Numbers - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Streams of Refreshing From the Fountain of Life, Peace for the Anxious; or, the Serpent of Brass

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And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived (Num. 21:8, 9).

The only way of salvation is most plainly set before us in various parts of the Old Testament Scriptures. Let us look at some of them. We are told that Abel obtained witness that he was righteous, by coming before God with the sacrifice of a lamb; while Cain, with all his efforts to bring the fruit of his own toil, was rejected. Noah and his family were saved by being inside the ark which God had commanded to be built, while every person outside the ark perished. Lot's mocking sons-in-law died under God's fiery judgment of Sodom, because they remained in the place which God had said he would destroy, and refused to escape for their lives. The Israelites in Egypt were saved from the vengeance of the destroying angel, because they took shelter in God's only remedy — the blood of the lamb. The manslayer escaped the forfeit of his life by fleeing to the city of refuge. The loathsome leper was at once cleansed by being sprinkled with blood. Rahab was saved in the destruction of Jericho, because the scarlet line was in her window. The serpent of brass set upon a pole was another testimony to the simple way of eternal salvation, which God provided for sinful men.

Many true-hearted souls have not peace with God, because they do not see the simplicity of the gospel. They do not allow their thoughts to be regulated by the written word of God, as the only standard of truth, or regard the Holy Spirit as the only Teacher and Revealer of the things of Christ; consequently there is no fixedness of thought, and no solid rest for their troubled minds. Unless the conscience be thoroughly convicted of the total ruin and depravity of the natural man, it is not prepared to receive the full testimony of God's abounding grace; and unless the mind be freed from human opinions, it will not perceive the beautiful simplicity of the gospel of God! Hence it is that so many sincere souls, who have been quickened by the Holy Ghost, go doubting and fearing nearly all their days. They either look within for certain feelings, attainments, evidences, and the like, instead of looking wholly to Christ; or, if they look to Christ, they think that something else is required, instead of receiving simply what God says in His word concerning the finished work of His beloved Son, and the safety and security of all those who come unto God by Him. Let no burdened sinner expect peace with God but by looking wholly to Christ crucified and risen, and believing God's record of the value of His finished work on the cross.

The story of the serpent of brass is calculated, by the Spirit's teaching, to give peace to anxious souls, because it so plainly sets forth the way of God in grace with men as ruined sinners. Our blessed Lord expounded it to Nicodemus, so that we have not only the inspired narrative, but also the Divine comment upon it, as teaching us the only way of eternal salvation. The testimony of Moses, by the Spirit in the Old Testament, and the explanation of Christ Himself in the New, stamp the subject with the deepest interest and importance. Little, perhaps, did the ancient lawgiver feel, when lifting up the brazen serpent in order that the dying Israelite might behold it and live, that he was shadowing forth that unequalled event, when Christ, in unparalleled love, was willingly lifted up upon the cross for the salvation of lost sinners. But so it was, as the Lord Himself touchingly testified, when He said,

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14, 15).

There are three points in this narrative which demand our solemn consideration.

1. The condition of the people.

2. The remedy God provided.

3. The effects.

1. THE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE. The people had sinned. They had murmured against God, and justly brought His judgment and wrath upon them. They were, therefore, under sentence of death; for sin and death are connected together. The wages of sin always has been, and always will be, death. Much people of Israel had died, and many more were dying; they were under the influence of the serpent's bite, and it was mortal. Nothing, therefore, could be more hopeless than their state; they might not have believed it, but so it was. They might have tried human remedies, because man always contrives to better his present distress if he can; but we may be sure that these remedies all failed. They were made to feel that the serpent's bite was beyond their power of healing; therefore they asked Moses to take away the serpents from them: but this was not God's way of meeting the case. The people, then, had sinned, were mortally wounded, without any power of ameliorating their condition, and without any human hope of deliverance.

