2 Samuel - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston

Behold the Bridegroom, King Shall Reign in Righteousness, A

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2 Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm 72

One is in no sense surprised that the last words of David should be true, to life, of Him, who is David's Son, and David's Heir, although He was also the Root of David, and David's Lord. I think no person can have the slightest difficulty in seeing, that the One of whom David speaks, in the third verse of the 23rd of 2nd Samuel — although the principle, of course, ought to apply to every ruler — in truth can be none but Jesus, and Jesus in that blessed moment of which the 72nd Psalm has already spoken to us this evening — when He shall rule and reign over this earth. In no part of Scripture can I put my hand upon a passage, which brings out more beautifully, and sweetly, what will be the character of that day, than that which we have read — "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God: and He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain."

Now turn to the 32nd chapter of Isaiah, where we get a remarkable expression with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, which I desire to point out to you — "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken" (vss. 1-3). Then lower down in the same chapter we read, "Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest" (vs. 15). That is the change, in the external aspect of the world, at that moment — the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and what men had, till then, counted a fruitful field, in that day, will be thought a forest — the character of things will be so changed. Reading on, you further find what marks the moment: "Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace: and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (vss. 16-18). Thus you see the Lord distinctly unfolds to His people, by the pen of Isaiah, what will mark that day when the King shall reign in righteousness.

Now, beloved friends, it is very important for us to see, distinctly, the relationship, in which we, as Christians, stand to the Lord, as compared with that of the people, Isaiah writes about here. I know perfectly well, it is a very common thing, for people to speak, poets to write, and preachers to preach about the Lord Jesus, as our King. Scripture, however, is quite silent upon this term, used in relation to the saints of the present dispensation — Christians. In fact, daresay, it may a little interest you, if I say, that the Lord Jesus, in the whole of His earthly pathway, never spoke of Himself as a king, save once. That once was in the 25th of Matthew, where He is speaking of the future day, of which this 32nd of Isaiah speaks also, when, as King, He will sit upon the throne of His glory, and "then shall the king say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." It is surely not without interest to us, to see, that the Saviour never speaks of Himself as a King, in the whole of His pathway here, save in that passage, and the reason is very simple. It is not as King that the believer knows Him now. It is not, of course, but that the Lord has authority over him, but the moment of the manifestation of the kingship of Christ has not yet come. The expression "King of saints" (Rev. 15:3) should be "King of nations," as the margin rightly gives it. When the Lord was upon the earth, He was a prophet, and now interceding before God, He is the great High-priest, but, in the day to come, He is to be a King.

What, then, is our relationship to the Lord Jesus? It is one of a much deeper, and far more blessed nature, than that of a subject to a king. Do not we, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, stand in a wonderfully nearer relationship to Him, than that of subjects to a king? There is, of necessity, no love between a subject and a king. It is merely a relationship of authority and subjection — exaltation on the part of the king, and subjection on the part of a subject. But the blessed truth of Christianity is this, that if you and I are brought, through grace, to know the Lord Jesus Christ now, as our Saviour, we are washed in His blood, and redeemed to God, through the work that He accomplished on the cross. We stand in the same relationship to God, as He does, as Man. He is now set down as the risen Man, the exalted Man in glory, and then, and never till then, did He become what Scripture asserts that He is, viz., "the head of the body — the Church." But now that He is in glory, the Holy Spirit comes down from Him there, and believers, Jew and Gentile, are first of all born of the Spirit, and then indwelt of the Spirit, and are so "baptized by one Spirit into one body," of which the Lord Jesus, in glory, is the living head. We are thus made members of Christ, and members one of another.

It is not by faith, nor by possessing life, but by having the Holy Spirit, that we become united to Christ. But what has that to do with the Lord's coming? A great deal. Another night I hope to show you, that they who are in union with Christ, as members of His body — hence composing the Bride — will have a wonderful place, by-and-by, in the millennial day. I do not purpose this evening taking up that side of the truth, but I will say this, that those who belong to Jesus now, who are united to Him, as Head or the Church, will have a marvelous place in the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find all this fully unfolded in Revelation 21-22, where the New Jerusalem, the Bride, the Lamb's wife, is depicted, and portrayed, and her relation to a delivered earth fully brought out. The importance of knowing the Saviour now, and our relationship with that Saviour, is very far reaching, because it is of that day, that the Lord Himself speaks, when He says, "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved Me" (John 17:22-23). And by-and-by, when the world sees the blessed Lord, and owns Him, it will be a wonderful thing for you and me, to find ourselves in association with Christ, not as subjects merely, but as sharers of the glory, which lie inaugurates, and will maintain for a thousand years, over the delivered earth. It is a happy thing to be a Christian, there is nothing brighter or better, if one thinks of it now, or for the time to come.

Here, then, we get plainly enough the divine statement that a King shall reign in righteousness. Now turn to a scripture which definitely states what the period of the reign will be — Revelation 20:4-6. On a previous occasion we looked at the 10th chapter, and saw how the Lord comes

as King of kings, and Lord of lords, from heaven, and how the beast and the false prophet will be put down by Him, when, as a warrior judge, He comes again to the earth. “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.”

The very first thing the true King does, before He commences His reign of peace upon the earth, is to bind the usurper of God’s rights, and place, in this world, from the Garden of Eden downwards. Satan is “bound for a thousand years.” He is called here the dragon, but also the old serpent. He was the source of all the evil, and sorrow, in the morning of man’s day on earth (Gen. 3),and every name, that Scripture gives him elsewhere, is introduced here, that there might be no mistake whatever as to his personality. The angel “cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season” (vs. 3). The time of his incarceration in the bottomless pit endures then for one thousand years.

Then John says, “I saw thrones, and they” (the heavenly saints, who came out with the Lord in chapter 19, the Church, I have no doubt, but more than the Church, all the heavenly saints) “sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God” (the early martyrs of the book of Revelation, see chapter 6), “and those which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands” (that is the later company of martyrs, spoken of in the 13th, and 15th chapters); “and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” They have full association with the Lord in the day of His earthly glory. “But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison” (vss. 4-7).

