because He alone judges righteously and will give to every sinner what he truly deserves. Before His holy presence, every sinner will stand in silent contrition. God’s fear is also His salvation. When God rises in judgement, He would also “save all the meek of the earth” (v. 9).

Yet despite God’s merciful warnings, there are some who would not fear God (Ps. 36:1; Rom. 3:18). They think that their defiance would shake the foundations of God’s plan. But the fact is, even the wrath of man shall glorify God. CHS: “Man with his breath of threatening is but blowing the trumpet of the LORD’s eternal fame. Furious winds often drive vessels the more swiftly into port. The devil blows the fire and melts the iron, and then the LORD fashions it for His own purposes. Let men and devils rage as they may, they cannot do otherwise than sub-serve [serve] the divine purposes.”

Peter was imprisoned by an angry Agrippa, but he was delivered by the angel of the LORD; God was praised. Paul and Silas were thrown into jail by the Romans, but God sent an earthquake to free His servants. Through them, salvation came to the house of the jailer; God was exalted. Stephen was stoned to death by an angry mob; the rest of the disciples were scattered abroad preaching the Gospel; God was glorified. Sometimes, God overrules. At all times, He rules. And when we recognise God’s rule, we will soon see that there is nothing in the purposes of man that God could not dispose of for His own honour. ■

***I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search. (Psalm 77:6)***

**H**ow good life was back then”—this was the complaint of the Psalmist. He remembered how the LORD answered his prayers. When he cried, God gave ear unto him (v. 1). When the Psalmist looked back at the past, he remembered God’s mercies. But things have changed. God seems to have abandoned him.

Bitterness in the taste buds is enhanced after you have tasted sweetness. So it is spiritually, the bitterness of the soul is deepened by the withdrawing of the sweetness of heavenly mercies. The Psalmist remembered the song in the night — the song he sang in times of affliction. The misery never silenced the music. No matter how dark the situation, the Psalmist could always find something which he could praise God for. But how much have things changed! The Psalmist recalled those times when the LORD sustained and comforted him. The music might not have stopped, but the tune had changed.

CHS: “He Who is the wellspring of delight to faith became an object of dread to the Psalmist’s distracted heart. The justice, holiness, power, and truth of God have all a dark side...even the brightness of divine love blinds us, and fills us with a horrible suspicion that we have neither part nor lot in it. He is wretched indeed whose memories of the Ever Blessed prove distressing to him; yet the best of men know the depth of this abyss.”

Has God stopped His mercies? Has God changed? No, the LORD is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Psalmist’s complaints prove this point. He says, “I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.” He looks to restore God’s presence in his life. He endeavours to bring those things back into his life again. God’s grace is ever sufficient, and the afflictions of life should drive us to, rather than away from, God. We who have tasted God’s sweetness should never give in to life’s bitterness. ■

***Will the Lord cast off for ever?...I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember Thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all Thy work, and talk of Thy doings. (Psalm 77:7, 11-12)***

It seems that Asaph's depression has given way to doubt, and his sorrow has fuelled his skepticism. He asks a series of six questions. Some look at these questions as hammer blows breaking one's faith, but I think the real intent is to secure God's love firmly in our heart.

There is only one answer to all six questions—No! Will the Lord reject us forever? No (Heb. 13:5). Will He never be favourable again? No (Ps. 149:4). Has His lovingkindness ceased forever? No (Jer. 31:3). Has His promise come to an end forever? No (Num. 23:19). Has the God of grace forgotten to be gracious? No (Ps. 25:6). Has His mercies dried up? No (Lam. 3:22-23).

Like Asaph, we know the answers to all six questions. They clarify our minds; they put things in the right perspective; and they turn our hearts to God. CHS: "Fly back, my soul, away from present turmoils, to the grandeurs of history, the sublime deeds of Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts; for He is the same and is ready even now to defend His servants as in days of yore...[Thankful] memory is a fit handmaid for faith...[Holy meditation] has a consoling power."

But why would a loving God put us through the trials of fire? A young Christian man had put all his money into an orchard. But a week-long frost destroyed his crop. He did not go to church that Sunday, or the next, or the one after. The pastor visited the man to find out what was wrong. The young man explained: "I'm not coming to church. Do you think I can worship a God Who cares for me so little that He will let a frost kill my crops?"

The pastor answered, "God loves you more than He does your peaches. You care about the peaches. God cares about you. His object is to grow men, not peaches." Christian, take heart! Nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8: 39). ■

***Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: Who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders: Thou hast declared Thy strength among the people. (Psalm 77:13-14)***

As Asaph remembers the past mercies of God, he also refreshes his knowledge of the Almighty. Asaph remembers the works of God and His wonders of old, and he sees with renewed faith, the holiness of the LORD.

CHS: "In the holy place we understand our God, and rest assured that all His ways are just and right. When we cannot trace His way, because it is 'in the sea,' it is a rich consolation that we can trust it, for it is in holiness. We must have fellowship with holiness if we would understand 'the ways of God to man.' He who would be wise must worship. The pure in heart shall see God, and pure worship is the way to the philosophy of providence."

The "sanctuary" in verse 13 is the "holy place." It can also refer to God's holiness. Martin Luther translates the verse as "O God, Thy way is holy." In both renditions, the idea is that God is holy in all His works; and we can only know of His divine providence when we come to the throne of grace in humble worship.

God is holy. God is also great—"Who is so great a God as our God?" He is the God "that doest wonders." The forces of nature tremble in His presence (v. 16). His power is seen in the clouds and rain; in the thunder and lightnings (vv. 17-18). God is supreme over all.

God is also caring. He rules; He also redeems. He unleashes His terrifying power upon the world, but He also leads us tenderly as a Shepherd. Consider the Israelites' journey through the wilderness: they suffered thirst and hunger; they were harassed by enemies; they were bitten by poisonous serpents. But God led them to the Promised Land. Like Asaph, no matter how incomprehensible, we have to be encouraged by God's past doings, and trust that He Who "hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). ■

***We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength, and His wonderful works that He hath done...That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: (Psalm 78:4, 6)***

Every Christian has a duty to learn and to teach. We are to learn the lessons of faith from our fathers. We are to incline our ears to them. And what we have learned, we will not hide them from our children.

CHS: "The best education is education in the best things. The first lesson for a child should be concerning his mother's God. Teach him what you will, if he learns not the fear of the Lord, he will perish for lack of knowledge. Grammar is poor food for the soul if it be not flavoured with grace. Every school bag should have a Bible in it. The world may teach secular knowledge alone, that is all it can offer, but as God's people, we must not deal so with our children; we should look well to every Timothy, and see to it that from a child he knows the Holy Scriptures. Around the fireside Christian fathers should repeat not only the Bible records, but the deeds of the martyrs and reformers, and moreover the dealings of the Lord with themselves both in providence and grace. We would gladly see this oral tradition practised by every Christian in his family, and children taught cheerfully by word of mouth by their own mothers and fathers, as well as by the printed pages of what they too often regard as dull, dry task books. What happy hours and pleasant evenings have children had at their parents' knees as they have listened to some 'sweet story of old.' Reader, if you have children, mind that you do not fail in this duty."

Learn and teach; thus is the golden chain of Christian heritage continued. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). Every generation must fight its own spiritual battles, and parents will do well to prepare and equip our children so that they may learn to serve and glorify the Lord as we did. ■



July

Proverbs 20:7 | *The just man  
walketh in his integrity:  
his children are blessed  
after him*

***The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law. (Psalm 78:9-10)***

Victory in battle does not depend on weapons alone. The heart of the soldier is a key factor. The men of Ephraim, the largest tribe in Israel, were well equipped, but they “turned back in the day of battle.” They lost because they did not have heart. They did not have the heart of courage. Neither did they have the heart of allegiance and obedience. They did not have the heart for God.

CHS: “Well equipped and furnished with the best weapons of the times, the leading tribes [Ephraimites] failed in faith and courage and retreated before the foe... How often have we also, though supplied with every gracious weapon, failed to wage successful war against our sins, we have marched onward gallantly enough till the testing hour has come, and then ‘in the day of battle’ we have proved false to good resolutions and holy obligations. Vows and promises were broken, idols were set up, and the living God was forsaken... [We fall to sin, and fail to] maintain a pure testimony for the one only true God.” We give way to idolatry; we violate His laws; we become covenant breakers.

At the Battle of Bull Run in the American Civil War, a young soldier was brought to the hospital with a gunshot wound. The father, on seeing his dying son, said, “My poor boy, you are terribly hurt, I see, in the back.”

“No, father, I am wounded in the breast. The bullet went in here,” and he laid his hand on his breast, “not at the back.” The young soldier did not turn back in the day of battle; neither should God’s people. We are to front the enemy, and resist the devil (James 4:7). Christian, “Fight the good fight of faith” to which you are called, and “hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:12). Never turn back on God in the day of battle. ■

***And they sinned yet more against Him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. (Psalm 78:17)***

New born babies do not appreciate what parents do for them. They have short memories. Their concern is not what was done for them a few hours earlier, but what is being done for them now—what you are doing for me today. To the unthankful person, the past and the future are meaningless, and the present is to be exploited. Ingratitude is also a sign of spiritual immaturity.

The children of Israel forgot the marvellous works that God had done for their fathers. They cared nothing about the covenant promises that they had made with God. Their chief concern was what they could consume at the present time. They were willing to forget the past and forfeit the future so that they could have “meat for their lust”.

CHS: It is “the nature of the disease of sin to proceed from bad to worse; men never weary of sinning, but rather increase their speed in the race of iniquity. In the case before us the goodness of God was abused into a reason for greater sin. Had not the Lord been so good they would not have been so bad. If He had wrought fewer miracles before, they would not have been so inexcusable in their unbelief, so wanton in their idolatry...[God] was all bounty of love, and they all superfluity of naughtiness...For them the heavens dropped manna, and they returned murmurs; the rocks gave them rivers, and they replied with floods of wickedness. Herein, as in a mirror, we see ourselves. Israel in the wilderness acted out, as in a drama, all the story of man’s conduct towards his God.”

Dear reader, beware of the sin of covetousness. The lust for meat turned the Israelites away from God, and they were judged because they believed not in Him, nor trusted in His salvation. How tragic it would be for a person to covet the meat that lasts for a season and forgo the eternal Bread of life. ■

***The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel. (Psalm 78:31)***

The Israelites murmured against God not for lack of food but for lust of meat. God provided them with angels' food, but they craved for common fare. The Lord gave them over to their lust.

CHS: "Lust grows upon that which it feeds on. If sick of too much flesh, yet men grow not weary of lust, they change the object, and go on lusting still. When one sin is proved to be bitterness, men do not desist, but pursue another iniquity... But short was the pleasure, sudden was the doom. The festival ended in a funeral... What they ate on earth they digested in hell... My soul, see here the danger of gratified passions; they are the janitors of hell. We must never dare to judge men's happiness by their tables, the heart is the place to look at. The poorest starveling believer is more to be envied than the most full-fleshed of the favourites of the world. Better be God's dog than the devil's darling."

The wrath of God came upon them while their meat was yet in their mouths. Moses wrote that the meat was between their teeth when God smote them with a very great plague (Num. 11:33). The people were unrestrained in their indulgence. The evidence of their sin was clearly evident to all except the gluttons themselves. The deception of sin is that it satisfies. It is like a man digging for gold. The deeper he digs, the more gold he finds, but he soon finds out that he cannot climb out of the hole that he has dug. That is the danger of sin—we are blinded by our own lust until we are oblivious of sin's deadly consequences. ■

***For their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant. But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath. (Psalm 78:37-38)***

The wrath of God awakened the Israelites to their sins. His judgement prompted them to repentance. They returned to God, enquired about Him, remembered that He was their Redeemer. But their repentance was as fleeting as it was false.

CHS: "There was no depth in their repentance, it was not heart work. They were fickle as a weathercock, every wind turned them, their mind was not settled upon God...Their promises were no sooner made than broken, as if only made in mockery. Good resolutions called at their hearts as men do at inns; they tarried awhile, and then took their leave. They were hot today for holiness, but cold towards it tomorrow...They changed from reverence to rebellion, from thankfulness to murmuring. One day they gave their gold to build a tabernacle for Jehovah, and the next they plucked off their earrings to make a golden calf. Surely the heart is a chameleon."

The reason for the people's false contrition was that their heart was not right. It means that their hearts were not settled. They might have worshipped God outwardly, but their hearts were divided. They worshipped God, but they still retained a remnant of sin in their hearts.

The divided heart of man is contrasted with God's faithfulness. Although He knew their hearts, He was true to His character; He forgave their iniquities and remembered that they were but flesh (vv. 38-39). We are liars; God is not. We may turn away from God's covenant; God will never. We may flatter Him, but God remains faithful. Such is the longsuffering and compassion of God upon us. ■

***How oft did they provoke Him in the wilderness, and grieve Him in the desert! Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. (Psalm 78:40-41)***

**S**in. Judgement. Repentance. Deliverance. These four stages in the spiritual life of Israel repeated themselves over the course of the nation's history. They are also seen in the lives of individuals. Despite God's mercy, the sinner remains unmoved. So while the Creator remembers our despair, the creature remembers not His deliverance (vv. 39, 42). God's love, it seems, has no effect on the stubborn and sinful nature of man.

One word accounts for this attitude of the Israelites—ingratitude. They were fed by God's hand, and they turned around and grieved God's heart. Would not this bring tears to God's eyes?

CHS: "Their provocations had an effect; God was not insensible to them, He is said to have been grieved. His holiness could not find pleasure in their sin, His justice in their unjust treatment, or His truth in their falsehood. What must it be to grieve the Lord of love! Yet we also have vexed the Holy Spirit, and He would long ago have withdrawn Himself from us, were it not that He is God and not man. We are in the desert where we need our God, let us not make it a wilderness of sin by grieving Him."

As if grieving God's heart was not bad enough, the Israelites also tempted and limited God. Not only did they defy God, they also doubted His power. Such is the perverse nature of unrepentant men. Dear reader, let us not grieve God by our ingratitude, or tempt Him by our irreverence, or limit Him by our unbelief. Instead, we must come to Him with thanksgiving for He is our Provider; in fear because He is our God; and in humility because He is our Saviour. ■

***And He led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. And He brought them to the border of His sanctuary, even to this mountain, which His right hand had purchased. (Psalm 78:53-54)***

**A**saph mentioned six of the ten plagues (vv. 44-51) that God had brought upon Egypt. The Lord slowly and surely made His way to anger until the final plague, where He wrought His terrible judgement against the firstborn of Egypt.

To the Israelites, it was a different outcome. To His people, the Lord's judgement against Pharaoh was their deliverance. To the Egyptians, God was the Avenger; but to the Israelites, the Lord was their Shepherd Who led them through the Red Sea, guided them through the wilderness, provided for their needs until they came to the border of the sanctuary.

CHS: The Lord "conducted them to the frontier of the Holy Land, where He intended the tabernacle to become the permanent symbol of His abode among His people. He did not leave them halfway upon their journey to their heritage; His power and wisdom preserved the nation till the palm trees of Jericho were within sight on the other side of the river...[The Lord] conducted them till they were in the region round about Zion, which was to be the central seat of His worship."

Thus shall our Lord also lead His redeemed through this life. We will enjoy the Lord's protection and none shall be lost. He will bring us right to the end of life, to the doors of death, and to the border of His sanctuary. The Christians' hope is that we are a purchased people with a purchased inheritance; and where the Lord is, there we shall be also. This is the real blessing of heaven; not that we have unrestrained indulgence in earthly amusements, but that we are in the presence of the holy God where there "is fullness of joy...[and] pleasures for evermore" (Ps.16:11). ■

***So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men; And delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand. (Psalm 78:60-61)***

Shiloh was the resting place of the tabernacle. It was the place where God chose to dwell among His people. However, because of their rebellion and treachery, God removed His glorious presence from them. The Lord would not allow His holy name to be associated with an unholy people. He would rather leave the tabernacle and deliver His people into the hands of the enemy than to receive their insincere worship.

God forsook the tabernacle in Shiloh. His glory would no more reveal itself in that place. No longer Shiloh but Ichabod—the glory has departed—that dreaded name in Israel's history.

"Remember Shiloh" is the slogan that speaks of God's hatred of sin. Jeremiah warned the Jews that God would forsake Jerusalem just as He did Shiloh if they did not repent (Jer. 26:6).

This is also the warning to the church. CHS: "Erring churches become apostate, but a true church still remains; if Shiloh be profaned Zion is consecrated. Yet is it ever a solemn caution to all the assemblies of the saints, admonishing them to walk humbly with their God... Let us take heed, lest as the ark never returned to Shiloh after its capture by the Philistines, so the Gospel may be taken from us in judgement, never to be restored to the same church again."

And this is God's warning to the Christian too. Disobedient believers can be so tainted with sin that God will leave them to their own devices. Dear reader, when God no longer strives with us, we can be sure that we are in great spiritual danger. ■

***He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands. (Psalm 78:70-72)***

Joseph was rejected. Ephraim was forsaken. But Judah and his favourite son, David, were chosen. The candlestick might have been removed from Shiloh, but God's glory was never extinguished. It continued to shine from Zion. God's spirit had departed from Saul, but He rested upon David, whom He had called out of the humble sheepfold to be Israel's king.

CHS: "It was an election of a sovereignly gracious kind, and it operated practically by making the chosen man a willing servant of the Lord. He was not chosen because he was a servant, but in order that he might be so. David always esteemed it to be a high honour that he was both elect of God, and a servant of God...A shepherd of sheep he had been, and this was a fit school for a shepherd of men. Lowliness of occupation will debar no man from such honours as the Lord's election confers, the Lord seeth not as man seeth. He delights to bless those who are of low estate."

David was called by God to be king. He was also equipped by God's power so that his reign would fulfill God's expectations. David's reign was the shadow of that of his greater Son, even our Lord Jesus.

That God did not despise the lowly David is a blessed thought. The last three verses of this Psalm are especially significant to me, especially in the days when I was working as a journalist. They used to help me consecrate my life to serve Him. If God can call David who was a shepherd of sheep to be the shepherd of Israel, then surely He can call me who broadcast news to broadcast the good news. Likewise, regardless of your station in life, God can and has use for you too. ■

***O remember not against us former iniquities: let Thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low. (Psalm 79:8)***

The destruction of Jerusalem was total. The survivors had no protection from their enemies. They had no means to provide for themselves. They could not seek the solace of religion because the temple had been left in ruins. They were at a loss on what to do with the dead bodies that littered the streets (v. 2).

As rising smoke from the ash heaps, the stench of the dead, and cries of the living hit the senses of the Psalmist, he could only ask God, "How long can this atrocity be allowed to go on?" He did not ask why because he knew the reasons. Sin leaves a long trail of destruction that is too horrific and far more extensive than the sinner can imagine.

CHS: "Sins accumulate against nations. Generations lay up stores of transgressions to be visited upon their successors; hence this urgent prayer. In Josiah's days the most earnest repentance was not able to avert the doom which former long years of idolatry had sealed against Judah."

The hand of God's wrath is heavy, but it will not be forever. Like Asaph, we must quickly call upon God for His mercy, "Let thy tender mercies speedily [go before] us: for we are brought very low." Here is the secret to the multitude of God's tender mercies. The riches of His grace are beyond our reach. It is too high that we can neither earn it nor buy it. But it is low enough and freely available for the one who is of a contrite heart and a broken spirit. ■

***Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? Let Him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of Thy servants which is shed. (Psalm 79:10)***

**W**here is your God? The Philistines worshipped Dagon. The Phoenicians bowed to Ashtoreth. The Romans would point to the Pantheon. What would you point to? Asaph pointed to two things—the power of God and the praises of His people.

CHS: “Justice is desired that God may be vindicated and feared. It is but meet [appropriate] that those who taunted the people of God because they smarted [came] under the Lord’s rod, should be made themselves also to smart by the same hand [face the same wrath]. If any complain of the [harsh] spirit of this imprecation, we think that...it is the common feeling of every patriot to desire to see his country’s wrongs redressed, and of every Christian to wish a noble vengeance for the church by the overthrow of error. The destruction of Antichrist is the recompense of the blood of the martyrs, and by no means is it to be deprecated; far rather is it one of the most glorious hopes of the latter days.”

The presence of God is seen in His power. The day beckons when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil. 2:10). The presence of God is also seen in the praises of His people—“we will show forth thy praise to all generations” (v. 13b). God desires neither silver nor gold nor animal offerings, but He delights in our worship. Where is your God? What is it that you worship? To whom do you show forth your praises? ■

***Turn us again, O God, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. (Psalm 80:3)***

In the eightieth psalm, Asaph prayed in anticipation of the fall of the northern kingdom. God was known as the Shepherd of Israel. The tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh were mentioned. He knew that God's judgement was not far behind; and that God would turn His face away from Israel. Thus, he called on the Lord to "turn us again, O God, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved" (vv. 3, 7, 19).

CHS: "Be favourable to us, smile upon us. This was the high priest's blessing upon Israel: what the Lord has already given us by our High Priest and Mediator we may confidently ask of Him...All that is wanted for salvation is the Lord's favour. One glance of His gracious eye would transform Tophet [a place where refuse was burnt] into Paradise. No matter how fierce the foe, or dire the captivity, the shining face of God ensures both victory and liberty."

The Psalmist's plea is honest and reasonable. He did not pray that God would turn them from their captivity; neither did he pray that God would turn to them. Israel rightly deserved God's judgement, and they were undeserving of His mercy. Instead, he prayed, "Turn us."

Sin is our turning against and away from God. Repentance is our turning to Him. All will be right when we are right with God. Hence, the best turn that we can make is not the turn of our circumstance but our character. Even so, we must realise that repentance is a spiritual work. Only the Holy Spirit can turn us back to God. Dear reader, as often as you turn away from God, cry out to Him, "Turn us again, O God, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved." ■

***Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. (Psalm 80:9-10)***

God was the loving Shepherd and He was also the careful Keeper of the vine. He brought Israel out of Egypt as a choice vine. God's preparing room for the vine is a picture of God's deliberate and careful removal of all hindrances to its growth.

CHS: The Canaanites were removed, "their forces were routed, their kings slain, their cities captured, and Canaan became like a plot of land made ready for a vineyard...Israel became settled and established as a vine well rooted, and then it began to flourish and to spread on every side." Israel prospered and its power and influence were felt throughout the world.

This is also a picture of the believer and the church. The strength of a Christian and the church is determined by their foundation. As we grow deep in the faith, and strengthen our foundation, we are able to climb higher and spread farther.

How sad then were the words of Isaiah—"[God] fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes" (Isa. 5:2).

There have been in times past when the church of God commanded respect and honour because she stood for God, and her influence extended far and wide. How sad when we consider the state of the church today! May the Lord send a revival into our hearts, homes and churches so that His vineyard may once again cover the hills and spread beyond the seas. ■

***Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand, upon the son of man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself. (Psalm 80:17)***

Israel was portrayed as a vine taken out of Egypt. God was the farmer who cleared the ground, planted and nurtured the vine. However, God allowed the vineyard to be overrun by wild beasts. The Psalmist could not understand how God would allow the vineyard planted by His own hand to be burned with fire. Yet there was hope in the ruined heaps.

The Psalmist looked forward to the man of God's right hand. Undoubtedly, Asaph was speaking of the Messiah, the One whom God has ordained to be the Saviour.

CHS: "Let thy power rest on Thy true Benjamin, son of thy right hand. Honour Him, save us, and glorify thyself... Send forth Thy power with Him whom Thou shalt strengthen to accomplish Thy purposes of grace. It pleases God to work for the sons of men by sons of men. 'By man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead.' It is by the man Christ Jesus that fallen Israel is yet to rise, and indeed through Him, who deigns to call Himself the Son of Man, the world is to be delivered from the dominion of Satan and the curse of sin. O Lord, fulfill Thy promise to the man of Thy right hand, who participates in Thy glory, and give Him to see the pleasure of the Lord prospering in His Hand."

The Son of Man sets the seal upon a new commitment. "So will not we go back from Thee" (v. 18a). As the words of the children's chorus remind us –

*I have decided to follow Jesus  
No turning back, no turning back!  
The world behind me, the cross before me,  
No turning back, no turning back!*

Dear reader, this is the only way to follow Jesus. ■

***I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots. Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. (Psalm 81:6-7)***

The eighty-first psalm begins with a call to joyous worship. The purpose of the celebration was to proclaim aloud the mighty acts of the Lord in the history of salvation. The very first act of salvation was to deliver the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt.

CHS: "Israel was the drudge and slave of Egypt, but God gave him liberty. It was by God alone that the nation was set free... He was no longer compelled to carry earth, and mould it, and bake it; the earth-basket was no more imposed upon the people, nor the tale of bricks exacted, for they came out into the open country where none could exact upon them."

The history of man's freedom is always preceded by war. Other people owe their liberties to their own efforts and courage, but Israel received liberty as a free gift of divine power. The same things can also be said of the Christian; we are free from the bondage of sin, free from the burden of religious rituals and works of righteousness because our Lord Jesus has set us free. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

CHS: "The story of Israel is only our own history in another shape. God has heard us, delivered us, liberated us, and too often our unbelief makes the wretched return of mistrust, murmuring, and rebellion. Great is our sin; great is the mercy of our God: let us reflect upon both, and pause a while." ■

***But My people would not hearken to My voice; and Israel would none of Me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. (Psalm 81:11-12)***

**T**he children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried...and God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant...God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them" (Exod. 2:23-25).

The history of Israel is a record of God's favours. Right in the heart of this psalm is a reminder of who God is and what He has done—"I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt" (v. 10a). This is the preamble to the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2). The history of Israel is also a record of the people's forgetfulness—"My people would not hearken to My voice; and Israel would none of Me."

CHS: God's "warnings were rejected, His promises forgotten, His precepts disregarded. Though the divine voice proposed nothing but good to them... yet they turned aside... They would not consent to His proposals, they walked in direct opposition to His commands...and their hearts were bewitched by the idols of the nations round about."

The same spiritual disease afflicts our hearts, and it is only because of God's grace that we have not totally turned our faces away from our Saviour. The real issue is not whether or not we believe in and worship God. The real spiritual battle is not between believers and atheists; the real battle is fought in the heart of every Christian—it is whether or not we love and obey Him.

"I am the LORD thy God" is a demand for undivided allegiance. The alternative is God's giving us up to our own lusts—a prospect too dreadful to contemplate. There is no punishment more severe than this. When God gives us up, there is no possibility for salvation. If we walk according to our own counsels, there is only one way and one sure destination. But when God chastens, He does so out of love (Heb. 12:5-6), and there is still hope yet. ■

***I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. (Psalm 82:6-7)***

**“Y**e are gods...ye are children of the most High.” The “gods” simply means that some people were given the honour and the authority by God to rule over men. The “gods” [*elohim*] are human judges [*elohim*] (Exod. 21:6; John 10:34-36). No doubt the judges are several rungs above the common man, but they are men nonetheless.

CHS: “They were delegated gods...This was their *ex-officio* character [office], not their moral or spiritual relationship...Magistrates would have no right to condemn the guilty if God had not sanctioned the establishment of government, the administration of law, and the execution of sentences. Here the Spirit speaks most honourably of these offices, even when it censures the officers...What sarcasm it seems! Great as the office made the men, they were still but men, and must die...How quickly death unrobes the great. What a leveller he is. Great men die as common men do. No places are too high for death’s arrows: he brings down his birds from the tallest trees. It is time that all men considered this.”

The title confers a right and carries a responsibility. Asaph was lamenting about the evil that was perpetrated by the judges. Instead of preserving justice, they perverted it.

Martin Luther was preparing his notes on Psalm 82 when the Peasants’ Revolt erupted in 1525, a perverse political version of the Reformation. The revolt tried to overthrow the established political classes. The peasants expected Luther’s support, but he refused because he knew that spiritual goals ought not to be confused with political ones. Luther correctly pointed out that Psalm 82 both established and curtailed the authority. He wrote, “For where there is no government, there can be no peace. Where there is no peace, no one can keep his life or anything else in the face of another’s outrage. Much less will there be room to teach God’s Word.” Luther further suggested that this psalm should be memorised by everyone who is in a position of authority, including parents. ■

***Keep not Thou silence, O God: hold not Thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, Thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate Thee have lifted up the head. (Psalm 83:1-2)***

This is the last of Asaph's psalms, which mostly calls on God to judge the enemies of Israel. In this national lament, Asaph prays for the Lord's intervention against her many enemies. There were ten in all (vv. 6-8). There was never an instance in Israel's history when ten enemies were arrayed against them, so it is more likely that the nations represent the enemies of God's people.

Not only were the lives of the people in peril, the Name of God was at stake. Hence, Asaph called on God to arise and defeat the enemies. CHS: "Here the appeal is to *EI*, the Mighty One. He is entreated to act and speak, because His nation suffers and is in great jeopardy. Now entirely the Psalmist looks to God; he asks not for "a leader bold and brave," or for any form of human force, but casts his burden upon the Lord, being well assured that his eternal power and Godhead could meet every difficulty of the case."

The Psalmist looks to no one but God alone. Only God can deliver. The enemies continue to plot against God's people. In the annals of history of the Jewish nation, there were many occasions when the Jews were threatened with extermination, and God seems to have been silent. They were enslaved; they were exiled by the Assyrians and Babylonians; they were expelled from Rome; they were persecuted in the Middle Ages; they were subjected to humiliating pogroms in eastern Europe, six million Jews were killed in the holocaust by the Nazis; yet the Jews prospered. A world census taken in 1836 showed that there were 3 million Jews. A century later, there were 16 million Jews despite wide anti-Semitic persecution in many countries. There can only be one reason why the Jews continue to thrive. God has not been silent. He keeps the promises that He had made to Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3).

God is never silent when we call upon Him. This is the petition that we should offer in times of crisis, when our honour and life are at stake. In times when He seems to be indifferent to our needs and dangers, call upon Him and we will see that He is with us all along. ■

***O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind. As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire; so persecute them with Thy tempest, and make them afraid with Thy storm. (Psalm 83:13-15)***

The Psalmist prays to God to destroy the enemies. He cites several historical precedents of God destroying the enemies of Israel (vv. 9-12). Now he is appealing to God to do the same: to scatter the enemies, destroy them, and bring them to an end.

This is an imprecatory prayer, one that calls for revenge. This seems to go against the tenor of the Christian faith which calls on us to be forgiving even to our enemies. To understand the reason for the Psalmist's prayer, we must understand the history of Israel's sufferings under the cruelties of her enemies. We would sympathise with Asaph even more when we see that he was not praying for his own deliverance but for God's honour and truth.

The Psalmist refers to Israel's enemies as God's enemies (v. 2) and to Israel as God's people. (v. 3) The enemies' plots are directed against God (v. 5) and when the enemies seized Israel, they are seizing God's land. (v. 12) In other words, the cause of God is at stake, and it is His battle. This perspective changes the way we think of Asaph's prayers. When we regard evil as directed at us personally and when we take action on our own accord, the response is revenge. However, when the evil is directed at God, we must leave it to Him to carry out His justice in His time and manner. We know that God will act. He is not indifferent. "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the LORD" (Rom. 12:19).

The purpose of Asaph's prayer is for God's name to be made known. CHS: "Hearing of the Lord's marvellous deeds in defeating such a numerous confederacy, the very heathens would be compelled to acknowledge the greatness of Jehovah...The godless race of man disregards this, and yet at times the wonderful works of the Lord compel the most unwilling to adore His majesty"

Judgement may proclaim the Lord's power, but we must not forget that grace is manifested in His longsuffering love. God loves and He will judge—He will do what is right. The day of judgement will come, but now is the day of grace because He "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9b). ■

***For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. (Psalm 84:10)***

**S**urgeon describes the eighty-fourth psalm as “one of the most sweet Psalms of Peace.” It describes the Psalmist’s desire to be found in God’s house, and his delight as he comes to the blessed sanctuary, even if it is only for a day, even if he has to come as a doorkeeper.

CHS: “Under the most favourable circumstances in which earth’s pleasures can be enjoyed, they are not comparable by so much as one in a thousand to the delights of the service of God... Even a glimpse at the love of God is better than ages spent in the pleasures of sense... The lowest station in connection with the Lord’s house is better than the highest position among the godless. To bear burdens and open doors for the Lord is more honour than to reign among the wicked. God’s worst is better than the devil’s best. God’s doorstep is a happier rest than downy couches within the pavilions of royal sinners.”

The Psalmist compares himself to the sparrow and swallow who found refuge in God’s sanctuary. And if God provides these birds with a home near His altar, how much more will He also provide a refuge for His people.

Such is the blessing of Christians. Besides the blessing of being able to dwell in God’s house (v. 4), we have two other blessings—the blessing of God’s strength and that of His guidance (v. 5). The Christian life is a pilgrimage through ups and downs, but no matter how rough the road, as long as we put our trust in God, we will go from strength to strength until Zion appears (v. 7). The second blessing comes with trusting in God (v. 12). There is a maturing in the Psalmist’s spirituality as he trusts in the Lord. He looks beyond the house of God to God Himself. He starts off pining to be present in God’s house and ends off pining to be in God’s presence. That should be our spiritual goal as well. As we grow in faith, we will learn to see God as He is. ■

***Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause Thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt Thou be angry with us for ever? Wilt Thou draw out Thine anger to all generations? Wilt Thou not revive us again: that Thy people may rejoice in Thee? (Psalm 85:4-6)***

Is your spiritual life stagnant? Do you have the joy of salvation? Do you rejoice, as Paul says, in all things and at all times? I am sure there have been times when you look back at the past and you ask, "Where is the joy I knew when I first came to the Lord?" You are discouraged. The pure joy of knowing that you are a child of the God of love seems to have vanished.

There are two reasons for this discouragement. First, we tend to look at the wrong things. We look at what we do not have, and forget about what God has provided. Second, the goodness of God has become so commonplace that we forget we are covered by His ubiquitous grace.

The Psalmist feels the same. He thanks God that He has turned from His anger (v. 3), yet he pleads for God's anger to cease. It seems that he too has forgotten God's goodness, and he needs—as we all do—a personal spiritual revival.

CHS: "We are dead or dying, faint and feeble, God alone can revive us, He has in other times refreshed His people, He is still the same, He will repeat His love...Thou lovest to see Thy children happy with that best of happiness which centres in Thyself, therefore revive us, for revival will bring us the utmost joy... Those who were revived would rejoice not only in the new life but in the Lord Who was the author of it. Joy in the Lord is the ripest fruit of grace...By our possession of it we may estimate our spiritual condition, it is a sure gauge of inward prosperity. Let us abound in holy joy and make it our constant delight to joy in God." ■

***Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. (Psalm 85:10)***

The Psalmist prays, and he says, "I will hear what God the LORD will speak" (v. 8a). As God's people, we can call on Him—He will answer; on our part, we have to wait. It is never foolish to wait on God for He knows best what to do and when to do it. This makes the Christian's wait both hopeful and fruitful.

