Exodus - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 4 (1856), "For I Am Gracious."

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Ex. 22:27; Deut. 24:10.

THE Apostle Paul speaks of the Jew, as having “the form of knowledge and of the truth in the Law.” (Rom. 2:20.) The Law gave, as it were, an outline of the knowledge of God; but the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, is the only One who has fully declared Him. Still there are traits of the Divine character incidentally brought out in the civil and social law, which it pleased the Lord to give to Israel, very distinct from the stern manifestation of righteousness in the awe-striking words they heard from Sinai. Many of the laws given to Israel have the solemn sanction, “I am the Lord,” or “I am the Lord your God.” (See Lev. 19) But when God showed His tender regard for human feeling and misery, He gave the sanction for the judgment or law, in these words, “for I am gracious.” “If thou at all take thy neighbor’s raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it to him by that the sun goeth down; for that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin; wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass when he crieth unto Me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.” God considers the feelings of the poor, and He would not have those feelings needlessly wounded. There may be a sense of degradation in poverty sufficiently trying of itself, without others attempting to force it on the poor. God has shown that the poor need sympathy, and they can appreciate it; not only is it written, “He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker,” but also, “Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker.” (Prov. 14:31; 17:5.) The sympathy of Jesus with human necessities anticipated the expression of them. “I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat, and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.” (Matt. 15:32.) “Love vaunteth not itself.” It was not the display of miraculous power in satisfying the need of the multitude which moved Jesus, but compassion for their necessities. “For I am gracious.” He considers, human feelings. There was no murmuring or complaining among the multitude, but He knew what they needed, and graciously provided it. Man in the progress of civilization is met by a gigantic mass of human misery and necessity, which seems to contradict his lofty aspirations. He uses the various appliances at hand to relieve this misery; but man is not gracious, for in relieving the misery of his fellow man, he makes him keenly to feel his inferiority. We can often trace up misery and poverty to its source; and if we can do this, how much more can God, the moral Governor of the world, link together cause and effect, and show the necessary connection between sin and misery. But God “upbraideth not,” for He is gracious, and this He shows where the case is most desperate. “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help. I will be thy King.” (Hos. 13:9, 10.) But human efforts, right as they are, want, for the most part, the blessed element of graciousness, and, therefore, they fail to reach the heart. God who knows sin to be the source of all misery, regards the actual misery in fullness of compassion. Even in forgiving sin He does it so graciously as to win the heart of the sinner unto Himself. Do we not read the heart of God Himself in giving such a law as that of the pledge of raiment. Man must regard such a principle as an inroad on all security; for man is not gracious; he thinks of himself. God is gracious, and thinks of human misery, and regards human feelings.

There is sometimes an intrusiveness into the private concerns of the poor on the part of those who desire to do them good, which is not only repugnant to their feelings, but offensive to Him who is “gracious.” Mark the graciousness of this law: “When thou dost lend thy brother anything, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge. Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee.” (Deut. 24:10, 11.) The poor brother might be sufficiently pressed down by a sense of his own misery, without having that misery increased by the discovery to another of his nakedness and poverty. When grace has won confidence, all will be laid bare; but rigid inquiry will often lead to concealment and deception. It is a lesson to be learned from Him who is gracious, to do a kind act in a kind manner. “The Lord loveth a cheerful giver;” for He Himself is the cheerful giver of the unspeakable gift of His own Son.

“Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ;” the stern Reprover of sin, and the One who pitied the sinner, met together in Him. Look at forgiveness with man. The forgiver makes the forgiven to have a keen sense of his inferiority. Not so forgiveness with Him who is gracious. He forgives in such a gracious way, as not only not to make the forgiven conscious of disgrace, but so as to establish perfect confidence with Himself. The poor prodigal was disgraced in his own eyes, and thought at best of only a degraded position in his father’s house. He knew not that his father was gracious. His father welcomes him as his son to his bosom, and instead of degrading him in the eyes of the household, killed the fatted calf on his account. “For I am gracious.” May we not only know His graciousness, but in our measure reflect it, according to the word of the Apostle, “Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore imitators of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved, us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.”