I speak not now of Satan’s release, but you see that for a thousand years — the millennium — the prime mover of all evil is cast out of the scene. Some person might say, Why a thousand years? Well, Scripture distinctly says it shall be a thousand years, and, I have little doubt in my mind that, the thousand years is connected very beautifully with the faithfulness of God. Do you not remember what God said, when He reformed this earth, and put man upon it? Turn back to the first of Genesis, and you will at once see another instance of how all Scripture hangs together most wonderfully. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Then we read, “the earth was without form and void.” Do you think that is the way God made the earth? Do you think God turned this earth out, a rude, shapeless mass, like that? Impossible, no! There is no mistake about that. Just turn to the 45th of Isaiah, verse 18, and you will find a remarkable statement as to this point. There the Spirit of God says, “Thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth, and made it; He hath established it, He created it not in vain; He formed it to be inhabited.”

What does “in vain” mean? It is the very same Hebrew word rendered “without form, and void” in Genesis 1:2. So you see that you have here, a great sidelight flung on Genesis 1. In the beginning God created the earth. When thus created, it was not created “without form, and void.” How it became “without form, and void,” is not told us in Scripture. We are only told, that God did not so create it, but that eventually it was reduced to that condition, and therefore, I have little doubt, that between the 1st and 2nd verses of Genesis 1, in other words, between “the beginning,” when God created the earth, and the time when it is seen to be “without form, and void,” we have that necessarily vast period, during which all the varied strata of the earth’s crust were formed, of which the geologists instruct us, and, for the deposition of which, they demand such unlimited ages. In the interval between these two verses you have space for all that geology demands. Let me say, in passing, you had better believe Scripture before geology. Geology sometimes speaks a little bit widely. Science, and geology especially, is rather like a noisy baby, it is very apt to make a great noise when it first appears, but as it gets older it gets quieter. We had better listen to God than to geologists, if they state what is counter to Scripture. We have lived long enough, some of us, to know that the theories of fifty years ago have all been exploded today, but the Word of God abides. Geologists tell us that there were at least twenty-nine epochs, and twenty-nine immense convulsions of the earth’s crust. Well, be it so, and what do you find? We discover the granite, which was formed at the bottom, brought to the top, and you build your houses thereof, and the coal, that you are glad to warm yourselves with in winter, though formed infinitely lower than where it is found today by your miners, was, by the very influence, that rendered the earth “without form, and void,” brought near the surface, or they could never get at it at all.

Let me repeat, then, that there is room, for all that geology wants, between verses 1 and 2, and then we can take the six days to be, as I believe them to be, days of twenty-four hours, in which God prepared the earth for man. It might have taken one hundred years for an oak tree to grow, but it would not take a carpenter one day to cut that tree, and make it into some useful article. That is what is meant, I take it, when it is said of the earth, that God “formed it to be inhabited.” He put to His hand, and formed the earth for man, and then “God saw everything that He had made, and, behold it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Then we read, “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made; and God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because that in it He had rested from all his work which God created and made” (Gen. 2:2-3).

We have, then, God working six days, and He appoints the seventh as the day of rest. That is the second of Genesis, and you know what took place in the third. I do not know that the fall of man took place on the very day that God did rest, but He had made man, and put a helpmeet by his side — a lovely type of Christ and His Church. Then the next thing we find is, that the serpent enters, and this happy scene is defiled by the enemy’s power. Man falls, and the rest of God is broken, and from that day till this, the earth has been marked by the trail of the serpent, the sin of man, and the absence of rest. That has gone on for nearly six thousand years. About four thousand years elapsed before Christ was born, and we are now in A.D. 1891, which makes 5891. We are not, however, quite sure of our chronology, and I am thankful for that too, for we may be rather nearer the end of the six thousand years, than people are aware of. Earth has been robbed of her Sabbaths for six thousand years, but God is faithful, and will give them to her, all in a lump, by-and-by, and so, I have little doubt, that the seventh thousand, will be the thousand years of which the 20th of Revelation speaks; for, as six days of labor, are to one of rest, so are six thousand years of sin, and sorrow, under the rule of the devil, to the thousand years, of rest, and peace, under the blessed Lord Jesus.

The next thing before us is the rapture of the saints, the Church is taken to glory, and then the Lord appears, Satan is cast into the bottomless pit, and the reign of the righteous King begins. The 72nd Psalm, to which I will turn you, is exceedingly beautiful, as unfolding what will be the character of that reign. All the Lord’s enemies are judged, and He gathers out of His kingdom all things that offend, and then He rules, and reigns over the earth, in absolute righteousness. In this Psalm you will see one particular feature of the Lord’s reign, that is exceedingly beautiful. He thinks of the poor especially. In the 4th verse we find, “He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. He shall

come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth. In His days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him; and His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve him. For He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper" (Psa. 72:4-12).

Every kind of injustice will be remedied, by His blessed hand, immediately, for He reigns in righteousness. There are three spheres where righteousness is found. In the present moment, if I think of God's dealings with men, I learn this, that grace reigns through righteousness — it is divine grace upon a righteous basis that saves men today. But from another point of view, now is the day when righteousness suffers. From the day of the rejection of the Lord Jesus, in fact from Abel downwards, righteousness has always suffered. You just try to be practically a righteous person, and you will suffer. I do not deny at all that in the long run "Honesty is the best policy," but nevertheless the honest one will have to suffer. You may suffer for "conscience toward God" (1 Pet. 2:19), or, "for righteousness sake" (1 Pet. 3:14), or, "as a Christian" (1 Pet. 4:16). In the millennial day righteousness reigns; and as regards eternity we read of "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). It is perfectly at home, so to speak, there. In the day when righteousness reigns upon the earth, it does not appear that everybody will be converted. The millennial reign of the Lord Jesus does not, necessarily, involve the absolute conversion to God, of every soul upon earth, although, thank God, the mass will be converted. There may be, even in that day, when the Lord is manifesting His glory so wonderfully, those, who may break out in opposition to Him. When the Lord appears by-and-by, in power, and majesty, with every attribute of glory connected with Him, it will be a magnificent, marvelous, and appalling sight for the world. Sinners will think then, that they had better bow down to Him, but whether they all will do so, in reality, is a question.