And such, too, is man's real condition before God now. The bitten, dying Israelites present to us a touching picture of tens of thousands, yea, millions, around us now. Man has sinned. He is a sinner in a threefold sense. He is a sinner by birth, as a descendant of fallen parents; a sinner by practice, as having actually transgressed God's holy commands; and a sinner in heart, as having sin dwelling in him, so that he is inwardly desperately wicked. But more than this, for most persons have added to all these the crowning sin of not believing in the only-begotten Son of God — not receiving that Savior whom God hath sent. The Holy Spirit has come to convict men that they are sinners, to show them that they are dead in trespasses and sins, and exposed to eternal death and condemnation. Surely nothing can be more hopeless than man's condition as under sin and death; nothing can be more helpless, because, with all his inventions to better his circumstances, he has never yet devised a remedy for death. He diligently projects moral schemes for lopping off the wide- spreading branches of outward infamy, but the stump still remains the stock of a corrupt tree. Man cannot devise a cure for death. He tries to smooth the dying pillow with the tear of sympathy, and

refreshing cordials; he may embellish the corpse with the costliest ornaments, and the sweetest spices; he can make the most attractive display at the grave; he can garnish the sepulcher with skilful adornments; but he cannot cure the serpent's bite, he cannot triumph over death. He sees death all around him, and feels dying himself, and he is without strength and without hope in the world.

Men little think what an admission they make when they say, "We are sinners." It really means, we have death working in us because we have sinned — we are dead in trespasses and sins, and on the way to eternal death. Such is really the meaning of the common expression, "I know that I'm a sinner." Oh that the Holy Spirit would tear away the veil of ignorance and unbelief from men's minds, and so convict multitudes everywhere, that, like the prophet of old, they may cry out,

Woe is me! for I am undone (Isa. 6:5).

Our condition, then, naturally, is similar to that of the bitten Israelites. They had sinned, so have we. They were guilty before God, so are we. They were justly condemned, so are we. They were dying because of their sin, so are we. They were unable to save themselves, so are we. Neither they nor ourselves had any hope whatever, till God, in free, boundless mercy, provided a remedy. Let us now consider —

2. THE REMEDY GOD PROVIDED. Why should God provide a remedy? Did the people deserve it? No. They had sinned, and merited God's righteous indignation. But their need, their helpless state, moved God's compassion and mercy, and He brought life and salvation to the dying and needy. The thought of the people was merely to have the serpents taken away from them — they only thought of some improvement in their present circumstances; but God's thoughts of love and pity are far higher than this. His way is to give life to dying souls — to abolish death; He therefore provided such a remedy, that whoever LOOKED upon it LIVED. This is a remedy worthy of the God of resurrection. It never entered into man's heart to conceive a remedy so perfect, so suitable; so glorious, so abundant in mercy.

The Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live (Num. 21:8).

The remedy was simple, and the cure immediate. It was not a question of their doings, experiences, or evidences; it was look and live. They were commanded to look outside themselves, straight to the object set before them, and, though at the point of death, they immediately lived. Those who felt the mortal wound inflicted by the fiery serpent had simply to behold the serpent of brass set upon the pole, and death in them gave place to life.

The remedy then was one, only one. It was lifted up between earth and heaven. It was wholly of God's providing. The benefit was conferred by simply looking. It was perfect and instantaneous in its cure. It needed nothing to be added to it. It was free to every bitten man, without money and without price. No one tried it in vain. Those who did not behold it died.

Such is God's remedy for dying souls now. It is Jesus only. He has been lifted up between earth and heaven. He died for sinners — for those who are dead in trespasses and sins. This only remedy is entirely of God's providing. His compassion and free grace sent forth the Savior; for

God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

It is sin that is the plague of our hearts, and in Jesus crucified we see sin condemned, and removed for ever from us; for there God hath made Christ

to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

On the cross it was that Christ was lifted up, that He might bring us to God.