When Moses sought to see the glory of the Lord, how marvelous the answer. “I will make all My goodness pass before thee; and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee, and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” Grace and mercy necessarily go together; but how many apprehend that God is merciful, who know not that He is gracious? How many have acknowledged a merciful deliverance or escape, and with grateful emotions of heart too, who have never, as it were, got an insight into the heart of God. His mercy is indeed over all His works. But when He proclaims His name to Moses safely hidden in the cleft rock, it is, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.” Men must see the mercy of God in His providential ordering of the things of this world; for our Father is “kind to the unthankful and to the evil.” “He is the Saviour (that is, the Sustainer and Preserver) of all men, but specially of them that believe.” But it is in redemption that we see so conspicuously the grace of God. All comes to us on the ground of mercy, for we can prefer no claim on God, but the very mercy which reaches us, exhibits the character of God in a way to win our hearts unto Him. We can “joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation.” For He is gracious. The depth of our misery has brought out the depth of His love. Safe in Christ and Him crucified, the true cleft Rock, the joy of our hearth is always to hear Him proclaiming His name, “For I am gracious.” God is not man. His ways are not the ways of man. Man, in doing even a kind act, shows that he is

man; and God, in exhibiting His kindness, shows that He is God. “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within Me, My repenting’s are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man.” (Hos. 11:8, 9.) “Therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you.” (Isa. 30:18.)

The Evangelist: Volume 4 (1870), Altar of Earth, The

Notes of an Address on Ex. 20:22-26

THESE words occupy a very remarkable place in Scripture. They come immediately after the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. They are full of grace and peace; whereas the law is called "the ministration of death" and "condemnation." (2 Cor. 3) They speak of blessing; but elsewhere Scripture declares, that "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." (Gal. 3) To cling then to the commandments for salvation, is like a drowning man in the broad Atlantic clinging to a bar of iron to save him—it only plunges him down with the most positive certainty.

You get no idea of happiness or peace with God through the Law of Moses. Quite the reverse. When the people saw the thunderings, and lightnings, and the mountain smoking, and heard the noise of trumpets, we are told that "they removed, and stood afar off." This is the effect of commandments to men as sinners, it puts them "far off." Man's religion too always puts the person at a distance from God. It does not bring him what the gospel brings—"everlasting life," present sonship, present union with Christ, present peace with God. How different these things are from a law of commandments But immediately after the giving of the law we find in a typical way grace brought out; as much as to say, “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1:17.) Law and gospel are very distinct. They are set in widest contrast in Scripture. God presents them to us separately; man mixes them up, because it gives him importance to do something for blessing, instead of receiving everything in divine mercy. We may refer to this again by and by.

The first words I read were, "Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make unto Me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold." God knows our hearts, dear friends. He says, "I the Lord search the heart." He therefore knows its desperate wickedness, its proneness to idolatry. God saying, Ye shall not make these gods, shows that He cannot trust man in the flesh; for He had just before commanded, saying, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." What are we about now? Are any of us bowing down to gods? I do not mean gods like the heathen; but are your hearts bowing to and loving something else, instead of the living and true God? There are living idols and intellectual idols, as well as idols of gold and silver; and Satan knows how to put them in our way. Thus we see idolatry forbidden, and then we have what would be according to the Lord's mind. "An altar of earth shalt thou make unto Me," &c. (Ex. 20:24.) God must be honored and worshipped; and He has a right to it from His creatures. But how is God worshipped? That is the question. There is nothing, man would say, in a mound of earth, and sacrifices offered on it; but it is everything with God, inasmuch as it typifies the person and work of His beloved Son. And all is of God. Man has had no hand in the matter. The earth and the sacrifices were all of God. Man says, "I will worship God, and go to heaven my own way;" but God points to Jesus crucified and risen, and says that is the way, and there is no other way. Men boast of their own works, prayers, fasting, benevolence, and sincerity; God, however, cannot accept any fruit of mere nature, because man is bad to his heart's core. The source of his doings is polluted. Being a fallen creature in Adam, he is unclean; so much so that Scripture says, "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." The offerings on the "altar of earth" present to us in figure the sacrifice of Jesus as the alone ground of God being approached and worshipped.