In proof of this, I ask you to turn to the 18th Psalm. It describes the moment when the Lord is made "the head of the heathen." "Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; and thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people whom I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they shall obey me: the sons of the stranger [see margin] shall yield feigned obedience [margin] unto me" (vss. 43,44). This is not a very remarkable thing; the fathers will be all right, but the sons unchanged; just, as today, you will find a godly father, and, alas! an ungodly son. Again, in Psalm 66 we read, "How terrible art thou in thy works; through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee," or as in the margin, "lie, or yield feigned obedience" (vs. 3). That is, in the presence of the unmistakable power, and divine authority of the Lord Jesus, in that day, there will be an apparent subjection to Him, that may not be real, and that being so, one is prepared for that which the 20th of Revelation gives us — namely, that after the thousand years, there is found Gog and Magog — a large company, who yield themselves to Satan, when, being loosed, he emerges from the bottomless pit.

I would now like you to look at some of the salient features of the millennium.

(1) Death will be a rare thing. Turn to Isaiah 65. "Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth I and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people, a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old, shall be accursed" (vss. 17-20). You see from this passage that death will be a rare thing. Today death is the rule; "death reigned from Adam to Moses," and right onward too; but in that day it will be the exception. We, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, are looking for the return of the Bridegroom, and we look to go to heaven, without death, and, thank God, some of us will — I do not say you and I will — but, certainly, some of the Lord's saints will be alive when He comes. You remember Methuselah, whose life was nine hundred and sixty-nine years. That was not very much short of the thousand; but in the thousand years of the peaceful reign of Jesus, man will live out the full limit, which God has designed for him. What is meant then by saying that "the child shall die an hundred years old"? Well, Supposing you had a little one of seven, and it died, you say it died a child. Supposing next week the grandfather dies, and his age is seventy, you say he was an "old man?" He was only seventy, and as seven is to seventy, so is an hundred to a thousand. Seven is the child's age in our day, while it will be an hundred in that day. In our day seventy is the old man's age, while in that day one thousand years will many an old man see. I take it that death will only be, as the result of the governmental dealing of God, upon some open, and distinct act of sin, against the Lord.

But I hear an objector saying, If people are not going to die, how will you get them fed; the population of the earth will overstep the possibility of its supplying food for its inhabitants?

(2) The curse will be removed from the earth. In that day God will change the very aspect of things upon the earth. I wonder if you have ever observed another verse in our chapter. "They shall build houses, and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards and cat the fruit of them" (vs. 21). Man is in the most happy, and blessed relations with God possible, in that day, and God will blessedly undertake for him then. We have looked already this evening at the 3rd of Genesis, where the curse came in. The head of creation, Adam, fell, and, for his sake, the ground was cursed. It did not yield its increase. It is by the sweat of the brow that man has had to earn his bread since, and I suppose there never was a day, when people, in this land, felt more the pressure of the curse than now, when agriculture has so failed, and competition is so keen. Every year comes out the cry that the land cannot be made to bring forth food, to feed the people thereof; and it is a question of importing from all quarters, to keep people alive, at least where you and I live.

Now observe what is going to happen in that day? The curse is to be removed entirely. It was partially alleviated in the day of Noah, but it will be completely abrogated in Messiah's day. This is plainly stated in Isaiah 35, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.... in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land, springs of water; in the habitation of dragons where each lay, shall be grass, with reeds and rushes.... And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (vss. 1-2,6-7,10). The Lord puts His hand upon the face of creation in that day.

Look at Amos 9: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of My people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shalt also make

gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God" (vss. 13-15). In Isaiah 32nd, the same testimony comes out, when "the wilderness shall be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest" (vs. 15). The sweet Psalmist of Israel also anticipates this moment when he says, "Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us" (Psa. 67:6). Very wonderful will be the change over the face of creation, and all a testimony to Christ.

(3) The animal creation will undergo a radical change. Turn for a little again to Isaiah 65, "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, saith the Lord" (vs. 25). The only creature, from which God does not remove the curse, is the serpent. Even in that day the recollection will be in Jehovah's mind, of the part the serpent played, in producing the ruin He is now remedying, and therefore we have that sentence, "dust shall be the serpent's meat."

Then in Isaiah 11 we have a glowing picture of the reign of the Messiah. He comes forth as a rod out of the stem of Jesse — a branch growing out. Then we get the character of His reign. "But with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf; and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed: their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall cat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (vss. 4-9). A marvelous day for the earth, and the, at present, groaning creation, will it be. It will be the fulfillment of the statement, "The creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom. 8:21-22). We shall then have the curse removed, and the brute creation — at least as far as "My holy mountain" extends — brought into touch with the mind of God, and all will be equally fitting, and beautiful.

(4) Jerusalem, in more than pristine glory, will be the world's metropolis. Jerusalem, which was so trodden down of the Gentiles, will occupy a wonderful place in that day, and, her recovered glory, as much eclipse the past, as the glory of Christ as King, will surpass that of Solomon. I refer you to the closing verses of Isaiah 59: "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord" (vss. 19-20). Then (chap. 60) there is the beautiful call, to a long down-trodden nation, to wake up to their glory. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Who is the light? It is Christ. (* Possibly here, Christ and the Church are indicated. See Lecture 9, The New Jerusalem.) When He did come as the light of Israel, they refused Him, but when He appears again, they will own Him, and acknowledge Him, and now the Spirit of God calls upon them to wake up and see what God is going to give them. "For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee....And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in My wrath I smote thee, but in My favor have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee" — the Jew knew what that meant — "the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious....Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders: but thou 'shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (Isa. 60:1-5, 10-13, 18-20).

Then let us go to the 62nd chapter: "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, (that is, my delight is in her), and thy land Beulah (that is, married): for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Isa. 62:1-7). Nothing could be more clear than these statements of God's faithful word to His people.

Look now at Zephaniah 3, "In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not; and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The Lord Thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in his love; He will joy over thee with singing. I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee; and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord" (vss. 16-20). That has nothing in the world to do with the Church, it is Israel's blessing, and Israel's day of glory.