The benefits, too, of God's salvation are realized by simply looking. It is,

Look unto me, and be ye saved (Isa. 45:22).

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31).

By Him; all that believe are justified from all things (Acts 13:39).

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

It is free to every one who desires it.

He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life (John 6:47) By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved (John 10:9). Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

God also gives an immediate and perfect cure.

He that believeth on me,

said Jesus,

hath everlasting life (John 6:47).

He that believeth is justified by His blood, shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life; for by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. He hath obtained eternal redemption for us.

The Israelites, by looking to the serpent of brass, only had temporal life; but, by looking unto the Lord Jesus, we have eternal life. This is the mercy of the gospel, as our Lord declared,

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14, 15).

It is not, then, ordinances, duties, self-denial, outward zeal, however proper these things may be in their place, but Christ and Him crucified that meets the sinner's need. He alone has triumphed over death. He only is the life, the truth, the way to the Father. He is the only Mediator between God and men. His blood the only fountain for sin and uncleanness. His death alone satisfied Divine justice. On Jesus, on the cross, God's fierce wrath was poured out, and His infinite holiness and truth vindicated. It is the death of Jesus on the cross that fully manifests man's ungodliness, and fully reveals God's abounding grace. Nowhere is sin's foul blackness so seen as in the cross, and nowhere else is sin condemned and put away. Without the death of the cross, Jesus taught there could be no salvation; and it was to the cross alone that He directed Nicodemus for eternal life. The apostles preached

Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23);

and Paul said,

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world (Gal. 6:14).

The testimony of Jesus Himself, the records of the Old and New Testaments, the witness of prophets and apostles, all concur in directing the serpent-bitten, sin-sick soul to the Lord Jesus who was crucified, and to Him alone, for everlasting life; and blessed indeed are those, who, by faith in Him, escape eternal death so fully deserved, and receive eternal life so wholly undeserved, but freely given.

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36).

3. THE EFFECTS.

It came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived (Num. 21:9).

His despairing, languishing heart revived. As soon as he was conscious that he lived, the fear of death departed, and peace took possession of his mind. Health and vigor returned for service and conflict, he overcame the enemies of the Lord, and went onward to the promised land. But further; having proved how effectual simply beholding the serpent of brass was, he, doubtless, was anxious that others perishing around him should enjoy the same blessing.

Applying this instruction to ourselves, by the light of our Lord's exposition of it, it is clear that whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was lifted up on the cross, has eternal life. He has a new life in him. He is a new creation. He is born again. It is a fact, that by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we have life.

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of

God hath not life (1 John 5:12).

It is not merely a change of views, but life — eternal life — that the believer in Christ receives.

The present possession of eternal life is connected with a remarkable change both in experience and action. Conversion is really a transition from death unto life. Those who had previously prided themselves on their good qualities, now see themselves to be vile and worthless; and that blessed Savior, whom they had so long despised and rejected, now becomes incomparably precious and lovely. That God, once so dreaded, is worshipped and adored as the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. His word and ways honored, and His people, once slighted if not persecuted, are now beloved objects of interest and affection. These are some of the workings of Divine life in the soul. But all who have life have not peace; they have eternal life, but do not know it. Such a sense of their own evil hearts and ways presses upon them; they cannot suppose it possible that such vile persons can have eternal life; yet they look to Christ, and cannot give Him up; they little think that the self-humbling experience they have is the effect of their having life. There are many such now, and there were also in the apostles' days; hence John wrote,

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life (1 John 5:13);

and he assured them that they might know that they had passed from death unto life, because they loved the brethren (1 John 3:14).

