Psalms - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

Christian Truth: Volume 23, Twofold Way of God, The: Sanctuary and Sea

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Psalm 77:13, 19

His way is "in the sanctuary," and His way is "in the sea." Now there is a great difference between these two things. First of all, God's way is in the sanctuary where all is light, all is clear. There is no mistake there. There is nothing in the least degree that is a harass to the spirit. On the contrary, it is when the poor troubled one enters into the sanctuary and views things there in the light of God, that he sees the end of all else—everything that is entangled, the end of which he cannot find on the earth.

We have the same thing in Psalm 73. "When I thought to know this, it was too, painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." That is, in the sanctuary of God everything is understood, no matter how difficult and trying and painful as regards ourselves or others. When we once enter there, we are in the place of God's light and God's love; and then, whatever the difficulty may be, we understand all about it.

But not only is God's way in the sanctuary (and when we are there, all is bright and happy), but God's way is in the sea. He walks where we cannot always trace His footsteps.

"We cannot always trace the way

Where Thou, our gracious Lord, dost move;

But we can always surely say That God is love.

"When fear its gloomy cloud will fling

O'er earth—our souls, to heaven above,

As to their sanctuary, spring, For God is love."

God moves mysteriously at times, as we all know. There are ways of God which are purposely to try us. I need not say that it is not at all as if God had pleasure in our perplexities. Nor is it as if we had no sanctuary to draw near to, where we can rise above it. But still there is a great deal in the ways of God that must be left entirely in His own hands. The way of God is thus not only in the sanctuary, but also in the sea. And yet, what we find even in connection with His footsteps being in the sea is, "Thou leddest Thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." That was through the sea; afterward, it was through the wilderness. But it had been through the sea. The beginnings of the ways of God with His people were there, because from first to last God must be the confidence of the saint. It may be an early lesson of his soul, but it never ceases to be the thing to learn.

How happy to know that while the sanctuary is open to us, yet God Himself is nearer still; and to Him we are brought now. As it is said (1 Peter 3), "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." This is a most precious thing, because there we are in the sanctuary at once, and brought to God Himself. And I am bold to say that heaven itself would be but a small matter if it were not to God that we are brought. It is better than any freedom from trial, better than any blessing, to be in the presence of the One to whom we belong, who is Himself the source of all blessing and joy. That we are brought to Him now is infinitely precious. There we are in the sanctuary brought to God.

But still there are other ways of God outside the sanctuary—in the sea. And there we often find ourselves at a loss. If we are occupied with the sea itself, and with trying to scan God's footsteps there, then they are not known. But confidence in God Himself is always the strength of faith. May the Lord grant us increasing simplicity and quietness in the midst of all that through which we pass, for His name's sake.

"Child of God by Christ's salvation, Rise o'er sin and fear and care-

Joy to find in every station,

Something still to do or bear;

Think what Spirit dwells within thee-

Think what Father's smiles are thine-

Think that Jesus died to win thee-

Child of God, wilt thou repine?

"Haste thee on from grace to glory,

Armed by faith and winged by prayer;

Heaven's eternal day's before thee,

God's right hand shall guide thee there;

Soon shall close thine earthly mission,

Soon shall pass thy pilgrim days,

Hope shall change to glad fruition,

Faith to sight, and prayer to praise."

Value of Trials: March 2008, Sanctuary and the Sea: the Twofold Ways of God, The

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C. H. Mackintosh

Short Papers, Isolation

It is one of our great difficulties at the present moment—indeed it has ever been a difficulty—to combine a narrow path with a wide heart. There is very much, on all sides, tending to produce isolation. We cannot deny it. Links of human friendship seem so fragile; so many things crop up to shake confidence; so many things which one cannot possibly sanction, that the path becomes more and more isolated.

All this is unquestionably true. But we must be very careful as to how we meet this condition of things. We have little idea how much depends on the spirit in which we carry ourselves in the midst of scenes and circumstances which, all must admit, are peculiarly trying.

For example, I may retire in upon myself, and become bitter, morose, severe, repulsive, withered up, having no heart for the Lord’s people, for His service, for the holy and happy exercises of the assembly. I may become barren of good works, having no sympathy with the poor, the sick, the sorrowful: living in the narrow circle within which I have retired; thinking only of myself, my personal and family interests.

What, we may well inquire, can be more miserable than this? It is simply the most deplorable selfishness; but we do not see it, because we are blinded by our inordinate occupation with other people’s failures.

Now it is a very easy matter to find out flaws, foibles, and faults in our brethren and friends. But the question is, How are we to meet these things? Is it by retiring in upon ourselves? Never; no, never. To do this is to render ourselves as miserable in ourselves as we are worthless, and worse than worthless, to others. There are few things more pitiable than what we call “a disappointed man.” He is always finding fault with others. He has never discovered the real root of the matter, or the true secret of dealing with it. He has retired, but it is in upon himself. He is isolated, but his isolation is utterly false. He is miserable; and he will make all who come under his influence—all who are weak and foolish enough to listen to him—as miserable as himself. He has completely broken down in his practical career; he has succumbed to the

difficulties of his time, and proved himself wholly unequal to meet the stern realities of actual life. And then, instead of seeing and confessing this, he retires into his own narrow circle, and finds fault with everyone except himself.