The Temple will be rebuilt, and its services restored with great magnificence. This we get unfolded in Ezekiel, chapters 40 to 46, which I am, from lack of time, unable to touch tonight, and you can peruse at your leisure. You will find this comes out, that Jerusalem is not only the joy of all the earth, but God owns that place as the spot where His temple is, and you have the temple rebuilt, in more than pristine glory, while the sacrifices are renewed, and the veil of the temple again exists in that day. That might seem to some of us a little retrograde, but I think you will find this, that, as the Old Testament sacrifices were anticipatory, the sacrifices of that day will be commemorative, because Israel's

salvation, like our own, is based on the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jerusalem becomes the center of earthly worship — all nations flow to it. Israel will have their temple rebuilt, and its services reinstituted, we have seen, but not only will Jehovah have their worship, but the whole earth will turn to Jerusalem, as its center of worship. In proof of this, I shall quote here but two scriptures — “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:1-3). Nothing could be plainer. Then in Zechariah 14, which, in its early verses, states, “I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle,” and then, that the Lord has come to the Mount of Olives, fought against them, and delivered her, we read, “And every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem, shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles; and it shall be that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain, there shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16-19).

The Feast of Tabernacles is the Old Testament feast, in Israel, which was typical of the millennial day of the Lord Jesus Christ. They had three great feasts, the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles; and it is very striking to see, that, while the Passover, which has its fulfillment in the death of Christ, and the Feast of Tabernacles, which is a figure of the coming glory of Christ, will be kept, Ezekiel is most careful to omit the Feast of Weeks, because that feast has found its antitype in Pentecost — the coming down of the Holy Spirit, and the forming of the Church. Israel will not keep it in that day, because the Church, so to speak, absorbed into herself what the Feast of Weeks meant. In that day Israel will keep the Passover (Ezek. 45:21), and the Feast of Tabernacles, and all the nations of the earth will come up, and join them, at least in the latter, and worship the Lord. A happy and blessed day for the earth will that be. A wonderful day indeed will it be for this poor sin-stained earth. Well may we pray, Lord, hasten that day.

Young Men of Scripture, Mephibosheth; or, a Good Finish

The story of Mephibosheth is to me exceedingly interesting, because it shows in a picture what man is in his natural ruined state, and how the grace of God can meet a man where he is, and what the effect of that grace will be upon the heart that has tasted it. The first thing we get in his history is when Mephibosheth was a child of five. Tidings come from Jezreel of the death of Saul and Jonathan. His grandfather and father were ignominiously slain on the mountains of Gilboa by the Philistines, and when the tidings came, “his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame” (2 Sam. 4:4).

Why did she fly? Why did that nurse take up that child of five years old, and fly? She reasoned exactly in the same way as man does about God. She reasoned from the conduct of Saul to David, as to what the conduct of David would be to the posterity, the offspring, of Saul, We have seen, on a previous night, how Saul had persecuted David, how he had hunted him like a partridge on the mountains. She knew that Saul hated David. She inferred that David would hate Saul, and that he would hate all the offspring of Saul. She argued—Here is the real heir to the throne: Saul is gone, and Jonathan is dead. The direct heir to Saul’s throne is this child, Mephibosheth; and now David will certainly get to the throne, for all Israel knows that David is marked out for the throne by God; he will be sure to cut off Saul’s posterity; but I will save this child from his vengeance. She took him from wrath, as she supposed, and in her haste she dropped him. He was injured, and crippled for life.

Man also is a cripple before God. Man has got away from God—every man! Adam first of all fell, and in his fall the whole of his family have got into a condition of distance from God. You may turn and say to me, “We admit that we are sinners at a distance from God, but we could not help being born sinners.” I allow that, but there is now no reason why you should remain at a distance from God. If you have not yet been converted, and led to know God as your Saviour, the reason is very simple. You prefer to remain where you are.

Turn to the next passage in Mephibosheth’s history, and read 2 Samuel 9, “And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” (2 Sam. 9:1). Here we shall find that Mephibosheth is not only grown, but has a child. I don’t suppose I shall go very far wrong in saying that at this time Mephibosheth must have been a man of between twenty and thirty years. And what has he done? He has remained away from David. But why did he not go up to David? He was afraid. He looked upon David in the same way as his nurse did, as the hereditary foe of his family. It is so with us. We have all sinned, and are away from God; and our hearts being deeply alienated from God, every man has the thought—God is against me. Lie! Lie of Satan! Foul lie of hell! God is not against man. He is for man.

It is man who is against God. It is you and I who are by nature against God. We have been opposed to God, and not God opposed to us. No, my friends, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ clearly solves this question. “If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Rom. 8:31-32), conclusively proves that God is for us. He is not opposed to man. We sometimes hear of God being reconciled to man. Scripture does not so speak. “And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled” (1 Cor. 1:21). It is man who is at a distance from God, and needs reconciliation. It is your heart and mine that are at a distance from God; but now God’s love has effected reconciliation in the case of every believer in Jesus! God was offended at man’s sin, but atonement has been made by Jesus’ death. God has received the atonement that Jesus has made, and man has to receive the reconciliation. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom. 5:10-11). What reconciles the heart of man to God? It is the thought—God loved me, when I did not love Him; Jesus died for me, when I did not care for Him.

This ninth chapter brings us to a point of immense interest in Mephibosheth’s history, where he gets really to know the heart of David. The kingdom is established. David is crowned. His foes have been put down. He is established on the throne, and in the calm quiet of the kingdom he is able to say, “Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” What a beautiful picture of the goodness of God! What a beautiful illustration of the grace of God at this very hour! Why have we this meeting in this hall

tonight? I believe that this meeting found its origin in heaven. It was prompted by God, and I hear His voice saying, as it were, “Is there yet any left of the lost race of Adam, that I may show him kindness for Jesus’ sake?” Is there an unsaved man—is there a lost man—is there an unpardoned man, within these walls tonight? The voice of God is heard saying, in His grace. “I will show him kindness for Jesus’ sake”; for observe, God has righteous ground for dealing with sinners thus. Man has deeply sinned; but before the day of God’s righteous judgment, His own blessed Son has entered the scene where man has sinned, and, dying for the sinner, has made atonement to God for his sins, so that God may bless in righteousness the one who believes in Jesus. Is there yet any left of the house of Adam, that God may show kindness to him tonight? To the foe, to the enemy, to the opponent, is this divine, this sovereign grace extended. God loves his enemies. He has loved us when we did not love Him. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Ziba, a servant of the house of Saul, could give useful witness in the case before us. The king says to him, “Art thou Ziba? and he said, Thy servant is he.” Every word has a meaning in Scripture, and this man’s name means “Plantation,” and you find what he was afterward. He was a man who was always looking after himself—who, as the saying goes, looked after the main chance, and he did so as long as he could. He gives witness of one of whom David may show kindness. The king says, “Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?” (vs. 3). That is a remarkable word, “the kindness of God.” A beautiful word! David looks around him, and says. “My heart is full of benevolence. Is there yet any left of the house of my foe? is there left any descendant of the man who hunted me, and sought me that he might slay me, and thrice threw javelins at me? Is there left any that—I may wreak my vengeance upon him? Ah! no —that I may show the kindness of God unto him. Beautiful word!