I have said that when the Israelite who had looked to the serpent of brass knew that he lived, fear of death left him, and peace took possession of his mind. So now, when the believer knows that he is pardoned, justified, and accepted, by simply looking to Christ in glory, who was crucified, peace flows into his heart. We have

joy and peace in believing (Rom. 15:13);

being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our

Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

Fear of death is removed when the soul looks only and simply to the Lord Jesus, and believes that He has died in his stead, and suffered for his sins on the cross. The believer thus knows, that whatever changes may take place, his life is hid with Christ in God, and though he may sleep in Jesus, yet he shall never see death. This fills the languishing spirit with consolation and peace, as well as strength for the service of God, and running the heavenly race.

Oh the blessedness of having eternal life by simply looking to the Lord Jesus who was lifted up! Because we have life, we more or less act according to the mind of God. We learn our vileness in the flesh, and hide in Christ our righteousness; we know the flesh has been condemned and crucified, but know Christ is our life. We experience infirmity and weakness, but know that Christ is our strength. We grieve that we are sometimes the subjects of folly and error, but know that Christ is our wisdom. We are painfully sensible of sinning, but are assured that Christ

is our Advocate with the Father. We are tempted by Satan to the unbelieving thought; “we shall one day perish”; but are comforted by that Promise of the Almighty Savior,

They shall never perish (John 10:28);

and when well-nigh overwhelmed by

fightings without and fears within (see 2 Cor. 7:5),

we rely on Him who is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him. Thus Christ is all to the Christian: and though when looking at self he may cry,

O wretched man that I am! (Rom. 7:24)

when looking to the Savior who was crucified he can say,

The Lord is my light and my salvation (Psa. 27:1).

FELLOW CHRISTIANS! we have life — spiritual, eternal life; let us, then, walk and act in the Spirit. Let us show that we belong to Jesus, that we have died, as regards the flesh, in Him, and that we have life by and in a risen, glorified Savior. We must abide in Christ, live upon Christ, feed on Christ, draw from Christ, if we would walk like Christ. This new life must be nourished, the spiritual energies used, the new-born affections exercised, if we would be strong and flourishing as servants of Christ. We need not, could not, work for life, because we have life. We could not be Christians if we had not looked to the Son of man lifted up, and had life. The word of Christ informs and strengthens the new life; the flesh and blood of Christ nourish the new life; the way of faith is the acting out of the new life; the Lord’s return from heaven is that for which the new life waits.

Seeing that we have eternal life by beholding the Lamb of God, let us seek to bring others to taste and enjoy the same blessings. Oh, how earnestly must the healed Israelite have ran far and near to bring his bitten friends to behold the serpent of brass! How quickly might he be seen throwing back the curtain of his neighbour’s tent, that the dying, gasping ones might take one look and live! What a reality God’s remedy was to them! And is it less so to us? Oh no, my brethren! let it then be our daily, fervent, untiring labour to present Christ to all around us.

But some of my readers cannot say that they have life. The Son of man has been lifted up to give life to sin-sick, dying souls, but they refuse to look and live. How sad is your portion! How awfully dark is your prospect! God’s love is despised by you. His pity and compassion are not welcomed. His gospel is not received. The sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus are despised, and you are still in your sins, daily sinking under the serpent’s bite, dying under its influence, and rapidly hastening to the bar of God’s judgment, to receive your final sentence, and eternal doom. But it may be that some may say, “I know I am a sinner. I am sure I have broken God’s laws. I have merited His displeasure. My heart trembles at death. I shudder at the thought of judgment. Can I be saved? Is there hope for me? Is there any possibility that I can have eternal life?” Yes! yes! dear soul; Jesus died for such as you. He was nailed to the cross for the ungodly. Every sin-convicted soul that looks to Him He saves.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31).

Streams of Refreshing From the Fountain of Life, Speak to the Rock

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock; so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as He commanded him (Num. 20:7-9).