The "altar of earth" speaks to us of the lowly Jesus, so despised and rejected of men that they said, "Away with Him!" "Crucify Him!" "Not this man, but Barabbas." Man saw nothing to attract him in Jesus—he saw no beauty in Him. "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." The sacrifices on the altar of earth speak of peace and acceptance; and how precious the words that are added—"I will bless thee!”

Is there a soul here desiring Jesus for his Savior? Think of Him as He was in the days of His flesh, always ready to bless all who desired it of Him. When distressed ones needed healing, He was always ready to heal—to open blind eyes, unstop deaf ears, cleanse the lepers, or raise the dead. But what did men think of Him? They esteemed Him not. When He died for sinners they thought Him "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." But believers rejoice in the blessed fact, that "He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace" (or which purchased our peace) "was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.”

Hence we read, "I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." To have to do with God's sacrifice is always the true place of blessing. Some spend half their days in trying to do better, or to be better, or feel better; but the moment they see Jesus the Son of God lifted up upon the cross for sinners, they say, What a wonderful sacrifice I What love Do not talk then, dear friends, about keeping commandments for salvation. There is nothing for you to do to be saved. It is all done, and needs nothing to be added to it. It is finished. Eternal redemption for us has been accomplished. From God's heart it all springs, and to Him be all the glory. The question then is not, What will you do? but, Do you believe that Christ has satisfied God, glorified God, established the righteousness of God about your sins? Are you thus satisfied with Christ? Are you saying, like another,

Observe then that the reason why God can bless you now and forever, is because the sacrifice of Christ has been offered, and is the alone ground of peace with God. The mound of earth with its burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, figured what God was going to do in the all-sufficient sacrifice of His beloved Son upon the tree; hence it is added, "I will bless you." Yes, true believers can say, Christ has by Himself purged our sins; He has redeemed us to God by His own blood. He has gone into heaven itself by His own blood; and this is our sure title to glory. We approach God in peace now, and shall enter glory by and by entirely through the finished work of Jesus.

But further, we read, "If thou shalt make an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone; for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou Nast polluted it." (v. 25.) God knows what man is. He knows that he always wants to glory in the work of his own hands, in some way or other, and not give all the glory to God. Man likes to bring something to God, and does not like to be altogether a receiver from God. Therefore God said, if you make a stone altar, it must be of stones just as you find them; you must not lift a tool upon it; if you do, it is polluted. Ah, no saint in heaven will be able to say that he got there because of anything he did, for "no flesh shall glory in His presence. He that glorieth, let him glory

in the Lord.”

But you say, Must I not trust in something of my own and in Christ too? No, not in a prayer, or a feeling, or any other work of your own; if you do, you believe not in Christ's finished work. If you lift up a tool-add anything, however small, to Christ's work, you have something of your own to glory in; you ignore the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Even a true child of God may lose his peace, if he turns back from Christ, like the Galatians, to add an ordinance, or anything else to it. "If ye be circumcised," said the apostle, "Christ shall profit you nothing." (Gal. 6:2.)

The history of most Christians, I believe is, that they began at the wrong end. Their consciences were awakened to a sense of sin and guilt, and they immediately began to do something with the thought of appeasing an offended God, until they so learned their helplessness and wretchedness, that they gladly rested in the finished work of the Lord Jesus, as the alone ground of peace. Then worship, service, and devotedness follow in their right place—"We love Him, because He first loved us.”