You may say to me, “What is the kindness of God?” We have the very expression used in the New Testament. We are left in no doubt as to what the kindness of God is. In writing to Titus, the Apostle Paul says: “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3.7). Wonderful words! The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man is shown in saving us. I don’t deny that God is good, and that He sends His rain on the just and the unjust, and causes His sun to shine on the evil, as well as on the good; but that is only in the way of providence. Where the real kindness and love of God come out, is in the giving of His own blessed Son, and that Son dying on the tree—the Just for the unjust. The kindness of God! Do you know it? Have you tasted it? Ah! my friend, are you still a stranger to this kindness of God? What is it? say you. It is the knowledge of salvation—it is the knowledge of eternal life—it is the knowledge of God as a Father—and it is the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. It is “The kindness of God our Saviour “not God our judge. We all thought about God as a judge. There is not one here, if he is honest, but will confess that his primary thought was that God was a judge. “God our Saviour,” I read here. “After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done”—that is, your works and mine are set aside—”but according to His mercy He saved us.” Who in this company tonight can really say, I am saved? If you are not, may God help you to believe the Gospel and see the truth. Then will you be able to say, I know the kindness of God; He has saved me this night by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as David was in quest of some of Saul’s household to bless them, so God is in quest of man to bless him. If there be only one young man in this hall tonight unsaved, then I have a message from God to him I have a message from the God of love, and that message is a message of kindness. The great point is to find the man for whom the message is designed. Ziba indicated the man in David’s day. He said, “Jonathan hath yet a son, who is lame on his feet.” He was a cripple. You could not get much out of a man lame on his feet. What would be the use of a man lame on his feet running in a race? What progress could a man lame on his feet make in climbing a mountain. Do you suppose you will find your way into heavenly glory lame on your feet. No!

Now, tell me, ye who are lame on your feet, would you not like to know Jesus tonight? Would you not like to have this blessed Saviour as yours? Alas! I am lame on my feet, do you reply? True, but it is not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to His mercy that God saves us. If you are ever going to be saved, how do you suppose it will be effected? There was a young man in this hall last Sunday evening. Another young man asked him, “Are you a Christian?” “No, but I think it is time to become a Christian “; and then he added, as though that would conclude the matter, and save him, “I think I will join the Christian Association.” Ah! is it by your own will, and jumping into the company of other people, that you hope to become a Christian? That is not the way at all. The way to become a Christian is to know Christ. The man who is really a Christian has been brought to see that he is a sinner—a ruined, lost, undone sinner; and then, when oppressed by the sense of his distance, he hears and believes the Gospel. By the Word of God he is brought to have to do with God, just as you will see Mephibosheth is here brought to David. David learns of his existence, and of his condition. He next asks, Where is he? “Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel in Lo-debar.” That was a long way off. Mephibosheth lived scores of miles away from Jerusalem. So did you and I live in “a far country,” like the prodigal son. That is where most men spend a good deal of their time. I admit that Lo-debar means “with pasture”; but do you think the pasture of Lo-debar could be equal to what was then in the king’s palace? Do you think “the husks that the swine did eat” are to be compared with “the fatted calf” of the father’s house? Do you think the pleasures of this world are to be compared with the blessedness of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and God as your Father? I assure you I tried well the pleasures of sin, but they did not satisfy. Nothing will satisfy your heart but the knowledge of God, and Him you may only know in the person of His Son —the Lord Jesus Christ. I grant that you are at a distance; but as the eye of the father was upon the son when he was “a great way off,” so is the eye of God upon each one here this evening.

“And king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar.” Sent and fetched him. Oh, what grace! No sooner does he know all about him than forsooth he must send and fetch him. I think I see the scene at that moment, when this fugitive—perhaps in the midst of his daily avocations—hear that a message from the king, borne by a herald with the king’s apparel, has arrived. He is arrested. “You are Mephibosheth?” says the messenger. “I am.” “I have a message for you.” “For me?” says Mephibosheth. “From whom?” “King David!” “And what is the message?” asks the trembling young man. “He has sent me to bring you from the spot where you are right up to Jerusalem—to his very presence.” I believe conscience began to work, and Mephibosheth would no doubt ask himself, “What does he want? What will he do with me?”

Just as David’s messenger approached Mephibosheth, so am I here tonight from heaven to call you. I am a messenger of God from glory to every unsaved man in this hall. “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye

reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). What do I want? I want you for Christ. I want your heart for Jesus! I want you to be brought to the Saviour! Young man! Come to the Lord! Turn this night, and know that blessed Saviour! Though you are yet in your sins, and at a distance from God, in an unregenerate condition, hear the Gospel, and turn to know the blessed Saviour in glory. God's message bids you come to Him. I do not doubt that when Mephibosheth heard the message, the query would arise in his mind, "How can I go?" I doubt not that David's messenger had beasts of burden to bring him from the far country to the king's presence. So it is tonight. What is it that brings a man to God? It is always the Word of God applied by the Holy Spirit. It is invariably some bit of Scripture—perhaps only one word—that comes into a man's mind, and turns him to God. God is sovereign in His grace. A young man passed a ball where there was preaching going on, in a careless, godless frame of mind. The door was on the swing, and he looked in. All he heard the preacher say was, "Turn or burn! turn or burn!" He was converted! A man, one Sunday evening, committed burglary, and was surprised by the police in the act. He fled, and was pursued. As he fled from the officers of the law, he turned a corner where stood a mission hall. Thinking to escape detection by this act, he entered the preaching place—an unlikely place, you would think, for a godless thief! The preacher at that moment gave out his text, "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" (Psa. 139:7). He escaped the policeman, but he did not escape God. He was convicted of his sin, and, thank God! it ended in his conversion. God delights, in grace, to meet a man where he is in his sin. The call to you tonight is to know God. And I want you to make up your mind.

"Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face and did reverence." It was a wonderful moment when he got into David's presence. He would recollect how he had acted. His own conscience would say, You kept up the grudge, you know. You kept out of David's presence; you never came to Jerusalem; you never helped to crown him. Your voice was not heard in that shout, "God save the king!" on the day of the coronation. Oh, no! He had kept far away, and he had reasoned thus: My grandfather hated David, David will hate me. I must keep away as far as possible from him. And you reason: I have sinned; God hates sin, therefore He must hate me. I will keep away as far from Him as I can.

Stop! That is an immense mistake. What you want is to come near to Him. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). Mephibosheth gets into David's presence, and makes obeisance. He falls down upon his face. His conscience is in the presence of the king, and it is a wonderful moment when the conscience gets into the presence of God. "And David said, Mephibosheth"—he calls him by his name.

I think he was a little startled, but he replies, "Behold thy servant!" He would take the place of a servant. "And David said unto him, Fear not; for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually" (vs. 7). What a beautiful word to a troubled soul! "Fear not!" It is God's lovely word of encouragement to the anxious soul. Fear not! Art thou troubled? Art thou anxious? Art thou afraid to draw near to God? What does He say? "Fear not!" That is the word of the Lord. "I will show thee kindness for Jesus' sake." Observe that God has now righteous ground for His action. God does not come down and bless man at the expense of His own character or righteousness. No; sin has been demonstrated at, and has been judged on, the cross, where the sinless Saviour died for the guilty sinner; and now, you observe God in righteousness is able to come out and bless man. "Fear not, for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually."

In effect David says: I shall bring you into my house, and you shall have a son's place. At this unfolding of grace, Mephibosheth bowed himself, and said, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am" I think that is a beautiful point. It pictures the real state of the soul that gets into the presence of God with a true estimate of what it is in His sight. Observe he calls himself "a dead dog." He humbles himself under the sense of his own actions, and the treatment he has given to David. I admit it was the treatment of indifference. Mephibosheth's had not been a course of open opposition like that of Saul. It had been cold distrust, and contemptuous indifference, and that is perhaps your position. It has not perhaps been open, blasphemous opposition to the Lord. What has it been? Cold and more or less, contemptuous indifference to Jesus. Mephibosheth had a deep sense of what his own behavior had been, and judged it unsparingly.

"Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul, and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him; and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may hive food to eat. But Mephibosheth, thy master's son, shall eat bread alway at my table", and then very strikingly is added, "Now Ziba had fifteen sons, and twenty servants" (vs. 10). I confess, when reading this, I often wondered why the Spirit of God should record that Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants, and it was a long time before I saw the point. It is very simple, however. It just shows how grace delights to contribute to the blessing of its object, and nothing is too much to devote to it. Here was David saying to Ziba, You and all your family must serve Mephibosheth; he is the object of my grace. And that is what God does. He saves and blesses a man out and out. He brings him to know Himself, and puts everything at his disposal. Everything is to contribute to his blessing. God loves us, and delights to bless us, and will turn everything to our advantage. The fifteen sons and twenty servants simply tell us that there is no limit to God's lavish supply to those whom His grace has blessed.

"Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons" (vs. 11). He was to be a son, not a stranger. He goes into David's house as a son, and that is what the Gospel does for the sinner. It makes him a son. Hitherto the servant of sin, and the servant of Satan, the moment the Gospel meets and blesses him, he becomes a son of God. "Ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). When the prodigal son had spent his all in the far country, the thought crossed his mind, "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." But observe that he did not say that. When the father saw him a great way off, he ran to meet him, and fell on his neck and kissed him. He treated him like a son, not as a servant. All! my dear friend, if God meets you, and blesses you, He gives you the place of a son, and not that of a servant. When he came to the father, he found nothing but love—nothing but goodness. How touching the description: "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him." And the son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son "; but he says nothing about being made a hired servant.

What did the father say? "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry" (Luke 15:18-24). So is it here. "Mephibosheth shall eat at my table as one of the king's sons," says David. And every man here may

so be blessed. We are forgiven our sins the moment there is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and at that moment we become the children of God, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name” (John 1:11-12).

But you might say to me, Can I receive Christ? You may; and if you are wise, you will do so at once.

And what became of Mephibosheth? He “dwelt in Jerusalem; for he did eat continually at the king’s table: and was lame on both his feet” (vs. 13). He dwelt in the place of royal grace, and how did he fare these? Like a king’s son. Had you seen him, he would have on the robe of a king’s son. If you had gone to the table of David, whom would you have seen there at every meal? Mephibosheth! He was quite at home, quite at ease; grace had won his heart. He is the figure of the Christian who knows that he is a Christian, who, as a simple believer, knows the joy which the Lord gives him. He seizes by faith what love provides, and enjoys it. He dwelt in Jerusalem. Why? “For he did eat continually at the king’s table.” He, nevertheless, “was lame on both his feet.” He was not altered in himself; his position was altered. And we, if we come to Christ, are we altered? No. We are ourselves still. We remain the same as before we received Jesus. We are not changed in ourselves, nor improved in our old nature, but we have a new life, with new joys, and a new object, Christ Himself.

If we receive Jesus, and eat at the Father’s table, and take the place of being His sons, we have to learn to be faithful, and that lesson Mephibosheth teaches us, too, beautifully. David lost his throne soon after Mephibosheth was received, through the conspiracy of Absalom, and had to fly from Jerusalem, and he naturally expected that Mephibosheth would be true to him and accompany him. So in the same way the Lord Jesus counts upon the fealty of your heart and mine, my dear young fellow Christian.

If you will turn over to 2 Samuel 16:1-4, you will see this brought out. Mephibosheth does not appear, but up comes Ziba with “two asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine.” The king asks him, “What meanest thou by these?” And Ziba said he had prepared these for the king’s household. Where is Mephibosheth? asked David. Oh! said Ziba, “He abideth at Jerusalem; for he said, Today shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father.” That was a dreadful lie of Ziba’s, but David was deceived, and he says, “Behold thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth.” It is very easy for one young man to tell lies on another, but the truth will all come out.