We find the story of the smitten rock first presented to us in the book of Exodus. It took place before the law was given, and is a fine example of grace — the grace of God to ungodly, sinful man. The people were in the deepest necessity; they had no water to drink. Day after day their thirst increased. There were no wells at hand. They might make the most diligent search, and put all their energies into exercise, in digging deep in all directions, still it was a barren and thirsty land, wherein was no water. Weak, parched, and prostrate, they had no power whatever of meeting their necessity. They were perishing with thirst, and had no water to drink. But more than this. They were sinners — they murmured; they tempted God, and were ready to stone His servant. Thus they were unworthy as well as needy. God might justly have allowed them to perish, for they merited His wrath and displeasure; but He took occasion to deal in grace instead of judgment. His pitying eye beheld their need; His loving heart compassionated them; His infinite wisdom and mercy devised a way of deliverance; and His almighty arm speedily carried it out. The question was, Could God, would God, give this thirsty, sinful, perishing people water to drink? Yes, He could and would do so, consistently with His own holy attributes, and that too in a way that should be to the praise of His glory. By smiting another instead of them, His justice would be satisfied, and His mercy freely flow. This is the way of grace to sinful, helpless man in the cross of Christ, and was shewn forth in the type of the smitten rock.

The Lord said unto Moses, Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt SMITE THE ROCK, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel (Ex. 17:6).

Thus, in the way of grace, the needy sinful people had an abundant supply of water to satisfy their thirst.

I say, this is a fine example of grace, and is important, because we are told in the New Testament that we are saved by grace:

By grace are ye saved, through faith (Eph. 2:8);

but perhaps few things are so little understood as grace. It is said by some that grace means that God will do His part, if we will do ours; but this entirely destroys the thought of grace. Others say, that it means unmerited love; but it means more than this, for it brings favour and

blessing to those who only deserve punishment and destruction; it brings eternal life and glory to such as have merited eternal death and banishment; and flows freely to us through the smitten Son of God, who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. It is the death of Christ, then, that is here typified by the smitten rock. There the stripes that we deserved were laid upon Him, and thence the water of life flows freely.

Grace, then, is only for sinners; it springs from God, is manifested in the death of Christ, and satisfies the thirsty souls of those who there taste and see that the Lord is good; and as it was only water from the smitten rock that quenched the thirst of the perishing Israelites, so it is only the blood of the cross that gives peace to a sin-sick soul. For a thirsty, perishing Israelite to have turned his back upon the waters gushing out so abundantly from the smitten rock, instead of drinking thereof, would be judged to be the height of madness; how much more so is it now to turn away from the crucified Son of God, who died to save sinners!

Having said thus much on the smiting of the rock, let us now turn more immediately to the subject before us; and first, we may notice that, after the people of Israel had drank the water from the rock, they lived, and fought the battles of the Lord; but after a while, though the rock never left them, they thirsted again, as we find in this chapter. This is a remarkable type, and serves to show us that, after we have received the Lord Jesus, after we have obtained life and peace through faith in His name, after we may have fought the battles of the Lord, after we may have drank for months and years the water of life, and enjoyed the presence of the Lord, yet we shall feel barren and thirsty, if we cease to live upon Christ; if we turn from Him, and lose the taste and comfort of His love.

In pursuing our meditation, we might remark —

1. On the state of the believer when not living upon Christ;

2. On failure in the service of God;

3. Consider what is the Christian’s true path; and

4. Glance at the blessings connected with it.

1. THE STATE OF THE BELIEVER WHEN NOT LIVING UPON CHRIST. So long as we abide in the Lord Jesus, dwell on His love, live in His presence, sit at His feet, rest on His promises, feed on His word, love His ways, pour out our hearts to Him, and draw out of His fullness, our peace flows as a river; we overcome in conflict, escape out of temptation, bear our sufferings with fortitude, fight the good fight of faith, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. But when the eye and heart forget Christ, when we turn from Him as the smitten Rock, the fountain of life and love, then the barrenness and sorrows of the wilderness press heavily upon us, and disappointment, rebellion, murmuring, and other bitter fruits of unbelief easily manifest themselves. Perhaps no people act more foolishly, are more miserable, or more exhibit the unlovely tempers and evils of the flesh, than those believers who forget the Lord Jesus, and draw not refreshment and blessing out of His fullness. The enemy, finding such off their guard, easily overcomes them with his fiery darts, acts upon the pride and lusts of the flesh, until, instead of the triumphant song of

Worthy is the Lamb (Rev. 5:12),

their lips give utterance to desponding and complaining exclamations.