The Psalmist prayed and he waited, and he was not disappointed. He remembered that God had promised peace (v. 8); that He will save (v. 9); and that there will be a blessed company of mercy, truth, righteousness and peace (v. 10-11).

CHS: "In answer to prayer, the exulting Psalmist sees the attributes of God [uniting to bless]... Mercy comes hand-in-hand with Truth to fulfill the faithful promise of their gracious God; the people recognise at once the grace and the veracity of Jehovah... The Lord whose just severity inflicted the smart, now in pity sends peace to bind up the wound."

It is without doubt that the Psalmist was pointing to the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him and on the cross, the four attributes of mercy, truth, righteousness and peace are united for the purpose of our salvation. God's demand for righteousness is met with His mercy. The truthfulness of God with regard to His justice and love are also met on the cross. And the outcome is reconciliation and peace between the sinner and God.

As we live in obedience to God, we will continue to enjoy His blessings and will also be a blessing to others. The four attributes are communicable ones, meaning to say as God's people, we can and must display the grace of mercy, truth, righteousness and peace in our dealings with men as well. ■

***Be merciful unto me, O LORD: for I cry unto Thee daily. Rejoice the soul of Thy servant: for unto Thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. For Thou, LORD, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee. (Psalm 86:3-5)***

**A**mong all the appeals King David made to God, the most common one is for divine mercy. Before God, David had never asserted his right as God's anointed king; instead, he said that he was a poor and needy servant (vv. 1-2). David pleaded for mercy, and he did so daily. To pray for mercy is to tug at the heart-strings of God. Call unto God, and He will answer you; for one that calls upon God will not be ashamed.

CHS: "The best of men need mercy, and appeal to mercy...they need it for themselves, and crave it eagerly of their God as a personal requisite...May we not, then, plead our importunity as an argument with God? He who prays every day, and all the day...may rest assured that the LORD will hear him in the day of his need."

David gave several reasons for God to answer his prayer for mercy. He was poor and needy (v. 1). He trusted in God (v. 2). He called upon God daily (v. 3). Persevering prayer alone is not enough for God to answer, but it is an indication of our faith in the Almighty. David called upon God alone (v. 4).

God must also answer David's prayer because God is good (v. 5). God is faithful; He has promised to answer our prayers (v. 7). God is great and does wondrous things (v. 10). God is loving and merciful (vv. 13-15). God has been faithful in times past and will continue to be faithful in years to come (v. 17).

In the same way, we must be sure of the reasons for our conviction that God would answer our prayers. If we cannot think of godly reasons for our requests, then it is probably the case that our petitions are wrong in the first place, that we are praying amiss, and that we need to change. ■

***Teach me Thy way, O LORD; I will walk in Thy truth: unite my heart to fear Thy name. I will praise Thee, O LORD my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify Thy name for evermore. (Psalm 86:11-12)***

David was keenly aware of his personal weaknesses and the threats from his enemies, and while he prayed for God's deliverance, he also asked that God would show him the way in which he should go.

CHS: "Instruct me thus at all times, let me live in Thy school... Be pleased to shew me the way which Thy wisdom and mercy have prepared for my escape... Not *my way* give me, but *Thy way* teach me... When taught I will practise what I know, truth shall not be a mere doctrine or sentiment to me, but a matter of daily life. The true servant of God regulates his walk by his master's will."

David also prayed that God would unite his heart to one that will glorify God forever. The spiritual battle is a battle for our hearts. There are two natures struggling within us; two hearts fighting for control. David knew his own heart, and how prone he was to wander from God.

Robert Robinson was a preacher with divided passions and persuasions. He switched from one church to another until he left the ministry altogether. One day as he was riding in a carriage, a lady was reading aloud these words from a poem:

*O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let Thy goodness like a fetter bind my wand'ring heart to Thee.  
Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above.*

These were Robinson's own words and they were read back to him. A man of divided heart is ineffective; the man of one object is the man whom God wants. Pray that God will bind our hearts by His grace so that we may render to Him our undivided love. ■

***The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of Thee, O city of God. (Psalm 87:2-3)***

**Z**ion is the city of God—it symbolises God’s kingdom. He established it (v. 1). He laid the foundation by entering into a covenant relationship with Israel. Jerusalem was often designated as Mount Zion or “holy mountain” (Ps. 3:4; Isa. 11:9; 65:25). Why Jerusalem? It was nothing that Jerusalem could boast. Jerusalem was chosen to be the city of God not because of its natural holiness, but because God has set His love on it, and it is an everlasting love.

CHS: “The love of God is greatest to His own elect nation, descended from His servant Jacob, yet the central seat of His worship is dearer still; no other supposable comparison could have so fully displayed the favour which Jehovah bore to Jerusalem—He loves Jacob best and Zion better than the best.”

When in the throes of despair, we often ask, “Why me?” But have you considered the blessing of salvation, and ask, “Why me?” God sets His love upon Israel (Deut. 7:7-8), but He sets His greater love upon the elect. God has a delight in the praises of Israel, but His greater delight is reserved for those who call upon His Son. God prepared Canaan for Israel, but He has prepared a greater city (Heb. 11:10)—an eternal one—for those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of His Son. Why me for Zion? Nothing good to boast of my own, but only the love of God.

Blessed Zion, the City of God, has been used as the theme for many poems and hymns. Augustine chose this phrase to be the title of his book. The *City of God* presents two cities established by two loves: an earthly city by the love of self, and a heavenly city by the love of God. This is God’s electing grace which demands our glorious praise, and blessed are we who can speak glorious things of Him. ■

***For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. (Psalm 88:3)***

The eighty-eighth psalm is known as one of the saddest and darkest psalms in the whole Psalter. The Psalmist begins with a flicker of hope but it moves from one expression of misery to another—from depression to despair to desolation. By the end of the Psalm, he was left in total darkness. Job reminds us that “man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble” (Job 14:1).

CHS: “Like a vessel full to the brim with vinegar, my heart is filled up with adversity till it can hold no more. He had his house full and his hands full of sorrow; but, worse than that, he had his heart full of it. Trouble in the soul is the soul of trouble...He felt as if he must die, indeed he thought himself half dead already. All his life was going; he was nearer dead than alive. Death would be welcomed as a relief by those whose depressed spirits make their existence a living death. Are good men ever permitted to suffer thus? Indeed they are; and some of them are even all their life-time subject to bondage.”

Psalm 88 reminds us that life does not always end with “and they lived happily ever after.” In other words, life does not always end with the right side up, and deliverance from our suffering is not assured. Yes, the Word of God promises that all lives do have a divine purpose, and all things will work for good to them who love God, but it does not necessarily mean that we will live to see it in our lifetime.

However, God has promised that He would not leave His people without hope. We will have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death—and for some it will be a longer journey—in order for us to dwell in the house of the LORD forever. ■

***I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. (Psalm 88:15)***

The hue of the eighty-eighth psalm darkens with every verse. The Psalmist said that he was full of troubles and near dying (v. 3), then he was counted as dead and without strength (v. 4), finally he was cut off from God and forgotten (v. 5).

The Psalmist added a second layer of darkness. He said that God was the cause of his misery. "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit... Thy wrath ... Thou hast afflicted me ... Thou hast put away mine acquaintance ... Thou hast made me an abomination" (vv. 6-8). Then there is a third layer; namely the silence of God. The Psalmist called upon God but to no avail (vv. 13-14). It is no wonder the Psalmist said that he was ready to die.

CHS: "His affliction had now lasted so long that he could hardly remember when it commenced; it seemed to him as if he had been at death's door ever since he was a child. This was no doubt an exaggeration of a depressed spirit... [However], since the Saviour became the acquaintance of grief, sorrow has become honourable in a believer's eyes. A life-long sickness may by divine grace prove to be a life-long blessing. Better suffer from childhood to old age than be let alone to find pleasure in sin."

The Psalm ends with "darkness". Is darkness the final word in our life? The answer is assuredly no! The darkness in our life is a reminder of our sinful nature; it is a reminder of the sinful world in which we live; it is a reminder of the reality of life on this earth. However, it also directs our eyes to the light of the world, which is Christ Jesus.

Look at the sky, the darker it is, the brighter the stars shine. Christ is our morning star that outshines the darkness. We know of the eternal hope dimly, but one day we shall see Him in His full glory. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2b). ■

***I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn unto David My servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. (Psalm 89:3-4)***

The world says that promises are made to be broken. However, God made promises to keep them. As the hymn writer says, "Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with Thee."

The context of this Psalm could be David's desire to build an earthly house for God. However, the LORD said that He would build an eternal one for David. "And thine [David's] house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:16).

"I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever" (v. 1a). "Forever" is one of several important words in this psalm—it describes the extent of God's faithfulness.

CHS: "This was the ground of the Psalmist's confidence in God's mercy and truth, for he knew that the LORD had made a covenant of grace with David and his seed, and confirmed it by an oath. The oath sworn to David has not been broken, though the temporal crown is no longer worn, for in the covenant itself his kingdom was spoken of as enduring for ever. In Christ Jesus there is a covenant established with all the LORD's *chosen*, and they are by grace led to be the LORD's *servants*, and then are ordained kings and priests by Christ Jesus."

What are the mercies of this covenant? Thomas Chisholm's hymn gives us a glimpse:

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside.*

These should make us look at God's faithfulness not merely as an attribute, but as a real spiritual blessing for Christians. ■

***The heavens are Thine, the earth also is Thine: as for the world and the fullness thereof, Thou hast founded them...Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is Thy hand, and high is Thy right hand. Justice and judgement are the habitation of Thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before Thy face. (Psalm 89:11, 13-14)***

God's faithfulness is intimately related to His power. For what use is there in a God Who is faithful in His covenant but unable to fulfill His promises? The Psalmist proves the faithfulness of God by His power in creation.

The heavens and the earth are His work and property. God owns them all, as well as everything that springs from the earth. The implications are that there is no reality outside of God, and that there is no other basis for the existence of the universe; it also means that God has a right to dispose of His creation as He pleases. God has a mighty hand to accomplish what He has purposed. His power is great; His skill is incomparable; and His work is glorious.

How fearful would be such power indeed if it resides in the hand of a tyrant! But God's mighty hand is also merciful. He Who is omnipotent is also faithful in His mercy.

CHS: Justice and judgement "are the basis of the divine government, the sphere within which His sovereignty moves. God as a sovereign is never unjust or unwise. He is too holy to be unrighteous, too wise to be mistaken; this is constant matter for joy to the upright in heart...[Mercy and truth] are the harbingers and heralds of the LORD; He calls these to the front to deal with sinners; He makes them, in the person of the Lord Jesus, to be His ambassadors...If mercy had not paved the way, the coming of God to any man must have been swift destruction."

Thus blessed are you "that know the joyful sound: they [you] shall walk, O LORD, in the light of Thy countenance" (v. 15). ■

***I have found David my servant; with My holy oil have I anointed him: With whom My hand shall be established: Mine arm also shall strengthen him. (Psalm 89:20-21)***

I remember an evangelistic campaign years ago that had a slogan that read, "Have you found it?" Flyers with this question were found everywhere. And curious readers would soon find that in the fine print, the "it" referred to God's salvation; thus rendering saving grace a man's choosing. The Psalmist says otherwise—it was God Who chose David.

CHS: "David was discovered by the LORD among the sheepfolds and recognised as a man of gracious spirit, full of faith and courage, and therefore fit to be leader in Israel...The verse must also be expounded of the Prince Emmanuel; He became the servant of the LORD for our sakes, the Father having found for us in His person a mighty deliverer...We have not a Saviour self-appointed and unqualified, but One sent of God and divinely endowed for His work. Our Saviour Jesus is also the LORD's Christ, or anointed. The oil with which He is anointed is God's own oil, and holy oil; He is divinely endowed with the Spirit of holiness."

God's sovereign choice applies also to the redeemed. God has chosen us for salvation when there was nothing good in us. He saved us according to His good pleasure. With our election, there is the unfolding of more spiritual grace — God also strengthens our faith (v. 21; Phil. 4:13); He protects us from the wiles of the devil (v. 22; Eph. 6:11); He gives us the victory (v. 23; 1 Cor. 15:57); He exalts the faithful (vv. 24-27); and He extends His blessings to our children (v. 28-29).

Going back to the evangelistic campaign slogan mentioned earlier, a better one would have been—"Have you been found?" Praise God that He has found us because to be found by God means that we can never be lost; and to be kept by His covenant means that we will never fall from grace. ■

***If they break My statutes, and keep not My commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail. (Psalm 89:31-33)***

The theme of the eighty-ninth psalm is God's faithfulness. He is faithful in the heavens and on the earth. He is faithful to Israel. He is faithful in His covenant with David. However, the LORD will not condone the sins of His people. If they break His laws, they will be disciplined (vv. 30-32). Yet, God remains faithful even in discipline. The love of God will outweigh His judgement. His discipline may even be severe, but it will not be permanent. *"Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail"* (v. 33).

CHS: "A glorious *nevertheless*...And a glorious fear-killing sentence! This crowns the covenant with exceeding glory. Mercy may seem to depart from the LORD's chosen, but it shall never altogether do so...[In Christ and] under the most trying circumstances, the LORD's lovingkindness to each one of His chosen will endure the strain...God may leave His people, and they may thereby suffer much and fall very low, but utterly and altogether He never can remove His love from them; for that would be to cast a reflection upon his own truth...This passage sweetly assures us that the heirs of glory shall not be utterly cast off. We believe in the Gospel rod, but not in the penal sword for the adopted sons."

No discipline is pleasant. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11). But discipline is like keeping the strings on the violin taut, so that the sound from the instrument is crisp and bright. Likewise when God disciplines, He is keeping our heart-strings in tune so that our lives may sing His praises. ■

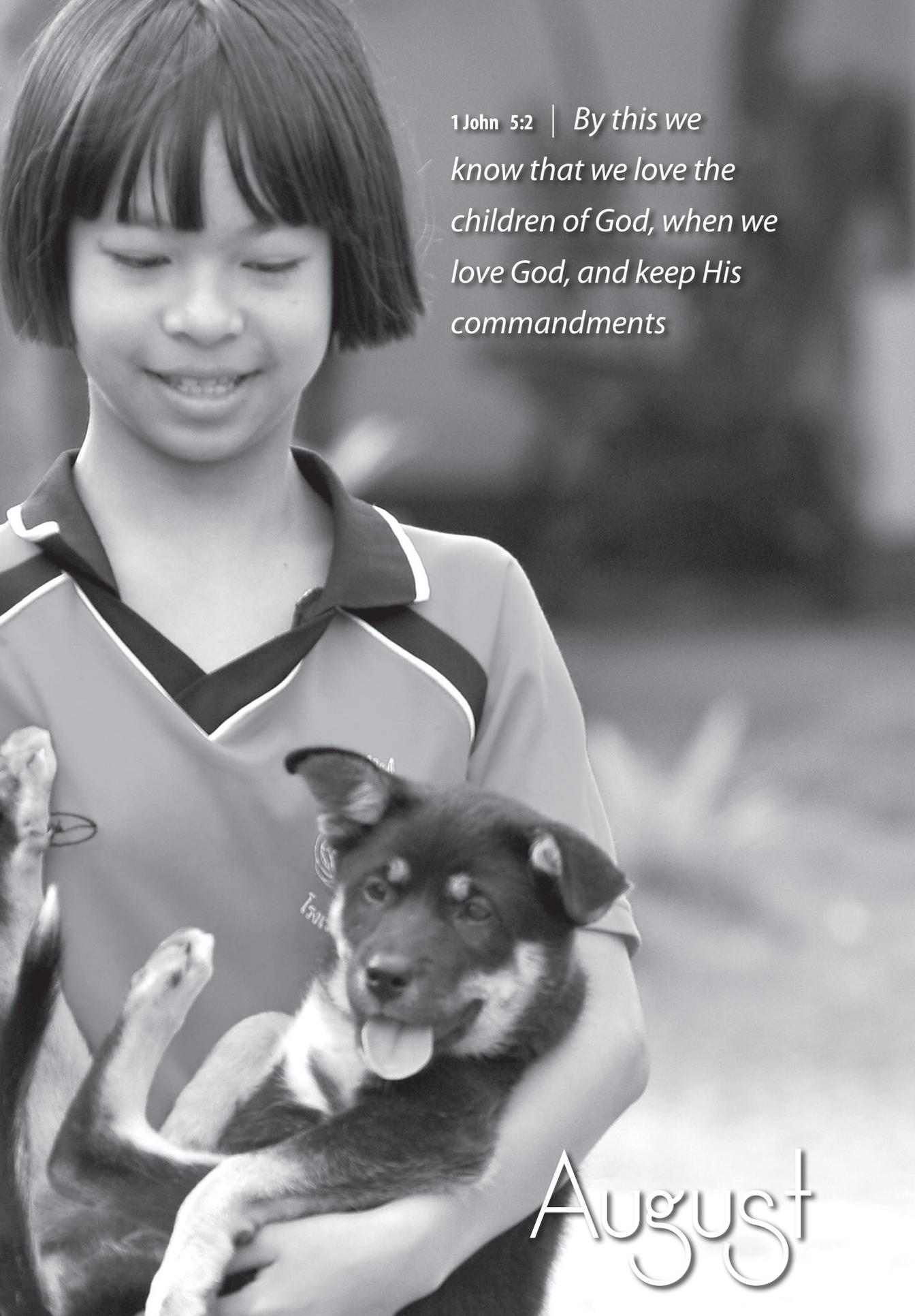
***Thou hast broken down all his hedges; Thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin. (Psalm 89:40)***

Out of the eight stanzas in Psalm 89, the seventh stanza (vv. 38-45) is the odd one. For the first 37 verses, the Psalmist has been singing the faithfulness of God. For the next eight verses, his hymn of "Great is Thy Faithfulness" turns into "Does Jesus Care?"

We do not know of the historical context which gives the reason for the Psalmist's change in tone. Whatever the circumstances, the Psalmist regarded them as a sign that God had forsaken the sons of David and had "made void the covenant" (v. 39).

CHS: "The 'divinity which doth hedge a king' had departed. Hitherto, the royal family had been like a vine within an enclosure, but the wall was now laid low, and the vine was unprotected. It is sorrowfully true that in many places the enclosures of the church have been destroyed, the line of demarcation between the church and the world has almost vanished, and godless men fill the sacred offices. Alas, O LORD God...shall Thy true vine be deserted by Thee?...God of truth, wilt Thou not arise and tread down falsehood? Set up the boundaries again, and keep Thy church as a vineyard reserved for Thyself."

When our faith in God is shaken by adversities, it is good to pause—*selah*—and remind ourselves that God is present even in the midst of the storm. If He were not, life would be just a series of random and meaningless events. If there is no God, then suffering and death, even good times, have no purpose. But God is present, and He is sovereign. He is the author behind every event, and although we may not understand His ways, we know that "to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Eccl. 3:1). ■



1 John 5:2 | *By this we  
know that we love the  
children of God, when we  
love God, and keep His  
commandments*

August

***Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast Thou made all men in vain? What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?  
(Psalm 89:47-48)***

**"H**ow long, LORD? Wilt Thou hide Thyself for ever?" (v. 46a). This is a question that suffering Christians often ask. To this cry, the Psalmist gives two reasons why God must act soon. First, the enemies are emboldened by God's "silence" (vv. 50-51); and second, life is short.

CHS: "All must die...[No man can] elude the arrows of death...Neither by strength, wisdom, or virtue can any man escape the common doom, for to the dust return we must. Since then we must all die, do not make this life all wretchedness, by smiting us so long, O LORD...[Do not desert us] in this brief span [of life] that we shall be quite unable to testify to Thy faithfulness: make us not feel that we have lived in vain. Thus the brevity of life and the certainty of death are turned into pleas with the Most High."

Paul says, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me" (Rom. 15:3b), and as God's people, we must be ready to plead for the vindication of God's truth and ways.

The Psalmist ends with the quiet assurance that our God is forever. He is immutable, meaning to say that God does not change. God's character does not change. He is forever faithful. He is always compassionate and merciful. God's truth does not change. His promises are "yea, and in Him [Christ] Amen" (2 Cor. 1:20). God's ways do not change. His dealings with men are true and constant. God's purposes do not change. He will work all things as He had purposed. God's Son does not change. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). This is the Christian's surest comfort and eternal security. As the Heidelberg Catechism says, "The only comfort in life and death is that I belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ." ■

***LORD, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. (Psalm 90:1-2)***

The ninetieth psalm is attributed to Moses, and it is the only one in the Psalter. This psalm contrasts the brevity of the human life with the eternity of God. It is also a contrast of the temporal glories of man and the eternal grandeur of God. In the dry and desert climate, a brief spell of rain will cause the wild flowers to bloom, but under the scorching heat of the sun, the flowers will wither in no time. That, Moses says, is the fleeting glory of man. No one knows this truth better than Moses. He grew up in Pharaoh's palace, but he saw the mighty Egyptian army perish in one day; and even if one lives to be a thousand years old, it is but one day to God.

All of men's glories are transitory. Our only reality and surety is God. CHS: "Moses, in effect, says, 'wanderers though we be in the howling wilderness, yet we find a home in Thee'... He [Jehovah] shelters, comforts, protects, preserves, and cherishes all His own. Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the saints dwell in their God, and have always done so in all ages. Kings' palaces have vanished beneath the crumbling hand of time... but the ever-living Jehovah...[is] the divine home of the faithful, untouched by so much as the finger of decay. Where dwelt our fathers, a hundred generations since, there dwell we still."

Isaac Watts wrote, based on Psalm 90, these words:

*O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home.  
Under the shadow of Thy throne  
Still may we dwell secure;  
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,  
And our defense is sure. ■*

***The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away...So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. (Psalm 90:10-12)***

Throughout history, men have sought for ways to prolong their lives. In the past, kings and princes searched for the elixir of life. In our day, wealthy men pay to have their bodies frozen in the hope of reliving again. But man's greatest problem is neither the frailty nor brevity of his life; his greatest problem is sin, and sin is the cause of death and misery in life.

CHS: "Sin seen by God must work death; it is only by the covering blood of atonement that life comes to any of us. When God was overthrowing the tribes in the wilderness He had their iniquities before Him, and therefore dealt with them in severity. He could not have their iniquities before Him and not smite them."

The man who does not have the reality of God thinks that he can conceal his sins. However, there is no hiding from God. Every sin shall be found out (Num. 32:23). Every evil will be exposed. There are no secrets before God. "For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mark 4:22).

In light of our sinful nature and God's omniscience, our response should neither be concealment of our sins nor confidence in our works. Rather, Moses says that we should pray for wisdom—to know that life is brief and that we should live those brief years well. Christians must take account of our lives. Moses' prayer is that God would enable us to see the whole of life, even the end of it. If we know when, where, and how we would die, this knowledge, no doubt, will affect our living. The prayer has been answered: Christ has given us the victory; live then as victors! ■

***And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it. (Psalm 90:17)***

**W**e count almost everything in life—money, cars, children—but to “number our days” is the most difficult mathematics. To “number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (v. 12) is to take into account the importance of each and every day. To “number our days” means more than just knowing the length of our lives. And no man can truly say that he has numbered his days and applied his heart unto wisdom until he has learnt to count every day as possibly his last.

When Moses tells us to “number our days,” it is a prayer for God’s help to make every day of our lives count for Him. We know we have lived each day well when we live in full consciousness of God’s love, when we find our fullest satisfaction in the Beloved. Practically, it means that we should forget about trying to fill our lives with things because they will perish. It means we should stop chasing the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow because it is only as real as mirage in the hot desert.

Our best days should be those when we find our greatest joy in our Lord Jesus. They may be days when we are in pain (v. 15), but if afflictions draw us near to our Lord, it is a day counted for Him.

CHS: “Give us the lamb, since Thou have sent us the bitter herbs. Make our days as long as our nights. Great trial enables us to bear great joy, and may be regarded as the herald of extraordinary grace. Where there are high hills there are also deep valleys...[God’s dealings are according to scale.] If we have fierce afflictions we may look for overflowing delights, and our faith may boldly ask for them. God Who is great in justice when He chastens will not be little in mercy when He blesses, He will be great all through; let us appeal to Him with unstagging faith.” ■

***He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust. (Psalm 91:1-2)***

**A**re you discouraged because life seems difficult? Are you disheartened because you are beset with troubles? The ninety-first is the song that will lift our hearts. It is one of Martin Luther's favourite psalms as he fought the spiritual battles in his life. Charles Spurgeon describes this psalm as one that speaks of "faith at its best."

When there is no one to help, the Psalmist turns to God. He is not just a distant and aloof deity with no interest in our well-being. The LORD, to the Psalmist, is a personal friend. The opening verses speak of the Psalmist's personal faith—"I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust."

CHS: "The blessings here promised are not for all believers, but for those who live in close fellowship with God. Every child of God looks towards the inner sanctuary and the mercy-seat, yet all do not  *dwell*  in the most holy place...[Most] do not habitually reside in the mysterious [blessed] presence... [But those who enjoy] continuous communion with God...abid[ing] in Christ and Christ in them, become possessors of rare and special benefits, which are missed by those who follow afar off...Into the secret place those only come who know the love of God in Christ Jesus, and those only  *dwell*  there to whom to live is Christ."

To those whom God is their dwelling place, there is the promise of His divine care. The Psalmist gives two pictures of God's protection. The LORD watches over us like a mother bird gathers her young under her wings, and He protects us like an armour protects the warrior. But the Psalmist adds something more concrete, "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler" (v. 4b). God's care for us is sealed by His own promises. His truth will be our security. We can count on that because God is faithful to His Word. ■

***There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. (Psalm 91:10-11)***

The depth and intensity of the Psalmist's personal faith is amplified by his choice of words. What did the Psalmist mean when he says, "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling"? This was the verse that was used by Satan to tempt our Lord Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the temple (Matt. 4:1-11). Does God promise that the believer will never be attacked by his enemies or afflicted by illnesses?

Satan misquoted the verse, leaving out the phrase "in all thy ways." If we choose the way of sin and disobedience, if we choose to leave the shadow of God's wings, we cannot expect to come under His protective cover. God's promise is this: keep to the path of obedience and righteousness, and God will take care of thee.

CHS: "The limit of this protection 'in all thy ways' is yet no limit to the heart which is right with God. It is not the way of the believer to go out of his way. He keeps in the way, and then the angels keep him. The protection here promised is exceeding broad as to place, for it refers to *all* our ways."

In life, the LORD may permit many terrible things to happen to His children—Job and even His own Son. But we know that no power is outside God's control. We who trust in God and walk in His ways should never have to doubt God's faithfulness in taking care of us. Why? "Because He hath set His love upon me...because He hath known my name" (v. 14). ■

***It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High: To show forth Thy lovingkindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night. (Psalm 92:1-2)***

Psalm 92 is a song for the Sabbath day. The Bible tells us that the Sabbath is the day of rest (Exod 20:8-11). It is also a day to be kept holy. There are Christians who emphasise the physical rest from labour and neglect God's injunction to keep the day holy. There can be no true rest if it is not holy rest; for what spiritual benefits can we derive from rest that is not holy?

The Psalmist understands the real purpose of the Sabbath—to give thanks unto the LORD; to sing praises unto His name; to proclaim His love. Why is it good to praise God?

CHS: "It is good ethically, for it is the LORD's right; it is good emotionally, for it is pleasant to the heart; it is good practically, for it leads others to render the same homage [worship]... To give thanks to God is but a small return for the great benefits wherewith He daily loadeth [gives] us... We thank men when they oblige us, how much more ought we to bless the LORD when He benefits us. Devout praise is always good, it is never out of season, never superfluous, but it is especially suitable to the Sabbath; a Sabbath without thanksgiving [worship] is a Sabbath profaned."

It is good to keep the Sabbath holy because God says so; and it is good because it sets us apart from the brutish man and the fool (v. 6). The Westminster Divines say that "man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Glorifying and enjoyment of God is expressed primarily in our worship. If you do not find the Lord's Day worship enjoyable, it is not because you have come to know God and have found Him boring, but rather, it is because you do not know Him much. The Christian who delights in the LORD will also delight in His Day. ■

***The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing. (Psalm 92:12-14)***

There is a contrast between those who know and worship God and those who do not. The unbeliever is like the grass which flourishes for a moment and is destroyed. The believer, on the other hand, is compared to the palm tree and cedar.

CHS: "When we see a noble palm standing erect...and growing amid the dearth and drought of the desert, we have a fine picture of the godly man, who in his uprightness aims alone at the glory of God...It is made by divine grace to live and thrive where all things else perish...[Like the mighty cedar alone on the mountain top,] the truly godly man under all adversities retains the joy of his soul, and continues to make progress in the divine life."

The godly man who delights in God stands a testimony to His abundant grace. He flourishes just like the man who abides in Christ brings forth much fruit (John 15:4). And whereas nature decays, grace thrives even in old age (2 Cor. 4:16). The godly man rejoices in the promise that the LORD's favour rests on him even when he is old.

*Jesus loves me, this I know,  
Though my hair is white as snow;  
Though my sight is growing dim,  
Still He bids me trust in Him.*

*When my work on earth is done  
And life's victories 'been won  
He will take me home above  
To the fullness of His love.*

*Yes, Jesus loves me, Yes, Jesus loves me,  
Yes, Jesus loves me, The Bible tells me so.*

Happy is the man who can sing this Sabbath Psalm, and show forth the goodness of God every day of his life. ■

***The LORD reigneth, He is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith He hath girded Himself: the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved. Thy throne is established of old: Thou art from everlasting. (Psalm 93:1-2)***

“The LORD reigneth” also means “Jehovah is King.” To say that “Jehovah is King” is to say that God is the supreme lawgiver and ruler, and that He has absolute authority over all matters. It describes the relationship between God and Israel (Exod. 15:18). The characteristic of the Divine King is that He is clothed in majesty. Majesty is hard to define. We know it when we see it. The kings of this world express their majesty by their jewelled crowns and golden scepters. The majesty of God is different.

CHS: God is clothed with majesty, “not with emblems of majesty, but with majesty itself...His is not the semblance but the reality of sovereignty...The LORD is clothed with strength...He wears strength also as His girdle. He is always strong...[His throne is established.]...Whatever opposition may arise, His throne is unmoved; He has reigned, does reign, and will reign for ever and ever...The eternal King sits above all in supreme serenity...All things are ordered according to His eternal purposes, and His will is done.”

The floods may lift up their waves, and the world may be filled with chaos, but our God is “mightier than the noise of many waters” (v. 4). The world’s turmoil and men’s rebellion should not shake our faith in our King. We can trust in God as King because His rule is characterised by truth and holiness (v. 5). God governs by His Word. He is not a capricious tyrant. He has made known His laws, and they stand sure. We know exactly what He would have us do and what He expects us to be.

The mark of the Christian is holiness. That is what God wants His people to be—holy. “Holiness becometh Thine house” (v. 5). Christian, our hearts are where God reigns, and in them, truth and holiness must be found. ■

***O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, show Thyself...Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. (Psalm 94:1, 7)***

**J**ehovah is King (Psalm 93). The King is also the Judge, which is the theme of the ninety-fourth psalm. God is the One to whom vengeance belongeth, meaning that He is the God of retribution (Rom. 12:19). The Psalmist is asking God to undertake on his behalf; that is vengeance and not revenge. Samuel Johnson, an English writer in the 1700s, makes this distinction. He writes, "Revenge is an act of passion; vengeance of justice." The Psalmist is asking for the latter. He is appealing to God as the righteous Judge to right the wrong, vindicate the innocent and punish the guilty.

CHS: This is "a very natural prayer when innocence is trampled down, and wickedness exalted on high. If the execution of justice be a right thing... then it must be a very proper thing to desire it; not out of private revenge...but out of sympathy with right, and pity for those who are made wrongfully to suffer... Injustice is here attributed to the LORD's being hidden...God has but to show Himself, and the good cause wins the day."

The Psalmist pleads for God to show Himself because of the impertinence and arrogance of the wicked (vv. 4-6). Not only did they afflict God's people, they also mock God as being blind and indifferent.

The story is told of a farmer who is strongly anti-Christian. As he plowed his field on Sunday morning, he would shake his fist at the people who passed by on their way to worship. October came and the farmer had his best crop ever. When the harvest was complete, he placed an advertisement in the local paper which read, "Faith in God must not mean much if someone like me can prosper." The response from his Christian neighbours was quiet and polite. In the next edition of the town paper, a small ad appeared. It read, "God doesn't always settle His accounts in October." Vengeance is God's and He will repay. ■

***Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of Thy law; that Thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked. (Psalm 94:12-13)***

The believers know that Jehovah is Judge; and the unbelievers need to be warned. The Psalmist pleads with them, “when will ye be wise?” (v. 8) If the unregenerate heart pays no attention to the Psalmist’s concern, would not the unbelieving mind at least consider these truths: God makes the ears and eyes, would He not hear and see? God gives the law, would He not judge? (vv. 9-10). Awake, sinner! God knows the thoughts of every heart, and they are altogether futile (v. 11). This is the folly of any person who acts as if there is no God.

But for the man who repents, there is hope. Blessed is the man whom God disciplines. CHS: “Though he may not feel blessed while smarting under the rod of chastisement, yet blessed he is; he is precious in God’s sight, or the LORD would not take the trouble to correct him...Affliction without the Word is a furnace for the metal, but there is no flux to aid the purifying: the Word of God supplies that need, and makes the fiery trial effectual...The afflicted believer is under tuition, he is in training for something higher and better, and all that he meets with is working out his highest good, therefore is he a blessed man, however much his outward circumstances may argue the reverse.”

The Psalmist describes the person whom God disciplines as a “man”, but not just any man; in Hebrew, it really means a “valiant man”—one of strength and character. Such is the “man” who is formed by God’s refining fires, whose mind has been moulded by the Word of God, and whose heart’s purpose is singular toward the LORD. Are you this “valiant man”? ■

***Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, My foot slippeth; Thy mercy, O LORD, held me up. In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul. (Psalm 94:17-19)***

It is not easy to appreciate the love of God when we are being disciplined. But the Psalmist testifies that God chastens because He loves, and He cares even when nobody else does.