David’s kingdom is restored to him in chapter 19, and he returns to Jerusalem. When he comes back, who is the first person to come out and meet him? Listen, it is very instructive to me: “And Mephibosheth, the son of Saul, came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace” (19: 24). He was a mourner. His heart was as true as steel to David. Jerusalem had been given up to merriment, and making much of Absalom. The rebels were drinking wine, and making feasts; but Mephibosheth was true to the rejected king. Just so is it now. The world is going on in its carelessness, forgetful of Jesus, and hurrying to eternal judgment. What is the real Christian doing? Standing for Christ. Are you standing for Christ? Do you think Edinburgh knows you as a man of God—as a downright, backbone Christian —a man who stands for the Lord? That is the question. Mephibosheth was well known in Jerusalem as true to the rejected king.

He stood alone apparently, but he stood. He had “no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). His heart was with his master in rejection. His heart was true to his absent lord. Now the king asks him, “Why wentest thou not with me, Mephibosheth?” and he answered, “My lord, O king, my servant deceived me, for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass that I may ride thereon, and go to the king, because thy servant is lame, and he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king” (vss. 26-27). He it was who got ready, and prepared the bread and fruit and wine, to meet the king; but Ziba, rogue that he was, seized the laden asses, and rode off to the king, and slandered his master. David was deceived, but you can’t deceive Christ. There is no deceiving Him. I have had many a thing said about me during these three and thirty years that I have been a Christian, but I don’t care what people say. They can’t deceive my Master. He knows the truth, and that is the great thing.

Rather taken aback by learning the true state of affairs, David says, “I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land. And Mephibosheth said... ea, let him take all, for as much as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house” (vss. 29-30). I don’t care about the land, says Mephibosheth. That was all Ziba cared for. He wanted the earth. Like the worldly Christian, he wants things on earth. Mephibosheth says, I don’t want the land, I wanted you. I wanted your presence, I wanted to be for you, and with you.

I call this a grand finish—a fine finish. Don’t you? Here is a man true as steel—a downright, backbone disciple—a man whom you can’t shunt. He won’t yield. His heart is for his lord. He is for his lord, and he wants his lord only. I think Mephibosheth was a beautiful character. He had tasted grace, and afterward was faithful. Do you think our Lord does not look for us to be true and faithful? If we are saying, I will follow Christ, and at the same time hugging the world—with one arm holding the world, and with the other trying to hold Christ—do you think that will do? No! That is a double-minded man, and “a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). There are a good many people professing to be Christians, but they have too much of Christ to enjoy the world, and too much of the world to enjoy Christ, or to be able to do any real service for Him in the world. They are the people whom nobody respects; they are the people without a backbone. God save you from being a Christian of that stamp! I would like you to be a living, burning witness for Christ —the sort of person concerning whom it will be said, “All! if you get near to him, he. will be sure to speak to you about Christ.” Seek a man who, to be like the Apostle Paul can say, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.”

How beautifully does the curtain drop upon Mephibosheth! I do not care for the land, he says; I did not want the land; but I wanted your presence, O David! I don’t think anything could be more grateful or sweet to the heart of David. And so is it with the Lord Jesus. He looks for our affections and our faithfulness to Him; and should that faithfulness lead to persecution and loss for His name, never mind, for He says to all who suffer for Him. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

Streams From the Fountain of Life, Wanderer's Return., The

(Read 2 Sam. 13:23; 14)

THE narrative contained in these two chapters shows, most beautifully, the way in which God acts now, in His grace, and in His desire to bring back the sinner to Himself. There is one great point, though, in which the narrative differs from, indeed is entirely in contrast with the gospel; because whatever God does is righteous, and if He loves, it is righteous love; whereas the narrative shows us love traveling faster than righteousness, and the sequel is, there is a grand revolt, David's throne is upset, as we see in chapter 15. If God shows love, if God saves me, He does it righteously; He saves by His grace, He saves utterly, but He saves righteously.

David brings back this young man, but he brings him back unrighteously without judging his sin, and the consequence was he got bold; and that is what people who do not believe in hell now are, they are bold and defy God. Absalom was a murderer. However deep might be Amnon's guilt, there was no excuse for Absalom. He was a murderer, and yet you hear him saying in the end of chapter xiv, "If there be any iniquity in me." His sin had been unjudged, he had been brought back unrighteously, his conscience was hardened, and the consequence was, the moral character of the throne of David was destroyed; and where the moral character is destroyed the throne is upset, it provokes a revolt, as chapter 15 tells us.

Now God cannot make light of sin, though He has only love in His heart for the sinner. You have outraged God's character and God's throne, but you have not changed one whit the heart of Him who fills that throne; and though you may be a sinner of the deepest dye, yet you are an object of the love of God; His love has not been destroyed by your sin. And so we see in David, his heart yearns after the runaway.

Did you notice that it is recorded three times, “Absalom fled? Why did he fly? Because his conscience, then fully alive to his guilt, told him that, though his father might be king, yet he himself was a murderer, and that there was nothing, in righteousness, for a murderer but death. So he fled, for sin makes cowards of us all, and when a man has sin upon his conscience, he feels he cannot face God. It is a solemn thing, my friend, to have to face God in your sins. Have to do with God you must; you cannot evade it; and you have sinned. I do not care how much or how little, you have sinned. It may not be like Absalom's, but what is sin? Sin is man following the desire of his own heart; and have not you done that? You know you have.

Here, the desire of his own heart makes Absalom a murderer, and he flies from the presence of the king. And have not you got away, have not you fled from God? Does not your conscience still keep you at a distance from Him? But oh, do not you desire to get back to God? May His word bring you back just now! Why is the gospel preached? Because the world is away from God. If you were not away from God, why need the gospel be preached to you? The gospel tells you that you are away from God, but that His love wants to bring you back. God wants to have you.

"Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." Not to bring us to heaven, not to bring us to peace, but to bring us to God; and no soul is brought to God till it is brought to trust the blood of Christ. How the grace comes all from God's side, too! Have you been seeking to know God? God has been beforehand with you. He has been seeking you. He gave His own Son for me long before I ever had a thought about Him; and now the cross tells me God wants to save me: and the cross tells me God can righteously save me. Are you unconverted, with a weight of sins upon your conscience? God wants to bring you back to Himself. The soul of David longed after Absalom; three years had Absalom been away! and how long have you been away? Twenty years? Thirty years? Threescore years? Well, I do not know your age, but this I know, that if unsaved, you have never been near Him yet. You have spent your life at a distance from God, but God wants to have you brought back; God wants to have the link of relationship formed between Him and you.