The last verse is equally solemn. "Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon." (v. 26.) Be assured, dear friends, there are no steps in salvation. Christ is the way, and a person is either in Christ, or he is not in Christ. He has either come to Christ and received Him as his Savior, or he has not. There are no steps in this—"Jesus cried and said, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;" and again, "I am the door"—not a flight of steps, but the door; "by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Some are priding themselves on their doings, and of the number of religious steps they have taken, but in God's presence they will learn the utter folly of it. Saul of Tarsus thought he had gained some steps. He said he had been circumcised the eighth day, was of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church, touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. What a flight of steps But when the glory of the Lord Jesus shined upon him, he soon fell from this eminence, and said, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." There are no steps then in salvation. No, it is only one step of faith which takes the vilest sinner, in his guilt and ruin, straight into the loving arms of God; for

Happy will it be for you, dear friends, if you now see that you have nothing to do, but simply receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior, for

Going up by steps, as we have read, only makes the nakedness manifest. How little do those think who boast of gaining heaven by keeping ordinances, being charitable, and the like, that they only expose their own nakedness, only make manifest that they have not actually received Him, whom God sent into the world to save sinners. How many are thus going religiously and respectably to hell! How different was the apostle's testimony! "This is the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Surely there are no steps here—it is simply receiving salvation by faith, through the already accomplished work of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 4 (1856), Marah, or the Bitter Waters Sweetened.

Ex. 15:23.

THE song of triumph, “which Moses and the children of Israel sang unto the Lord,” is speedily followed by murmurings from the same lips. Three days wandering in the wilderness, and finding no water, was sufficient to obliterate from the thoughts of Israel what God had wrought. When they did come to water, “they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?” The same people who had sung the song of triumph with Moses, now murmur against Moses. The Lord Himself, not Moses, was the theme of their song; and in the Lord’s estimate the murmuring was against the Lord, and not against Moses. “Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured.” It is well to attend to this “admonition.” We are ever ready to lay the fault on others, when it goes ill with us; but it is really against the Lord Himself that we complain. “His hand is not shortened,” His grace is not exhausted, His ear is not heavy. This Moses knew, and he turned the murmuring against himself into a cry unto the Lord. Moses might have met their complaining of him, by complaining against them; but he reckoned on God’s grace and power. He had before known the petulance of the people, when they stood on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea. He had stilled their fears, and cried unto the Lord. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward;” and the Lord “led them through the deep, as a horse in the wilderness...to make Himself a glorious name.” Again the Lord hears the cry of Moses in answer to the murmurings of Israel; and the Lord showed him a tree, which, when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet; and the Lord added to His name, so glorious already, that of Healer— “I am the Lord that healeth thee.” It was the bitter waters of Marah which brought out this gracious name of God. Had Israel at once entered on Canaan, “a land of hills and valleys which drinketh water of the rain of heaven,” they would not have been in circumstances to learn this new and gracious name of God. It is God, who knew the bitterness of the waters, who alone knew the tree to sweeten them. And may we not say, that God is able to make all the experience of the wilderness not only profitable, but also that out of which the truest comfort is to be extracted. The “ordinance” of the sweetening the bitter waters is written for our admonition.

It is no uncommon thing to find the fresh joy of recent conversion succeeded by murmuring. There is something so wonderful in having peace with God, and deliverance from bondage through fear of death, as necessarily to call forth grateful emotions. But then, it is often the sense of these things, rather than the groundwork of our deliverance, that gives us joy, and allowable joy, although there be the danger of resting in the blessing received, rather than in the Blesser. Israel went through the Red Sea as on dry land; but it was the arm of the Lord that divided the sea for them, and gave them a dry and safe path through the divided waters. They might well think of that memorable passage, but in so doing, they might forget, and did forget the arm of the Lord; and therefore the next difficulty in their way led them to murmuring. But Moses remembered the arm of the Lord, and found its intervention quite as manifest in healing the bitter waters as in dividing the Red Sea. Now the arm of the Lord revealed to us is the Cross of Christ. Christ crucified is to us who are saved, the power of God, and the wisdom of God. It is upon the ground of what God has wrought in the Cross of Christ, that we are redeemed to Himself, and delivered out of this present evil world; but although sung with truth unto the Lord, “Thou in Thy mercy hart led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed; Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation;” yet, actually, though they were out of Egypt, they were not in Canaan; though all needed power was present to bring them there, and they only needed faith in that power to enter in; but actually they were in the wilderness. Even so we can give thanks unto the Father, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. In that kingdom we are in spirit, and in rich blessing, and in Christ we are already made to sit down in heavenly places, and fully blessed; but