CHS: "Without Jehovah's help, the Psalmist declares that he should have died outright...Blessed be God, we are not left to that condition yet, for the Almighty LORD is still the helper of all those who look to Him. Our inmost soul is bowed down when we see the victories of the LORD's enemies...but He will yet arise and avenge His own cause, therefore have we hope."

When we are defeated, we need someone who can save us. When we are downtrodden, we need someone who can help us get back on our feet. When we are confused, and our minds are full of questions and doubts, we need to have the peace of mind. God alone is the answer.

Each day, our minds are filled with many passing thoughts, some perplexing, others frivolous, but most are anxious worries about events that are often beyond our control. However, above the myriad of conflicting thoughts, we can find peace in God. Whatever trouble we might have arising from the cares of life, and from the evil imaginations in our own minds, we can always find in God the unfailing source of consolation and the anchor for our souls.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee" (Isa. 26:3). Blessed is the man who trusts in God, and who in the multitude of thoughts turns to Him and finds peace that passeth all understanding.

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace. ■*

***Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms...O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. (Psalm 95:2, 6)***

The ninety-fifth psalm is often used as a call to worship. It reminds us how and why we should worship, and it warns us that the neglect of this spiritual duty and privilege will cause our hearts to harden.

Sadly, worship in most churches today is nothing more than a performance. A.W. Tozer writes that in most churches, true worship has been replaced by this "strange and foreign thing called the 'program.' This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us."

All worship begins with a desire to come before the presence of the Almighty God. The Psalmist says, "Let us come." It is not enough to worship on your own. True worship and spiritual excitement are contagious.

CHS: "One can imagine David in earnest tones persuading his people to go up with him to the worship of Jehovah with sound of harp and hymn, and holy delight. The gladness of his exhortation is noteworthy, the noise is to be joyful...It is to be feared that this is too much overlooked in ordinary services, people are so impressed with the idea that they ought to be serious that they put on the aspect of misery, and quite forget that joy is as much a characteristic of true worship as solemnity itself."

The Psalmist exhorts us to "make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms." Biblical worship must include a combination of sounds (joyful noise) and words (psalms). Of the two, words are crucial. Without the theologically sound words in the worship, all music is mere sound.

The Psalmist also describes the demeanour by which we should worship. We are to "bow down...kneel before the LORD." When we worship, we recognise God for Who He is. God is great and He deserves our worship. When we bow down before Him, we recognise ourselves for who we really are. We are His redeemed, and to worship Him must always be a delight. ■

***For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today if ye will hear His voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness. (Psalm 95:7-8)***

God always demands a response from you. No man can stay neutral in His presence. A man will either fall on his knees in worship or he will turn away from the Almighty in defiance. The man who will not worship God is an infidel. The heart that will not praise the Almighty is a hardened one.

The essence of true worship is not singing and making joyful noises; rather, it is hearing what God has to say. It is like Mary choosing the good part by quietly sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to the Master, while Martha cumbered herself with many things. I wonder how many spiritual blessings have passed us by because we were preoccupied with our own things. The Psalmist's counsel is "Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart."

We should not underestimate the significance of this "if." CHS: "Dreadful 'if' Many would not hear, they put off the claims of love, and provoked their God. 'Today,' in the hour of grace, in the day of mercy, we are tried as to whether we have an ear for the voice of our Creator. Nothing is said of tomorrow... He [God] presses for immediate attention, for our own sakes He asks for instantaneous obedience... [Yield to His love now.] We cannot soften our hearts, but we can harden them, and the consequences will be fatal... God remembers men's sins, and the more memorably so when they are committed by a favoured people, against frequent warnings, in defiance of terrible judgements, and in the midst of superlative mercies... Do not seek to turn aside the edge of the warning; thou hast good need of it, give good heed to it."

What God has graciously offered today, He can judiciously withdraw tomorrow. Today, if you have heard the voice of God, obey! Now is the hour of salvation. ■

***O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth. Sing unto the LORD, bless His name; show forth His salvation from day to day. (Psalm 96:1-2)***

**T**he exuberant joy of the Psalmist is unmistakable. The ninety-sixth psalm is most certainly composed by David to celebrate the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The Bible tells us that as the Ark made its way into the city, a jubilant David “danced before the LORD with all his might” (2 Sam. 6:14).

CHS: “New joys are filling the hearts of men, for the glad tidings of blessing to all people are proclaimed; therefore let them sing a new song. Unto the one only God all music is to be dedicated... Sing unto the LORD, all the earth. National jealousies are dead; a Jew invites the Gentiles to adore, and joins with them, so that all the earth may lift up one common Psalm as with one heart and voice unto Jehovah.”

David invites you to sing unto the LORD a new song. The new song is not one that is new in composition. By the new song, David was not referring to the latest psalm that he had penned. When the Psalmist urges believers to sing God a “new song,” he is calling on them to sing about some new thing that God has done, a new blessing that God has bestowed. For David, the new thing that God had done was to move the Ark to Jerusalem.

For believers, we have a new song to sing unto our Saviour every day, seeing that God’s “compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22-23). And these are the new songs that will never cease.

Yet, there is a new song that is waiting to be sung. Before the throne of the Almighty God, a new song will be sung, “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10). That will be the new song for eternity. Will you be part of that heavenly choir? ■

***Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: He shall judge the people righteously. (Psalm 96:10)***

**M**y great-grandfather was a devout idol-worshipper. I remember seeing him kneeling and bowing before an altar of idols in the mornings and evenings, offering incense and praying for blessings. But these idols are merely carved wood. The Hebrew word for “idols” means “good for nothing.” The idols we worship today do not rest on shelves—they reside in our hearts. They are the things we love more than God, and the things to which we give our first allegiance. But like the idols of wood, these idols of the heart are “good for nothing.”

Contrast these manufactured idols with Jehovah Who “made the heavens” (v. 5), Who alone is “honour and majesty... strength and beauty,” and to Whom alone we must worship. To worship any but God alone is sin. For this reason, David calls us to worship God because “the LORD reigneth” (v. 10).

CHS: “This is the gladdest news which can be carried to them [the unbelievers]—the LORD Jehovah, in the person of His Son, has assumed the throne... The dominion of Jehovah Jesus is not irksome, His rule is fraught with untold blessings, His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.”

The LORD reigns, and He “shall judge the people righteously” (v. 10). Our view of judgement is almost always negative. But the Psalmist says that God’s judgement is accompanied with great rejoicing in the heavens and on the earth. Why? Because truth and righteousness will eventually prevail.

The coming down of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signified the fall of communism—a godless and evil system had collapsed and the free world rightly rejoiced. However, there is a true and greater rejoicing coming when our Lord Jesus returns. We who trust in Him must look to that day of perfect righteousness and truth, and we who are concerned about truth and holiness must have the LORD as our King. ■

***The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the LORD of the whole earth. (Psalm 97:5)***

The ninety-seventh psalm begins with the closing thoughts of the previous psalm—The LORD reigns and the world rejoices. The psalmist states that the reason for our rejoicing is that God will restore righteousness and truth. If we get our theology right, God's reign includes the work of His divine justice—the enemies will be burned up, and the earth will be shaken (vv. 3-5).

CHS: "States and kingdoms which stand out upon the world like mountains are utterly dissolved when He decrees their end. Systems as ancient and firmly-rooted as the hills pass away when He does but look upon them. Heathenism yielded at the glance of Jehovah Jesus, and the tyrannies based upon it dissolved like melted wax... His dominion is universal, and His power is everywhere felt... In the little world of our nature the presence of Jesus in reigning power is as a fire to consume our lusts and melt our souls to obedience."

But is not God's sovereign power tempered by love? Yes and no. No, because unless God is sovereign and all-powerful, His love would be meaningless. What good is a God Who is willing to love but is hindered from doing so for a lack of power? Yet yes, God's power is tempered by love, but only in Christ Jesus. We are "accepted [by God only] in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

Thus it is God's sovereign love in His Son that is our greatest comfort. A godly pastor was worried about the future of his ministry that he could not sleep. His wife asked him, "Do you think God was in this work before you came?" The man nodded. His wife asked again, "Do you think God will be in this work after you leave?" The man nodded again. Then the wife asked, "So, why do you not think that you can trust Him to be in this ministry while you are around?" The man immediately understood. The LORD reigns, and our trust in His reign is the wellspring of our hope and comfort. ■

***Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: He preserveth the souls of His saints; He delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked. (Psalm 97:10)***

If we love the LORD, we must be like Him. Hence, the Psalmist says that we must hate evil, to the same extent and degree, as God does.

CHS: God hates sin, "His fire consumes it, His lightnings blast it, His presence shakes it out of its place, and His glory confounds all the lovers of it. We cannot love God without hating that which He hates. We are not only to avoid evil, and to refuse to countenance it, but we must be in arms against it, and bear towards it a hearty indignation. '*He preserveth the souls of His saints.*' Therefore we need not be afraid of proclaiming war [against sin]...God keeps those who keep His law. As they [we] keep far from evil so shall evil be kept far from them [us]."

Man does not naturally hate evil. If anything, we have a propensity to sin. We are intrigued by the crimes that we read in the newspapers and watch on television. As Christians, we must learn to hate evil even as we learn to love God. Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), a Puritan preacher, gives us some thoughts as to how we may know to hate evil:

"First, a man may know his hatred of evil to be true if it is universal—he that hates sin truly, hates all sin. Secondly, true hatred of sin is fixed—there is no appeasing it but by abolishing the thing hated. Thirdly, true hatred of sin is a more rooted affection than anger—anger may be appeased, but hatred of sin remains and sets itself against the whole kind. Fourthly, if our hatred of sin is true, we hate all evil, in ourselves foremost, and secondarily in others—he that hates a toad, would hate it most in his own bosom. Fifthly, he that hates sin truly, hates the greatest sin in the greatest measure; he hates all evil in a just proportion. Sixthly, our hatred to sin is right if we can endure admonition and reproof for sin, and not be enraged—therefore, those that swell against reproof do not appear to hate sin." ■

***The LORD hath made known His salvation: His righteousness hath He openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered His mercy and His truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. (Psalm 98:2-3)***

The ninety-eighth psalm is one of joyful praise. It was simply titled—"A Psalm". It could be that it was meant to be a pattern for all psalms of praise. The Psalmist does not give us the historical context or reasons for praising God. Perhaps, his intention was to present the psalm as one of pure praise and celebration so that it can be sung on any occasion in the believer's life. There is no better way to prove the theme of joy in Psalm 98 than to point out that Isaac Watt's *Joy to the World* is based upon it. It is also no coincidence that this psalm is strikingly parallel to Mary's *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55).

God is to be praised for He "hath done marvellous things" (v. 1); above all, He is to be praised for our salvation. CHS: "The LORD is to be praised not only for effecting human salvation, but also for making it known, for man would never have discovered it for himself...In God's own light His light is seen. He must reveal his Son in us, or we shall be unable to discern Him."

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come  
Let earth receive her King...And Heaven and nature sing  
Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!  
Let men their songs employ...Repeat the sounding joy.*

There is no secret to God's saving grace. He has made known His salvation to the heathen. It is clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures, and it ought to be plainly preached so that "all the ends of the earth [would know] the salvation of our God" (v. 3b). What a loss of blessings it will be to believers if we would not raise our voices to proclaim the salvation of our God; and what greater loss it will be to the sinner if the redeemed kept silent about His gift of grace. ■

***Let them praise Thy great and terrible name; for it is holy...Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is holy... Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy. (Psalm 99:3, 5, 9)***

The theme of the ninety-ninth psalm is unmistakable—God is holy. This is the attribute by which God wanted to be known (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). God is holy, and everything that He has done and said is clothed in holiness.

CHS: “Holiness is the harmony of all the virtues...the crown of His honour and the honour of His crown. His power is not His choicest jewel, nor His sovereignty, but His holiness. In this all comprehensive moral excellence He would have his creatures take delight, and...their delight [in His holiness] is evidence that their hearts have been renewed, and they themselves have been partakers of His holiness.”

We often think of holiness as moral excellence, but this is but one aspect; God’s holiness is more than that. Holiness is that which sets God apart from the rest of His creation. God is holy in the sense of transcendence.

In the Bible, believers are known as saints. No man is a saint because he has attained a certain level of moral excellence. A man is a saint in the biblical sense of the word because he has been “set apart” by God. A saint is one who has been called out by God for service. A saint is one who has transcended. He is in this world, but he is not of it.

God’s holiness has practical implications for us. God is holy; therefore we must be holy too. “But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Pet. 1:15). Holiness is not an option for a believer. Second, we are made holy in Christ (1 Thess. 3:13). Third, God’s holiness demands our worship—“Exalt the LORD ...worship...for the LORD our God is holy” (v. 9). We worship God because we acknowledge His holiness; they who do not, despise this very quality of God. ■

***Know ye that the LORD He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. (Psalm 100:3)***

The one hundredth psalm is appropriately named "A Psalm of Praise." There is always a reason to praise God. Scottish preacher Alexander Whyte was known for his prayers in the pulpit. He always finds something for which to praise God. One Lord's Day morning, the weather was so gloomy that a worshipper would have thought to himself, "Certainly, it is impossible for the preacher to thank God on such a wretched day as this!" But Reverend Whyte began his prayer with these words, "We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this."

There is always a reason to be thankful, but what better reason to praise God than the knowledge that we are His. The world exalts the self-made man. "Who is that man?" they would ask. The Christian, on the other hand, cares about "whose is that man?"

CHS: "Shall not the creature reverence its maker? Some men live as if they made themselves...but Christians recognise the origin of their being and their well-being, and take no honour to themselves either for being, or for being what they are...It is our honour to have been chosen from all the world besides to be *His* own people."

It is not demeaning to be counted as sheep if we have God as our Shepherd. Our Lord Jesus is the good Shepherd Who gives His life for His sheep (John 10:11-16). This is the Christian's assurance. We are God's. Are you weak? We are His sheep. Are you discouraged? We are His sheep. Do you feel that you have been abandoned? We are His sheep. Jesus says, "I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine." ■

***I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt Thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. (Psalm 101:2-3)***

David did not tell us when or why he wrote the one hundred and first psalm. However, it is a psalm that is appropriate for a man who is placed in a leadership position in his home or even over a country. This psalm is a prayer of consecration. David seems to be setting some principles for himself as the father in his home and as God's anointed king over Israel. The Chinese has a saying: "Discipline of the self, order in the home, unity in the nation, peace in the world." It simply means that before a man can change the world, he has to discipline himself. That is also where David began, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way" (v. 2).

CHS: "David's resolve was excellent...A king had need be both sage and pure...If he be not so in intent, when he comes to the throne, his after conduct will be a sad example to his people. He who does not even resolve to do well is likely to do very ill. Householders [fathers], employers, and especially ministers, should pray for both wisdom and holiness, for they will need them both...'*I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.*' Piety must begin at home. Our first duties are those within our own abode. We must have a perfect heart at home, or we cannot keep a perfect way abroad."

David's key to behaving wisely was to take care of what his eyes would see (v. 3). Sadly, David did not live up to his own words (2 Sam. 11). Nevertheless God's word is still true despite man's failures. Nothing is more crucial to the children's spiritual growth than the father's spiritual life. If there is one thing that fathers cannot fail, it is the failure of being godly. ■

***I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop.  
(Psalm 102:6-7)***

The title of the one hundred and second psalm reveals the emotions of the writer. He was afflicted and overwhelmed even as he poured his heart out to God. The Psalmist began with a cry to be heard and for God to show Himself (vv. 1-2). The implication is that God had been silent and had hidden Himself.

The Psalmist was beset with several problems. He was sick (v. 3). He was discouraged and heartbroken (v. 4a). He had lost his appetite and was reduced to skin and bones (v. 4b-5). On top of that, he was abandoned by his friends. The Psalmist used three types of birds to illustrate his loneliness. "I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop."

CHS: "The Psalmist compared himself to a bird—a bird when it has lost its mate or its young, or is for some other reason made to mope alone in a solitary place...The sparrow is happy in company, and if it were alone...there can be little doubt that it would become very miserable, and sit and pine away. He who has felt himself to be so weak and inconsiderable as to have no more power over his times than a sparrow over a city, has also...sat himself down in utter wretchedness to lament the ills which he could not heal. Christians of an earnest, watchful kind often find themselves among those who have no sympathy with them [and feel that they labour alone]."

Are the Psalmist's emotions justified? Does God abandon His own? Like the Psalmist, we can also fall into the sin of self-pity. But listen to the words of our Lord Jesus, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father...Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:29-31). Just as His eyes are on the sparrows, and so all the more, He watches over me. ■

***My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass. (Psalm 102:11)***

The one hundred and second psalm is one of seven penitential psalms in the Psalter. The Psalmist recognised that his present predicament was because of God's indignation and wrath (v. 10). He was riding high, but was then brought low. The Psalmist used two pictures to illustrate his fading life—the declining shadow and the withering grass.

CHS: "His days were but a shadow at best, but now they seem to be like a shadow which was passing away. A shadow is unsubstantial enough, how feeble a thing must a declining shadow be?...He was like grass, blasted by a parching wind, or cut down with a scythe, and then left to be dried up by the burning heat of the sun. There are times when through depression of spirit a man feels as if all life were gone from him, and existence had become merely a breathing death."

Before the days of mechanical clocks, people tell time by the sun-dial. As the sunlight hits upon the sun-dial, it marks the hour of day. As the sun sets, the shadow becomes less distinct, and it soon vanishes. This is true for the person who does not know our Lord Jesus Christ; and unless he repents, there is a day of darkness from which he will never see the sun again. For the believer, we have this promise from our Saviour, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). In Christ, we do not have a declining shadow—what we have is only bright hope. ■

***But Thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever; and Thy remembrance unto all generations. (Psalm 102:12)***

The twelfth verse is the great turning point of this psalm. The Psalmist describes himself as a disappearing smoke, a deserted sparrow and a declining shadow. These may be true of him, but they are certainly not true of God. Whatever the Psalmist is, God is not.

After a long list of complaints, the Psalmist abruptly stops. It is as if he has been falling, and he has finally reached rock bottom; he looks up, and he sees the eternal God sitting on His throne.

CHS: The Psalmist's "mind is turned away from his personal and relative troubles to the true source of all consolation, namely, the LORD Himself, and His gracious purposes towards His own people...The sovereignty of God in all things is an unfailing ground for consolation; He rules and reigns whatever happens, and therefore all is well...All things else are vanishing like smoke, and withering like grass, but over all the one eternal, immutable light shines on, and will shine on when all these shadows have declined into nothingness."

Listen to the Psalmist's praise—"But Thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever." It is not man that shall endure forever but God. We think we have the right to live forever. The reality is that we perish. Yes, God can and is able to heal and extend our days on earth. When we are sick, we should ask God to heal. However, here is a more blessed truth which the Psalmist, lying on his sick bed, finally understood—that there is an eternal God Who knows us by name and remembers us as long as He lives. ■

***For He hath looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death.  
(Psalm 102:19-20)***

The Psalmist thought that God was deaf to his prayer, hence his cry to God to listen (v. 1). What a desperate cry and what a sorry mistake this is! God “will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer” (v. 17). This is the blessed promise that the Psalmist wants to make known not just to the heathen (v. 15) but also for generations to come (v. 18).

With this turning point in the Psalmist’s life comes also a transformed perspective. Before, we see, in the Psalmist, a man preoccupied with himself; now, we see a man filled with evangelistic zeal. “God hears prayer.” “Jesus saves.” Write these down because the world and our children also need to know that there is a God Who saves.

CHS: “A note shall be made of it, for there will be destitute ones in future generations, and it will make glad their eyes to read the story of the LORD’s mercy to the needy in former times. Registers of divine kindness ought to be made and preserved; we write down in history the calamities of nations; how much rather than should we set up memorials of the LORD’s lovingkindness! Those who... [have delivered cannot forget God’s mercy, and] they are bound to tell others of it, and especially to instruct their children in the goodness of the LORD.”

What shall we say? Except that there is a God who looks down from heaven “to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death.” As in the days of old when God heard the groans of the children of Israel in Egypt and sent Moses to deliver them, so He also sends His Son to save those who call out to Him for forgiveness; and He sends the Holy Spirit to comfort those who look to Him for sustaining grace. ■

***They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed: But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end. (Psalm 102:26-27)***

The Psalmist turned his early complaints into praises. "I am withered like grass. But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever" (vv. 11b-12a). But as tough times roll in, doubts of God's faithfulness begin to set in again, and so he complained again, "He weakened my strength...He shortened my days" (v. 23).

Weakened strength and shortened days serve their divine purpose when they compel us to look to God in faith and to see Him as the unchanging God in the midst of an ever-changing world. Just as a man who changes his clothes does not change his nature, so the creation changes but the Creator does not change. God is the same.

CHS: "The Psalmist remembered that when Israel was vanquished, her capital destroyed, and her temple levelled with the ground, her God remained the same self-existent, all-sufficient being, and would restore his people, even as He will restore the heavens and the earth... 'I am God, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed'...God lives on...We may lose our dearest earthly friends, but not our heavenly Friend. Men's days are often suddenly cut short, and at the longest they are but few, but the years of the right hand of the Most High cannot be counted...O my soul, rejoice thou in the LORD always, since He is always the same."

Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8). The Psalmist concludes his quest with the confidence that God is unchanging, and His faithfulness extends beyond Himself to His children after Him. "The children of Thy servants shall continue"—they will continue to dwell in the Almighty. "Their seed shall be established before Thee." As sure as God is unchangeable, so will be the safety and welfare of those who trust in Him. ■

***Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.***  
***(Psalm 103:2-5)***

**H**ave you been regular in your personal communion with God? Did you think about God today? What are your thoughts about Him? Unlike most other psalms, the one hundred and third psalm reads like David's personal jottings. As he sat and contemplated about God, he could not help but burst in spontaneous praise. While others may complain about what God had failed to do for them, David blessed the LORD with his whole being. He listed God's goodness and numbered His blessings. Dear reader,

*Count your blessings, name them one by one,  
 Count your blessings, see what God hath done!  
 Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly...  
 Count your many blessings. Wealth can never buy...  
 Count your blessings...  
 And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.  
 (Johnson Oatman, Jr.)*

There is a benefits-package for every child of God—forgiveness of sins, restoration of the body, redemption of the soul, blessings of mercies, provision of every good thing, and renewing of strength.

CHS: "Many a worldling is satiated, but not one is satisfied. God satisfies the very soul of man, his noblest part, his ornament and glory...Our good LORD bestows really *good things*, not vain toys and idle pleasures; and these he is always giving, so that from moment to moment he is *satisfying* our soul with good."

The soul who is satisfied by God will be the soul who worships Him. The mouth that has tasted the sweetness of God's saving grace is bound to glorify Him Who fills it. An ever-flowing spring of blessings calls for ever-flowing songs of praise. This is the Christian's eternal employment; we will never cease to praise Him because God will never cease to bless us. ■

***For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.***

***(Psalm 103:11-12)***

David is thankful to God for all that he has, but the first thing for which David is thankful is the forgiveness of sins (v. 3). "Some thank the LORD for friends and home, for mercies sure and sweet." We must. "Some thank Him for flowers that grow, some for the stars that shine." We should. But where would we be if we were to acquire all these things and yet lose our souls? So the hymn-writer puts our lives in the right order.

*But I would praise Him for His grace  
In prayer I would repeat  
Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul,  
Thank you, Lord, for making me whole;  
Thank you, Lord, for giving to me  
Thy great salvation so rich and free.  
(Seth and Bessie Sykes)*

The greatest of all gifts from God is the gift of His Son, in Whom we get forgiveness of sins, a work of grace that is great in magnitude. God forgives all our iniquities (v. 3). It is also a work of mercy that knows no end. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" (v. 12).

CHS: "O glorious verse...Sin is removed from us by a miracle of love! What a load to move, and yet it is removed so far that the distance is incalculable. Fly as far as the wing of imagination can bear you, and if you journey through space eastward, you are further from the west at every beat of your wing. If sin be removed so far, then we may be sure that the scent, the trace, the very memory of it must be entirely gone. If this be the distance of its removal, there is no shade of fear of its ever being brought back again...Our sins are gone, Jesus has borne them away."

Christian, rejoice in every good gift, but rejoice above all for the best of them—the forgiveness of sins. God alone can give this grace, and He has given it through His Son, Jesus. ■

***For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. (Psalm 103:14-15)***

**W**hat a contrast between God and man! God is holy; we are sinful. God is strong; we are weak (v. 3). God is powerful; we are oppressed (v. 6). God is the loving Father; we are like pitiful children (v. 13). God is the creator; we are His creatures. He is eternal; we are but dust.

CHS: God “knows how we are made, for He made us. Our make and build, our constitution and temperament, our prevailing infirmity and most besetting temptation He well perceives, for He searches our inmost nature...[We are] made of dust, dust still, and ready to return to dust...[Even men of so-called iron constitutions are] dissolved, and other men of like vigour are following to the grave, where ‘dust to dust’ is an appropriate requiem.”

We often forget that we are dust and as frail as a flower in the field. We often think more highly of ourselves than we ought to (Rom. 12:3), over-estimate our strength, overrate our intelligence. There are parents who are guilty of being unmindful of the infirmities of their children, and impose upon them burdens too heavy for their age. Not so with God. He knows our frame. He is the omnipotent Father Who knows the weakness of His children. So our Heavenly Father never overloads us, and never fails to give us strength that is equal to our day, because He always takes our frailty into account when He is apportioning to us our lot. Blessed be His holy Name for this gentleness towards His frail creatures.

God knows how much we can take; He knows the weight of burden that we can carry. And with every testing, He “will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13b). ■

***The LORD hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all...Bless ye the LORD, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure. (Psalm 103:19, 21)***

**P**raising ought to be a believer's personal activity, and David would not leave the privilege of praising God to others. He wants to praise God himself—"Bless the LORD, O my soul" (vv. 1, 22).

Praising is also a corporate activity. "Bless ye the LORD, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His...Bless the LORD, all His works in all places of His dominion (vv. 21-22a). The work of God is so great that the whole creation recognizes His power and must sing His praises.

CHS: "Here is a grand burst of song produced by a view of the boundless power, and glorious sovereignty of Jehovah. His throne is *fixed*, for that is the word; it is established, settled, immovable...[God's power is not delegated. He sits supreme on His throne.] He now reigns universally, He always has done so, and He always will. To us the world may seem rent with anarchy, but He brings order out of confusion...Great and small, intelligent and material, willing and unwilling, fierce or gentle—all, all are under His sway... He is the blessed and only Potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords."

Hence, David concludes this song with the same words that he began with. "Bless the LORD, O my soul." This is the evidence of a redeemed man. We need to examine ourselves whether or not there is real praise for God in our hearts. We say "Amen" to the prayers of the worship leader, but do we really hear? We listen to the singing of the choir, but do we praise along? We listen to the preaching of the minister, but do we really hear? Spiritual lukewarmness is a common disease in our churches. If that is our condition, we need to come before God, as David did, and we need to stir up our hearts for God and to bless Him. ■

2 Corinthians 6:17-18 | *Wherefore  
come out from among  
them, and be ye separate,  
saith the Lord, and touch  
not the unclean thing;  
and I will receive you,  
And will be a Father unto  
you, and ye shall be my  
sons and daughters,  
saith the Lord Almighty*



September

***Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, Thou art very great; Thou art clothed with honour and majesty: Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain. (Psalm 104:1-2)***

The one hundred third and fourth psalms are considered twins, both beginning with “Bless the LORD, O my soul.” In the former, David sings of the goodness of God in salvation, and God is portrayed as a Father to His children; in the latter, the Psalmist praises the greatness of God in creation, and God is exalted as the Creator. The first four verses parallel the first two days in the Creation account (Gen. 1). The intent of the Psalmist was not to show the sequence of creation, but the splendour of the Creator—God is very great; He is clothed with honour and majesty; He is draped in light.

CHS: “The declaration of Jehovah’s greatness here given would have been very much in place at the end of the psalm, for it is a natural inference and deduction from a survey of the universe...The wonder expressed does not refer to the creation and its greatness, but to Jehovah Himself. It is not ‘the universe is very great!’ but ‘THOU art very great.’”

God Himself cannot be seen, but the beauty of nature is like His royal robe that reveals His majesty and honour. One must be blind indeed who does not see that nature is the work of the Master Craftsman; and one is gravely mistaken who identifies God with nature, worshipping the sun and moon and thinking that he is actually worshipping God. Unfortunately, some brand of modern day environmentalism is actually ancient pantheism in new garb.

The God of the Bible, on the other hand, transcends nature. God clothes Himself in light, and this reflected beauty is enough evidence of God’s glory. Truly, the Psalmist is right when he declares, “O LORD, my God, Thou art very great.” ■

***He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that He may bring forth food out of the earth; And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart. (Psalm 104:14-15)***

Our God creates; He also cares. He is the source and sustainer of life. Through the rain, God provides richly for His creation. The rain provides drink "to every beast of the field" (v. 11). It provides for growth of trees of which branches the birds nest. But the final beneficiary of God's sustaining grace is man. "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man." Though God had cursed the ground because of Adam's sin, He is still merciful, and "many, O LORD my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward" (Ps. 40:5a).

CHS: "Grass grows as well as herbs, for cattle must be fed as well as men. The herb is for man, and he must till the soil, or it will not be produced, yet it is God that causeth it to grow in the garden...Man forgets this and talks of his produce, but in very truth without God he would plough and sow in vain... By the aid of genial showers the earth produces not merely necessities but luxuries, that which furnishes a feast as well as that which makes a meal."

Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. And God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him. Worship God for His creative power; praise Him for His sustaining grace. Our God provides; He is Jehovah-Jireh.

*The saints should never be dismay'd,  
Nor sink in hopeless fear;  
For when they least expect His aid,  
The Saviour will appear.*

*This Abraham found: he raised the knife;  
God saw, and said, "Forbear!  
Yon ram shall yield his meaner life;  
Behold the victim there."*

*Wait for His seasonable aid,  
And though it tarry, wait;  
The promise may be long delay'd,  
But cannot come too late.  
(William Cowper) ■*

***He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. (Psalm 104:19-20)***

Even as the rains are in God's hands, so are the moon and the sun. To the unbeliever, it is all part of the cycle of nature. But how does this cycle come about? And what keeps it going in a fixed course? God fixed the movement of the sun and moon, which in turn regulate the order of day and night and the seasons.

The earth's tilt and rotation are just right. It is tilted at an angle of 23 degrees from the perpendicular, that is, in relation to the plane of its orbit. If it were titled at 45 degrees, temperate zones would experience torrid zone heat in the summer and frigid zone cold in the winter. On the other hand, if the axis of the earth were vertical to the plane of its orbit, January and July would have the same climate and ice would accumulate until much of the continents would be ice-covered six months and flooded the other six months.

The earth also rotates at just the right speed, making a complete revolution around the sun every 24 hours. In this way, the earth's crust is evenly heated. If our day were a year long, as it is on Mercury, there would be scorching heat on one side, and bitter cold on the other. If our day of 24 hours were longer or shorter, all present balanced adjustments would be upset, and life on earth would become intolerable, if not utterly impossible.

Praise God that He appoints the seasons by the ordering of the movement of the sun and moon. CHS: "By the waxing and waning of the moon the year is divided into months, and weeks, and by this means the exact dates of the holy days are arranged... Never let us regard the moon's motions as the inevitable result of inanimate impersonal law, but as the appointment of our God... The sun is represented as knowing when to retire from sight, and sink below the horizon... [He never loiters or pauses as if undecided... It is needed for man to know the hour of rise and rest.] For all these, man should praise the LORD... Who has made these great lights to be our chronometers [timekeepers]." ■

# 04 Psalm 104:24-30

SEPTEMBER

Open Hand, Hidden Face

des

***That Thou givest them they gather: Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled: Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.  
(Psalm 104:28-29)***

**T**he earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). All of life belongs to Him whether on the earth or in the sea (vv. 24-25). The oceans are still a mystery to man, but God made it to be the playground for the leviathan (a sea creature). The unknown creatures of the sea bring fear and fascination to man, but even they wait upon God for their provisions.

CHS: God opens His hand, and they are filled with good. "Here is divine liberality with its open hand filling needy creatures till they want no more: and here is divine omnipotence feeding a world by simply opening its hand... There would be no need to strike a blow, the mere closing of it would produce death by famine...So dependent are all living things upon God's smile...The breath appears to be a trifling matter...yet, once withdrawn, the body loses all vitality, and crumbles back to the earth...Thus dependent is all nature upon the will of the Eternal."

Man should know God's wondrous provisions even more keenly. It is God alone Who acts. "Thou sendest forth Thy spirit" (v. 30a)—we are created; "Thou givest...Thou openest Thine hand"—we are fed; "Thou hidest Thy face...Thou takest away their breath"—we die.

Let us praise the LORD Who opens His hand, Whose providence and grace satisfy our mouths with good things. Let us also praise Him Who not only gives life to His creatures and sustains them, but also takes it away. ■

***The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in His works...I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. (Psalm 104:31,33)***

**"A**nd God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31a). Even God Himself was pleased with His own works. This is not divine pride; had God not rejoiced over His creation, He would have been guilty of false modesty.

CHS: The LORD shall rejoice in His works. "He did so at the first, when He... saw that everything was very good; He does so still in a measure where beauty and purity in nature still survive the Fall, and He will do so yet more fully when the earth is renovated [renewed]...[The Psalmist] finds his heart gladdened by beholding the works of the LORD, and he feels that the Creator Himself must have felt unspeakable delight in exercising so much wisdom, goodness, and power."

Like the Psalmist, we join in worship—though our voices may be weak—we will sing unto the LORD as long as we live. What a loss on our part if we do not participate in this blessed and rightful duty.

CHS: "The theme [of praise] is an endless one...and remains for ever fresh and new. The birds sang God's praises before men were created, but redeemed men will sing His glories when the birds are no more. Jehovah, Who ever lives and makes us to live shall be for ever exalted, and extolled in the songs of redeemed men...We never sing so well as when we know that we have an interest in the good things of which we sing, and a relationship to the God Whom we praise." ■

***Glory ye in His holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. Seek the LORD, and His strength: seek His face evermore. (Psalm 105:3-4)***

In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the “hallelujah” (Praise ye the LORD) found at the end of the one hundred and fourth psalm is placed at the beginning of the one hundred and fifth psalm, and thus this psalm begins and ends with “hallelujah,” and appropriately so, because it is a psalm of praise. The Psalmist calls on us to “give thanks...call upon...make known...sing...talk ...glory... rejoice...seek...remember” the wondrous and marvellous works that God has done. The different verbs give us a more complete picture of worship.