Cast your eye back for a moment over life's pathway, and tell me what relationship has there ever been yet between your soul and God? Has Christ been uppermost? Has He had a place in your thoughts? Has He had a place in your plans? Has He been your object? The soul that is unconverted and honest says, "No, God has had no place in my thoughts hitherto; my plans have all been formed without Him; Christ has not been my object." But you must meet God. Why not meet Him now in grace, when in the love of His heart He wants to save you? Can you meet Him in judgment? In your sins? Oh! when is so good a time to meet Him as this very moment?

The reason man does not accept God's offer of mercy is because he does not care for it. Why did not the men in the Gospels accept the invitation to the feast? Because they were like you, who remain unsaved; they did not care for it, they had no heart to come, and you have not cared to be saved. If the heart had been right, the man with the yoke of oxen would have said, "The oxen are very fine, but I can wait until tomorrow to prove them," and the man with the piece of ground would have said, "I can wait till tomorrow to go and see that;" and the man who had married a wife would have said, "I am going to a feast, my dear, and you had better come with me," i.e., he would have gone himself and taken her with him. But they had no heart to go, and you have no heart for Christ's invitation; but though your heart is all wrong, God's heart is towards you.

David's heart was towards the prodigal, but he said, "If this heart bring him back, this hand holds a sword that must be planted in his bosom as soon as he returns." Then Joab comes in through the wise woman of Tekoah, as you read, and the end of it is that David gives way and brings him back without judging his sin. But does God bring back His prodigals without judging their sin? No, no. He has judged it in the Cross of Christ.

Until the Cross, where Christ suffered and bare sin, there was a barrier between man and God. Until the Cross of Christ, God is behind the veil: God dwelt between the cherubim (symbol of His righteousness); and there was a thick veil between man and God. The High Priest drew near once a year; went inside that veil, alone, with blood of others; but he came out again, and the veil remained. But when Jesus dies; when man had nailed Him to the tree; when man had done his worst—for it was man's hand that drove in those nails, it was man's hand that planted the crown of thorns upon that peerless brow, it was man's hand that plunged the spear into that blessed side—then, I say, when man had done his very worst against God, God seizes that very moment, in His matchless, His exquisite, His infinite grace, to do His very best for man. Christ, in that hour of darkness, when God's righteous wrath and man's unrighteous wrath alike fell on His blessed head, does a work that enables God to come out in righteousness and in love to man, and save the vilest.

When Jesus died, not only the rocks were rent, but he who entered the temple next found the veil rent from the top to the bottom. Why from the top to the bottom? Because it was God's hand that had done it. If man had rent that veil it would have only been to bring swift destruction on himself; and if man goes into God's presence now without Christ's blood, what must it be but sure destruction to him? But God Himself breaks down the barrier; that Cross where the Holy One died for the sinner, opened the way into God's very presence. "I am the way," says Christ, and if you seek another way, you are on the wrong way.

David's love, as we have seen, outstrips his righteousness, but when God brings back the sinner, He brings him back in righteousness. The Cross of Christ tells me this, that God's grace reigns now, in the place where death reigned before, and it reigns through righteousness, not at the expense of righteousness. Instead of death falling on the guilty soul, death falls on Jesus—the death of the Cross, death in the dark shades of Golgotha—and that death opens the way into God's presence for you and me.

If I were not brought to God in righteousness, I should be afraid some day he would rake up the question of my sins; but when I know my sins have all been taken up by my substitute Jesus, and that He has borne every one of them, not as I know them, but as God knows them, then I know that I escape the penalty due to them, through sovereign love indeed, but love that is based on righteousness.

Do you believe this story of the Cross? Then do you not see in it how God loves you? Yes, He wants you. He tells me first of all that He has gauged my guilt, and that Christ took the full weight of that guilt on Him when He died; and "mercy and truth meet together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

The wise woman of Tekoah said, "We must needs die," i.e., the moral of her story is, Make haste; and the moral of my story to you is make haste, for you may soon die, you know not how soon, and you must meet God. "Yet," she says, "Doth he (God) devise means that his banished be not expelled from him." I have told you God's means. I know they find no acceptance in the eyes of man. "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness," but the Cross of Christ is God's only way of salvation. Christ maintains the character of the Throne of God in righteousness, while He manifests the character of' the heart of God in its deep, deep love. Can you, my friend, agree with a lunatic who once thus exquisitely expressed it

“Could I with ink the ocean fill,Were every blade of grass a quill,Were the whole heaven of parchment made,And every man a scribe by trade,To write the love of God aboveWould drain the ocean dry:Nor could the scroll contain the whole,Though stretched from sky to sky.”

Blessed! whatever else he did not know, he knew the love of God which "passeth knowledge.”

Now there comes the contrast between the narrative and the gospel, between the King's message and God's message. The King's character breaks down; love reigns at the expense of righteousness; God's love reigns through righteousness. The King's message is, "Go, bring the young man back," but "let him not see my face." What is God's message to you? "Bring him, bring her to Me." "Christ suffered to bring us TO God." Luke 15 says that while the returning prodigal was "yet a great way off, the father saw him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

After two years Absalom gets the kiss, but how long has the sinner now to wait for the Father's kiss? Two years?

No! Not two seconds! What do you find when you come to God? That He has open arms for you! I think that prodigal must have stood still in downright sheer amazement when he saw his father run; and he kissed his unwashen cheek! kissed him in his rags; fell on his neck and kissed him! What wondrous grace! God's own heart proposes the plan for our salvation. God gives up His Son to die; God's hand raises Him from the dead. God sends down the Holy Ghost, and God now Himself sends out the message, inviting the sinner to come near. It is all wondrous grace and love. In David's heart there is love, but not light. In God there is both. He has shown me up in my true character. He has to make no discoveries of me by and by. He has discovered my true state, and love comes in and meets that state. Light shows me my sin, love puts that sin away.

Oh! will you not turn to this One; the One in whom both love and righteousness are combined? Will you not receive Christ at once? With Him everything is yours. May you receive His grace, and taste the joy of it, and be a witness and confessor of how good is God, how perfect His way, and may you walk accordingly till the day when He shall take you up to Himself. But oh! my unsaved friend, do not you miss the day of His grace, the day of His love now and be left to face the day of His terrible Judgment.

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