It has been said by another, that “the blood of Christ both strengthens our inner man, and keeps down the weeds of the flesh.” And so it is; for, in the exercise of faith, we draw from Christ, and are so spiritually strengthened, that we are able to keep under carnal lusts. But, though we be true disciples of Christ, severed from Him we grow weak spiritually, and fleshly desires and ways spring up, and are sometimes painfully manifested. Accordingly, this chapter shows us, that when the people had no water from the rock, and thirsted, that they gathered themselves together against the servants of God; that they chode with Moses, complained of the barrenness of the wilderness, and concluded that they would die, and never see the land of promise. Their experience was that of darkness, barrenness, and misery, because they got away from the only fountain of refreshment and blessing. And so it is with God’s people now. Oh, how many complaining children of God may trace their present sadness of soul, not, as they suppose, to the circumstances that have crossed their path, but to the two evils of forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water! How can we be happy apart from Him who is our life and salvation? How can we be making melody in our hearts, so long as the spring of all our joys ceases to be viewed by us as the river of life to our souls? Those who cleave to the Lord Jesus, and walk in His ways, may assuredly count upon the comfort of the Holy Ghost as their portion; and while they will not be without the trials of the wilderness, they will realize the present help and mercy of God in trouble, and in God’s own good time deliverance from trouble. Thus abiding in the Lord Jesus, we shall be happy and fruitful, but severed from Him we shall be barren and unhappy; and, as the apostle Peter saith, such will be blind, unable to see afar off, and will forget that they were purged from their old sins. How important, then, that the Christian should not feed on ashes, or seek in any measure satisfaction at the worldling’s swine-trough; but, knowing that Christ is all, live upon Christ — His person, work, fitness, fullness, and offices; hide, as it were, in His wounds, drink deeply into His gracious words and ways, treasure up His promises, eat His flesh, dwell on His unutterable and unchanging love, seek more and more His unsearchable riches; so that the constant language of our souls may be,

His mouth is most sweet, yea, He is altogether lovely. This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend (S of S 5:16).

2. FAILURE IN SERVICE is also recorded in this affecting narrative. Moses desired to serve the Lord, and to serve His people; but he did not do so in God’s way; instead, therefore, of its being acceptable service, it was so displeasing to the Lord, that he was not allowed to go into the land on account of it. It was zeal, but not according to knowledge. God told Moses to take the rod, but did not tell him to use it as he did. He was also told to speak to the rock, but instead of that he smote it. God used no rebuke in speaking to His servant about the assembly, but Moses called them

rebels (Num. 20:10).

All these things show that Moses was not serving in the temper and spirit of the Lord. To seek to satisfy God’s thirsty people was well, but he did not act in it for the glory of God. And it is important to notice that, notwithstanding Moses’ failure, God acted then, as He often does now — He brought blessing to the people, though He chastened His servant for his inconsistent conduct. The failure was very great, not only in its

not being obedience to the Lord's plain command, but in spoiling the type, which was, doubtless, intended to teach us that the rock once smitten, need never be smitten again, but would give forth refreshing streams at the cry of faith, as we now know Christ.

The rod here was evidently not the rod of Moses, wherewith he smote the rock; that rod Moses took with him on the top of the hill, after the rock in Horeb was smitten, and we never hear of it afterwards. Moses' rod there did its work, and the type teaches us that the law had its claims met in the wounds, bruises, and death of the Son of God. The rod ordered to be taken in this scene at Meribah was the rod which was before the Lord (Num. 20:9), which was Aaron's rod (see Num. 17:1-5), and teaches us not about smiting, but about the resurrection and priesthood of Christ. We are told that this dead rod

budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds (Num. 17:8).