The object of worship is God. We thank Him and no one else. We make known His deeds and no one else. CHS: “Make it a matter of joy that you have such a God [that you worship the true and living God]. Idolaters may well be ashamed of the actions attributed to their fancied deities, their names are foul with lust and red with blood, but Jehovah is wholly glorious; every deed of His will bear the strictest scrutiny; His name...His character...His law...His government...His influence are all holy.”

So let us “seek the LORD. Seek the LORD, and His strength: seek His face evermore.” The Psalmist calls us to seek the LORD. It must be a blessed and important thing to do when the call is repeated three times. We are to seek God’s presence, and His strength, and then His favour, and this is a seeking that must never cease—the more we know about God, the more we must seek Him. The prophet Isaiah says, “Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near” (Isa. 55:6). Lest we think we can draw near to God on our own, the Bible tells us that we are “made nigh [to God] by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13b), and that we only seek the LORD because “the Father seeketh such to worship Him” (John 4:23b). ■

***He hath remembered His covenant for ever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations. (Psalm 105:8)***

Christian, remember God for His marvellous works (v. 5) for surely He remembers His covenant with us. A covenant is a promise. The Psalmist here is referring to the covenant that God made with Abraham (Gen. 15). That covenant was both unilateral and unconditional. It was unilateral because God Himself set the terms, and it was unconditional because God caused a deep sleep to come over Abraham before he could ratify the covenant. God, appearing as a vision of a smoking furnace and burning lamp, passed between the divided carcasses alone.

CHS: "Here is the basis of all His dealings with His people: He had entered into covenant with them in their father Abraham, and to this covenant He remained faithful...If the LORD has His promise in memory, surely we ought not to forget the wonderful manner in which He keeps it. To us it should be matter for deepest joy that never in any instance has the LORD been unmindful of His covenant engagements, nor will He be so world without end."

That God remembers His covenant "to a thousand generations" is also a matter of assurance. While God says He visits "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation" (Exod. 20:5), He also remembers His mercies to "a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:9). The covenant is eternally valid, and its fulfillment is not dependent on man (Lev. 26:42-45).

To us, He has remembered His covenant in sending His Son, through whom we are heirs of the new covenant—a covenant of grace. Let us therefore give thanks unto the LORD and talk of all His wondrous works, so wonderful for their faithfulness and truth. ■

***Until the time that his word came: the Word of the LORD tried him.  
(Psalm 105:19)***

God called for a famine (v. 16), and He sent Joseph (v. 17). God so ordered by His providence that Joseph was sent before his brothers into Egypt so that he might deliver them out of the famine. But Joseph was sent to Egypt as a slave by the wicked conspiracy of his brothers. God made use of their evil to accomplish His good. In the same way, He makes use of the passions of sinners at all times to execute His plans. Men are free in their wickedness; but God is equally free in frustrating their schemes and overruling their designs for His own purposes.

God was with Joseph in the prison as He would be in the palace (Gen. 39:2, 21). The enslavement (v. 20) was part of God's refining and purifying process for Joseph.

CHS: "God has His times, and His children must wait till His 'until' is fulfilled. Joseph was tried as in a furnace, until the LORD's assaying work was fully accomplished. The word of the chief butler was nothing, he had to wait until God's word came, and meanwhile...[Joseph's] faith was sorely exercised. A delayed blessing tests men, and proves their metal, whether their faith is of that precious kind which can endure the fire...There is a trying word and a delivering word, and we must bear the one till the other comes to us."

Martin Luther, in his time of sufferings, wrote, "The supreme blessing in which one can truly know the goodness of God is that He will be gracious to us for the sake of His Son. To someone who properly appreciates this blessing, everything else is a trifle. Though he is despised, he sees that he keeps more than he has lost. If he is poor, he knows that he has a gracious God; if he is sick, he knows that he is called to eternal life. His heart has this constant consolation: Only a short time, and everything will be better." Like Joseph, we must learn to endure our afflictions because we have a covenant-keeping God. ■

***He sent Moses His servant; and Aaron whom He had chosen. They shewed His signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham. (Psalm 105:26-27)***

God always had the right man for the right moment. He called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and He chose Jacob (v. 6). Before famine hit the land, God sent Joseph (v. 17). And when Pharaoh turned his heart against Israel, God sent Moses and Aaron.

CHS: "When the oppression was at the worst, Moses came. For the second time we have here the expression, 'He sent'; He Who sent Joseph sent also Moses and his eloquent brother. The LORD had the men in readiness and all he had to do was to commission them and thrust them forward. They were two, for mutual comfort and strength, even as the apostles and the seventy in our Lord's day were sent forth two and two. The men differed, and so the one became the supplement of the other, and together they were able to accomplish far more than if they had been exactly alike: the main point was that they were both sent, and hence both clothed with divine might."

Whom God sent, He would also equip. Moses and Aaron were God's messengers. "They shewed His signs among them"—literally, it means "they placed among them the words of His signs". Moses and Aaron gave Pharaoh the words of God's miracles. They spoke by the command of God, and their words were performed by the power of God.

Likewise, as God's messengers, our job is to place among the unbelievers the words of His grace. His words, and not ours; His truth and not our opinions. Campbell Morgan was known for his gift of Bible exposition. His preaching made him popular. One evening, as he sat in his study, he felt God saying to him, "What are you going to be, a preacher or My messenger?"

As Morgan pondered the question, he realised that his desire to become a "great preacher" was hindering his work. For several hours Morgan sat struggling with God's call and his own ambition. Finally he said, "Thy messenger, my Master—Thine!" He took the precious outlines of his sermons which he was proud of, and set them aflame. As the outlines were burning, Morgan prayed, "If Thou wilt give me Thy words to speak, I will utter them from this day forward, adding nothing to them, taking naught away. Thine whole counsel I will declare, so help me God!" ■

***Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them. (Psalm 105:38)***

The Egyptians were pantheists. They worshipped a myriad of gods and goddesses. These deities were all linked to the three forces of nature that were vital to Egypt, namely the Nile river, the land, and the sky. When God wrought the plagues upon Egypt, the purpose was to show the superiority of Jehovah over the Egyptian gods.

With each plague, the intensity of the suffering increased. God also targeted the plagues at the Egyptians, sparing the children of Israel. The final plague was the worst of all. Pharaoh was told that God would pass through the land, and the first-born of every household from Pharaoh's to the lowliest slave would die.

The Egyptians had suffered so many plagues, but none brought as much sorrow throughout the land as this. In the end when the Israelites left, the Egyptians were glad to see them go.

CHS: The Egyptians "feared His people and were glad to pay them to be gone. What a change from the time when the sons of Jacob were the drudges of the land, the offscouring of all things, the brickmakers whose toil was only requited by the lash or the stick. Now...Pharaoh's wickedness was foiled [and the children of Israel feared]."

Pharaoh represents the man to whom God has spoken directly and repeatedly. There is no man to whom God's Word has been more personal, plain and pointed. But it took ten plagues, much suffering and sorrows before Pharaoh's heart would yield. And all the while, Moses persevered. Often times, it takes more than a word before unbelievers would receive your witness for our Lord Jesus. Similarly, it often takes more than a sermon before believers submit to God and do what they know they must do. ■

***For He remembered His holy promise, and Abraham His servant. And He brought forth His people with joy, and His chosen with gladness. (Psalm 105:42-43)***

**T**here is nothing in the children of Israel that prompted God to deliver them. "...the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself...The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people...But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers..." (Deut. 7:6-8).

This is the doctrine of God's sovereign and unconditional election, without which no man will be saved. The hymn writer, Robert Lowry, says, "Nothing can for sin atone...Naught of good that I have done...Nothing but the blood of Jesus." God's election is unconditional in that those whom He had elected were not better than those whom He did not elect. Conversely, those whom He did not elect were not any worse than those whom He had elected. The elect and the non-elect were sinners alike. The difference between them is the evidence and the effect of God's sovereign grace.

CHS: God remembered His holy promise. "The covenant and he for whose sake it was made are ever on the heart of the Most High. He remembered His people because He remembered His covenant...And He brought forth His people with joy...Up from the wilderness He led them, rejoicing over them Himself and making them rejoice too."

God redeems His elect because it pleases Him to do so. Also, God redeems us so that we can praise Him. Above all, God redeems us so that we might "observe His statutes, and keep His laws" (v. 45). As God's chosen children, we are His peculiar people not in the sense of being exclusive or elitist, but that we are to be like Him, that we might be as holy as He is. "But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). ■

# 12 Psalm 106:1-5

SEPTEMBER

God's Enduring Mercy

day

***Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever. (Psalm 106:1)***

The one hundred fifth and sixth psalms are two ways to tell the same story of Israel. In the former, the story is told from God's perspective, and demonstrates God's faithfulness to the covenant that He has made with Abraham; whereas in the latter, the story is related from the view of Israel, and her unfaithfulness. The two psalms set the darkness of man against the light of God. It is against this background of our sinfulness that the mercy and grace of God is seen in their full glory. Thus, as God's redeemed, we are called to give Him our unrestrained praise.

CHS: "Our meditation dwells upon human sin; but on all occasions and in all occupations it is seasonable and profitable to praise the LORD...We praise the LORD truly when we give Him thanks for what we have received from His goodness...[God's] goodness towards sinners assumes the form of mercy... Since man ceases not to be sinful, it is a great blessing that Jehovah ceases not to be merciful. From age to age the LORD deals graciously with His church, and to every individual in it He is constant and faithful in His grace, even for evermore."

When Israel sinned, God disciplined them severely, but He never cast her aside. This is the story of the believer as well; "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20b). When we look at our own lives, we will realise, as Isaiah did, that "woe is us," but wonderful is God's grace. We praise God not because He is wonderful and we are wonderful too. True praise begins when we come to realise that God is good to us when we are bad to Him, that He loves us when we are His enemies and He is merciful to us when we do not deserve His mercy. We praise God for what He has made us to be in spite of what we are. ■

***We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of Thy mercies; but provoked Him at the sea, even at the Red Sea. (Psalm 106:6-7)***

Despite God's loving-kindness, the children of Israel rejected His kingship and resisted His authority. The history of Israel is a history of infidelity from generation to generation. Their fathers sinned, and so did the children. "We have sinned with our fathers." What a timely warning to fathers. Blessed is the father who guides his son in the path of godliness. But what a sad legacy it is when the father cuts a path through the wilderness of sin for his children.

CHS: "Men may be said to have sinned with their fathers when they imitate them, when they follow the same objects, and make their own lives to be mere continuations of the follies of their sires [fathers]... We inherit from our fathers much sin and little wisdom; they could only leave us what they themselves possessed... A long sojourn [stay] among idolaters had blunted the perceptions of the chosen family... How many of God's wonders are not understood [by fathers and sons]... What is not understood will soon be forgotten... It was an aggravation of Israel's sin that when God's mercies were so numerous they yet were able to forget them all."

Though men "believe not, yet [God] abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). Despite their unbelief and rebellion, God "saved them for His Name's sake" (v. 8a). God parted the Red Sea and delivered the children of Israel; only "then believed they His words" (v. 12a).

However, their faith was shallow because it was temporal, and it was based upon sight. A faith that needs to see the Word of God perform is not real faith. It is an empirical faith, and praises of such faith are short-lived because there is always the need and the urge to see in order to believe. But as our Lord told Thomas, "because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). ■

# 14 Psalm 106:13-21

SEPTEMBER

Starved Souls

day

***And He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.  
(Psalm 106:15)***

The chief sin of the children of Israel was rebellion. The root of that sin was discontentment. They were dissatisfied with what God had provided. About a month and half since they left Egypt, the Israelites began to complain against Moses and Aaron, "Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Exod. 16:3). God met their complaints by giving manna.

The people soon got sick of manna, and they "fell a lusting" after the foods they ate back in Egypt (Num. 11:4-6). Again God answered their gripe by sending quails into the camp. But with the meat, God also sent a great plague (Num. 11:33).

CHS: "Prayer may be answered in anger and denied in love. That God gives a man his desire is no proof that he is the object of divine favour, everything depends upon what that desire is...The meat was poison to them when it came without a blessing; whatever it might do in fattening the body, it was poor stuff when it made the soul lean. If we must know scantiness, may God grant it may not be scantiness of soul...When wealth grows with many a man his worldly estate is fatter, but his soul's state is leaner. To gain silver and lose gold is a poor increase; but to win for the body and lose for the soul is far worse."

Discontentment causes a man to lose sight of things of true value. Temporal goods become more important than spiritual blessings. He strives for gold but forgets about God. He excels in the world but fails in the Word. When God blesses us materially, let us also be mindful of His grace. In our receiving of gifts, remember to worship the Giver. ■

***Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He should destroy them. (Psalm 106:23)***

**D**iscontentment is the root from which springs the bitter fruit of idolatry. While Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving the law of God, the Israelites turned against Him by building a golden calf (Exod. 32). If sinners would only open their eyes to the folly of idolatry! They bowed down to a calf that they had made, but rejected the LORD Who made them. They revered an idol that fed on grass, but rejected the LORD Who gave them manna. Idolatry is a grave sin. On this occasion, God said that He would destroy the Israelites and start afresh with Moses. Israel would have perished at the foot of Sinai if not for Moses' intercession and God's mercy.

CHS: "Like a bold warrior who defends the wall when there is an opening for the adversary and destruction is rushing in upon the city, Moses stopped the way of avenging justice with his prayers. Moses had great power with God. He was an eminent type of our Lord...As the Elect Redeemer interposed between the LORD and a sinful world, so did Moses stand between the LORD and his offending people."

Great was the sin of Israel, but greater was the power of Moses' prayer to turn away God's wrath. In Moses, we see the power of a righteous man's intercession. In Jehovah, we have a God Who still hearkens to the voice of His creatures. This surely ought to move us to pray more fervently for the salvation of our loved ones, for the protection of our children from the wiles of the devil, and for revival for ourselves so that we might rise from the sloth and spiritual apathy to whole-hearted service and victory. ■

# 16 Psalm 106:28-33

SEPTEMBER

Unholy Alliance

des

***They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead. Thus they provoked Him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them. (Psalm 106:28-29)***

Sin brings a man down the slippery slope. It may start with one small step for the sinner, but it always ends in a tragic outcome. The Israelites' discontentment led them to idolatry until they joined themselves with Baal-peor. Baal-peor was a Moabite idol, whose worship included rituals of gross sexual immorality. The Israelites were full participants in the worship of Baal-peor and "the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel" (Num. 25:1-3).

CHS: "Ritualism led on to the adoration of false gods. If we choose a false way of worship...[it would not be long before] we choose to worship a false god...Those who are weary of seeking the living God have often shown a hankering after dark sciences, and have sought after fellowship with demons and spirits. To what strong delusions those are often given up who cast off the fear of God!"

God's laws are not to be trifled with. The deception of sin is that it would always take you farther than where you want to go, keep you longer than the time you want to stay, and cost you more than the price you are willing to pay. A new sin brings a new judgement from God. Sinners can invent new vices, but God is not powerless in inventing new judgement. An abominable sin will bring a more severe judgement. Twenty-four thousand people died that day. More would have perished if not for the timely intervention of Phinehas, Aaron's grandson, who demonstrated the sinfulness of wrongdoings and the righteous wrath of God by killing an Israelite who had joined with a Moabite woman (Num. 25:7-8).

Sin is like spreading sore, and it can only be stopped if the infected area is cut off. Blessed is the man who has the courage and conviction to take a drastic stand against sin, to remove the eye and to cut off the limb in order to save the soul (Matt. 18:8-9). ■

***But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works... Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against His people, insomuch that He abhorred His own inheritance. (Psalm 106:35, 40)***

God had warned Israel to utterly destroy and drive out the inhabitants in Canaan "lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee" (Exod.34:11-13). But the Israelites did not (Jud. 1). Instead, they "mingled among the heathen." The Israelites accommodated the Canaanites; they adapted to the way of the heathen. God's people acculturated, which led to apostasy.

CHS: The Israelites "found evil company, and delighted in it. Those whom they should have destroyed they made their friends. Having enough faults of their own, they were yet ready to go to school to the filthy Canaanites, and educate themselves still more in the arts of iniquity. Few would wish to go to the condemned cell for learning, yet Israel sat at the feet of accursed Canaan, and rose up proficient in every abomination."

The apostasy so blinded the moral sense and decency of the Israelites that they even sacrificed their children. To kill one's children as an act of worship is an unthinkable abomination. But can we be so sure that we do not practise these dastardly acts ourselves? It may not be with the blades of steel that we plunge into the hearts of our children, but rather the slow infusion of the poison of worldliness which numbs their souls to spiritual things. No Christian can court worldly company and copy worldly fashions without being affected by them. The folly of worldly conformity shows itself slowly, but how great an evil it is when it finally appears in full form. As Christians, we are called to bear witness against these things, not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:1-2).■

# 18 Psalm 106:41-48

SEPTEMBER

Save Us!

des

***Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto Thy holy name, and to triumph in Thy praise. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD. (Psalm 106:47-48)***

The Christian's life is in many ways a microcosm of the history of Israel. God chose Israel to be His own, as He did us who are His elect. But Israel sinned against God because of unbelief and discontentment; as do we by our compromise and conformity to the world. As a result, God sent Assyria and Babylon to conquer and oppress Israel; in the same way, God will chastise us who are His beloved for our profit (Heb. 12:5-11).

Although the Israelites had sinned greatly, God "regarded their affliction... He heard their cry...He remembered for them His covenant" (vv. 44-45), and He delivered them. In the same way, God saves us. This is compassion that is unmerited. This is the reason for the Psalmist's prayer, "Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen;" and his praise, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD."

CHS: "This is the closing prayer...for those who would in future be captives. 'Save us, O LORD our God.' The mention of the covenant encouraged the afflicted to call the LORD their God, and this enabled them with greater boldness to entreat Him to interpose on their behalf and rescue them...Weaned from idols, they desire to make mention of Jehovah's name alone, and to ascribe their mercies to His ever abiding faithfulness and love. The LORD had often saved them for His holy name's sake, and therefore they feel that when again restored they would render all their gratitude to that saving name...They [We] have all been spared by His grace, let them [us] all join in the adoration with loud unanimous voice."

What an assurance of salvation, that God's faithfulness is not nullified by our unfaithfulness. Only the perverse mind would exploit God's grace to sin. God forbid (Rom. 6:1-2). The Psalmist's "Amen" and "Hallelujah" is his—and should be every Christian's—affirming the blessed truth that God is faithful. ■

***Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. (Psalm 107:5-7)***

The one hundred and seventh psalm is a song of praise and thanksgiving as the children of Israel return to Jerusalem after their exile. It is also known as the Psalm of the English Pilgrims. The trials of the Pilgrims as they sailed across the Atlantic are a mirror of the experience of the Psalmist. The theme of the psalm is that God will always lead His people to better things; the journey may be trying, but the outcome will always be triumphant.

The children of Israel had been without a home for some 70 years. They were driven from their homes. They were forced to flee for their lives. They were strangers in a strange land, as did the Pilgrims who were persecuted for their faith. God's people were homeless wanderers.

CHS: *"Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble! Not till they were in extremities did they pray, but the mercy is that they prayed...and to the right Person. They could not help themselves, or find help in others, and therefore they cried to God. Supplications which are forced out of us by stern necessity are none the less acceptable with God...If hunger brings us to our knees it is more useful to us than feasting; if thirst drives us to the fountain it is better than the deepest draughts of worldly joys; and if fainting leads to crying it is better than the strength of the mighty...Deliverance follows prayer most surely...The LORD was ready to save them...'*He led them forth by the right way.'

There are many wrong ways, but only one right one, and into this none can lead us but God Himself."

Without God, we move about in the wilderness, never finding a city to rest. With God, He will never lead us in circles from desert to desert. God's way will end up in His "city of habitation." God's leading will be to a place of His blessed rest (Matt. 11:28). ■

***Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron...He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. (Psalm 107:10, 14)***

**W**ith the Babylonian captivity also came slavery and bondage. The children of Israel were deprived of their freedom. They were “bound in affliction and iron”. It must be pointed out that they were not free from blame. They were not persecuted for their faith; they were punished for their disobedience (vv. 11-12).

Yet despite the people’s rebellion, when they cried out to God, He heard them and delivered them (v. 13). They sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, but God saved them. They were “bound in affliction and iron,” but God “brake their bands in sunder”.

CHS: “The state of a soul under conviction of sin is forcibly symbolised by such a condition [—‘darkness and the shadow of death’]; persons in that state cannot see the promises which would yield them comfort, they sit...in despair, they fear the judgement, and they are distressed by the prospect of death...[Sin also] causes a double bondage. [It binds the soul and squelches the hope...But the LORD in providence frees the prisoners]...So also He frees men from care and trouble, and especially from the misery and slavery of sin.”

But note that God does not only remove the fetters. He also breaks them asunder so that our deliverance is complete. God never leaves His work unfinished. When God delivers, He neither leaves our soul in partial darkness, nor our members entangled in chains. What Christ has done at Calvary, He has done completely and eternally so that we “should not serve sin” (Rom. 6:6b). ■

***Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death...He sent His word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. (Psalm 107: 17-18, 20)***

The Bible warns us of a “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16), where there is a determined and deliberate rebellion against God’s Word and rejection of His grace that leaves a man with no hope of pardon (Matt. 12:31-32). John also warns us, “All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death” (1 John 5:17). But every sin has its consequences, and it is foolish for a man to think that he can march on with his life with total disregard for his sins.

CHS: “Many sicknesses are the direct result of foolish acts. Thoughtless and lustful men by drunkenness, gluttony, and the indulgence of their passions fill their bodies with diseases of the worst kind. Sin is at the bottom of all sorrow, but some sorrows are the immediate results of [man’s] wickedness...Alas, even the LORD’s own people sometimes play the fool in this sad manner...And as the disease rages their little strength is spent in pain and misery. Thus it is with souls afflicted with a sense of sin, they cannot find comfort in the choicest promises, but turn away with loathing even from the Gospel, so that they gradually decay into the grave of despair.”

But there is hope even outside the door of death. There is mercy for the one who is near the “gates of death”, but they are not yet inside. Deliverance comes not by the hand of man, but by the Word of God. “He sent His word, and healed them.” The God Who creates by the word of His mouth is also the God Who saves by the Logos—the Word of life. We will do well to remember the power of the Word, and blessed are we who delight in hearing and meditating upon it. ■

# 22 Psalm 107:23-26

SEPTEMBER

Security for the Perilous

des

***They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep. (Psalm 107:23-24)***

In the days before steam engines, a ship sailed at the mercy of the wind. A mariner could only prepare the sails to catch the wind, but he could determine neither the force nor the direction of the wind. To the ancients, sailing was a risky business. The Psalmist describes it as going down to the seas. The sea was a mystery, and the ebb and flow of the tides were regarded as God's "wonders in the deep." In a sense, life is like sailing, with every man having his own unique circumstances.

CHS: "All believers have not the same deep experience; but for wise ends, that they may do business for Him, the LORD sends some of His saints to the sea of soul-trouble, and there they see, as others do not, the wonders of divine grace. Sailing over the deeps of inward depravity, the waste waters of poverty, the billows of persecution, and the rough waves of temptation, they need God above all others, and they find Him."

Just as the sailor who has to contend with the ever-changing tides, so we have to contend with the uniqueness of one day from another. But in spite of the changes, there is an unchanging constant—everything is the works and wonders of the LORD. So whether in calm seas or over troubled waters, the best assurance we can have is the truth that we have anchored our souls upon our Lord Jesus.

*Upon life's boundless ocean where mighty billows roll,  
I've fixed my hope in Jesus, blest anchor of my soul;  
When trials fierce assail me as storms are gathering o'er,  
I rest upon His mercy and trust Him more.*

*I've anchored in Jesus, the storms of life I'll brave,  
I've anchored in Jesus, I fear no wind or wave.  
I've anchored in Jesus, for He hath pow'r to save,  
I've anchored to the Rock of Ages.  
(Lewis E. Jones) ■*

***They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end...He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. (Psalm 107: 27, 29)***

Life is tough and often challenging. Every man, at some point in his life, will have to wander through the desert; walking through the valley of darkness and lingering near the gates of death; lying on beds of affliction and sailing through the storms of life. A man must needs be caught in the oceans amidst a violent storm to appreciate what the Psalmist says about the ones whose "soul is melted...reel to and fro...and are at their wits' end" (vv. 26-27).

CHS: "Those who have been on the spiritual deep in one of the great storms which occasionally agitate the soul know what this verse means. In these spiritual cyclones, presumption alternates with despair, indifference with agony! No heart is left for anything, courage is gone, hope is almost dead... Their fears drive them out of all power to use their brains...What more can they do?...[Here is also a description of the spiritual sailor caught in the storm.] We have staggered frightfully! We could stand to nothing and hold by nothing. We knew not what to do, and could have done nothing if we had known it."

All we could do was to cry unto the LORD (v. 28); and that is all we need to do. God Who sends His word of healing (v. 20) will also send His word of calming. By His word, He commands the waves to rise; and by His word, He speaks the waters to calm.

CHS: "When God makes peace, it is peace indeed, the peace of God which passeth all understanding." It only takes one word of God to calm the troubled soul. Christian, pray that God would work in your heart when we face our storms. Call unto Him and His peace will come. ■

# 24 Psalm 107:33-38

SEPTEMBER

Empty to Full

des

***He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings. And there He maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation. (Psalm 107:35-36)***

The Psalmist calls on the people to “praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (v. 31) This hymn of praise recognises the power of God over the affairs of man. His authority has no limits. He can turn the rivers into a desert, and turn the desert into watersprings (vv. 33-35).

Such is man’s life. There are ups and downs. The Shepherd leads His sheep beside green pastures and still waters, and He also leads them through the valley of the shadow of death. Life is an ever ebb and flow of tragedies and triumphs, adversities and blessings; and God is the One Who turns the tides.

CHS: “With another turn of His hand, He more than restores that which in judgement He took away...This wonder of mercy is the precise reversal of the deed of judgement, and wrought by the selfsame hand [God]. Even thus in the church, and in each individual saint, the mercy of the LORD soon works wonderful changes where restoring and renewing grace begin their benign work...When the earth is watered and men cultivate it, cities spring up and teem with inhabitants; when grace abounds where sin formerly reigned, hearts find peace and dwell in God’s love as in a strong city. The church is built up where once all was a waste when the LORD causes the broad rivers and streams of Gospel grace to flow forth.”

In all life’s changing circumstances, there is one great truth—God is sovereign and He exercises His sovereignty in perfect love and wisdom. Thus, no man is brought low or lifted high unless God wills it. For this reason, in good times, we praise Him for His blessings; and in bad times, we praise Him yet the more for His all-sufficient grace. ■

***The righteous shall see it, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth. Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD. (Psalm 107:42-43)***

Most people make judgements and decisions based upon what they see and their own human wisdom. The disciples saw the man who was born blind, and they immediately concluded the man's blindness must be due to his sins or the sins of his parents. The disciples were wrong. Christians also have the tendency to judge and decide based upon what we see and know.

There is nothing wrong with trying to make judgements and understand the mind of God, but we must never forget that God's thoughts and ways will always be higher than ours. At the end of his great thesis on the doctrine of salvation, Paul had to humble himself and declare, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the LORD? or who hath been His counsellor?" (Rom. 11:33-34) There are times when we just have to place our hands over our mouths and say nothing but rejoice in God.

CHS: "Divine providence causes joy to God's true people; they see the hand of the LORD in all things, and delight [in His justice and grace]... What can the wicked say? God's providence is often so conclusive in its arguments of fact, that there is no replying or questioning."

The righteous, on the other hand, will see and rejoice. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things"—good and bad—will rejoice regardless because they understand the lovingkindness of the LORD. So let the redeemed rejoice for we see the innumerable proofs of God's love; and in situations when we cannot see, let us trust Him confidently, knowing that in due time, things which are hidden will be made manifest, and the truth will still be that God is full of lovingkindness. ■

# 26 Psalm 108:1-5

SEPTEMBER

A Fixed Heart

des

***O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory. Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise Thee, O LORD, among the people: and I will sing praises unto Thee among the nations. (Psalm 108:1-3)***

The one hundred and eighth psalm is written by David, and it is taken from two of his earlier psalms (57 and 60). The first five verses are taken from Psalm 57:7-11; and the last eight verses from Psalm 60:5-12. Psalm 108 is also known as the "Warrior's Morning Psalm," because David was up early in the morning, and he began the day by praising God. That is the secret of his steadfastness.

CHS: "Though I [David] have many wars to disturb me, and many cares to toss me to and fro, yet I am settled in one mind and cannot be driven from it. My heart has...one resolve. Thy grace has overcome the fickleness of nature... Even though I have to shout in the battle I will also sing in my soul, and if my fingers must needs be engaged with the bow, yet shall they also touch the ten-stringed instrument and show forth Thy praise... Only when a thoroughly enraptured soul speaks in the instrument can music be acceptable with God: as mere musical sound the LORD can have no pleasure therein, He is only pleased with the thought and feeling which are thus expressed. When a man has a musical gift, he should regard it as too lovely a power to be enlisted in the cause of sin." CHS further quotes Charles Wesley:

*If well I know the tuneful art  
To captivate a human heart,  
The glory, LORD, be Thine.  
A servant of Thy blessed will,  
I here devote my utmost skill  
To sound the praise divine.*

We can only render to Him what He has first given us. This is God's *modus operandi*. "My heart is fixed...for Thy mercy is great" (vv. 1, 4). David's heart was fixed upon God because he knew that God's heart was fixed upon him. He loved us first so that we may love Him; He saved us so that we may serve Him; He is faithful to us so that we may learn to trust Him. And it is God's faithfulness that is the reason for our unwavering confidence in Him. ■

***Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. Through God we shall do valiantly: for He it is that shall tread down our enemies. (Psalm 108:12-13)***

With the shield of faith, David marched into battle confident of the victories that God had wrought for him. Most of us are not warriors in the military battlefields. However, the Bible tells us that we are also engaged in warfare—a spiritual battle—“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). Our enemy is far more pernicious. Against this enemy, our own strength is insufficient, and the help of man is vain. For this spiritual battle, we need God.

CHS: “We ought to pray with all the more confidence in God when our confidence in man is altogether gone. When the help of man is vain, we shall not find it vain to seek the help of God...[Divine] help shall inspire us to help ourselves. Faith is neither a coward nor a sluggard: she knows that God is with her, and therefore she does valiantly; she knows that He will tread down her enemies, and therefore she arises to tread them down in His name. Where praise and prayer have preceded the battle, we may expect to see heroic deeds and decisive victories.”

“Through God we shall do valiantly.” That is our secret support. God is the source from which we draw our strength, courage and wisdom for the battle. Our victory has been won. The prophet Isaiah speaks of a man emerging from the battlefield with his garments stained with blood. Who is this warrior? And He answered, “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save” (Isa. 63:1b). Because our blessed Saviour is that bloodstained warrior, “thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57). ■

# 28 Psalm 109:1-5

SEPTEMBER

Devoted to Prayer

des

***They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause. For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer. (Psalm 109:3-4)***

To some, the tenor of the one hundred and ninth psalm may seem to run against every fibre of the Christian faith. It is an imprecatory psalm. It is filled with terrible curses. Does not the Bible tell us that Christians are to “bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not”? (Rom. 12:14) David begins by asking God to turn away from the prayers of his enemies. Their deeds were wicked. They repaid good with evil and rewarded love with hatred (v. 5). Their words were false and malicious (vv. 2-3).

There is a common saying that goes: “Stick and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” But this is not true. Words from slanderous lips can leave scars just as deep as those from a blade of steel. James warns that the tongue is like “a fire, a world of iniquity...it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell” (James 3:6).

What was David’s response to these verbal attacks? “I give myself unto prayer.” CHS: “He did nothing else but pray. He became prayer as they became malice. This was his answer to his enemies, he appealed from men and their injustice to the Judge of all the earth, Who must do right. True bravery alone can teach a man to leave his traducers unanswered, and carry the case unto the LORD.”

Notice the words “give myself unto” are in italics in the Bible, meaning to say that they were added in by the translators. Without them, the force of David’s words would have been stronger, “They are my adversaries: but I prayer.” “Prayer” is not just the noun that describes the action of asking God, but here “prayer” is the noun that describes the man. David was a “*pray-er*.” ■

***Let them be before the LORD continually, that He may cut off the memory of them from the earth. (Psalm 109:15)***

An imprecation is a curse. Imprecatory psalms are those that invoke curses upon the enemies. Psalm 109 is one of the strongest and most intense imprecatory psalms in the Psalter. It contains more than 20 curses. The imprecatory psalms, like the rest of Holy Scriptures, are included for our admonition (1 Cor. 10:11).

Can Christians justify the use of these imprecatory psalms? We need to take note of several points here. Firstly, it must be noted that David was writing as a king and not as a private citizen. These curses did flow from a personal vendetta but were actually for public vindication. As a king, David had the duty to see that evil must be met with justice. Secondly, David left the work of judgement to God. He did not take vengeance into his own hands. In fact, even when David had the opportunity to kill Saul, he did not do so (1 Sam. 24:10). The Christian must leave judgement to the hands of the righteous Judge, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the LORD" (Rom. 12:19b). Thirdly, it is scriptural to desire the punishment of the evil and the rewarding of the good. Lastly, when justice is done and done rightly, it will lead the wicked to seek the LORD, and the righteous to praise Him.

The hardest section of Psalm 109 is verses 9 to 15, where the curses are extended to the family of the evildoer. Yet it serves as a warning to us—telling us that the effects of our sins are far-reaching. The sinner faces the consequences of his sin, but its ripples may extend to the generations after him.