actually we are in the world, though not of it; and the very standing which God has given to us in Christ, makes us to know experimentally what the world is, what the flesh is, what Satan is. The new convert, with a light heart and firm step, it may be, goes his three days' journey in the wilderness, and finds no water, or else, finding water, he cannot drink of it, because it is bitter. When laboring under the burden of a guilty conscience, deliverance from such a burden is the one desire of the soul; but when that deliverance is effected through faith in the blood of the Lamb, and peace with God known instead of a guilty conscience, the trial which before arose from unbelief, is now exchanged for another order of trial, the trial which begins from realized redemption, the trial of faith. Can we trust the same Christ to meet us in every difficulty by the way, on whom we have trusted for our acceptance with God? Could Israel trust the same arm of the Lord to sweeten the bitter waters, which had divided for them the Red Sea? A very short journey along the narrow path which leadeth unto life brings us to Marah. The unsatisfying of the creature has to be learnt—this proves one range of painful experience. We cannot stand as it were in a negative position; if we have left, on the principle of obedience, the flesh-pots of Egypt, we shall yet hanker after them, unless our hearts delight themselves in the good things of Canaan. This lesson is also one of painful experience. Then also there are expectations formed, short of having our expectation from God only; these expectations must necessarily be disappointed for our real blessing and joy. Whatever may be our "Marah," it generally brings out from us murmuring and complaining against persons or things; and this is always the case when we taste the bitter waters, and compare our present with our past condition, instead of looking up to God, who is higher than the things which are pressing us down.

We are brought to Marah, it may be, we murmur; and as murmurings only increase the bitterness of the waters, we cry unto the Lord, and He shows us the tree which immediately sweetens them. There is a tree, and One who hung on it, under the curse of God, when on that tree He bore our sins in His own body. This is God's "ordinance" to us for sweetening the bitter waters. It is the doctrine of the Cross. We have learned its grandest lesson, as being the groundwork of our reconciliation with God, for "God hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." It is indeed "Marah" to us, when we begin to discover that sin dwelleth in us. In most cases, it is the sense of guilt, arising from positive transgressions of God's commandments, which affects us at first, and leads us to the Cross as our only refuge; but how is the bitterness, arising from the discovery that, fearful as was the discovery of rebellion against God, and alienation of heart from God, it is nothing compared with the fearfulness of the discovery, that sin and death are our natural constitution, to be met? even by the Cross of Christ. Cast this tree into the waters and they are sweetened. It is not only that your sins have been borne by Christ, but that you yourself have in God's judgment been crucified with Him. "I am," says the Apostle, "crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live." "Our old man is crucified with Him." How are the bitter waters sweetened! How much deeper does the love of God appear, how much broader the work of Christ, how much more solid the ground on which we stand, when we can dare to see all that we are, as well as to consider all that we have done; and see all judged in the Cross!

An onward journey in the wilderness may bring us to "waters1 that fail." (Jer. 15:11.) This is another Marsh. Have we learned how to correct disappointment in our expectation from ourselves? we need to learn the same with respect to others. We expect from them that which we do not find in ourselves, and we murmur; but when the cry comes unto the Lord, again the tree sweetens the bitter waters, or makes those that "failed" us to be the occasion of leading us to the living fountain of waters. It is still Jesus Christ and Him crucified; but now known not only in what He has done, but in what He Himself is, as never disappointing our expectation from Him. "I am," says He, "the Bread of life; he that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst."

Or our Marah has been found in another direction. We have thought to do the impossibility of serving God and mammon—Christ and the world. We set aside the experience of others, and almost the testimony of the Lord Himself, and will needs hazard the experiment. Sure of our value of Christ, and of our real desire to benefit others, we fondly hold to the thought, that the world of our day is hardly the world of past history; that there are so many recognized ameliorating influences at work in the world, that we would fain help them on. But it is not long ere we are brought to a point; either the conscience is to be maintained in its allegiance to God, or surrendered to the world. The world, in seeking its own, cannot afford room for exercise of conscience towards God. No association with the world can be based on such a principle. The world ignores God's right to be heard and obeyed in its matters. Its friendship is enmity with God. Again we murmur. Why is it so? The cry, and again the same tree heals these bitter waters; the glory of the Cross is discovered, in not only separating us from a world under righteous doom, but as introducing us into "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us;" and we learn to glory in the Cross of Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world.