And was laid up before the testimony

and the Lord said, Thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not (Num. 17:10).

Thus we see shadowed forth the resurrection and priesthood of Christ. It can, therefore, easily be seen how consistent with the truth it would be for Moses to hold forth this beautiful rod beside the rock gushing with his waters at his word, and how contrary to the typical meaning it was to smite the rock, especially with such a rod. How blessed now to know Jesus in resurrection-glory as the Rock once smitten to save His people from death, but now before the Lord; and that we have only to contemplate Him to be filled with adoring gratitude, only to speak to Him, and His blessings flow with abundant refreshment.

How much religious service in the present day, we fear, is not acceptable to God! How much there may be that God's eye detects as being chiefly the busy energy of the flesh, and not spiritual — not in the obedience of faith — not in accordance with the truth of God! How important that we should not only be addicting ourselves to the Lord's work, but that we should carry it out in God's way, and for His glory! But this leads us to consider —

3. THE CHRISTIAN'S TRUE PATH. Declension of soul, and failure in service, generally go together, as we see in Peter, who first followed the Lord

afar off (Luke 22:54),

and in mistaken zeal,

cut off the servant's ear (see John 18:10).

The Christian's true path is communion with God, and obedience to His word; and the backsliding and failing Christian must return thence, if he would be happy, and glorify God. The believer's calling is unto

fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:3);

to walk with God, to realize that all his springs are in Him, and to wait for His Son from heaven. Christ, the true Rock that was smitten, is his all-satisfying portion. He has to do with the Lord Jesus who was crucified, who said,

It is finished (John 19:30)!

and bowed His head, and gave up the Ghost. He knows that that one finished work of eternal redemption is perfect, and that by it He hath perfected for ever all those who truly believe in Him; so that there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. He, therefore, looks to Jesus risen and glorified, the slain Lamb on the right hand of God, as the One who has all power in heaven and in earth. His business, then, in every need is to

speak to the Rock (see Num. 20:8),

and to prove that living water continually flows from Him.

The Christian has generally much joy at first, because his thirst is satisfied by simply drinking of the waters of the smitten rock, and Christ is all to him. He knows little of the deceitfulness of his own heart, the trials of the wilderness, or of the seductions of Satan. After a while, however, when unexpected difficulties and necessities cross his path, he perhaps unconsciously loses sight of Christ, by being taken up with the sorrowful circumstances, and thirsts for refreshment and comfort. But where will he find it? Surely he will find it flow only from that same Rock which at first quenched his thirst, the Lamb who is now in the midst of the throne. This, then, is the Christian's true course: looking unto Jesus, abiding in Jesus, drawing from Jesus, learning of Jesus, whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace; or as the apostle expresses it,

Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God (Phil. 4:6).

Speak to the Rock; every need should lead us to the fullness of the Lord Jesus; every temptation to His sympathy and power; every occasion of blessing with thanksgiving to Him; every sorrow should lead us to contemplate the sorrows of Jesus; every act of service should be done in dependence on the Lord Jesus; yea, concerning everything we should speak to Him. Those who thus set the Lord always before them will experience that He is at their right hand, and that they cannot be moved.

Oh, ye dear children of God! are you cast down by reason of the trials of the way? Are you oppressed, and fainting under a sense of your many needs, many sorrows, many achings of heart?