CHS: David "wishes that the father's sins may follow up the transgressor and assist to fill the measure of his own iniquities, so that for the whole accumulated load the family may be smitten with utter extinction. A king might justly wish for such an end to fall upon an incorrigible brood of rebels; and of persecutors, continuing in the same mind, the saints might well pray for their extinction; but the passage is dark; and we must leave it so. It must be right or it would not be here." ■

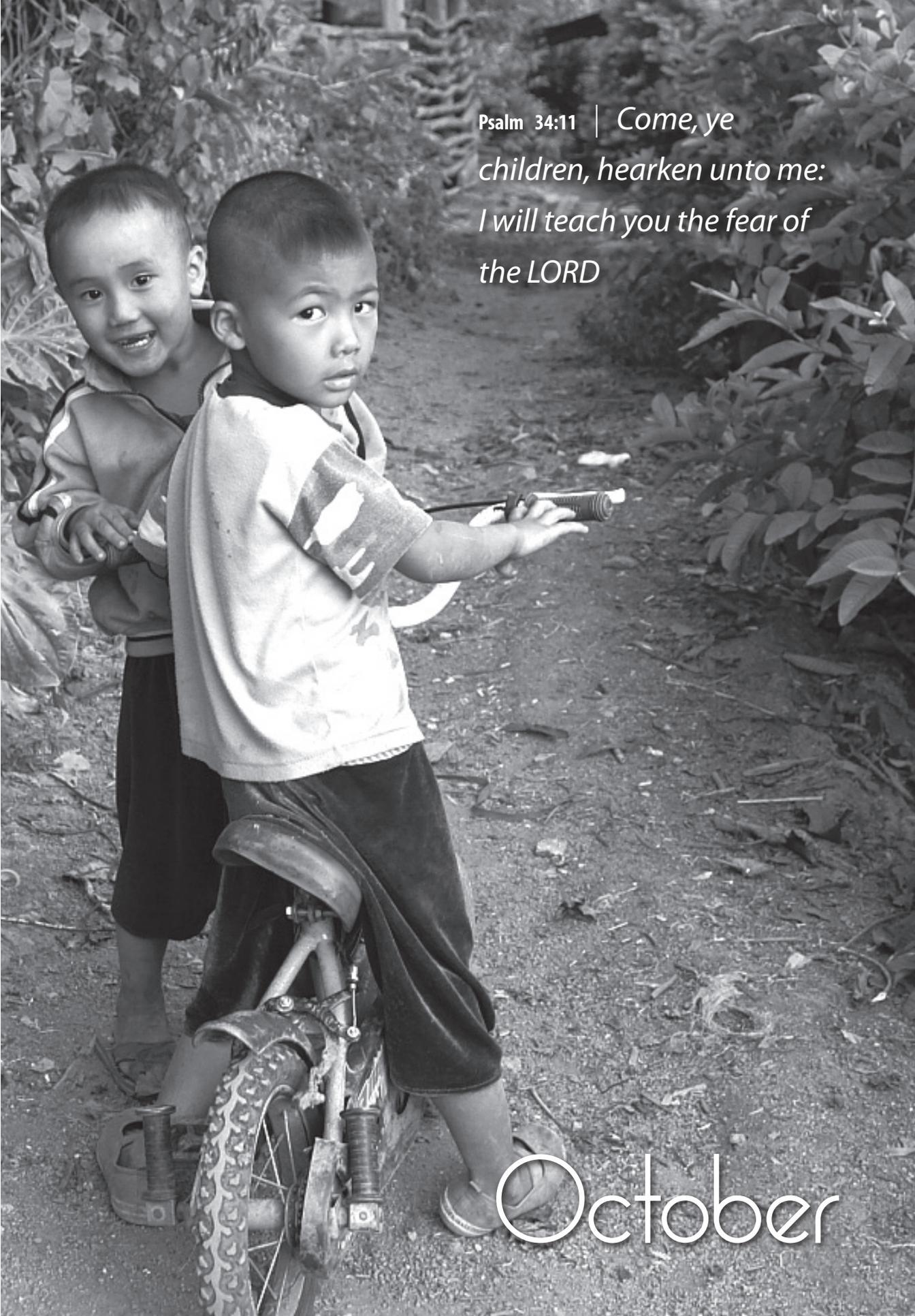
***Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the LORD, and of them that speak evil against my soul. (Psalm 109:20)***

David prays for God to bring judgement not on just those who do evil but also on those who fail to do good, those who “remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart” (v. 16).

CHS: “Because he had no memory to show mercy the Judge of all will have a strong memory of his sins...He had malice in his heart towards one who was already sufficiently sorrowful...Yet no grief excited sympathy in him, no poverty ever moved him to relent. No, he would kill the heart-broken and rob their orphans of their patrimony. To him groans were music, and tears were wine, and drops of blood precious rubies...So little mercy had he ever shown that he had forgotten how to do it, he was without common humanity, devoid of compassion, and therefore only worthy to be dealt with after the bare rule of justice.”

If the evildoer would repent, there is forgiving grace, but if the incorrigible man persists in his wickedness with neither remorse nor signs of repentance, believers would be remiss if they do not pray to God to intervene and deliver. Christians must not fall into the snare of silence just because imprecation seems to run counter to our “civilised” minds. Bear in mind the act of imprecation is the last resort against unrelenting and malicious attacks upon a child of God.

CHS: “David was a man of gentle mould, and remarkably free from the spirit of revenge...[thus he speaks as the suffering believer whose] great principles needed to be vindicated and great injuries redressed.” Our prayer is that we stand on God’s side and are the ones who cry out for His mercy; and not those who would face His wrath. ■



Psalm 34:11 | *Come, ye  
children, hearken unto me:  
I will teach you the fear of  
the LORD*

October

***But do Thou for me, O GOD the LORD, for Thy name's sake: because Thy mercy is good, deliver Thou me. For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me. (Psalm 109:21-22)***

David prays that God would intervene and punish the wicked. After that, he turns his attention away from the evildoers to God. They are my adversaries who “speak against my soul but Thou...” (vv. 20-21). We can dwell on our hurts and cut ourselves deeper by our own preoccupation with them, or we can dwell on God because His mercy is good. David chose the latter, praying, “Do Thou for me, O God the LORD.”

CHS: “What shall He do?...[God would] do whatever He thinks fit. He [David] leaves himself in the LORD’s hands, dictating nothing, but quite content so long as his God will but undertake for him. His plea is not his own merit, but *the name*. God Himself has performed His grandest deeds of grace for the honour of His name, and His people know that this is the most potent argument with Him.”

The LORD will undertake for us. He will deliver us, but not because we are good and deserving but because His mercy is good. When men are merciless, we have a God Who is merciful. When the devil seeks to devour us, we have a God Who delivers.

God will save all who call upon Him, and His heart is sensitive to those who are poor and needy. CHS: “The LORD has always a tender regard to broken-hearted ones, and such the Psalmist had become: the undeserved cruelty, the baseness, the slander of his remorseless enemies had pierced him to the soul...It is time for a friend to step in when the adversary cuts so deep.” My friend, are you in desperate need? Are you in deep sorrow? “Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are they that mourn...Blessed are the meek...Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness...” (Matt. 5:3-6). ■

***Let them curse, but bless Thou: when they arise, let them be ashamed; but let Thy servant rejoice...I will greatly praise the LORD with my mouth; yea, I will praise Him among the multitude. (Psalm 109:28, 30)***

God delivers because He is good. He saves us because we are unable to save ourselves. David was a "reproach" to his enemies (v. 25). Thus when David was delivered, his enemies would know that deliverance had to come from God. "O save me according to Thy mercy: That they may know that this is Thy hand; that thou, LORD, hast done it" (vv. 26b-27).

The wicked do not like to see the godly emerge victorious, and thus they will curse, but God will bless, and believers will rejoice. CHS: "Their cursing will then be of such little consequence that it will not matter a straw. One blessing from the LORD will take the poison out of ten thousand curses of men...[We are] protected and rescued...it ought to be our greatest joy that the LORD is honoured in our experience; the mercy itself ought not so much to rejoice us as the glory which is thereby brought to Him Who so graciously bestows it."

Our assurance is that we are on the victory side. Notice the contrast between verses 6 and 31 in this psalm. Verse 6 tells that Satan will set himself at the right hand of the wicked, abetting to do evil; whereas in verse 31, we read that the LORD will stand at the right of the righteous, abiding to defend and save them.

The Christian should never cease to pray or praise because God will never be absent when the righteous are put on trial. God is the Judge of all. When we cannot find justice in the courts of man, we know that truth and justice will prevail before the Almighty. ■

***The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion: rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies. (Psalm 110:1-2)***

**“**What think ye of Christ [Messiah]? Whose son is He?” our Lord asked. The Pharisees replied, “The Son of David.”

“How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, ‘The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool?’” (Matt. 22:42-44)

The answer to the Pharisees’ dilemma is that Christ is both the Son of David and the Son of God. The one hundred and tenth psalm is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament, and the first verse is the most quoted verse (Acts 2:34-36; 7:56; 1 Cor. 15:25; etc.) Psalm 110 is recognised as one of the greatest messianic psalms. The other Messianic psalms have sections that make reference to earthly kings, but Psalm 110 is all about the Messiah.

CHS: “Jehovah [LORD] said unto my Adonai [Lord]: David in spirit heard the solemn voice of Jehovah speaking to the Messiah...[What wonderful communion between the Father and the Son from which this springs the covenant of grace.]... ‘*Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool!*’ [The Father calls the Son, our Lord Jesus to His honoured seat for the work well done]...[The Father has given His Son all authority to rule.] Jesus, however hated by men, is still the King of kings.”

Christians need to have an exalted view of Christ. He is not the helpless baby in the manger; neither is He that tortured teacher on the cross. These are sentimental images that evoked our pity. Christ is the King Who ascended into glory. When Stephen saw Him, Christ was “standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55b). When Paul met Christ on the way to Damascus, Paul saw “a light from heaven...the brightness of the sun” (Acts 26:13). When John had a vision of Christ, he “fell at His feet as dead” (Rev. 1:17).

Christ is the Friend of sinners, but He is also Lord and King, to be honoured, obeyed and worshipped, and we need to know Christ in this light, for if we do, we will love Him with greater reverence. ■

***The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honourable and glorious: and His righteousness endureth for ever. (Psalm 111:2-3)***

The one hundred and eleventh psalm is an acrostic psalm, meaning that every verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It also begins with “hallelujah” (“praise ye the LORD”). The Psalmist announces before the assembly that he will praise God, and he calls on them to join in the worship. The Psalmist sets the tone and takes the lead.

The act of worship, by its very definition, cannot be a deed of half-heartedness. It is either you worship God with your all, or you worship Him not at all. Hence the Psalmist declares, “I will praise the LORD with my whole heart” (v. 1). There are some people who would not praise God because they do not know Him. But what is even more tragic is for the people who know Him to praise Him only half-heartedly.

Why do we worship God? Because His works are great. They are great in number; great in magnitude; great in beauty; and great in goodness. We need only look into the sky and see the vastness of the heavens. And we need look at ourselves to see the intricacies of life. The works of God are great because He is great. There is nothing so big that God cannot handle, and there is nothing so small that God will overlook. Yet there is one work that is “honourable and glorious” and greater than all.

CHS: “His one special work, the salvation of His people, is here mentioned as distinguished from His many other *works*...It is deservedly the theme of the highest praise, and compels those who understand it and experience it to ascribe all honour and glory unto the LORD...No other work can be compared with it [the work of redemption]: it honours both the Saviour and the saved... and brings glory to God.” Let us therefore praise God (before the assembly) for this most glorious work. ■

***The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do His commandments: His praise endureth for ever. (Psalm 111:10)***

The world is overloaded with information. A child in today's elementary school knows more than a child the same age a generation ago. But information alone is not wisdom. The same child today who knows more is not necessarily wiser. Wisdom in the Bible is defined as a skill. When God wanted to build the tabernacle, He filled certain men "with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship" (Exod. 31:3). Wisdom then is a skill—the skill of living a godly life.

It is a skill that has to come from God Who is the Giver of life. CHS: "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. It is the first principle...To know God so as to walk aright before Him is the greatest of all the applied sciences... Obedience to God proves that our judgement is sound. Only a man void of understanding will ever justify rebellion against the holy God. Practical godliness is the test of wisdom. Men may know and be very orthodox, they may talk and be very eloquent, they may speculate and be very profound; but the best proof of their intelligence must be found in their actually doing the will of the LORD.*"

It is only in and by the Word of God that we can acquire the wisdom of God. How foolish then it is for the believer who has the Word of God and yet stumbles through life because he does not have the skill to live for His glory. Some think it is a waste of time to study the Bible, but which child would not want to know about the father? Spurgeon says that the study of God— theology—is the "highest science...which can engage the attention of a child of God." ■

***Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in His commandments. (Psalm 112:1)***

The one hundred eleventh and twelfth psalms come as a pair. The former is an acrostic poem about God; the latter is an acrostic poem about the godly man. Psalm 111 ends with the man who is wise because he fears God; Psalm 112 begins with the man who fears God and is blessed.

The fear of God is not one which paralyses the man in terror. The fear of God is a profound reverence for the Almighty. We fear God when we stand in awe of His majesty and holiness. The fear of God means we cannot take Him lightly; it means that God is not an incidental part of our lives; it means that the Word of God cannot be peripheral in our thinking and acting. The fear of God means that He and His Word must be central in our lives.

CHS: "Jehovah is so great that He is to be feared, and He is at the same time so infinitely good that the fear is sweetened into filial love, and becomes a delightful emotion... There is a slavish fear which is accursed; but that godly fear which leads to delight in the service of God is infinitely blessed... The man [who fears God] not only studies the divine precepts and endeavours to observe them, but also rejoices to do so... Holiness is his happiness, devotion is his delight, truth is his treasure... Ungodly men may in some measure obey the commandments out of fear, but only a gracious man will observe them with delight. Cheerful obedience is the only acceptable obedience... He who takes pleasure in the command is truly loyal."

When we consider God's blessings, we often think of material wealth. But God's blessings not only clothe the body but also bathe the soul. Prosperity is a blessing but it is not a proof of godliness. The man who is wise would rather be godly than rich because "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). ■

***Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD. (Psalm 112:6-7)***

The only constant in the world, some say, is change. In this ever-changing world, the godless man is like a boat sailing in the ocean, at the mercies of the waves. He hopes that he can cope, but he can never be sure.

The God-fearing man, on the other hand, "shall never be moved". This is the stability that comes with faith. He may experience all kinds of surprises in life, but wealth does not make him complacent; deprivation does not make him whine. As Paul says, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound...I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4:12).

CHS: "God has rooted and established him so that neither men nor devils shall sweep him from his place. His prosperity shall be permanent, and not like that of the gambler and the cheat, whose gains are evanescent...his home shall be permanent, and he shall not need to wander from place to place as a bird that wanders from her nest; and even his name shall be abiding, for a good man is not soon forgotten...He shall have no dread that evil tidings will come, and he shall not be alarmed when they do come...He is neither fickle nor cowardly...he may change his plan, but not the purpose of his soul...[His heart is] fixed in solid reliance upon God."

This is the man whose life is anchored upon Jesus. He does not waver and is not easily tossed about. He is not privileged in the sense that he is spared the adversities of life, but he perseveres because he trusts the LORD Whose righteousness endureth forever. ■

***Who is like unto the LORD our God, Who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth! (Psalm 113:5-6)***

**W**hat is God like? This is one of those questions that grandchildren will unsuspectingly ask grandparents. It is a good question, though the trouble is that it is unanswerable. The Westminster Divines give this definition, "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth" (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 4). It is theologically accurate and succinct; but abstract.

It is impossible to fully describe what God is like. He is like none else. God cannot be compared to anything. He is in a category of His own. He is unique. "There is none like unto the LORD our God" (Exod. 8:10b; 9:14). The only way we can relate something about God is to describe Him in terms of what He has done (He creates, He saves) and what He is like (He is like a loving father).

The Psalmist describes God's greatness by using "the name of the LORD" (v. 1). The LORD is YHWH (Yahweh, Jehovah). The LORD is the self-existing, self-sufficient, eternal, and unchangeable God. The LORD is the God Who resides where no man can reach.

CHS: "In the height of His abode none can be like Him. His throne, His whole character, His person, His being, everything about Him, is lofty, and infinitely majestic, so that none can be likened unto Him... He dwells so far on high that even to observe heavenly things He must humble Himself. He must stoop to view the skies, and bow to see what angels do."

Just think of the extent of His condescension when He was made flesh and dwelt among sinful flesh. Mary sang, "For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden" (Luke 1:48a); Isaiah praised, "The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." What is God like? There is no complete answer, but it is enough for us to know that He is our Saviour and Friend. ■

***Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the God of Jacob; Which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters. (Psalm 114:7-8)***

Psalms 113-118 are collectively known as the Egyptian Hallel, but only Psalm 114 refers directly to Egypt (v. 1). These psalms are sung in connection with the Passover—the first two before the meal and the remaining four after it. The theme of this psalm is the Exodus—a familiar subject—but the Psalmist presents the event from God's perspective.

In this psalm, we read nothing about the struggles of Israel—only the success of Israel's God. We read nothing about the unfaithfulness of the people—only the unwavering love of God. "Judah was His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion" (v. 2). No nation in man's history was ever a theocracy except Israel. God had set His eye and heart upon Israel—she was to be a nation of priests (Exod. 19:6). Alas, unfaithfulness robbed her of that honour. However, there is a peculiar people who has been made priests—the church which is the body of believers (1 Pet. 2:9). "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 24:1a). Thus, it is no wonder that the whole creation trembles at God's amazing love.

CHS: The Psalmist calls on "all nature again to feel a holy awe because its Ruler is still in its midst...Let the believer feel that God is near, and he will serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Awe is not cast out by faith, but the rather it becomes deeper and more profound. The LORD is most revered where He is most loved."

Tremble, the whole creation must in the presence of God. But you who have also known His saving grace tremble not in fear of His wrath, but in faith, as we join the Psalmist in praising God for His provision of the Paschal Lamb. ■

***Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands...They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them. (Psalm 115:4, 8)***

**W**hat the heathen could not see, they despise—"Where is now their God?" (v. 2) What unspeakable audacity it is to show contempt for the LORD Who resides in the heaven, and Who is free to do whatever He pleases. At the same time, what utter foolishness it is to boast of their gods who had to be fashioned with their own hands.

CHS: "*Their idols are silver and gold, mere dead inert matter; at the best only made of precious metal, but that metal quite as powerless as the commonest wood or clay. The value of the idol shows the folly of the maker in wasting his substance...[The value of the material] does not increase the power of the image, since there is no more life in silver and gold than in brass or iron... Inasmuch as the maker is always greater than the thing that he has made, these idols are less to be honoured than the people who fashioned them. How irrational that men should adore that which is less than themselves! How strange that a man should think that he can make a god!*"

The gods of the modern man do not rest on shelves; instead they reside in our hearts and minds. They are fashioned by men's ideas. A god who is fashioned by our own thoughts is no more a god than the image made by our own hands. The ultimate folly of idolatry is that the idolaters eventually become like the idols—dumb and dead. The idolaters sank so low that they could not see the foolishness in confiding in images of wood and stone, and in believing the abstractions that they have conjured themselves.

Christians are forbidden to worship idols (Second Commandment); nevertheless, we must never diminish the LORD and pigeon-hole Him into a god of our own liking. God is to be worshipped not just for what He has done for us, but also for Who He is. ■

***Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: He is their help and their shield. The LORD hath been mindful of us: He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great.  
(Psalm 115:11-13)***

The heathen worship idols. They put their trust in a chunk of stone or a block of wood. Their faith is as misplaced as it is foolish.

The Christian worships the true and living God. The Psalmist expresses the Christian's worship as trusting God. To worship God is to ascribe honour to Him. Worship of God is an essential part of religion. Prayer is an essential part of religious worship. And prayer entails trust. It is foolish to pray without trusting. Thus the Psalmist repeatedly sounds the exhortation—trust in the LORD (vv. 9-11).

CHS: *"Trust in the LORD,"* whether belonging to Israel, or to the house of Aaron, or not, all those who reverence Jehovah are permitted and commanded to confide in Him... These repeated exhortations were rendered necessary by the trying condition in which the children of Israel were found... All this would be very staggering to faith, and therefore they were bidden again and again and again to trust in Jehovah... [Likewise, in the age of blasphemy,] the skeptic is loud in unbelief, [but] let us be equally open in the avowal of our faith."

To trust God is to obey Him. To trust God is to put our lives into His hand. When we come to the point where we see no road ahead of us, we hold to God all the more tightly, so that He becomes our help and shield. This is the trust that opens the door of God's blessings. God will bless those who put their trust in Him. This promise is repeated four times. Regardless of your background and status, as you trust in God, He will bless. Where He has blessed once, He will continue to bless without ceasing. More blessings will in turn evoke deeper trust and fervent worship. This is the holy cycle of a Christian's spiritual growth. ■

***The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD. (Psalm 115:17-18)***

God blesses both great and small as long as they fear and trust in Him (v. 13), and the Psalmist says that God's blessings extend to the children. This applies to the blessing of salvation. Not all will be saved, but everyone—regardless of his station in life—who puts his trust in the Son of God will be.

God also blesses both great and small with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3b). This means that spiritual growth is not restricted to a select few. On the contrary, it is God's desire to bless. The only hindrance comes from us—we have not because we ask not (James 4:2), and we ask not because we trust Him not. But to all who trust in the LORD, He "giveth to all men liberally" (James 1:5). God blesses even in death. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (Ps. 116:15)—both great and small alike.

Our response in light of God's blessings is to praise Him. The spiritually dead cannot praise the LORD. CHS: "*The dead praise not the LORD!...They cannot unite in the Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with which the church delights to adore her Lord. The preacher cannot magnify the LORD from his coffin, nor the Christian worker further manifest the power of divine grace by daily activity while he lies in the grave...The tomb sends forth no voice...[from there] arises no sound of gospel ministry.*"

If Christians would not praise God, then who will? If we do not praise now, then when should we? The ministry of worship here is the work of believers, and the time of ministry is now. "We will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore." We who have been redeemed and are still living must continue in our praises for God. ■

***Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and He helped me. (Psalm 116:5-6)***

**T**he one hundred and sixteenth psalm is an intensely personal psalm, in which the Psalmist reveals his fears of dying but ends with an affirmation of God's faithfulness. The context of this psalm tells us that the Psalmist was afflicted with a sickness so severe that he thought he was going to die, but God delivered him. Hence, the Psalmist's opening declaration is, "I love the LORD" (v. 1).

What grounds did the Psalmist have for speaking with such confidence? First, "I love the LORD" is a reflection of a greater truth—it is God Who first loved us. Second, the Psalmist had a record of God's faithfulness in his life. The Psalmist's experience of answered prayers prompted him to call upon the LORD as long as he lived (v. 2). Thus when death pounded on his door, the Psalmist instinctively called upon God, "LORD; O LORD, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul" (v. 4).

CHS: "In hearing prayer the grace and righteousness of Jehovah are both conspicuous. It is a great favour to hear a sinner's prayer, and yet since the LORD has promised to do so, He is not unrighteous to forget His promise and disregard the cries of His people...*'Yea, our God is merciful'*...He would never have been our God if He had not been merciful."

God's grace, righteousness and mercy come in great supply—not to the wise fool but to the simple in faith. The Septuagint translates "simple" in this verse as "babes", implying those who have no guile and worldly craftiness. The simple trust in God; and He preserves them. The simple are brought low, but the LORD does not pass them by. What a blessing it is to know that the God of the universe stops by us and stoops to help when we have fallen. ■

***I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted...I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. (Psalm 116:10-13)***

The faith of the Psalmist is greatly tested, and it is not found wanting. The greater the testing is, the stronger his declaration of faith. "I believed, therefore have I spoken." It was a testing that revealed to the Psalmist the futility of man. His friends and family, on whom he might presume to rely on for help, had failed him. The sweet words of friendship remained just words. Hence, he lamented, "All men are liars."

But not God. The trying times and the fair-weather friends stand in great contrast to the faithful God. The afflictions affirmed the Psalmist's faith in God and afforded the opportunity to teach and testify of his faith. It was a faith that said "I believe even..."

CHS: "Though greatly afflicted, the Psalmist had not ceased to believe: his faith was tried but not destroyed. 'I could not have spoken thus if it had not been for my faith: I should never have spoken unto God in prayer, nor have been able now to speak to my fellow men in testimony if it had not been that faith kept me alive, and brought me a deliverance...Concerning the things of God no man should speak unless he believes...the most powerful speech which has ever been uttered by the lips of man has emanated from a heart fully persuaded of the truth of God.'"

Learn from the Psalmist. There are some whose faith in the LORD fails when tested. They become cynical. Such faith is weak (Prov. 24:10). The Psalmist's faith, on the other hand, is strengthened by testing (James 1:3-4). The cup of testing may be bitter, but to the one who trust in God, there is also the cup of salvation. In his hour of crisis, the Psalmist became a true believer; what will you become? ■

***Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.  
(Psalm 116:15)***

Death is a certainty (Heb. 9:27), but the views concerning death differs according to one's perspective on life. The evolutionist sees death of a man as a part of a natural process, no different from the beast in the field. The heathen fear dying because it brings an uncertain and dreadful future. But to a child of God, death is deliverance. If we have walked before Him in the land of the living, we need not fear to die before Him when the hour of our departure is at hand. God manifests His mercy by deliverance, and the final deliverance from the sorrows and pains of life is death.

CHS: "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints!* They shall not die prematurely; they shall be immortal till their work is done... Those who are redeemed with His precious blood are so dear to God that even their deaths are precious to Him. The death-beds of saints are very precious to the church, she often learns much from them; they are very precious to all believers, who delight to treasure up the last words of the departed; but they are most of all precious to LORD Jehovah Himself... The LORD watches over their dying beds, smooths their pillows, sustains their hearts, and receives their souls."

The Psalmist says that the LORD looks at the death of the saints as precious, meaning that the LORD regards the death of His redeemed as something of great value. There are great purposes to be accomplished by it. There is great glory associated with it. God loves us so much that when He removes His children from this world, it is an act of predetermined purpose to achieve some great end. What ends could death achieve? The departed saint adds to the hosts of heaven. Death proves the veracity of Holy Scripture. Above all, the death of the saint demonstrates the glorious victory of redemption. ■

***O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise Him, all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD. (Psalm 117:1-2)***

Psalm 117 is the shortest in the whole psalter, but it contains the grandest theme in the Bible—the enduring love of God. The Psalmist calls on all the nations and all the people to praise God; in other words, it was a call issued to the whole world—Jews and Gentiles alike (John 3:16).

CHS: God’s merciful kindness is great toward us. “By which is meant not only His great love towards the Jewish people, but towards the whole family of man. The LORD is kind to us as His creatures, and merciful to us as sinners, hence His merciful kindness to us as sinful creatures. In Christ Jesus, God has shown mercy mixed with kindness, and that to the very highest degree...He has kept His covenant promise that in the seed of Abraham should all nations of the earth be blessed, and He will eternally keep every single promise of that covenant to all those who put their trust in Him.”

In expressing the greatness of God’s love, the Psalmist uses a term that describes God’s love through its power to prevail over all situations and people. God’s love is so great it prevails over all adversities. God’s love is so great it prevails over our sins. Paul says, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

God’s love prevails, and His truth endures forever for all peoples in all nations. What can man do but to praise Him? Isaac Watts’ hymn would be appropriate in this light:

*From all that dwell below the skies,  
Let the Creator’s praise arise;  
Let the Redeemer’s Name be sung,  
Through every land, by every tongue.*

*Eternal are Thy mercies, LORD;  
Eternal truth attends Thy Word.  
Thy praise shall sound from shore to shore,  
Till suns shall rise and set no more. ■*

***Let them now that fear the LORD say, that His mercy endureth for ever. (Psalm 118:4)***

The one hundred and seventh psalm serves as a good prelude to Psalm 118. This psalm is the last of the Egyptian Hallel. It was sung at the conclusion of the Passover, and the Jews who understood very well the significance of the feast were summoned to praise God because His mercy endureth forever (vv. 2-4). The call to worship was also issued to all who fear the LORD.

CHS: "If there were any throughout the world who did not belong to Israel after the flesh, but nevertheless had a holy fear of God, the Psalmist calls upon them to unite with him in thanksgiving...There is a repetition of the exhortation to *say*...We are not only to believe, but also to declare the goodness of God; truth is not to be hushed up, but proclaimed...[Christians should count it our greatest joy to speak of the glory of God.] We should shout 'Hosanna' and sing loud 'Hallelujahs.'" We should all affirm the end of every prayer with a thunderous "Amen."

The person who is timid in his praises for God is telling the world he is fearful of man, and showing his lack of reverence for God. Christians are to fear God, proclaim His mercy, and we are to do it *now*. There is no better time like the present to tell the world about the goodness of God. "Now" also means always. To praise God now is to never cease from praising.

Can a Christian stop praising God? Hardly, it is remiss on our part to cease praising God Whose mercy never ceases. The seventeenth century British poet, John Milton, captures this theme of unceasing praise with these words:

*Let us, with a gladsome mind,  
Praise the LORD, for He is kind.  
For His mercies aye endure,  
Ever faithful, ever sure.*

*Let us blaze His Name abroad,  
For of gods He is the God.  
For His mercies aye endure,  
Ever faithful, ever sure. ■*

***The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?...  
It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is  
better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.  
(Psalm 118:6, 8-9)***

The one hundred and eighteenth psalm opens with a call to worship. This is followed with a description of the confidence of the worshipper. The Psalmist who fears God (v. 4) is fearful of nothing else (v. 6). Martin Luther is especially fond of this Psalm. He called it his own beloved psalm. He wrote, "When emperors and kings, the wise and the learned, and even saints could not aid me, this psalm proved a friend and helped me out of many great troubles. As a result, it is dearer to me than all the wealth, honour, and the power of the pope."

Verse 6 is one that was used by many martyrs who perished during the Sixteenth Century Reformation. The question was asked, "What can man do unto me?" Quite a bit. He kills in rage. He lies. He oppresses. History of mankind is replete with man's inhumanity against his fellow man. But the wicked can do no more than what God permits. The Psalmist is not fearful of man because he is sure of God's presence with him. He is not fearful because his life is safe in God's hands.

CHS: The LORD was on his side. God was for him. The Psalmist "rejoiced in the divine help; all men turned against him, but God was his defender and advocate, accomplishing the divine purposes of His grace...He does not say that he should not suffer, but that he would not fear: the favour of God infinitely outweighed the hatred of men...[thus] he had no reason to be afraid. He was calm and confident, though surrounded with enemies, and so let all believers be, for thus they honour God."

There is a saying that goes, "One with God is a majority." David was with God, and the mighty Goliath was no match for him. Daniel was with God, and the Babylonians could do nothing against him. The Psalmist was with God and thus he was fearless. Is God with you? ■

***I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD hath chastened me sore: but He hath not given me over unto death. (Psalm 118:17-18)***

**F**aith in God does not spare a man from sufferings. Neither does the presence of God exempt him from the pain of sufferings. The Psalmist was surrounded by his enemies. They hovered over him like a swarm of bees. Nevertheless, the Psalmist declares, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD."

CHS: "He is cheerfully assured that no arrow could carry death between the joints of his harness, and no weapon of any sort could end his career. His time had not yet come, he felt immortality beating within his bosom. Perhaps he had been sick, and brought to death's door, but he had a presentiment that the sickness was not unto death, but to the glory of God...Feeling that he would live he devoted himself to the noblest of purposes: he resolved to bear witness to the divine faithfulness...The LORD's prophets shall live on in the midst of famine, and war, and plague, and persecution, till they have uttered all the words of their prophecy; His priests shall stand at the altar unharmed till their last sacrifice has been presented before Him."

Verse 17 was especially dear to William Cowper, the hymn writer. Cowper was committed to an asylum as a young man because of his depression. In the hospital, Cowper tried three times to kill himself. In one of his poems written after his suicidal attempt, he wrote, "Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portions." Here was a man who had no hope before he found hope in Christ Jesus. What a change we see in Cowper who were to give us such wonderful hymns as "God Moves in a Mysterious Way", "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood", and a relatively unknown one entitled, "Peace After a Storm":

*When darkness long has veil'd my mind,  
And smiling day once more appears;  
Then, my Redeemer, then I find  
The folly of my doubts and fears.*

*Straight I upbraid my wand'ring heart,  
And blush that I should ever be  
Thus prone to act so base a part,  
Or harbour one hard thought of Thee! ■*

***Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD: This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter...The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. (Psalm 118: 19-20, 22)***

The one hundred and eighteenth psalm traces the last leg of Israel's journey out of Egypt, and thus there is a sense of triumph as the song progresses. The exodus is a picture of our own journey of redemption. Our deliverer is the blessed Son of God. He is the Gate "into which the righteous shall enter." Jesus said, "I am the Door of the sheep...by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:7,9).

CHS: The Psalmist loved the gate of the LORD "because it was the gate of righteousness...The Lord Jesus has passed that way, and not only set the gate wide open, but secured an entrance for all those who are made righteous in His righteousness: all the righteous must and shall enter there."

In Christ we also see that "the stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." CHS: God had appointed His chosen Servant to the office. Christ "is the living stone, the tried stone, elect, precious, which God Himself appointed...[The Jews] rejected Him with disdain. They could see no excellence in Him...He could not be made to fit in with their ideal of a national church...therefore they cast Him away and poured contempt upon Him... [But] in raising Him from the dead the LORD God exalted Him to be the head of His church...and He has become the confidence [of the redeemed—Jews and Gentiles alike]."

The corner stone is also a place of preeminence. Rightfully, Christ is "the head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22b). He is the One "in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). But sadly, today, there are only a few Christians who have Christ as their preeminence. To many He may not be rejected, but certainly He is laid aside. But what is the difference? What real benefit is there for us when Christ is our Saviour but not our Lord? ■

***Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD. God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. (Psalm 118:26-27)***

“**B**lessed be He that cometh in the name of the LORD.” These are words of welcome. In the Psalmist’s days, the Lord was the Coming One. In the time of the Apostles, He was welcomed but only briefly for He was soon betrayed and crucified. In our day, Christ is still the Coming One although He had already come once. Today, unbelievers scoff at the idea of a Coming Christ. But as God’s people, we must be ready with our hosannas. We must be waiting and ready to receive Him with joy. Every believer must wait for His return with great anticipation, “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13). The Psalmist refers to Him as the LORD—Jehovah—the God Who saves. Such wonderful knowledge can only be known by divine revelation.

CHS: “We have received light, by which we have known the rejected stone to be the head of the corner, and this light...[shows that the despised Nazarene is the Prince of Peace]. Our knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ came not by the light of nature, nor by reason, nor did it arise from the sparks which we ourselves had kindled, nor did we receive it of men; but the mighty God alone hath showed it to us.”

The Psalmist takes one step further. It is not enough to know that God is the LORD. He says, “Thou art my God.” Jesus asked the disciples, “Whom do men say that I am?” (Mark 8:27). The disciples told Jesus what others thought of Him. Then Jesus asked again, “But whom say ye that I am?” (Mark 8:29). It does not matter what others think of Christ. But it matters a great deal what you think of Him. Is the LORD your God? ■

***Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart. (Psalm 119:1-2)***

The one hundred and nineteenth psalm is the longest psalm in the Psalter. It has 22 stanzas with eight verses in every stanza. It is acrostic, meaning to say that every verse of every stanza begins with a letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Thus the first eight verses begin with *aleph*; the next eight begin with *beth*. This acrostic pattern is marked by subheadings in the English versions.