The experience of the children of God in itself is for the most part substantially the same, because it is the result of that which God has made them to be in Christ; but the sweetening of these experiences in God's appointed way, by the use of His "ordinance," Jesus Christ and Him crucified, makes all the difference of the waters in their bitterness occasioning murmuring, or the casting in of the tree which God has pointed out, causing praise and thanksgiving; so that the next stage in the journey through the wilderness is the shade of the palm trees, and refreshment of the wells of Elim. (Ex. 15:27.)

Israel sang triumphantly and then murmured, and by virtue of the tree cast into the waters were refreshed, and learned Jehovah as their Healer. Jeremiah triumphed, too, in the Lord. "But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible One, therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed, for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten. But, O Lord of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, let me see Thy vengeance on them: for unto Thee have I opened my cause. Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord: for He had delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers." (Jer. 20:11-13.) But this song of praise is not sustained. The waters were bitter indeed unto the prophet, all his familiars watching for his halting. Speedily he turns from God's deliverance to his actual circumstances, and curses the day wherein he was born. (vs. 14.) He cried not unto the Lord, and found no tree to sweeten the bitter waters. Such will be the case, when our deceived heart would feed upon the ashes of our own experience, instead of the flesh and blood of Christ.

The disciple of Christ has full taste of all the bitterness which belongs to man, and he tastes also of bitter waters that others know not (see Psa. 73); but he has been taught the secret of how to sweeten these bitter waters, by bringing in Christ and Him crucified in the various aspects in which God presents Him to our faith, and finds his strange character written by the apostle, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 4 (1856), Feast in the Wilderness., The

Ex. 10:24 to end.

WE see from the 9th verse that God's purpose for Israel was for them to keep a Feast, and in 1 Cor. 5 the same is applied as the present condition of God's people. The mention of the leaven there couples it definitely with the Feast of the Passover—they were delivered from Egypt; we are a people delivered from the wrath to come: the object of it unceasing, unchanging joy. It was to be "a Feast unto the Lord." The scene in Egypt was laid in the deepest trial; but the purpose of God was for them to keep a Feast. Nothing is of more importance than to consider our exceeding short coming in outward manifestation, by the failure of this condition of soul. Our hearts well know that this fruit is not pressed, so as to yield its own juice in present support to the soul. Glory be to His grace, we have always to sing that our failure does not affect the security of our souls, because we are set in Christ. Though we may not be keeping the Feast to the Lord, there is One keeping it whoever rejoices the heart of God: we have Jesus, by whom God wrought out all His pleasure, and we are in Him. God knows no disappointment in Him. He is the Man of His right hand; but that does not militate against the failure of our ways.

And not only is this table the Feast, but it gives its coloring to the whole dispensation. "The table in the wilderness" is the character of this dispensation; spread by God, guarded by God, but presenting one unbroken scene, all of God's doing; we had no part in it. We are brought into the house by the Father; it is for the children within the house to be merry, and God has provided for Himself joy in the sorrow; and where we fail is in not apprehending the character God affixed to this scene. We are to have joy in the sorrows; and if you fail to realize this, you fail is something that the joys of heaven will never be able to give you; for then the sorrows will be over. Get out of the place, and the occasion is lost forever; get into the glory, and you cease to realize trial. It is unmixed joy.

We so shrink from trial now. Why? Because we know so little of the joy in the trial, and God alone knows the terrible trials of the wilderness.

There were two things specially marked here. The denial of letting the children go (vss. 7-11); there is the denial of Pharaoh (the wicked one) to God's purpose, that they should keep a Feast in the wilderness. And how could they keep a Feast of joy while their little ones were in Egypt? A Feast implies circumstances of joy. We cannot keep it without a merry heart; and it is said that "a merry heart is a continual feast." Pharaoh knew it. The attempt was most crafty, to get the tenderest object of their affections absent. He says, "Leave the object of your affections behind, and you go. Do not hazard all you have, but reserve something. Evil is before you, wilderness fare; do not expose them!" Had they yielded, God's purpose would have been impeded.