Oh, speak to the Rock! Go and tell the Lord Jesus all your sorrows, and all your perplexities; yea, tell Him all — pour out your heart before Him. He will refresh your spirit, lift up your hands that hang down, sustain your confidence, give you wisdom, and show you that He careth for you. He bids you trust in Him at all times — not some times, but all times — therefore speak to Him this time. You may have proved it a blessed thing to speak to Him in times past: oh, speak to Him now! Cast all your care on Him, for He says, He careth for you. Cast every burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you. You need not fear any sorrow, if it only lead you to the Lord Jesus; and every felt need will be a blessing, if it only be a fresh errand to the mercy-seat. Fellow-Christians! the Rock still gives forth His water, and refreshing streams still flow freely to us

from our Lord Jesus. It is vain to look elsewhere. Princes cannot help us. Creatures are broken cisterns; and it is written,

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help (Isa. 31:1)!

and,

Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm (Jer. 17:5).

Without Christ we can no nothing; but there is no uncertainty in calling upon the Lord Jesus.

Speak to the Rock, and it shall give forth His waters (see Num. 20:8).

Such is the way of blessing; for it is written,

Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him (Psa. 2:12).

Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors (Prov. 8:34).

In this way only will true Christians be happy, and thus be fitted for the Lord's work; for

the joy of the Lord is your strength (Neh. 8:10).

It is only by the written word, unfolded to us by the Spirit, that we know how to serve God acceptably.

If a man love me, he will keep my words (John 14:23),

said Jesus. It seemed a little thing when God said,

Speak to the rock,

that Moses should smite it; but it dishonored God. God's word is to be heeded by us, and obeyed; and drinking of the water from the rock and honoring His word, we shall render acceptable service. The importance of simply obeying God's word is again taught us in 1 Sam. 15, God commanded Saul to slay all the Amalekites, but Saul only slew some. This was disobedience; and God told him, that

to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams (1 Sam. 15:22).

We see another example in the days of David. God had ordered that none were to carry the ark of God but the Levites; but David ordered it otherwise. The consequence was, that disappointment, chastisement, and failure, accompanied the service (see 1 Chron. 13:10); but afterwards, when the king acted according to the word of the Lord, and rendered acceptable service, it was connected with the Lord's blessing, and the people's joy and gladness. How important, then, that we should beware of the traditions of men, and heed and obey the written word of God!

4. Let us now glance at THE BLESSINGS CONNECTED WITH DRINKING OF THE WATER FROM THE ROCK. The people's thirst was quenched, their murmurings ceased, their spirits were refreshed, and their hearts were cheered. But the sequel shows us two things more: first, that they acted graciously; and secondly, they fought against the enemies of the Lord valiantly. In reference to the first point, we are told that they sent kind messages to the king of Edom, and when the Edomites repeatedly refused to let Israel pass through their land on any terms, they went another way. This was carrying out the mind of God, for Edom was Israel's brother after the flesh; and it reminds us of the fact, that those who taste and enjoy most of the grace of God will be kind, yielding, and gracious to others. Who would have thought, a short time before, that those rebellious Israelites would be so soon seen acting in such a gracious temper; but they had drank of the water from the rock — they had seen and believed the goodness of the Lord, and this had made the difference.

With regard to the second point, when the Canaanites attacked them, and took some of their brethren prisoners, they went forth in the strength of the Lord, and fought valiantly and successfully against the enemy, and utterly destroyed both them and their cities. They fought for their fallen brethren, and against the enemies of the Lord. Is it possible that these very people were so recently chiding with Moses, and setting themselves against him and Aaron? Yes; but they had drank of the water from the rock; they had been restored in their minds to a consciousness that God was for them, and not against them, and this had made the difference. Do not such considerations so endear the cross of Christ to our souls, that we cheerfully sing –

Soon, beloved, the Lord Jesus will come again, and our pilgrimage days will have for ever passed away; we shall then no longer know the sorrows and drought of a barren wilderness. Now it is our highest privilege to

speak to the Rock

— to hold intercourse by faith with our blessed Lord Jesus, whom having not seen we love; then we shall see Him face to face, and admiring His eternal beauties and excellencies with unmingled and unchanging joy and gratitude, we shall be FOR EVER WITH THE LORD.

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