Psalm 119 is so rich that volumes have been written on it. The most impressive commentary was written by Thomas Manton whose three-volume work on this Psalm totalled 1,677 pages. This is a glorious psalm because it has a glorious theme—the Word of God. Almost every verse in this psalm has a reference to the Word of God. There are no less than eight synonyms for “Scripture”—law, word (*dabar*), word (*imrah*), ordinances, testimonies, commandments, statutes, and precepts.

It has always been man’s desire and God’s intent that man be happy. Throughout history, men have tried to achieve happiness by pursuing wealth, status, love, and power. But these pursuits always fall short because even the best of men’s intentions are warped by sin. God offers a recipe for true happiness—“Blessed are the undefiled in the way...Blessed are they that keep His testimonies.” Happiness is not a state—it is a journey—the more we walk in Him, the more blessed we will be.

CHS: “They are doubly blessed whose outward life is supported by an inward zeal for God’s glory. Blessedness is ascribed to those who treasure up the testimonies of the LORD...they search the Scriptures...they love them... they continue in the practice of them...If we keep God’s testimonies they will keep us; they will keep us right in opinion, comfortable in spirit, holy in conversation, and hopeful in expectation.” ■

***Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word...Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee. (Psalm 119:9,11)***

Doctor's advice is that we should get a full physical every year, and one that would include an examination of the heart, to make sure that its arteries are clear, its beats are regular, and so on. But more importantly, the spiritual heart needs to be examined too, and every believer needs to ask, "What is the condition of my heart?"

We keep our physical hearts in good working order by being careful about what we feed our bodies. Likewise, we keep our spiritual hearts in good condition by being mindful of what we feed our souls.

When shall this feeding of the soul begin?—at the earliest possible moment in a person's life. Paul said that "from a child," Timothy has known the holy scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15). The child is used in the Bible to refer to infants and even unborn babies. Many parents have been fed on the devil's lie that they must allow their children to make their own choices with regard to their religion. And while they wait for their children to be "old" enough to decide for themselves, the world poisons the children's minds.

Thus it is important that we take heed to God's Word. CHS: "No nobler ambition can lie before a believer, none to which he is called by so sure a calling; but none in which greater difficulties can be found. Let him not, however, shrink from...[the pursuit of a pure life]...rather, let him enquire the way by which all obstacles may be overcome...Let him become a practical disciple of the holy God, Who alone can teach him how to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil...Let him not be ashamed often to enquire [God's way because He]... is so ready and so able to instruct him in it." ■

***I am a stranger in the earth: hide not Thy commandments from me. (Psalm 119:19)***

Our Lord says there are two ways—there is a broad way that leads to destruction and many there be which go in there at. There is also a narrow way that leads to life, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:13-14). The broad way is also the popular way. Hence it should not surprise us that if we walk God's narrow way of life, we would be regarded as strangers in this earth. As Christians, we are strangers in the earth in the sense that we are mere passers-by. As the chorus tells us

*This world is not my home I'm just a passing through,  
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue  
The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door  
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.  
(Jim Reeves)*

We are strangers also in the sense that we are out of place in this world. As Christians, we are called out of the darkness of the world by God Whom the world neither believes nor honours. And the only way for us to be successful strangers is for God to show us His way.

CHS: "The Psalmist was a stranger for God's sake, else had he been as much at home as world lings are: he was not a stranger to God, but a stranger to the world...[If God's commandments are gone,] what have I else?...What can I do if I lose Thy Word?...God's commands were his solace in his exile: they remind him of home; and they showed him the way thither."

The Bible is our light through this dark world. If there is no light, what is the use of sight? We would be as hopeless without light as we would be without sight. Thus while we pray that God would open our eyes, we also pray that He would not hide His truth from us. ■

# 25 Psalm 119:25-32

OCTOBER

I Have Chosen...

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***I have chosen the way of truth: Thy judgements have I laid before me. I have stuck unto Thy testimonies: O LORD, put me not to shame. (Psalm 119:30-31)***

The Psalmist has been praying—"Teach Me Thy statutes...Make me to understand...Strengthen Thou me according unto Thy Word...Grant me Thy law" (vv. 26-29). God heard his prayers and set before him the way of truth, implying that there is also the way of lies. Now we have to choose.

CHS: "A man must choose one or the other, for there cannot be any neutrality in the case. Men do not drop into the right way by chance; they must choose it, and continue to choose it, or they will soon wander from it...There is a doctrinal way of truth which we ought to choose, rejecting every dogma of man's devising. There is a ceremonial way of truth which we should follow, detesting all the forms which apostate churches have invented; and then there is a practical way of truth, the way of holiness, to which we must adhere."

Our life is a never ending series of choices. We have a choice every day—to live for God or to live for the world. Not to choose is in itself a choice. Man's own wilful choice, because of his fallen human nature, is never the way of God. It is only by God's grace that He grants us the will to choose the way of truth and holiness.

Having chosen, the Psalmist says that he laid God's judgements before him. It literally means to set God's judgements before our minds as the guide of our conduct and the aim of our lives. Holy living is unnatural to the natural man. We do not become godly by mere wishing, but there must be diligent study of Holy Scripture, deliberate observing of God's statutes, and a devoted commitment to our blessed Saviour. ■

***Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. (Psalm 119:33-34)***

The Psalmist prays, "Teach me, O LORD...give me understanding." CHS: The Psalmist "not only needs teaching, but the power to learn: he requires not only to understand, but to obtain *an understanding*. How low has sin brought us; for we even lack the faculty to understand spiritual things, and are quite unable to know them till we are endowed with spiritual discernment."

The natural man cannot understand spiritual truths (1 Cor. 2:14), and it is only by the grace of God through the illumination of the Holy Spirit that we can understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:12).

We need to pray for God's understanding; not so that we may be known as wise, but that we may know how to be godly. The Christian ought not to disdain divine wisdom because it is by the renewing of our minds that we are transformed (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23).

Christianity is an intelligent faith. God gives us His Word so that we, in studying and obeying it, may be "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17).

How shall I praise Him? Where shall I serve Him? Our understanding of God's will in these areas is important. We need God's understanding in worship because we must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Intelligent worship means that we must know the God Whom we worship, and we must praise Him with understanding (1 Cor. 14:15). We need God's understanding for our faith because our faith is resting upon God's promises. And to believe God's promises, we must understand what they are. We need God's understanding for our spiritual growth (2 Pet. 3:18). We need God's understanding in knowing God's will (Rom. 12:1-2). We need God's understanding in our witnessing so that we will "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Be renewed in your mind because it does matter. ■

***So shall I keep Thy law continually for ever and ever. And I will walk at liberty: for I seek Thy precepts. I will speak of Thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. (Psalm 119:44-46)***

Liberty is not a western democratic concept. As a matter of fact, the western idea of liberty is a perversion of biblical liberty. Liberty, as the unbelieving world defines it, is the freedom to do as one pleases. Christian liberty, however, is to keep God's law continually. True liberty is to be freed from our own self-centredness so that we may be free to live for God.

CHS: "Saints find no bondage in sanctity. The Spirit of holiness is a free spirit; He sets men at liberty and enables them to resist every effort to bring them under subjection... God's mercies and His salvation, by teaching us to love the precepts of the word, set us at a happy rest; and the more we seek after the perfection of our obedience the more shall we enjoy complete emancipation from every form of spiritual slavery."

Thus, the first thing in a man's life is to find the right master, and not your own freedom. When you have found the right Master, you will find freedom (John 8:36). But if you start with looking for your own freedom, you will soon find that you are a slave to every whim.

To be free in Christ is also to be free from the fear of man. The Psalmist says that he will testify of God's truths before kings. Martin Luther was brought before Emperor Charles V and the representatives of Rome at the Diet of Worms to recant his teachings. After a night of prayer, Luther said, "My heart is held captive by the Word of God... I cannot and will not recant. Here I stand. I can do no other." Like Martin Luther, we ought neither to be afraid of men nor be ashamed of Christ and His Gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). ■

***Remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope...I remembered Thy judgements of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself. (Psalm 119:49, 52)***

**W**hat do you do when you are discouraged? Where do you go when it seems that the whole world is turned against you? David found himself in such a situation when his friends turned against him after their families were kidnapped by the Amalekites. The men who had sought David's help turned against him. In their grief, they even threatened to stone him, "but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God" (1 Sam. 30:6c).

The Psalmist too called upon God when he was in trouble. "Remember the word unto Thy servant...This is my comfort in my affliction" (vv. 49-50). The word "remember" appears three times in this stanza (vv. 49, 52, 55). In verse 49, it was an appeal by the Psalmist to God to remember His promises. That was the Psalmist's hope; it was his only source of comfort.

CHS: The Psalmist "asks for no new promise, but to have the old word fulfilled. He is grateful that he has received so good a word, he embraces it with all his heart, and now entreats the LORD to deal with him according to it. He does not say, 'remember my service to Thee,' but 'Thy Word to me'".

This was the Psalmist's personal plea, just like the thief's prayer to our Lord Jesus, "Remember me" (Luke 23:42). The hope is real only if it is true to you personally. It would be a tragedy if God's promise was remembered by all others but it did not come true to you. However, that will never be the case because the LORD will not forget anyone who calls upon Him.

The next two usages of "remember" were promises on the part of the Psalmist in which he asserted that he would never forget God's laws and His name. In other words, his faith in God would not change with circumstances. God is unchangeable, and His promises are sure. Our faith and true comfort must rest on His Person, His Word and His works. ■

***Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep Thy words...I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies. (Psalm 119:57-59)***

The Psalmist was not satisfied with the *presents* of God, he would rather have the *presence* of God; hence he said, "Thou are my portion." What he meant was that God was his inheritance. This prayer reveals the heart of the Psalmist. After the children of Israel had conquered Canaan, they divided the land among themselves. But the Levites were not given any land. Instead, they were given 48 cities scattered all over the land so that they could minister to the people readily. They had no land, but they had a better inheritance. "Unto the tribe of Levi Moses gave not any inheritance: the LORD God of Israel was their inheritance" (Josh. 13:33). God was their portion. Likewise, when the Psalmist said, "Thou art my portion," he wants nothing from God but God Himself.

CHS: The Psalmist "is lost in wonder while he sees that the great and glorious God is all his own!...[He] has seen the prey [spoils] divided, and heard the victors shouting over it...but he chooses the LORD to be his part of the treasure. This is a large and lasting heritage, for it includes all, and more than all, and it outlasts all...[With so much in the world to seek after, the Psalmist] deliberately turns from all the treasures of the world, and declares that the LORD, even Jehovah, is his portion."

To claim God as our portion is the essence of true worship. We miss a whole lot of blessings if we praise God only for what He can do and neglect to extol Him for Who He is. When God is our portion, we naturally live to please Him. The Psalmist said, "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies." This is one of the greatest turning points in every believer's life. When we come to recognise God for who He is, He will also come to us. We see ourselves for who we really are, as well as the direction that we are heading; and we will turn from our own ways and towards our Saviour. What a blessed change this is! ■

***It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes. The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver. (Psalm 119:71-72)***

**W**hy do bad things happen to good people? Philosophers and theologians have grappled with this question for centuries. The argument goes that if God is good, there should be no suffering; and if there is pain, God is not good, not powerful or both.

God dealt with this issue in the oldest Book of the Bible—Job. The existence of man's suffering is not inconsistent with that of a loving God. There are several reasons for suffering. We live in a fallen and imperfect world. "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Suffering brings about repentance. Suffering that drives you to your knees in humble contrition before God is good.

There is a rare genetic disorder known as CIPA in which the person suffering from it does not feel pain, heat or cold. A person with this condition can be running a high fever or cut himself, but he feels no pain, and thus he does not seek treatment. Likewise, the sinner who does not feel the pain of sin will not seek God's treatment for his soul. The Psalmist says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy word" (v. 67). Suffering is productive. It is like the fire that burns off the dross and refines the gold (Rom. 5:3-4). Suffering glorifies God (John 9:1-3).

The Psalmist recognises the hand of God in his suffering; "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." CHS: Affliction "was overruled for good ends... Whatever he may have thought while under the trial, he perceived himself to be the better for it when it was over...It is bad for sinners to rejoice in their sins, and good for saints to sorrow in God...Very little is to be learned without affliction...Experience teaches. There is no royal road to learning the royal statutes; God's commands are best read by eyes wet with tears." ■

***I know, O LORD, that Thy judgements are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me. Let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Thy word unto Thy servant. (Psalm 119:75-76)***

Our Lord Jesus referred to the *jod* as the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, but the *jod* stanza in this Psalm deals with a very important issue in our Christian life—intelligent faith amidst inexplicable suffering. God did not make man like how He made beasts. God fashioned us and gave us understanding to know Him and His ways (v. 73), even when the ways are difficult. The Psalmist prays for understanding of God’s faithfulness in two areas—in His affliction and in His mercy.

CHS: “Because love required severity, therefore the LORD exercised it...It was the faithfulness of God to His covenant which brought the chosen one under the rod. It might not be needful that others should be tried just then; but it was necessary to the Psalmist, and therefore the LORD did not withhold the blessing. Our heavenly Father is no Eli: He will not suffer His children to sin without rebuke, His love is too intense for that.”

God Who is faithful and true to Himself must bring judgement upon sin, but He always chastens in love because amidst the affliction, there is God’s abundant mercy.

CHS: “Having confessed the righteousness of the LORD, he [the Psalmist] now appeals to His mercy, and while he does not ask that the rod may be removed, he earnestly begs for comfort under it. Righteousness and faithfulness afford us no consolation if we cannot also taste of mercy, and, blessed be God [in whom there is multitude of mercy, and therefore we may expect it].”

This is exactly what we need—a need for God’s chastening so that we may walk in godliness and a need for God’s mercy to forgive our sins and to sustain us in our sorrows. God loves us, and He loves us too much to leave us in our sinful ways. We must “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). ■

*Psalm 78:4-7 | We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength, and His wonderful works that He hath done...That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments*



November

***My soul fainteth for Thy salvation: but I hope in Thy word...They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not Thy precepts. Quicken me after Thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of Thy mouth. (Psalm 119:81, 87-88)***

The first few verses constitute the lowest point in the whole Psalm. The Psalmist says that his “soul fainteth; his “eyes fail;” he is shriveled like a wineskin in the smoke; he is in the pits; he is all but consumed; and his days are numbered (vv. 81-85). However, the Psalmist looks to no one but God for His deliverance. “My soul fainteth for Thy salvation.” Where does the Psalmist look for God’s deliverance? In His Word.

CHS: “Nothing else could satisfy him but deliverance wrought out by the hand of God, his inmost nature yearned and pined for salvation from the God of all grace, and he must have it or utterly fail...[He is sure that] salvation would come, for God cannot break His promise; nor disappoint the hope which His own word has excited.”

Our lives too must be infused with this hope—a hope that perseveres in prayer, one that increases our fervency in pleading with God, one that thrives in adversity, one that stimulates our faith and sustains our service.

The Psalmist is depressed but he is not defeated. Where does he find this enduring hope? Alexander Pope’s famous line, “Hope springs eternal in the human breast”, is often quoted to mean that man in his worst times will always hope for the best. That may be true, but it is both a foolish thought and a false hope, if our faith is anchored on our own mind and fortitude. Hope springs eternal in the human breast only if that hope rests upon the eternal God, and we can find and have that hope in His Word (vv. 81, 83, 86-88). ■

***For ever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. (Psalm 119:89-90)***

**T**he Psalmist was thrown into the pit of persecution and sinking in the mire of misery, but he hoped in God's Word, and that was the Rock upon which he stood. He can trust in God's Word because "it is settled in heaven."

CHS: "Jehovah's Word is not fickle nor uncertain; it is settled, determined, fixed, sure, immovable. Man's teachings change...but the LORD's Word is from of old the same, and will remain unchanged eternally. The power and glory of heaven have confirmed each sentence which the mouth of the LORD has spoken, and so confirmed it that to all eternity it must stand the same—settled in heaven, where nothing can reach it. God's purposes, promises, and precepts are all settled in His own mind, and none of them shall be disturbed. Covenant settlements will not be removed, however unsettled the thoughts of men may become; let us therefore settle it in our minds that we abide in the faith of our Jehovah as long as we have any being."

God's Word is settled and preserved. Atheists have tried to demolish it through arguments. Tyrants have attempted to destroy it by force. Apostates have sought to diminish it by adding and subtracting from it. Yet the Word of God has survived despite men's worst schemes and best intentions. The Word of God continues to thrive today. God's Word is settled on earth. His faithfulness "is unto all generations." God will keep His Word so that no man will ever be deprived of His truth.

God's faithfulness in turn demands that we do not forget His precepts (v. 93). In facetiousness, I once asked, "What is the best Bible?" To which many would point to one version or another. But the best Bible is actually *the read Bible*. The unread Bible is blight upon God's people and His church. God's Word is settled, so let us study it. ■

***I have more understanding than all my teachers: for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Thy precepts. (Psalm 119:99-100)***

Do you love God's Word? It seems like a superfluous question to ask Christians. However, the sad reality is that many who claim to love God do not read His Word, which has been described by many as God's love letter to us. I know something about love letters. My wife and I exchanged over a thousand of hand-written letters during the three years while we were apart.

Do you meditate upon God's Word? To meditate is to have God's Word on your mind in the course of the day. The orthodox Jew wears on his forehead, a phylactery—a box containing a portion of Scripture—as a picture of this constant meditation on God's Word.

Because he loved and meditated on God's Word, the Psalmist was able to say that he was wiser than his teachers. CHS: "Our teachers are not always to be trusted; in fact, we may not follow any of them implicitly... [Instead we must] follow closely the chart of the Word of God, that we may be able to save the vessel when even the pilot errs. Disciples of Christ who sit at His feet are often better skilled in divine things than doctors of divinity."

The Psalmist was not in any way arrogant. Neither is he saying that we cannot learn from men. However, when man's wisdom is compared with God's revealed Truth, the former always comes out short. Man's wisdom is always lacking. God's Word, on the other hand, is sweet. We need that blessed sweetness because the Christian life is not all sweet. We live in a bitter world, and the only thing that can help us get through the bitter experiences of life is to delight in the sweetness of God's Word. It is the healing balm to our every hurt. ■

***Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.  
(Psalm 119:105)***

The Bible is not a mysterious book which only the elite few can understand. One of the most important contributions of the Sixteenth Century Reformers is to avail the Word of God to the ordinary Christian. As William Tyndale said, "The ploughboy who reads the Scriptures for himself will know more than Roman priests." The Bible is clear. It is a lamp unto our feet. It leads us in the way of truth and righteousness.

CHS: "We are walkers through the city of this world...let us never venture there without the light-giving word, lest we slip with our feet. Each man should use the word of God personally, practically, and habitually, that he may see his way and see what lies in it. When darkness settles down upon all around me, the word of the LORD, like a flaming torch, reveals my way...One of the most practical benefits of Holy Writ [Scriptures] is guidance in the acts of daily life: it is not sent to astound us with its brilliance, but to guide us by its instruction. It is true the head needs illumination, but even more the feet need direction, else head and feet may both fall into a ditch."

There are Christians who take God's Word as a light to mean that God will give them detailed instructions to every decision in their lives. This is not the purpose of God's Word. It is light in the sense that it reveals to us God's instructions with regard to the conduct and priorities of our life. No worldly philosophy gives this illumination. Only the Word of God is able to light our paths; and it is only when we obey His written precepts that we will be walking according to His ways. ■

# 05 Psalm 119:113-120

NOVEMBER

I Will Love Thy Law

Nov

***I hate vain thoughts: but Thy law do I love. Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in Thy Word. (Psalm 119:113-114)***

The Bible tells us that we live in perilous times, when “men shall be lovers of their own selves...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:1-4); and the situation deteriorates for “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3:13a). How then can Christians “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:12b)? The Psalmist’s prescription—“I hate vain thoughts: but Thy law do I love.”

CHS: “The opposite of the fixed and infallible law of God is the wavering, changing opinion of men...The thoughts of men are vanity; but the thoughts of God are verity...[Man’s thoughts are especially] vain in the sense of vain-glory, pride, conceit, and self trust...[empty and frivolous,] evil, and foolish... [The Psalmist looks upon them] with a hate as true as was the love with which he clung to the pure thoughts of God.”

The “vain thoughts” that the Psalmist hates are not merely futile ideas. They are also vacillating opinions of double-minded men. They worshipped Jehovah but also bowed to Baal. Elijah rebuked the Jews, “How long halt ye between two opinions?” (1 Kings 18:21).

A double-minded man is one who is not comfortable to have both feet in the world, but he is not committed enough to have both feet in the church. He puts his hand to God’s plough, but he is constantly looking back at the world. He worships God and gold. He prays to the Almighty, but he also pines for the world. He wants a semblance of piety, but he would not leave the pleasures of sin.

Christians, beware of the sin of double-mindedness (James 1:8; 4:8). Fix your mind on God and His Word alone. Let it direct your thoughts. Let it renew your mind. Let it fire your heart. Fly to the divine Author. Let Him be your hiding place against worldly wisdom. Let the LORD be your shield against the attacks of apostasy. Let God’s Word be your hope. ■

***Therefore I love Thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way. (Psalm 119:127-128)***

Throughout the one hundred and nineteenth psalm, the Psalmist had kept the spotlight on the Word of God. The Psalmist loved the law of God. It was his source of hope and comfort. He had kept the judgements of God. However, under the weight of oppression from his tormenters, it seemed that the Psalmist had taken his eyes off the Word of God. According to the Masoretes—copyists of the Hebrew Scriptures—verse 122 is the only verse that makes no reference to the Word of God. Perhaps, the Psalmist was distracted by his enemies, but only for a moment. It was not long before he reaffirmed his love for the Word of God.

CHS: "Far from being swayed by the example of evil men, so as to join them in slighting the Scriptures, he was the rather led into a more vehement love of them...It is the mark of a true believer that he does not depend upon others for his religion...Wealth brings with it so many conveniences that men naturally esteem it...and yet, in the judgement of the wise, God's laws are more enriching, and bring with them more comfort than all the choicest treasures. The Psalmist could not boast that he always kept the commands; but he could declare that he loved them; he was perfect in heart...He judged God's holy commands to be better than the best earthly thing."

We live in the age of relativism. A thing may be true to one yet false to another. It can be true today but false tomorrow. Nothing is binding. Nothing is concrete. Nothing is absolute. But God's Word is absolute, and He demands the absolute. Thus, we who claim to love the Word of God must also resolve to "hate every false way"; for we cannot love the right way without also hating the wrong ones. ■

***Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them. The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. (Psalm 119:129-130)***

**A**re you fascinated by how some things in life come to be? Do you look at nature and stand awestruck by its majestic beauty? Or have you lost that sense of wonder? The post-modern man who has a “scientific” explanation for everything in the world has robbed himself of that sense of wonder. He shuts himself away from the reality that there is actually something much bigger than himself which cannot be explained—God. God alone is truly wonderful. He is the Wonderful, Counsellor (Isa. 9:6). His works are wonderful (Ps. 40:5). God has made us—fear-inspiringly and wonderfully (Ps. 139:14). And the Psalmist adds one more observation to this list— God’s commands are wonderful.

CHS: “Wonderful in their nature, as being free from all error...wonderful in their effects as instructing, elevating, strengthening, and comforting the soul... It is wonderful that God should have borne testimony at all to sinful men, and more wonderful still that His testimony should be of such a character, so clear, so full, so gracious, so mighty.”

God’s Word is wonderful because it gives understanding. The Bible opens the window of our soul to all of life’s questions—what is important and what is not; what is right and what is wrong; what our priorities should be. A man who finds the Bible too simple is either too proud to admit his lack of understanding or too lazy to study it carefully. The Psalmist says that God’s Word gives understanding to the simple. The wonderful truths of the Bible are hidden from those who are wise in their own eyes. But the man who is simple is truly wise because he looks at everything through the prism of God’s Word; and life becomes real and meaningful. ■

***Righteous art Thou, O LORD, and upright are Thy judgements. Thy testimonies that Thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful. (Psalm 119:137-138)***

God's Word is wonderful—it gives us understanding (v. 130); it directs our life (v. 133); it is the means by which God blesses us (v. 135); it is the revelation of a righteous God (119:137).

Righteousness is God's Name—Jehovah Tsidkenu—The LORD our Righteousness (Jer. 23:6). CHS: The Psalmist "uses the sacred name [of God] in worship. He praises God by ascribing to Him perfect righteousness. God is always right, and He is always actively right, that is, righteous. This quality is bound up in our very idea of God. We cannot imagine an unrighteous God."

We also cannot imagine a righteous God Who overlooks the unrighteousness of man. Before we can stand in the presence of the righteous God, we must be declared righteous by Him. To be declared righteous is a judicial act. God, on the merits of His Son, declares sinners righteous not because He sets aside His laws, but that they are all met in Christ.

"Righteous art Thou"—righteousness is what God is. God's righteousness is expressed in His Word. His righteousness is everlasting (v. 142). He is righteous in all circumstances (v. 143). CHS: "Jehovah both saith and doth that which is right...This is a great stay to the soul in time of trouble. When we are most sorely afflicted, and cannot see the reason for the dispensation, we may fall back upon this most sure and certain fact, that God is righteous, and His dealings with us are righteous too."

I know of godly Christians who would read through the Bible and mark on the margins of some verses, the letters T and P. They stand for "tested and proven." Christians who have clung on to the Word of God in times of trouble will testify that God is righteous altogether. His Word never fails. "For all the promises of God in Him [Christ] are yea, and in Him Amen..." (2 Cor. 1:20). ■

***I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD: I will keep Thy statutes.  
I cried unto Thee; save me, and I shall keep Thy testimonies.  
(Psalm 119:145-146)***

Every Christian knows the importance of prayer. One writer describes prayer as the breath of the Christian. If that were so, it is no wonder so many Christians today are so short-breathed and wanting in stamina. EM Bounds wrote, "The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men... What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organisations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men mighty in prayer. God does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer."

The Psalmist believes in prayer. This stanza is an instruction manual on prayer. In these verses, the Psalmist tells us how he prayed (v. 145), what he prayed for (vv. 146, 149-150), when he prayed (v. 147), how long he prayed (v. 148), how his prayer was answered (v. 151), and his whole experience of prayer (v. 152).

The Psalmist prays—he cried unto God with his whole heart. CHS: "We cannot tell whether at all times he used his voice when he thus cried; but we are informed of something which is of much greater consequence, he cried with his heart. Heart-cries are the essence of prayer... His whole soul pleaded with God, his entire affections, his united desires all went out towards the living God... There may be no beauty of elocution about such prayers, no length of expression, no depth of doctrine, nor accuracy of diction; but if the whole heart be in them they will find their way to the heart of God."

Martin Luther gave a similar advice, "When you pray, rather let your heart be without words, than your words without heart." God delights in the earnest pleading of His people. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16b). ■

***I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not Thy Word. Consider how I love Thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to Thy loving-kindness. (Psalm 119:158-159)***

The Bible warns us against an empty profession in Christ. This has been a problem among Christians throughout history. God told Ezekiel that “they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness...they hear thy words, but they do them not” (Ezek. 33:31-32). God also told Isaiah the same thing, “This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me” (Isa. 29:13). Our Lord Jesus also used the same words to rebuke the Pharisees. Central to faith is obedience to God. Faith without obedience is worthless. Bishop JC Ryle says, “Open sin and avowed unbelief no doubt slay their thousands, but profession without practice slays its tens of thousands.” Thus the Psalmist was rightly grieved when the transgressors kept not God’s Word.

CHS: The Psalmist “was sorry to see such sinners...They were a sad sight to me, however fine their clothing or witty their chattering...My grief was occasioned more by their sin against God than by their enmity against myself. I could bear their evil treatment but not their neglect of Thy [God’s] Word.”

But lest we point out the mote in someone’s eye and overlook the beam in our own, the Psalmist affirms his love for God’s precepts. A precept is a principle to be practised. The Psalmist is not talking about theology but practical godliness through obedience. And obedience is not merely a matter of gritting our teeth and getting on with life. Obedience is coming to God and trusting in His Word; and allowing Him to quicken us to give us life (v. 156). ■

***Great peace have they which love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them. (Psalm 119:165)***

There are people who would pay thousands of dollars visiting psychologists just to have peace of mind. Others spend thousands more on pills to calm their frayed nerves. Neither has been effective. The divine prescription is simple—“Great peace have they which love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them” (v. 165).

CHS: “It deals not with those who perfectly keep the law, for where should such men be found? but with those who love it, whose hearts and hands are made to square with its precepts and demands. These men are...[walking] in obedience to the law, and though they are often persecuted they have peace, yea, *great* peace; for they have learned the secret of the reconciling blood, they have felt the power of the comforting Spirit...They have many troubles, and are likely to be persecuted by the proud, but their usual condition is that of deep calm—a peace too great for this little world to break.”

God’s Word is the Christian’s surest repose. When you are despised, remember that “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6b). When you are depressed, look “unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2a). When you are deserted, follow David’s example. He “encouraged himself in the LORD his God” (1 Sam. 30:6c).

“This book reveals the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and practise it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller’s map, the pilgrim’s staff, the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword, and the Christian’s charter...It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet...It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure.” The Bible is the Christian’s treasure, and loving it yields our greatest reward—peace. ■

***Let Thine hand help me; for I have chosen Thy precepts. I have longed for Thy salvation, O LORD; and Thy law is my delight. Let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee; and let Thy judgements help me. (Psalm 119:173-175)***

The Psalmist ends this great psalm with a clear and bold affirmation of God's promise, as well as His practical love and mercy. He prays, "Let Thine hand help me" (v. 173). Save me. "Let my soul live" (v. 175). He neither looked to himself nor his friends; instead, he pleaded with God for the Almighty alone was able and willing to save. This reminds us of Peter when he was walking on the water and beginning to sink. Peter did not look to his friends; instead, he cried out, "LORD, save me." And "immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him" (Matt. 14:31a).

If only sinners would be as desperate for God's salvation as Peter was desperate for Jesus' rescue. The Psalmist also has the same longing—"I have longed for Thy salvation, O LORD."

CHS: "He knew God's salvation, and yet he longed for it; that is to say, he had experienced a share of it, and he was therefore led to expect something yet higher and more complete. There is a salvation yet to come, when we shall be clean delivered from the body of this death, set free from all the turmoil and trouble of this mortal life, raised above the temptations and assaults of Satan, and brought near unto our God, to be like Him and with Him for ever and ever."

That should be every believer's desire as well—it certainly was Paul's. He told the Philippians, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you" (Phil. 1:23-24). For every day that God gives to you on earth, there is a purpose. The Psalmist says, "Let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee" (v. 175a). The chief end of men is "to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." Live your life to the fullest, but live it for the glory of God. Let your life praise Him. ■

# 13 Psalm 120:1-7

NOVEMBER

Songs of Degrees

Nov

***Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar! My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war. (Psalm 120:5-7)***

Psalms 120-134 are collectively known as the songs of degrees. Spurgeon describes them as a “psalter within a psalter”. The word “degrees” refers to something that is ascending. There are several meanings as to what the degrees refer. There are some who say that degrees refer to the literary device in the psalms where one thought is carried to the next level. Others believe that the degrees refer to the steps in the temple. A third group says that degrees refer to the Jews going up to Jerusalem from Babylon at the end of their 70-year exile. The best explanation, in my opinion, is that these are songs that the Jews sang as they made their way to Jerusalem for the annual feasts.

A pilgrim is a traveller, one who is on his way. The Psalmist sees himself as a pilgrim on this earth. He realises that he does not fit into the world around him. So he cries out to God, “Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue” (v. 2).

The Psalmist knows what it is like to be in this world. He has experienced it in Mesech and Kedar. He has even made friends with its citizens (vv. 5-6). Can truth abide with falsehood? Can Christ and Baal have any concord? Can we be at home in a world that is anti-Christ? CHS: “A peace-maker is a blessing, but a peace-hater is a curse. To lodge with such [a peace-hater] for a night is dangerous, but to dwell with them is horrible.”

The Psalmist is for peace, but he lives among those who are for war (v. 7). From the psalm, it does not appear that his prayer was answered. We do not always get what we want. David lived in the midst of treacherous “friends”. Daniel lived among enemies. Let the words of Paul encourage you: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18); that would include quarrelsome ones. And even so, we must learn to be peacemakers. ■

***I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.  
My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.  
(Psalm 121:1-2).***

Psalm 121 is appropriately known as the Traveller's Psalm. David Livingstone read this psalm before he set out for Africa. The Jews must have sung this psalm as they made their way to Jerusalem. The journey must have been long and hard, but as the hills of Judah appeared in the distance, there was a fresh wind of strength; and thus they sang, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

The reading in the Authorised Version seems to imply that the Psalmist was looking to the hills for God's help, but this is not the case. As the hills came into view, it was a sign that the Temple was near, and that it would not be long before he could worship the LORD Who made heaven and earth.

CHS: "What we need is help... What a mercy that we have it in our God. Our hope is in Jehovah, for our help comes from Him... Jehovah Who created all things is equal to every emergency; heaven and earth are at the disposal of Him Who made them, therefore let us be very joyful in our infinite Helper. We are bound to look beyond heaven and earth to Him Who made them both: it is vain to trust the creatures: it is wise to trust the Creator."

The Psalmist is not saying that the believer will only have bright and sunny days, but that the LORD will be just a prayer away at all times and in all circumstances, and especially in the bad ones. The Christian life is neither a walk in a well-manicured garden, nor a cruise in a super-liner; rather, it is a testing journey walking towards God, and all of us travel the same road and are on the same ground. There will be happy days and there will be sad ones. Everyone will grow old, get sick and eventually die. But the Christian's joy is that each day brings us one day nearer to the LORD Who made heaven and earth. ■

***I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. (Psalm 122:1)***

The Jews were closer to Jerusalem than they were before. In Psalm 121, they saw the hills of Judah ahead of them. In Psalm 122, they were just outside the city. It is difficult for outsiders to appreciate the love that Jews have for Jerusalem. It was the place where Solomon's temple stood. It was the place where the LORD revealed Himself above the mercy seat.

The temple was the heart of Jerusalem, and the city was the heart of the nation. It is no wonder that exiled Jews could not sing the songs of Zion when they were in a strange land (Ps. 137:4), for their hearts were fixed on Jerusalem. In this Psalm, what we read is a spirit of renewal and rejoicing.