In verse 24 (after Moses' denial of this), Pharaoh proposes to leave the flocks behind, and to take the little ones. "The flocks behind!" still objects of affection, alas! though of a lesser kind: they were their property. Moses' reply does, to my mind, express most simply the true nature of a Feast, viz., real dependence on God for everything. Moses, by the Holy Ghost, tells Pharaoh, "We know not wherewith to serve the Lord till we be come thither;" everything they had was given by God to serve Him with.

Psalm 63 was a song of merriment "in the wilderness of Judah," as the heading tells us; in one sense, the desert, yet a wilderness of praise. Why of Judah? Because God was with them. He had undertaken all for them to the end. They were delivered to Himself; and this must place Israel in dependence on Him. The food of their table, their shoes, their garments, the manna; it was His place to provide all. They had nothing to do but to hold the Feast; but that that hindered would be the leaving anything in Egypt. Pharaoh tried first to keep their persons, then the children, then the flocks; but not till they were clean delivered from Egypt, and apart from it could the Feast be kept. And surely this same thing is at the root of our individual failure. It is not our persons only that are to be devoted to God, but everything we possess is to be His. Our property, our little ones, Are they in Egypt? Is it the tenderness of Pharaoh, or of God, I am exercising with regard to my little ones? Have we anything left in Egypt for the day of destruction? Oh! the tendency of all our hearts to lean to flesh and blood. It was Pharaoh's aim to bring them to independency.

Jesus carried out the separation fully, and left none of His little ones in Egypt. He was the true Nan-rite. He knew the depth of sorrow in that broken heart. That separated Son could tell the joy of the Lord's strength. Though He was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, He kept the conditions of the Feast, and knew the true meaning of its being "a Feast unto the Lord."

The whole scene of the Passover is brought before us in 1 Corinthians 5. "Purge out the old leaven." This would take in everything, "that ye may be a new lump," &c. even as Christ. Would you know why you are unleavened? Because true of us in Christ. God can say, "Amen" to you and to me, because He kept the Feast. But there is something definite to you and to me besides. Our Feast may be with terrible crying and tears, but the Feast is to be above all my sorrow. That is what Israel did not know, but we are called to it. In spirit like Abraham (Rom. 4), "to hope against hope." Temptation, tribulation, failure, these will be, but the Feast is to be kept; nevertheless, let it give its stamp to every step of the way.

One word more. Any word that skews the depth of grace is a terrible word. "Let us keep the Feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (vs. 8.) The old leaven was the flesh-pots of Egypt. All was to be brought out before they partook of the Lamb. But what is the distinction between the "old leaven" and "the leaven of malice and wickedness?"

God presents us with an object, a Feast—the Lord Jesus Christ's work and person. But what may we be keeping the Feast with? We may be filled with the love of the world, in some shape or other—dress, relations of life, &c., &c. We may be filled also with the "leaven of malice and wickedness." I believe there is a sharpness in these words that none but the children of God know. God is, as it were, going into a disquisition with His children, with regard to their dispositions, &c. What may you have in your heart at the Feast? "Malice." It is an awful word. It is probing with the probe of God the desperate evil of our hearts.

Here is what God would have us put away—any root of evil, guile, deceit, &c.—that the Feast may be in spirit and in truth, to the Lord, "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Israel was to hold everything in readiness to serve the Lord. I say the experience of the Feast was conditional, not the security of it. It is eternally secure in Jesus. But let us observe the conditions. The victory will be ours in proportion as we keep all this evil under.

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

IF we would have our own sorrows soothed, our own wounds healed, and our troubled breasts calmed, we must meditate much on the wounds and sorrows of Jesus, when “it pleased the Lord to bruise Him,” when “He was wounded for our transgressions.”

THERE is a temptation when men do not please us, for us on our part to displease God. If we do not seek to please ourselves, but God, He will show us how to act when men displease us. “Even Christ pleased not Himself.”

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