CHS: "Good children are pleased to go home...David's heart was in the worship of God, and he was delighted when he found others inviting him to go where his desires had already gone: it helps the ardour of the most ardent to hear others inviting them to a holy duty... 'let us go'... [The Psalmist] was glad *for the sake of others*: glad that they wished to go themselves, glad that they had the courage and liberality to invite others... David was glad *for his own sake*: he loved the invitation to the holy place, he delighted in being called to go to worship in company, and, moreover, he rejoiced that good people thought enough of him to extend their invitation to him."

"Let us go" is also a mark of Christian unity. It is the picture of a people from different walks of life whose hearts and minds are united in one call—to worship God. Jerusalem is "compact together" (v. 3). The tribes "give thanks unto the Name of the LORD" (v. 4). How pleasant it is when God's people can unite our hearts together in our devotion to God. ■

***Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love Thee. Peace be within Thy walls, and prosperity within Thy palaces. (Psalm 122:6-7)***

Jerusalem is the city of peace. There is a hint of irony when the Psalmist exhorts for prayer for peace in Jerusalem. Perhaps he was praying that Jerusalem would live up to her name. However, justice must precede peace. The Psalmist describes the many thrones of judgement in the fifth verse before he asks for prayers for the peace of Jerusalem.

Christians must pray and work for peace, but not peace at any price. The peace that God offers is the peace at the highest price—our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). He is our peace (Eph. 2:14). He is the giver of peace (John 14:27). The peace that our Saviour gives is one that is sealed on the cross of Calvary. By His death, we can have peace with God (Rom. 5:1).

Jerusalem is a picture of the church. The church is for us what Jerusalem was for the Jews, and Christians too must pray for the peace of the church. CHS: "In a church peace is to be desired, expected, promoted, and enjoyed... In a church one of the main ingredients of success is internal peace: Strife, suspicion, party-spirit, division—these are deadly things. Those who break the peace of the church deserve to suffer, and those who sustain it win a great blessing. Peace in the church should be our daily prayer, and in so praying we shall bring down peace upon ourselves."

Where there is peace, there will be prosperity. The word "prosperity" means "abundance of quietness". It is a beautiful description of what the church should be like—a place where believers can find rest in God and comfort from one another. The Psalmist is saying that those who love Zion will have peace, and the peace will bring more love which leads to more peace, and it goes on in a virtuous cycle. Our lives will be filled with the peace of God. ■

# 17 Psalm 123:1-4

NOVEMBER

I Will Look Up

Nov

***Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that He have mercy upon us. (Psalm 123:1-2)***

**W**ith every step, the Jews are drawing nearer and nearer to God. The eyes that beheld the hills of Judah and the house of the LORD from afar now beheld the temple in front of them. They needed not to strain their eyes. They lifted their eyes and saw God "Who dwellest in the heavens". Psalm 123 is also known as the Psalm of the eyes. "Eyes" occur four times in the first two verses.

But God is an invisible Spirit; how could the Psalmist see Him? With the eyes of faith and a heart of hope. CHS: "The higher the LORD is the better for our faith, since that height represents power, glory, and excellence... We must use our eyes with resolution, for they will not go upward to the LORD of themselves, but they incline to look downward, or inward, or anywhere but to the LORD: let it be our firm resolve that the heavenward glance shall not be lacking... God is in heaven... where He looks down on the world and succours [comforts] His saints as their needs demand."

The eyes of faith are accompanied by a heart of devoted service. The Psalmist compares the longing of the believer to a servant's longing for his master. To lift up our eyes to the LORD is good. It is even better to lift up our hands to serve Him. Our Lord saved us and has committed to us the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18).

CHS: "True saints, like obedient servants, look to the LORD their God *reverentially*... They watch, *obediently*, doing His commandments, guided by His eye... They look *continuously*, for there never is a time when they are off duty; at all times they delight to serve in all things... [They] look *submissively*, waiting patiently for the LORD, seeking both in activity and suffering to glorify His name."

By God's grace, we are adopted into His family. We are His children. In loving gratitude, we are His servants. We who are grateful sons must also learn to be obedient servants. ■

***Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. (Psalm 124:6-8)***

In the one hundred and twenty-fourth psalm, the Psalmist contemplates the outcome of a man without God. What an enormous difference the LORD makes in the life of a believer! If God were not there for us, we would be like a prey being eaten up (vv. 3, 6). The devil, as Peter reminds us, is as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). If God were not there for us, we would be like a house being swept away by the rushing torrents (vv. 4-5).

But praise be that “Jehovah thy God is He Who is going with thee; He will not fail thee nor forsake thee” (Deut. 31:6; Heb. 13:5). Blessed is the man whom the LORD has not given up. Blessed be the LORD Who does not give up His own.

CHS: “The LORD is heartily praised for not permitting His servants to be devoured...It implies that none can harm us till the LORD permits: we cannot be their prey unless the LORD gives us up to them, and that our loving LORD will never do. The more imminent the danger, the more eminent the mercy which would not permit the soul to perish in it. God be blessed for ever for keeping us from the curse. Jehovah be praised for checking the fury of the foe.”

There are people who like to dwell on hypotheses—the “what if’s”—What if God has not saved us? What if God is not on our side? The Psalmist, on the other hand, sets his mind on reality. The reality is that God has not given us up as a prey. The reality is our soul has escaped the claws of condemnation. The reality is God is our Deliverer. This reality is secured by the name of Jehovah, Who made heaven and earth (v. 8). Blessed be the LORD Who has made us by His spoken word. More blessed is the LORD Who has delivered us from evil through His dear Son. ■

# 19 Psalm 125:1-5

NOVEMBER

The Lot of the Righteous

Nov

***For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity. (Psalm 125:3)***

**W**e live in perilous times. One social commentator once said that we are living in the new Dark Ages. The traditional family is breaking up, the society is breaking down, there is a war on terror; yet there is a culture of self-centred complacency. However, there is no danger that hits as close to home as when it actually does hit home, and we are immediately awakened to the perils of our times. Christians are not exempted from these trying times, but we are safe in the LORD because He Who watches us “cannot be moved, but abideth for ever” (v. 1). We also have His promise that righteousness will prevail.

CHS: “The people of God are not to expect immunity from trial because the LORD surrounds them, for they may feel the power and persecution of the ungodly...The graceless often bear rule and wield the rod; and when they do so they are pretty sure to make it fall heavily upon the LORD’s believing people...[but] God has set a limit to the woes of His chosen: the rod may light on their portion, but it shall not *rest* upon it...The rod of the wicked may fall, but...it cannot have lasting sway.”

We read in verse 3, the promise of God’s deliverance. The Psalmist merely affirms what God has promised that He would do. God will deliver the righteous. As for how and when, these are His prerogatives, not ours. In verse 4, we also see the prayer for God’s blessings. The Psalmist asks because no man is righteous and deserves God’s blessing. And every blessing that comes into our lives must be due to God’s hand of goodness upon us. ■

***They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126:5-6)***

The children of Israel, who were driven from their homes, returned after 70 years of exile. To them, homecoming was indeed a joy unspeakable. Their delirious exultation was quite understandable, "The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad" (v. 3). There are some experiences in life that would come close to the joy that the Jews felt when they set foot on Jerusalem again—recovering from an illness or returning home after a long absence. But above all these, salvation deserves the greatest joy.

As soon as the Jews resettled in Jerusalem, they were met with the huge tasks of rebuilding the temple, the wall, and their own lives. As in our own lives, there will be times of discouragement when the thrill of first joy gives way to the toil of daily grind. John Wesley once asked, "Where is the joy I knew when I first saw the LORD?"

However, we should never despair. As surely as the night's darkness shall give way to the morning light, so will our tears be turned to joy. CHS: "Present distress must not be viewed as if it would last for ever; it is not the end, by any means, but only a means to the end. Sorrow is our sowing, rejoicing shall be our reaping. If there were no sowing in tears there would be no reaping in joy...Winners of souls are first weepers for souls...When our own hearts are broken with grief at man's transgression we shall break other men's hearts: tears of earnestness beget tears of repentance."

There is nothing in this life and in the eternity to come that is more worth doing than saving souls. With tears, sow the Gospel seed. Do not give up. Do not cease to pray. And in His time, our Lord Who gives us the work will also send us the harvest. ■

***Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so He giveth His beloved sleep. (Psalm 127:1-2)***

Solomon, who penned the one hundred and twenty-seventh psalm, also wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes; and both share a well-known theme—the vanity of life without God. The man who builds his house without God builds in vain. The man who devotes his time and talent in his own pursuits does so in vain. The motto on the coat of the Scottish arms of Edinburg reads, “Without the LORD, Frustration.” This is true for our lives as well.

CHS: “Men desiring to build know that they must labour, and accordingly they put forth all their skills and strength; but let them remember that if Jehovah is not with them their designs will prove failures...Without God we are nothing...We are not safe because of watchmen if Jehovah refuses to watch over us.”

Psalm 127:1-2 was quoted by Benjamin Franklin at the convention to form a constitution for the United States. Mr. Franklin had said, “If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable then that an empire can rise without His aid? ‘Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it.’ I firmly believe this.”

It is true for nation-building; it is also true for building homes and churches. Note that it is God Who first works—He builds and keeps. God’s working does not save us from honest and diligent labour—we labour and watch. Oliver Cromwell, the Puritan general, often tells his troops, “Trust God, and keep your powder dry.” It is God Who makes our work for Him meaningful. And it is God, by His grace, Who grants us success in our labour. A mighty man may have a quiver full of arrows (v. 5), but everything will be in vain unless the LORD rules in his heart and his life. ■

***Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. (Psalm 128:3-4)***

In Psalm 127, Solomon gives the formula for successful home building—God must be in it. In Psalm 128, we see the outcome of that method—blessings upon the home. “Blessings” is the key word in this psalm. Blessing comes to the man who does two things, namely fearing the LORD and walking in His ways. To fear the LORD means to revere Him in awe. God is serious, and He must be taken seriously. He must be in the centre of your life. His will must be the reason for your every ambition. His strength must be the power of your working. His glory must be your goal. To walk in God’s ways is to be obedient. Enoch walked with God, and his walk was one that “pleased God” (Heb. 11:5).

Blessed is the man who feareth the LORD, for he shall be fruitful in his ministry as well as in his home. CHS: “It is not every man that feareth the LORD who has a wife; but if he has, she shall share in his blessedness and increase it...To complete domestic bliss children are sent. They come as the lawful fruit of marriage, even as clusters appear upon the vine. For the grapes the vine was planted; for children was the wife provided...Good wives are also fruitful in kindness, thrift, helpfulness, and affection: if they bear no children, they are by no means barren if they yield us the wine of consolation and the clusters of comfort.”

The children are like olive plants around the man. He is blessed with the wine of his wife (the fruitful vine), and the oil from his children (the olive plants). It is said that the olive tree takes about 15 years before it produces fruit. It takes almost as long before parents can see the fruits of their parenting. The Psalmist is not saying that God-fearing families will have no problems. There are godly parents who are grieved over the waywardness of their children. Yet the principle of a blessed home is this—Fear God and walk in His ways. ■

# 23 Psalm 129:1-8

NOVEMBER

Down but Never Out

Nov

***Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me. The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows. The LORD is righteous: He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked. (Psalm 129:2-4)***

**F**rederick the Great, then the King of Prussia and a stubborn skeptic, once demanded his chaplain to prove the truthfulness of the Bible, of which the chaplain offered a single word, "Israel." The history of Israel is one of survival. They were enslaved in Egypt, were attacked by the Canaanites during the time of the Judges, fought among themselves in the era of the kings, were exiled by the Assyrians and Babylonians, were ruled by the Greeks, were dispersed by the Romans, and were persecuted by the Nazis. Thus the Psalmist is right in saying, "they afflicted me from my youth." Not just *in* her youth, but since then and will continue to be so until our Lord returns.

No other nation has gone through as much as Israel, and "yet they have not prevailed against [her]." Reason: Jehovah is righteous. CHS: "Whatever men may be, Jehovah remains just, and will therefore keep covenant with His people and deal out justice to their oppressors... Sooner or later a righteous God will interpose, and when He does so, His action will be most effectual; He does not unfasten, but cuts asunder, the harness which the ungodly use in their labour of hate. Never has God used a nation to chastise His Israel without destroying that nation... He hates those who hurt His people even though He permits their hate to triumph for a while for His own purpose."

True believers will suffer persecution. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12; John 15:18-19; Matt. 10:22; 24:9). Yet the promise is that no tribulation or persecution can separate us from the love of Christ for "in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Rom. 8:35-37). ■

***But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope. (Psalm 130:4-5)***

Psalm 130 is an intensely personal one. It reads like a page out of the Psalmist's personal journal. It begins with a man in the depth of despair, and ends with him on the summit of saving grace. It was the hearing of this psalm at Aldersgate in 1738 that John Wesley said that his heart was "strangely warmed". The journey from the pit to the peak begins with an awareness of one's sinfulness.

Today, the world talks about dysfunctions rather than sins. When man lives with little awareness of God, he also lives in oblivion of his own sinfulness. To the repentant sinner, sin is not a no-cure soul disease; there is forgiveness with God.

CHS: "Free, full, sovereign pardon is in the hand of the great King: it is His prerogative to forgive, and He delights to exercise it. Because His nature is mercy, and because He has provided a sacrifice for sin, therefore forgiveness is with Him for all that come to Him confessing their sins. The power of pardon is permanently resident with God: He has forgiveness ready to His hand at this instant...None fear the LORD like those who have experienced His forgiving love. Gratitude for pardon produces far more fear and reverence of God than all the dread which is inspired by punishment."

There is forgiveness with God, not for some sins but for all sins. God's forgiveness is fully applied. There is no sin that God cannot forgive; neither is there a sin so deep that His grace cannot save one from. God's forgiveness is presently applied. The reality of forgiveness is now; the forgiven sinner does not need to live under the weight of his guilt. God's forgiveness is freely applied. It is free to all who would place their hope on Him (vv. 5-7). God's forgiveness is to be effectively applied. The man who is forgiven of his sins will fear the Forgiver even more. Grace binds the heart of the saint more tightly to the Saviour than sin could fetter his soul. The Psalmist whose sins have been forgiven says, "My soul waiteth for the LORD." ■

***Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child. (Psalm 131:2)***

Psalm 131 reads like a refrain to Psalm 130. The former flows naturally from the latter. The man whose sins have been forgiven has no reason to be haughty. On the contrary, he should be clothed in humility (1 Pet. 5:5). As much as pride is the first sin among the things that God hates (Prov. 6:17), humility is a principal virtue that God delights in (Isa. 57:15).

King David says that he has learnt to cease to “exercise [himself] in great matters” (v. 1). This does not mean that he sits idly while the opportunities pass him by, but that he does not seek to make himself great. One writer says that the Christian who seeks to exalt himself is like building Babel while living in Eden.

David also recognises that there are some matters that are beyond his comprehension. So he becomes like a child in the presence of God—with the wonder of calm contentment and the peace of total trust in God. David is like a “weaned child”.

CHS: “The Psalmist had been upon his best behaviour, and had smoothed down the roughness of his self-will...so that towards God he was not rebellious, even as towards man he was not haughty...He had become as subdued and content as a child whose weaning is fully accomplished...To the weaned child his mother [and not the milk] is his comfort though she has denied him comfort. It is a blessed mark of growth out of spiritual infancy when we can forego the joys which once appeared to be essential, and can find our solace in Him Who denies them to us.”

May we too be weaned, and grow up to find joy and contentment in God and not just in His blessings. ■

***I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, Until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. (Psalm 132:4-5)***

Psalm 132 is about the return of the ark to and the building of the temple in Jerusalem. It was David's desire to build a dwelling place for God. CHS: David "could not enjoy sleep till he had done his best to provide a place for the ark. It is a strong expression...the man was all on fire...Everybody can see what he means, and how intensely he means it. Oh, that many more were seized with sleeplessness because the house of the LORD lies waste!...He resolved to find a place where Jehovah would allow His worship to be celebrated, a house where God would fix the symbol of His presence, and commune with His people."

When David told Nathan about his desire to build a temple for God, the prophet replied, "Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee" (2 Sam. 7:3). And although David did not get to build the temple, the LORD said to David, "Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto My name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart" (1 Kings 8:18).

David was remembered not for his accomplishment but for his honest desire. Likewise, God does not measure our actions by the extent of our success, but by our sincere desire for His glory. Far better is the one-talent man who uses it for God's glory than the ten-talent man who employs them for his own interest. Far more praiseworthy is the industrious man who toils to see the LORD's work done and done well than the talented man who is indifferent to God's calling. May God give us the desire of David to be fervent about spiritual things. ■

# 27 Psalm 132:6-12

NOVEMBER

God's Vow

Nov

***The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; He will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep My covenant and My testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.  
(Psalm 132:11-12)***

David's desire was to build a habitation for the LORD (v. 5). The LORD's covenant was that He would establish and preserve the throne of David for his sons. David did not get to build the temple; that privilege went to Solomon. Nevertheless, God also "hath sworn in truth" that He would establish the throne of David.

CHS: "He swears *in truth*, for He means every word that He utters...*'He will not turn from it.'* Jehovah is not a changeable being. He never turns from His purpose, much less from His promise solemnly ratified by oath...He is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent. What a rock they stand upon who have an immutable oath of God for their foundation!"

God's one promise has two facets. First, there is the promise to David and his heirs. Second, there is the promise of the Son of David, the promised Messiah, Who is the perfect King, and Whose "throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:16b).

God's promise is balanced by the responsibility of David's sons—they must keep God's covenant. God's sovereignty has decreed that David's sons would rule, but His holiness also demanded that they be loyal to the covenant. We learn from this that election does not exempt us from obedience to God's Word. Rather, election enhances our obedience. God "hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4). This proves the importance of godliness in the home. As a writer once said, "Grace does not follow in the blood," but let every man be filled with holy fear lest we or our children be drawn away by indifference or unbelief. ■

***For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation.  
This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.  
(Psalm 132:13-14)***

The LORD "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). The people prayed (vv. 8-9) and God answered them with more than they have asked. The people asked that He would come to His place of rest (v. 8) and God replied that He had chosen Zion to be His place of habitation forever (vv. 13-14). The people prayed that the priests be clothed with righteousness (v. 9) and God answered that He clothed them with salvation (v. 16). In each of these cases, God answered His people with more than they have prayed for.

The Jews did not see beyond the earthly throne in Jerusalem. God, on the other hand, said that He hath chosen Zion for His habitation and rest for ever. Why Zion? Because the LORD has chosen her.

CHS: "Zion is chosen, chosen for a habitation of God. The desire of God to dwell among the people whom He has chosen for Himself is very gracious and yet very natural: His love will not rest apart from those upon whom He has placed it. God desires to abide with those whom He has loved with an everlasting love... It is a double marvel, that the LORD should choose and desire such poor creatures as we are: the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in believers is a wonder of grace parallel to the incarnation of the Son of God. God in the church is the wonder of heaven, the miracle of eternity, the glory of infinite love."

Throughout man's history, emperors, kings, and dictators have tried to set up a kingdom that will last forever. But all earthly thrones will eventually be relegated to the history books. There is only the kingdom of God upon which the sun will never set. Praise God that the throne of the Son of David endures for ever. ■

***Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!...Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD.  
(Psalm 133:1; 134:1)***

Psalm 133 is about unity. Unity is desired in every organisation from the gardening club to the church and the nation. CHS: "We can dispense with uniformity if we possess unity: oneness of life, truth, and way; oneness in Christ Jesus; oneness of object and spirit – these we must have, or our assemblies will be synagogues of contention rather than churches of Christ. The closer the unity the better; for the more of the good and the pleasant there will be. Since we are imperfect, somewhat of the evil and the unpleasant is sure to intrude; but this will readily be neutralised by the true love of the saints. Christian unity is good in itself, good for ourselves, good for the brethren, good for our converts, good for the world; and for certain it is pleasant. A church united in earnest service of the LORD is a well of goodness and joy to all those who dwell round about it."

The Psalmist who calls us to behold the beauty of unity also calls us to behold the glory of worship. Worship in the church today is trivialised because believers are trivial. A writer once said that the "common assumption of today's Christendom is that worship is primarily for us—to meet our needs." Some *egocentric* Christians worship so that they may be blessed, and thus we often hear responses like, "I am blessed by the music and the message."

The Psalmist, however, calls us to bless the LORD. True worship is *theo-centric*. CHS: "*Bless ye the LORD!* Think well of Jehovah, and speak well of Him. Adore Him with reverence, draw near to Him with love, delight in Him with exultation...He blesses you; therefore, be zealous to bless Him. May *blessed* and *blessing* be the two words which describe our lives." May we thus in our worship learn to bless the LORD from whom all blessings flow. ■

***Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the name of the LORD; praise Him, O ye servants of the LORD. Ye that stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God. (Psalm 135:1-2)***

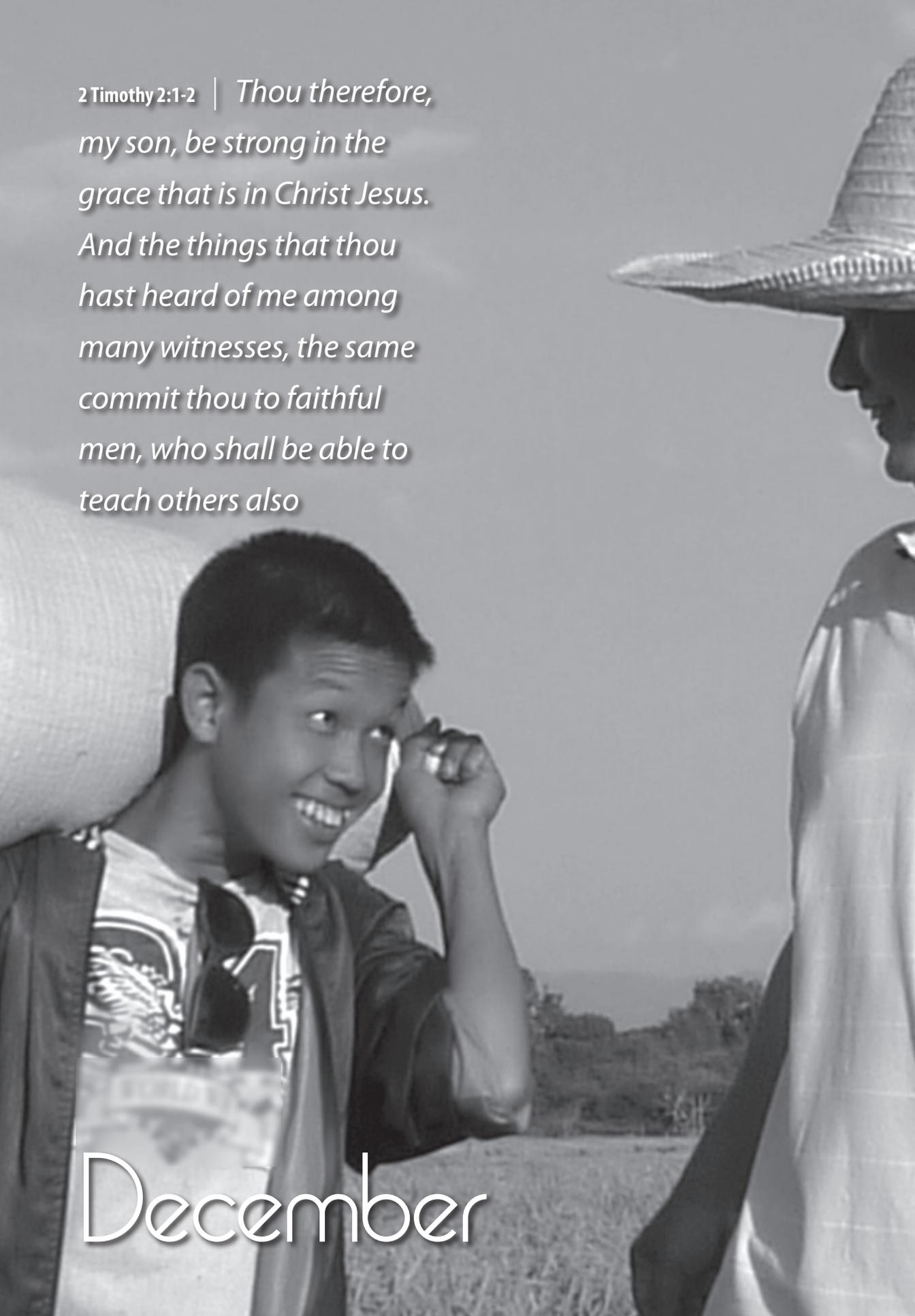
**A**.W. Tozer once wrote, while the Bible Societies have been successful in disseminating Bibles, “to great sections of the church, the art of worship has been lost entirely, and its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the ‘program.’ This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of service which now passes for worship.” Tozer wrote these words in 1948; since then, more sections of the church have turned the worship service into a “program.”

What is worship? Some Christians find it difficult to define worship, and they do what seems right in their own eyes as long as it is clothed in sincerity. To worship is to ascribe worth. God is worthy because He is God. His worthiness is not determined by man. Thus, it cannot be left to man to determine how he wants to ascribe worth to God.

In Psalm 135:1-2, the Psalmist calls us back to biblical worship. All worship begins with an invocation—a call to worship. CHS: “It is not enough for us to praise God ourselves...let us call in all our friends and neighbours...Let His character be extolled by you, and let all that He has revealed concerning Himself be the subject of your song...[Let the holy] name of ‘Jehovah’ be the object of your adoration. By that name He sets forth His self-existence, and His immutability; let these arouse your praises of his Godhead...‘Praise him, O ye servants of the LORD’...You are ‘servants’, and this [worship] is part of your service; therefore celebrate His name with praises. We do not praise enough; we cannot praise too much. We ought to be always at it; answering to the command here given—Praise, Praise, Praise. Let the Three-in-One [Triune God] have the praises of our spirit, soul, and body. For the past, the present, and the future, let us render three-fold hallelujahs.” ■

2 Timothy 2:1-2 | *Thou therefore,  
my son, be strong in the  
grace that is in Christ Jesus.  
And the things that thou  
hast heard of me among  
many witnesses, the same  
commit thou to faithful  
men, who shall be able to  
teach others also*

December



***For I know that the LORD is great, and that our LORD is above all gods. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. (Psalm 135:5-6)***

The Psalmist gives several reasons for worshipping God. He is inherently good (v. 3). That is the essential quality of God. How frightful it would be if God is omnipotent and yet not good? But God is good. His wisdom is good so we can trust His promises; His power is good so we can rely on His strength; and His works are all good so we can count on His love.

God is love (v. 4). He chose Jacob because He loved him (Rom. 9:13a). God chose Jacob over Esau while they were still in the womb. This means that God did not choose on the basis of what you have done or not done. God's election is motivated purely by love. This reason alone is enough for us to praise Him.

God is great (v. 5). CHS: "God is great positively, great comparatively, and great superlatively...[The Psalmist] says positively, 'I know'...He knew by observation, inspiration, and realisation...He not only knows the greatness of Jehovah, but that...[He] is infinitely superior to all the imaginary deities of the heathen."

God is sovereign. He does as He pleases (v. 6). CHS: "His will is carried out throughout all space. The King's warrant runs in every portion of the universe... Jehovah rules over all. His decree is not defeated, His purpose is not frustrated: in no one point is His good pleasure set aside...Jehovah works His will: He pleases to do, and He performs the deed. None can stay His hand."

One reason is enough to bring us to our knees in reverential worship. The Psalmist gives us more reasons than we need so that we may worship with greater understanding. And the more we know about the LORD, the more our reverence in worship must reflect that knowledge. ■

***Bless the LORD, O house of Israel: bless the LORD, O house of Aaron: Bless the LORD, O house of Levi: ye that fear the LORD, bless the LORD. Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, which dwelleth at Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD. (Psalm 135:19-21)***

It seems that the Psalmist had made a comparative study between the true and living God and the gods of the other religions. The contrast is as day is to night. God is full of good works. The idols are full of no works. God does as He pleases. The idols are the result of what men do to them. God smote the nations and slew mighty kings. The idols sat in silence. Hence it was easy for the Psalmist to conclude, "Bless the LORD." He begins the psalm with three invocations to praise the LORD (vv. 1-2), and he ends with more blessings to God.

CHS: "*Bless the LORD, O house of Israel. All of you...praise the one Jehovah... Bless the LORD, O house of Aaron. These were elected...to draw very near to the divine presence; therefore they beyond all others were bound to bless the LORD. Those who are favoured to be leaders in the church should be foremost in adoration...Bless the LORD, O house of Levi...The house of Levi had choice reasons for blessing God...Remember that the whole of the Levites were set apart for holy service...therefore they were in honour bound above all others to worship Jehovah with cheerfulness.*"

The last three verses of Psalm 135 is an earnest call to all classes of the people to bless and praise the LORD. Its repetitiveness expresses an overflowing joy—the utterance of a heart filled with awe for the majesty, glory, and mercy of God.

Do you belong to the house of Israel, or Aaron, or Levi? Most likely not. Do you belong to the house of them that fear the LORD? Assuredly yes. Let us who call upon Jehovah, praise His Name, bless Him, and worship Him. ■

***O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever. (Psalm 136:1)***

**A**lthough Psalm 136 does not begin or end with the words “Praise ye the LORD” (*hallelujah*), it is known as the last of the Great Hallel psalms. To some Jews, Psalm 136 is the only Great Hallel (Great Hallelujah), and it is sung during the Passover, one of the great annual feasts celebrated by the Jews. The theme of this psalm is simple: It reveals God’s continuous involvement in the redemptive history of Israel from the time of the Exodus to the conquest of the land. The Psalmist begins with this thrice-repeated call: “Give thanks unto the LORD.” The phrase “give thanks” is also translated as “confess” and “praise.” Hence, this is more than just a call of thanksgiving; the Psalmist is summoning God’s people to worship.

Why do we thank God? The inspired poet gives us three reasons: God is good; He is the God of gods; and He is the Lord of lords. CHS: “Essentially He is goodness itself, practically all that He does is good, relatively He is good to His creatures...He is good beyond all others; indeed, He alone is good in the highest sense; He is the source of good, the good of all good, the sustainer of good, the perfecter of good, and the rewarder of good. For this He deserves the constant gratitude of His people.”

The goodness of God is first seen in His creation. God is good because He made everything good (Gen. 1:31). Those who do not recognise God as the good Creator either worship creation or exploit them. The believer, on the other hand, looks at creation, and recognises the handiwork of God. The Christian understands that God has given us richly all things (including creation) to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17). Hence, believers should value creation, and worship the Creator. ■

**...For His mercy endureth for ever... (Psalm 136:1-26)**

Psalm 136 has three separate hymns—Hymn of Creation (vv. 1-9), Hymn of Deliverance (vv. 10-16), and Hymn of Conquest (vv. 17-26). But there is only one recurring refrain, namely “for His mercy endureth for ever.”

CHS: “We shall have this repeated in every verse of this song, but not once too often. It is the sweetest stanza that a man can sing. What joy that there is mercy, mercy with Jehovah, enduring mercy, mercy enduring for ever. We are ever needing it, trying it, praying for it, receiving it: therefore let us for ever sing of it, ‘When all else is changing within and around, in God and His mercy no change can be found.’”

The word “mercy” in Hebrew is *hesed*. It is also translated as “lovingkindness”. *Hesed* is God’s love, and it is a love that is enduring and unchanging. There are several reasons for the repetitive refrain. It may have been designed to be used in public worship as a response to the works of God. It may have been used as a literary device where the phrase acts as a foundation, and regardless of the circumstances, the foundational fact is that God’s mercy endureth forever.

The blessed truth is that every work of God, be it the creation of the world, or the redemption of Israel, or the demonstration of His power and righteousness, is all evidence of His justice, serving as a foundation for our praising Him. All that we have gone through and experienced—good or bad— is brought into our lives by the sovereign God Whose works are great, Whose purposes are benevolent, and Whose thoughts are to us-ward (Ps. 40:5). Hence, we too sing the glad refrain—“God’s mercy endureth forever.” ■

***Who remembered us in our low estate: for His mercy endureth for ever: And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for His mercy endureth for ever. (Psalm 136:23-24)***

Psalm 136 has two voices. There is the voice of the beneficiary who sings the refrain; and there is the voice of the one who sings of the Benefactor and His wondrous works. He made the heavens. He smote Egypt. He led the people through the wilderness. He gave them the land. He remembered them in their low estate.

CHS: "Our prayer is, 'LORD, remember me,' and this is our encouragement—He has remembered us. For the LORD even to think of us is a wealth of mercy. Ours was a sorry...estate of spiritual bankruptcy and mendicancy...The LORD seemed to have forgotten us, and left us in our sorrow; but it was not so for long: He turned again in His compassion, bethinking Himself of His afflicted children...[We are] sinfully low in faith, and love, and every other grace; and yet the LORD has not forgotten us as a dead thing out of mind; but He has tenderly remembered us still. We thought ourselves too small and too worthless for His memory to burden itself about us, yet He remembered us."

God remembers us in our low estate for a reason—to redeem us. Israel was brought low by her enemies. They were enslaved, but God delivered them just as He has delivered us from the slavery of sin. It was a deliverance that came with a price—sinners were redeemed, and Jesus Christ is our Redeemer. This is the very essence of the Gospel—not that we remember God but that He remembers and redeems us.

Thus our worship and life must reflect this Benefactor-beneficiary relationship. The focus of worship is not on man but on God. It is not whether you feel good or not. Rather, it is "Has God been exalted in your worship?" Worship is the only thing that we can give to God. Do it well. ■

***How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land? If I forget Thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember Thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. (Psalm 137:4-6)***

Psalm 137 is a tale of contrast between two cities—Babylon and Zion. There is the historical Babylon which was the enemy of Zion. And there is the spiritual Babylon, the Mystery Babylon, and the spiritual Zion, which is the New Jerusalem (Rev. 18-22). Babylon represents the world of unbelief; Zion is the world of faith.

Augustine of Hippo used both cities as the backdrop for his book, *The City of God*. He wrote, "Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self."

The Jews were recalling their days in Babylon. Despite the beauty of the mighty Euphrates and Tigris, the people could neither rejoice nor sing.

CHS: "How shall they...sing in a strange land? With one voice they refuse, but the refusal is humbly worded by being put in the form of a question. If the men of Babylon were wicked enough to suggest the defiling of holy things for the gratification of curiosity, or for the creation of amusement, the men of Zion had not so hardened their hearts as to be willing to please them at such a fearful cost. There are many things which the ungodly could do, and think nothing of the doing thereof, which gracious men cannot venture upon."

Distressed but not defeated, the Psalmist proves that he is determined to remember the goodness of God and the blessings of Zion. Note the change from "we" (v. 4) to "I" (v. 5). There is a sense that every Christian must remember God personally. Faith and commitment in the Redeemer must and can only be exercised individually. You must do it yourself. Remembering the LORD will eventually lead to rejoicing in Him. Recount God's goodness, and the songs of rejoicing will return. ■

***Though the LORD be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly: but the proud He knoweth afar off. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me: Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and Thy right hand shall save me. (Psalm 138:6-7)***

David went through many difficult trials and dangers in his life, but God had proved Himself faithful. The LORD had answered David's prayers, and He had strengthened David's hands (v. 3). Every experience in David's life was but another testimony to God's goodness and faithfulness. Whenever testing rolled in, David knew that God would be there to help the lowly.

In the same way, God will help those who are humble. When we become lowly and exalt God, He will, in turn, exalt us. But when we exalt ourselves in His presence, the LORD will bring us low so that we may have the real perspective of Who He is and who we really are.

David knew God—He knew that God dwells on high. David also knew that God is not aloof and indifferent to us. When we walk in the midst of trouble, God will help us. CHS: "If I am walking there [in the midst of trouble] now, or shall be doing so in years to come, I have no cause for fear; for God is with me, and will give me new life...He is in a blessed condition who can confidently use the language of David—'Thou wilt revive me.' Adversaries may be many, and malicious, and mighty; but our glorious Defender has only to stretch out His arm and...we will be saved."

This assurance rests on God's love. We are not spared from walking in trouble, but when there is the promise of God's reviving, we can walk through the darkest valleys with confidence because the LORD will save us. John W Burgon wrote, "God's creating hands formed our souls at the beginning; His nail-pierced hands redeemed them...His glorified hands will hold our souls fast and not let them go." The LORD will save and "perfect that which concerneth me." ■

***O LORD, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, Thou knowest it altogether. (Psalm 139:1-4)***

Psalm 139 is a hymn of praise and a prayer of thanksgiving, yet it is also a lamenting call for God's deliverance. It is a psalm that is rich in theology, for it deals with topics such as the omnipotence and omniscience of the Almighty God. It is also a psalm that is intensely personal (note the singular pronoun used), for it describes the relationship between the Psalmist and his God.

The Christian faith is not merely expressed in theological abstractions; it is also manifested in our personal relationship with God. This fact is trite but true. Hence, God is not just a distant all-knowing Being, but He is the One Who has searched me and known me altogether. And He is not a dreadful omnipresent God, yet He is One from whom you cannot escape.

CHS: "How well it is for us to know the God Who knows us! The divine knowledge is extremely thorough and searching...This infallible knowledge has always existed—"Thou hast searched me"; and it continues unto this day, since God cannot forget that which He has once known. There never was a time in which we were unknown to God, and there never will be a moment in which we shall be beyond His observation...nothing is concealed from Thee...[even] the unformed word, which lies within the tongue...is certainly and completely known to the Great Searcher of hearts. A negative expression is used to make the positive statement all the stronger: not a word is unknown is a forcible way of saying that every word is well known. O Jehovah, how great art Thou! If Thine eye hath such power, what must be the united force of Thine whole nature!"

To the unbeliever, God's omniscience is threatening, and rightly so. But to the redeemed, God's omniscience is a great relief because it is before Him that truth will ultimately prevail. ■

***Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?...If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:7, 9-10)***

**H**ave you tried running away from your shadow? As long as there is light, there is shadow. God is the eternal light. He fills the whole world with His presence. He is everywhere; hence He sees all things. And no man can hide from the omnipresent God. To the unbeliever, it is a dreadful feeling to be under the watchful eye of God. There are some who think that David was complaining about and trying to escape God's piercing gaze. Not so! On the contrary, David was comforted by the thought of God's omnipresence.

"Whither shall I go?" David asked this question as an expression of the futility of one who tries to escape from God. Fly up into space, it is where God resides. Dive down to the deepest chasm of *sheol*, and God is there too. One writer correctly points out that hell is so fearful because it is the domain of the righteous God.

What about taking flight to the east where the sun rises, or even to the seas where the billows roll? Even there, you will find that you are still in the palms of His hand (Isa. 40:12). Even the darkness is no shield. The fool thinks that he can hide in the darkness, but even darkness is God's domain (Isa. 45:7).

CHS: "No one can escape from the all-pervading being and observation [of God]...From the sight of God he cannot be hidden...From the presence of God we cannot be withdrawn. We must be, whether we will it or not, as near to God as our soul is to our body. This makes it dreadful work to sin; for we offend the Almighty to His face, and commit acts of treason at the very foot of His throne." ■

***How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with Thee. (Psalm 139:17-18)***

God must and can only be described with superlatives. He must be all-knowing. He must be all-present. And He must be all-powerful. If God is not all-powerful, it means that there must be some power that is greater than He. If God is not all powerful, it means that His power can be curtailed and His will be thwarted. Praise God for His benevolent omnipotence.

David recognised that God is all powerful but his understanding is far more than a mere theological abstraction. David saw God's omnipotence in his life, especially at the inception of life. Hence, David praised God—"I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (v. 14).

God's creation goes hand in hand with His counsel. It is impossible for a person to know the God of compassion without acknowledging Him as the God of creation. He is the Creator, and His creative concerns include individuals! In reflection, David exclaims the goodness of God—"How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!"

CHS: "That God should think upon him is the believer's treasure and pleasure. It is a joy worth worlds that the LORD should think upon us who are so poor and needy: it is a joy which fills our whole nature to think upon God; returning love for love, thought for thought, after our poor fashion... When we remember that God thought upon us from old eternity, continues to think upon us every moment, and will think of us when time shall be no more, we may well exclaim, 'How great is the sum!' Thoughts of our pardon, renewal, upholding, supplying, educating, perfecting, and a thousand more kinds perpetually well up in the mind of the Most High. Thoughts such as are natural to the Creator, the Preserver, the Redeemer, the Father, the Friend, are evermore flowing from the heart of the LORD."

What a blessing it is indeed to know that God has us in His mind at all times! When we retire, God is ever with us. Even when we have closed our eyes for the last time on earth and get to open them again in heaven, we can say with David, "When I awake, I am still with Thee." ■

***Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)***

The believer whose mind is filled with thoughts of God's love will have no place in his heart for the wicked. David puts this in very stark terms, "Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee?...I hate them [the sinners] with perfect hatred" (v. 21-22). The popular adage is that Christians are to hate the sin and love the sinner but David makes no difference between the two. The sinner's sin is that of hating God. And David has only perfect hatred for the one who hates God. David was so consumed with the greatness and goodness of God that he did not want to be with anyone or do anything that would hinder that relationship.

The reason David keeps clear of the wicked is not that he thought himself to be too good for them, but because he cannot trust himself in such evil company. David, like all sinners, is prone to sin, so he prays that God would "search him... try him...know his thoughts...and lead him in the way everlasting."

CHS: David "challenges the fullest investigation, the innermost search: he had need be a true man who can put himself deliberately into such a crucible... Exercise any and every test upon me. By fire and by water let me be examined. Read not alone the desires of my heart, but the fugitive thoughts of my head... Know with all-penetrating knowledge all that is or has been in the chambers of my mind. What a mercy that there is one Being Who can know us to perfection! He is intimately at home with us. He is graciously inclined towards us, and is willing to bend His omniscience to serve the end of our sanctification."

David's prayer is serious. To know the truth in its truest sense, we have to walk in it. Blessed is the man who submits to the Almighty God, and lives under the light of His omnipresence. This is the key to a sanctified life. ■

# 12 Psalm 140:1-5

DECEMBER

Preserve Me!

Dec

***Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings. (Psalm 140:4)***

**P**salm 140 describes the wicked men who were bent on destroying David. These were men who were evil in their motivations, violent in their actions, and poisonous in their words. Their actions were both overt (they gathered for war) and covert (they hid a snare and spread a net by the wayside).

What can Christians do in light of man's wickedness? David prayed for God's deliverance. CHS: "No creature among the wild beasts of the wood is so terrible an enemy to man as man himself when guided by evil, and impelled by violence. The LORD by providence and grace can keep us out of the power of the wicked. He alone can do this, for neither our own watchfulness nor the faithfulness of friends can secure us against the serpentine assaults of the foe. We have need to be preserved from the smooth as well as the rough hands of the ungodly, for their flatteries may harm us as much as their calumnies [lies]... Evil hands will do what evil hearts have imagined and evil lips have threatened. LORD, preserve us by Thine omnipotence when men attack us with their violence. This prayer is a wise and suitable one...[God alone] is the patron of holiness, and when the pure lives of His people are in danger of overthrow, He may be expected to interpose. Never let the pious forget to pray, for this is a weapon against which the most determined enemy cannot stand."

But lest we think that there are only some people who are evil, the Holy Scriptures remind us that man's "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:12-18)

Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, writing about his experiences in the Russian Gulag, says, "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

If we understand the depravity of our own souls (and David certainly did), then this prayer is not just asking for deliverance from the wicked, but also from our own sinfulness. Sanctification begins when we realise our sinfulness before a holy God. ■

***I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD. O GOD the LORD, the strength of my salvation, Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.***

***(Psalm 140:6-7)***

**W**hat is your greatest possession? The believer will say he has nothing. We are but stewards of God's manifold grace. God is the One Who owns the cattle upon a thousand hills. "The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). God is the owner because He is the Creator. All is God's, but what amazing grace to know that God is ours. David says, "Thou art my God."

CHS: "Here was David's stay and hope. He was assured that Jehovah was his God... The LORD was David's own by deliberate choice, to which he again sets his seal with delight. The wicked reject God, but the righteous receive Him as their own, their treasure, their pleasure, their light and delight... The LORD can discern a voice in our wailings... Because He is God He can hear us; because He is *our* God He will hear us. So long as the LORD doth but hear us we are content: the answer may be according to His own will, but we do entreat to be heard... The more we consider His greatness and our insignificance, His wisdom and our folly, the more shall we be filled with praise when the LORD attends unto our cry."

One writer describes David's affirmation—"Thou art my God"—as the litmus test of one's profession. It is one thing to say to your pastor that the LORD is your God. Whether you can confidently declare the same to the omniscient God is another thing.

What a joy it would be to those who truly say the LORD God is theirs— the One Who hears our prayers (v. 6); Who is our Saviour (v. 7), Who is our Deliverer and Preserver (vv. 8-11), Who is our righteous Judge (v. 12), and the One Who is truly worthy of our praises (v. 13). ■

***Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties. (Psalm 141:3-4)***

Psalm 141 is a prayer psalm. Every verse in this psalm is a plea to God. It is also known as an evening psalm (v. 2). Prayer is one of those things in our Christian experience which we know is important yet of which we are seriously lacking. There are many reasons for this deficiency. One is the lack of God's presence in our daily lives. RA Torrey, a well-known Bible teacher, once said that Christians "should never utter a syllable of prayer until we are definitely conscious that we have come into the presence of God."

David describes his prayer as incense (v. 2), which is a symbol for prayer. In the Tabernacle, incense was continually offered to God so that the fragrance of the incense filled the Holy Place, a picture of the people enveloped in prayer.

Prayer is conversing with God, and David wisely prayed that God set a guard over his mouth, heart and hands. CHS: "That mouth had been used in prayer, it would be a pity it should ever be defiled with untruth, or pride, or wrath... David feels that with all his own watchfulness he may be surprised into sin, and so he begs the LORD to keep him...When the LORD becomes the guard of our mouth the whole man is well garrisoned."

David is also watchful about his heart and his hands. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). The throne of a man is his heart, and whatever occupies that seat is the master of the soul. The hands do what the heart directs. The legs go where the heart leads. David was so conscious of sin that he would not eat of the dainties of the wicked. The world entices us with its morsels of delight, but as God's people, we must do well to stay away from them. Heed this advice—"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the LORD out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22). ■

***But mine eyes are unto Thee, O GOD the LORD: in Thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute. Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity.  
(Psalm 141:8-9)***

Psalm 141 begins with David entering into the presence of God for worship and prayer. He knelt before God, "LORD, I cry unto Thee...give ear unto my voice" (v. 1). That sweet hour of prayer had come to an end, and as David prepared to leave the blessed presence, he asked for a departing benediction—"Mine eyes are unto Thee...in Thee is my trust...Keep me."

CHS: David "looked upward and kept his eyes fixed there. He regarded duty more than circumstances; he considered the promise rather than the external providence; and he expected from God rather than from men. He did not shut his eyes in indifference or despair, neither did he turn them to the creature in vain confidence, but he gave his eyes to his God, and saw nothing to fear. Jehovah his LORD is also his hope...Nobody could preserve David but the Omniscient and Omnipotent One: He also will preserve us."

David set his eyes only and always on God. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me" (Ps. 23:4a). Peter learnt the same lesson on the Sea of Galilee. By faith, he stepped out of the boat into the tossing waves, and he was walking to our Lord Jesus. But as soon as he took his eyes off Jesus, he began to sink. Our Lord did not commend Peter for his faith; instead He rebuked him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:31).

Faith in Christ is the only way to come to Him. Our faith is God's gift. For Peter to put that faith to the test and saw it succeed, yet then fear as if Jesus would fail him, is to fail in his faith. The Bible gives us the same exhortation—"Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross...Consider Him...lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12:2-3). ■

# 16 Psalm 142:1-7

DECEMBER

Not Man But God

Dec

***I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto Thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. (Psalm 142:4-5)***

In Psalm 142, David was alone and in trouble. The title of the psalm tells us that David was in a cave either in Adullam (1 Sam. 22) or Engedi (1 Sam. 24). In both cases, the circumstances were substantially the same; David had fled to the cave to escape from Saul. David was a fugitive for whom no one cared. He was the prey who had no refuge. David looked to his right hand man...but there was none.

In better days, the people were singing David's praises. But now there was no man to help. No man would stand with him or for him. David had known many, but now many would hide their faces from him. David was deserted. He was alone. But whereas David despaired when he looked around, he knew that he would never fail when he looked up.

CHS: "As man would not regard him, David was driven to Jehovah, his God. Was not this a gain made out of a loss? Wealth gained by a failure? Anything which leads us to cry unto God is a blessing to us... 'Thou art my refuge.' Not Thou hast provided me a refuge, but Thou, Thyself, art my refuge. He fled to God alone; he hid himself beneath the wings of the Eternal."

God is also David's portion in the land of the living. The Christian life is both present and future. To be sure, our future is infinitely glorious, but with God as our portion, our present ought not to be any less victorious. It is true that to die in Christ is gain, but only so for one whose living is Christ. And there is no living on earth like living for God. ■

***Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in Thy faithfulness answer me, and in Thy righteousness. And enter not into judgement with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified. (Psalm 143:1-2)***

Psalm 143 is generally regarded as the last of the penitential psalms. A penitential psalm is a cry for God's mercy. To be penitential is not to perform an act of penance; rather, it is to be repentant, having an inward change of the heart. David was no stranger to enemies, but in this case, he referred to only one enemy (v. 3), and it seemed that David's problems were due in part to God's judgement upon his sins.

David's appeal for mercy was on the basis of God's faithfulness and righteousness. CHS: "Saints desire to be answered as well as heard: they long to find the LORD faithful to His promise and righteous in defending the cause of justice... Though clear before men, he could not claim innocence before God. Even though he knew himself to be the LORD's servant, yet he did not claim perfection, or plead merit; for even as a servant he was unprofitable... To this day it stands true even to the same extent as in David's day: no man living even at this moment may dare to present himself for trial before the throne of the Great King on the footing of the law."

David's confession was Paul's doctrine—"by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight... [but every sinner is] justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:20-24).

This is the thought that causes David to remember the LORD's past deliverances, meditate upon His present works, and muse about the enduring love that God has shown to him and every repentant sinner. If God has been faithful in the past, why should He fail in the present? He is the same today, yesterday and forever. Muse on the works of His hands. ■

# 18 Psalm 143:7-12

DECEMBER

Teach Me Thy Way

Dec

***Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God: Thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness. (Psalm 143:10)***

Repentance—turning away from our sins—is the first step of faith. The repentant sinner would also desire to walk in the path of righteousness. It is not enough to stop doing wrong, the redeemed must also learn to do what is right in God's sight. David was not only concerned about God's deliverance—he was also concerned about his walk with God. David needed salvation; he also needed God's direction.

CHS: "How childlike—'Teach me'! How practical—'Teach me to do'! How undivided in obedience—'to do Thy will'! To do all of it, let it be what it may. This is the best form of instruction, for its source is God, its object is holiness, its spirit is that of hearty loyalty. The man is hidden in the LORD, and spends his peaceful life in learning the will of his Preserver... 'For thou art my God'... When the heart can sincerely call Jehovah 'my God,' the understanding is ready to learn of Him, the will is prepared to obey Him, the whole man is eager to please Him."

David desired to be among the godly. He yearned for the land of grace, peace, and communion. David's holy desire was matched by his godly motivation. He sought to do God's will and he walked in God's way not for some pecuniary rewards but for the sake of God's Name. The narrow road and the strait gate is a difficult and trying journey. The way is steep and oftentimes trying. The godly way runs opposite to the reason and the impulses of the natural man. But by the grace of God and for the sake of our Lord Jesus, we press on, "looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2a). ■

***LORD, what is man, that Thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that Thou makest account of him! Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away. (Psalm 144:3-4)***

The best and true faith is personal. In Christianity, there can be no faith by proxy. Psalm 144 is an expression of David's personal faith in God. "Blessed be the LORD *my* strength...*my* goodness, and *my* fortress; *my* high tower, and *my* deliverer; *my* shield, and He in whom I trust..." (vv. 1-2) Blessed be the man who shares David's confession.

As David relished in his communion with God, he was drawn to his own frailty. Who are we to claim the LORD as our own? What rights do we have to make this audacious assertion? And what demands do we have upon the divine privileges?

CHS: "What a contrast between Jehovah and man! The Psalmist turns from the glorious all-sufficiency of God to the insignificance and nothingness of man. He sees Jehovah to be everything, and then cries, 'LORD, what is man!' What is man in the presence of the Infinite God?...Adam is like to Abel. He is like that which is nothing at all...[He is actually vain, and he resembles that unsubstantial empty thing.] He is so short-lived...His life is only like to a shadow...Infinite condescension can alone account for the LORD stooping to be the friend of man. That He should make man the subject of election, the object of redemption, the child of eternal love, the darling of infallible providence, the next of kin to Deity, is indeed [amazing love]."

Although David was king, he was not oblivious to his own frailties. When David looked at himself, he saw vanity. But when he turned to God in faith, David found in Him everything. What a difference faith in God makes! ■

***Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood: That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace. (Psalm 144:11-12)***

Despite the oppression from his enemies, David trusted in the LORD. Instead of sighing in despair, he was singing a new song (v. 9). He was confident that God would give him deliverance (v. 10). He prayed that God would save him from the “hand of strange children”.

CHS: “Riddance from the wicked and the gracious presence of the LORD are sought with a special eye to the peace and prosperity which will follow thereupon. The sparing of David’s life would mean the peace and happiness of a whole nation...Our sons are of first importance to the state, since men take a leading part in its affairs; and what the young men are the older men will be. He desires that they may be like strong, well rooted, young trees, which promise great things. If they do not grow in their youth, when will they grow? If in their opening manhood they are dwarfed, they will never get over it...But when we see them developed in holiness, what joy we have of them!...Daughters unite families as corner stones join walls together, and at the same time they adorn them as polished stones garnish the structure into which they are built. Home becomes a palace when the daughters are maids of honour, and the sons are nobles in spirit; then the father is a king, and the mother a queen, and royal residences are more than outdone. A city built up of such dwellings is a city of palaces, and a state composed of such cities is a republic of princes.”

The dividends of God’s salvation benefited not just David alone, but also his children. It started with one man who comes to God for salvation, and the blessings overflow to the next generation. Where godliness and righteousness is the tone and tenure of the home, our children will be blessed. ■

***I will speak of the glorious honour of Thy majesty, and of Thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of Thy terrible acts: and I will declare Thy greatness. (Psalm 145:5-6)***

**P**salm 145 is the last of the acrostic psalms. Every verse begins with a letter in the Hebrew alphabet. However, although there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, there are only 21 verses in this psalm. The reason is that one of the letters (*nun*) has been omitted. The theme of this psalm is David's praise to God the King. This is a great statement from David, who was Israel's greatest king. He recognised that there was One Who was greater than he. David knew it when he was sitting on the throne; and that he was a subject of the King of kings.

What does the great King of heaven deserve? Our praise and worship. And what do we praise God for? His majesty and His works. A.W. Tozer says that man's language staggers when we talk about God. There are no words apt enough except the superlatives.

CHS: "David cannot give over the worship of God into the hands of others... he must have his own individual share in it... His language labours to express his worship of Jehovah. Everything which has to do with the Great King is majestic, honourable, glorious. His least is greater than man's greatest, His lowest is higher than man's highest. There is nothing about the infinite LORD which is unworthy of His royalty; and... nothing is wanting to the splendour of His reign: His majesty is honourable, and His honour is glorious: He is altogether wonderful."

Others will speak of the terrible acts of God's judgement, but David will declare the greatness of His grace. And this is the duty of every believer—to make a personal declaration of God's grace and mercy in your life. ■

***Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. (Psalm 145:13)***

The story was told of a young child who followed his parents to church since he was born, and he had memorised the Lord's Prayer—sort of. One day, he was heard reciting his version of the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father who does art in heaven, Harold is Thy Name." This boy's childish ignorance is a picture of Christians who recite the Lord's Prayer without understanding. When we come to the part of the Prayer that says "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," we are affirming that God is the King and we are His subjects; and that His will and not ours be done.

CHS: David's "meditation has brought him near to God, and God near to him...He sees the great King, and prostrates himself before Him. It is well when our devotion opens the gate of heaven, and enters within the portal, to speak with God face to face, as a man speaketh with his friend. The point upon which the Psalmist's mind rests is the eternity of the divine throne...The LORD's kingdom is without beginning, without break, without bound, and without end. He never abdicates His throne. None can overthrow His power, or break away from His rule...Men come and go like shadows on the wall, but God reigneth eternally. We distinguish kings as they succeed each other by calling them first and second; but this King is Jehovah, the First and the Last."

The everlasting kingdom of God deserves everlasting allegiance from those who follow Him. There is not a moment to waste by having our loyalties displaced by some temporal thing or person. The words, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," will be best appreciated by those who are subjects of God in the fullest sense; and those who are truly loyal to the LORD. ■

***The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. (Psalm 145:18)***

**T**he LORD GOD is the omnipotent King. His kingdom is everlasting. These two attributes would make God a dreadful tyrant if He is not also loving and compassionate. But the LORD lifts up those who fall. He provides for all who wait upon Him. The omnipotent and eternal King is also “righteous in *all* His ways, and holy in *all* His works” (v. 17). Another proof of God’s covenant love for us is that He hears our prayers.

CHS: God is near to us “to sympathise and favour. He does not leave praying men...to battle with the world alone, but He is ever at their side. This favour is not for a few of those who invoke Him; but for...‘all’ who place themselves beneath the shield of His glorious name by calling themselves by it, and by calling upon it in supplication...[and to all who] find Him to be a very present help in trouble.”

The Person to whom we direct our prayer is important. The heart by which we pray is also crucial. David says we must “call upon Him in truth.” Do not pray like the Pharisee who prayed thus with himself (Luke 18:11), and who prayed to be seen and heard of men (Matt. 6:5). Such prayers may tickle men’s ears, but they will never move God’s heart. The God of truth cannot be nigh to the spirit of hypocrisy. To call upon God in truth, we must first have a true heart. Verse 15 is one of David’s last words in the Psalter. The man of God’s own heart ended with a legacy of praise—“My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless His holy name for ever and ever” (v. 21). ■

# 24 Psalm 146:1-10

DECEMBER

The Man who is of no Help

Dec

***Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. (Psalm 146:3-4)***

The remaining five psalms of the Psalter are collectively and appropriately known as the Hallelujah Psalms. Like the final movement of a symphony usually ends majestically, so the Psalms would end with a crescendo of praises to the Almighty God. In Psalm 146, the writer praises Jehovah when he juxtaposes God's faithfulness with man's failings. Note the number of verses that are dedicated to God—He is the Creator, Judge, Provider, Liberator, Preserver, Protector of the weak, and the eternal King (Ps. 146:6-10). Comparatively, there are only a few verses reserved for men—he is helpless; he is no help; and he is as transient as his breath. Heed the Psalmist's counsel—"Put not your trust in princes."

CHS: "Men are always far too apt to depend upon the great ones of earth, and forget the Great One above; and this habit is the fruitful source of disappointment. Princes are only men, and men with greater needs than others; why, then, should we look to them for aid? They are in greater danger, are burdened with greater cares, and are more likely to be misled than other men; therefore, it is folly to select them for our confidence...Man is a helpless creature without God; therefore, look not for help in that direction. All men are like the few men who are made into princes, they are more in appearance than in reality, more in promising than in performing, more apt to help themselves than to help others."

Man not only fails in his words, but he also fails in his thoughts. His opinions vacillate; his "assertions" are uncertain; his loyalties are divided. However, what is said of man in general should be said of God's people. As Christians, we must live honestly so as to be deserving of every man's trust. ■

***He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.  
(Psalm 147:3)***

The Psalmist calls on God's people to praise Him. Why? Because it is good, pleasant and fitting (v. 1). Why? Because of Who God is and what He has done. Verse two describes the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem during the time of Nehemiah. Lest we think that God is only involved in big projects, the Psalmist adds that He also heals the broken-hearted.

CHS: "The LORD is not only a Builder, but a Healer; He restores broken hearts as well as broken walls. The kings of the earth think to be great through their loftiness; but Jehovah becomes really so by His condescension. Behold, the Most High has to do with the sick and the sorry, with the wretched and the wounded!...Few will associate with the despondent, but Jehovah chooses their company, and abides with them till He has healed them by His comforts... Come, broken hearts, come to the Physician Who never fails to heal: uncover your wounds to Him Who so tenderly binds them up!"

What a blessing it is to be broken-hearted and to have the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort as our Healer. God is like the Samaritan who went out of his way to tend to the needs of the man who had been robbed and left for dead. While other men passed by the man without so much as a hint of concern, the Samaritan showered his compassion on the stranger. Such is the magnitude of the love of our Saviour. He is the Shepherd Who leaves the flock and goes out in search of one lost sheep. To the unbeliever, it would have been a foolish decision to leave ninety-nine for one—but what a consolation it must be if you are that sheep! ■

***He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy. (Psalm 147:10-11)***

**“W**hat can I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb. If I were a wise man, I would do my part; yet what can I give Him? I'll give Him my heart.” This Christmas poem by English poet Christina Rossetti expresses not only the Christian's desire but also God's delight. God has no pleasure in the brute strength of His creatures. He does not even delight in the physical excellence of man.

CHS: *“He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man.”* These are the athlete's glory, but God hath no pleasure in them. Physical or material greatness and power are of no account with Jehovah. Men who boast in fight the valour of gigantic might will not find themselves the favourites of God... The Lord of hosts has no pleasure in mere bone and muscle... God does not take pleasure in us because of our attainments... He respects character rather than capacity... While the bodily powers give no content to God, spiritual qualities are His delight. He cares most for those emotions which centre in Himself: the fear which He approves is fear of Him, and the hope which He accepts is hope in His mercy... They fear, for they are sinners; they hope, for God is merciful. They fear Him, for He is great; they hope in Him, for He is good. Their fear sobers their hope; their hope brightens their fear: God takes pleasure in them both in their trembling and in their rejoicing.”

Therein is the hope of any and every man. If God has decided to find pleasure only in the strong, the intelligent or the rich, few would be able to stand in His presence. But God delights in the one who fears Him; that is one thing that every man—rich or poor, strong or weak—can do. ■

***He sheweth His Word unto Jacob, His statutes and His judgements unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for His judgements, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD. (Psalm 147:19-20)***

It is good and pleasant to praise God. But comely praise is dependent upon our knowing of the God Whom we praise. But “canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” (Job 11:7) Man’s intelligent praise of God depends on His revealing of Himself. Our Lord Jesus invites us to “search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). John Wesley wrote, “Let me be *homo unius libri* [a man of one book].” Similarly, the Psalmist praised God Who “sheweth His Word unto Jacob.”

CHS: God “Who is the Creator is also the Revealer. We are to praise the LORD above all things for His manifesting Himself to us... Whatever part of His mind He discloses to us, whether it be a word of instruction, a statute of direction, or a judgement of government, we are bound to bless the LORD for it. He Who causes summer to come in the place of winter has also removed the coldness and death from our hearts by the power of His Word, and this is abundant cause for singing unto His name. As Jacob’s seed of old were made to know the LORD, even so are we in these latter days; wherefore, let His name be magnified among us.”

Of all people, why did God choose to reveal to Jacob alone? And why only Israel? This is the mystery of God’s amazing grace and His electing love. But there is a purpose to God’s election—the election call is the loudest call for adoration. Man has no answers to God’s sovereign work, but the elect knows the purpose of it—God’s people are bound by gratitude to sing hallelujahs to His Name. ■

***Praise Him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for He commanded, and they were created. He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: He hath made a decree which shall not pass. (Psalm 148:4-6)***

The Hallelujah Psalms direct our attention to our worship of God. True worship is God-centred (Ps. 146). True worship is God-motivated (Ps. 147). In Psalm 148, the Psalmist identifies the true worshipper. The psalm tells us that everything everywhere must worship God. The whole creation is a continuous hymn of praise unto the God of creation.

The Psalmist begins with the angelic hosts. "Praise ye Him, all His angels: praise ye Him, all His hosts" (v. 2). The pagans worship angels, sun, moon, stars, and every cosmic phenomenon as if these came into existence by themselves. The Psalmist, on the contrary, directs his worship not at creation, but at the Creator. The LORD not only created; He had also eternally set in place the movement of the heavenly bodies. Nothing is ever random with the God of order.

CHS: "The continued existence of celestial beings is due to...[the power of] Jehovah, and to that alone. They do not fail because the LORD does not fail them. Without His will these things cannot alter...The heavenly bodies are ruled by Jehovah's decree: they cannot pass His limit, or trespass against His law. His rule and ordination can never be changed except by Himself, and in this sense His decree 'shall not pass'...This submission to God's law is praise... [Thus] the eternal hymn is forever chanted; even the solemn silence of the spheres [planets] is a perpetual Psalm."

The immutable God Who rules the universe also rules in our lives. The expectation is the same—where God has declared His laws, He expects nothing but submission. Where He has spoken, the children of all generations can do nothing but obey. ■

***Let them praise the name of the LORD: for His name alone is excellent; His glory is above the earth and heaven. (Psalm 148:13)***

The heavenly bodies bow in worship to the LORD (vv. 1-6). The earth-bound creatures also worship Him (vv. 7-10). That man who is created in God's image refuses to worship the LORD speaks of the tragic state of man's depravity. The whole creation can only praise God by their silent existence; only man is created with a mind to know God, with a heart to love Him, and with a voice to sing His praise. And when man refuses to worship God and substitutes Him with one of His creatures, it is the most grievous of sins. Thus the Psalmist calls on us to praise God for His name alone is excellent.

CHS: "All that is contained in the name or character of Jehovah is worthy of praise, and all the objects of His creating care will be too few to set it forth in its completeness... [His Name] alone deserves to be exalted in praise, for alone it is exalted in worth. There is none like unto the LORD, none that for a moment can be compared unto Him... '*His glory is above the earth and heaven*'... [God's glory] is therefore alone because it surpasses all others. His royal splendour exceeds all that earth and heaven can express."

Here is where we must see ourselves. Do we regard life, blessings, and salvation as coming from God alone, or do we think that they are the work of our hands? The Psalmist says that it is the LORD Who "exalteth the horn of His people, the praise of all His saints" (v. 14a), meaning to say that God will make His blessings so abundant that it would be impossible for us to be superfluous in our praises for Him. ■

***Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and His praise in the congregation of saints. (Psalm 149:1)***

**W**orship should be second nature to God's people. And music is an integral part of worship. Martin Luther once wrote, "I truly desire that all Christians would love and regard as worthy the lovely gift of music, which is a precious, worthy, and costly treasure given to mankind by God...next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. It controls our thoughts, minds, hearts, and spirits...This precious gift has been given to man alone that he might thereby remind himself that God has created man for the express purpose of praising and extolling God."

CHS: "Sing, for it is the fittest method for expressing reverent praise. Sing a hymn newly composed, for you have now a new knowledge of God. He is ever new in His manifestations; His mercies are new every morning; His deliverances are new in every night of sorrow; let your gratitude and thanksgivings be new also...Our singing should be 'unto the LORD'; the songs we sing should be of Him and to Him...Never can we find a nobler subject for a song than the LORD...nor one which we are personally so much bound to sing as a new song 'unto the LORD.'"

Psalm 149 begins with the same words—"Praise ye the LORD." It is the second last psalm in the Psalter, and yet the Psalmist calls on the people to sing a new song. The new song is not new in the sense of frivolous novelty. The new song is simply an eternal truth that is sung with a renewed heart. The song is new in the sense that as we experience the new mercies of God each day, and as we draw closer to Him, we will praise God with greater zeal and fresher fervour. ■

***Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in His sanctuary: praise Him in the firmament of His power...Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD. (Psalm 150:1, 6)***

**"P**raise ye the LORD. Praise God in His sanctuary: praise Him in the firmament of His power." The Psalmist calls on us to "praise God in His sanctuary." CHS: "Praise God...in His holy place...[God's house] should be filled with praise, even as of old the high priest filled the...tabernacle with the smoke of sweet-smelling incense...Whenever we assemble for holy purposes our main work should be to present praises unto the LORD our God."

It would be a gross omission on the part of God's people if we think that the sanctuary refers only to the church building; and worship as a once-a-week activity. The Holy Scriptures tell us that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 6:19), meaning to say that where we are, that is, God's sanctuary, and what we do there is worship. Frances Havergal's famous hymn touches on this idea.

*Take my life, and let it be consecrated, LORD, to Thee.  
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise...  
Take my will, and make it Thine...Take my heart, it is Thine own...  
Take my love...Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.*

Allow me to end this last devotion of the year with a personal testimony. This daily devotional through the Psalms accompanied by Charles Spurgeon's *Treasury of David* was first published in 2006 as a biweekly Bible-reading guide. I had embarked on this arduous work because there was a need—a need to re-introduce daily worship within the covenant home; a need to re-establish a godly habit of Bible reading within the Christian home. There is much truth to the often-quoted and under-practised adage that says "the family that prays together stays together." We pray that this book proves helpful in making the Word of God an integral part of your daily life. "Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD." Amen. ■