How truly delightful and refreshing to turn from this dismal picture to the only perfect Man that ever trod this earth! His path was indeed an isolated one—none more so. He had no sympathy with the scene around Him. “ The world knew him not.” “ He came unto his own [Israel], and his own received him not.” “ He looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but he found none.” Even His own beloved disciples failed to sympathize with, or understand Him. They slept on the mount of transfiguration, in the presence of His glory; and they slept in the garden of Gethsemane, in the presence of His agony. They roused Him out of His sleep with their unbelieving fears, and were continually intruding upon Him with their ignorant questions and foolish notions.

How did He meet all this? In perfect grace, patience, and tenderness. He answered their questions; He corrected their notions; He hushed their fears; He solved their difficulties; He met their need; He made allowance for their infirmities; He gave them credit for devotedness in the moment of desertion; He looked at them through His own loving eyes, and loved them, notwithstanding all. “ Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”

Christian reader, let us seek to drink into our blessed Master’s spirit, and walk in His footsteps; and then our isolation will be of the right kind, and though our path may be narrow, the heart will be large.

Christian Truth: Volume 2, All Is Vanity: Under the Sun

In the sixth verse of the thirty ninth Psalm we have three great types of character as set forth in the vain show, vain disquietude, and heaping up. These types may sometimes be found combined, but very often they have a distinct development.

There are many whose whole life is one "vain show," whether in their personal character, their commercial position, their political or religious profession. There is nothing solid about them—nothing real—nothing true. The glitter is the most shallow gilding possible. There is nothing deep, nothing intrinsic. All is surface work—all the merest flash and smoke.

Then again we find another class whose life is one continued scene of vain disquietude. You will never find them at ease—never satisfied—never happy. There is always some terrible thing coming

- some catastrophe in the distance, the bare anticipation of which keeps them in a constant fever of anxiety. They are troubled about property, about friends, about trade, about children, about servants. Though placed in circumstances which thousands of their fellow creatures would deem most enviable, they seem to be in a perpetual fret. They harass themselves in reference to troubles that may never come, difficulties they may never encounter, sorrows they may never live to see. Instead of remembering the blessings of the past and rejoicing in the mercies of the present, they are anticipating the trials and sorrows of the future. In a word, "they are disquieted in vain."

Finally, you will meet another class, quite different from either of the preceding—keen, shrewd, industrious, money-making people—people who would live, where others would starve. There is not much "vain show" about them. They are too solid, and life is too practical a reality for anything of that sort. Neither can you say there is much disquietude about them. Theirs is an easy-going, quiet, plodding spirit, or an active, enterprising, speculating turn of mind. "He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them."

But reader, remember, on all three alike the Spirit has stamped "vanity." Yes, all, without any exception, "under the sun," has been pronounced by one who knew it by experience, and wrote it by inspiration, "vanity and vexation of spirit." Turn where you will, "under the sun," and you will not find aught on which the heart can rest. You must rise on the steady and vigorous pinion of faith to regions above the sun in order to find "a better and an enduring substance." The One who sits at the right hand of God has said, "I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." Pro. 8:20, 21. None but Jesus can give "substance"—none but He can "fill"—none but He can "satisfy." There is that in Christ's perfect work which meets the deepest need of conscience; and there is that in His glorious Person which can satisfy the most earnest longings of the heart. The one who has found Christ on the cross, and Christ on the throne, has found all he can possibly need for time or eternity.

Well, therefore, might the psalmist, having challenged his heart with the question, "What wait I for?" reply, "My hope is in Thee." No vain show, no vain disquietude, no heaping up for him. He had found an object in God worth waiting for; and therefore, turning away his eye from all beside, he says, "My hope is in Thee."

This, my beloved reader, is the only true, peaceful, and happy position. The soul that leans on, looks to, and waits for Jesus, will never be disappointed. Such a one possesses an exhaustless fund of present enjoyment in fellowship with Christ; while at the same time, he is cheered by "that blessed hope" that when this present scene, with all its vain show, its vain disquietude, and its vain resources shall have passed away, he shall be with Jesus where He is, to behold His glory, to bask in the light of His countenance, and to be conformed to His image forever.

May we then be much in the habit of challenging our earthbound, creature-seeking hearts, with the searching inquiry, "What wait I for?" Am I waiting for some change of circumstances, or "for the Son from heaven"? Can I look up to Jesus, and with a full and honest heart say, "Lord, my hope is in Thee"?

May our hearts be more thoroughly separated from this present evil world and all that pertains thereto, by the power of communion with those things that are unseen and eternal.

From various cares our hearts retire,

Though deep and boundless their desire,

We've now to please but One;

Him before whom each knee shall bow -

With Him is all our business now,

And those that are His own.

With these our happy lot is cast,

Through the world's deserts rude and waste,

Or through its gardens fair;

Whether the storms of trouble sweep,

Or all in dead supineness sleep,

T'advance be all our care."

Short Papers, What Wait I For?

Psalm 39:7.

This is a searching question for the heart; but it is oft times a most salutary one, inasmuch as we may constantly detect ourselves in an attitude of waiting for things which, when they come, prove not to be worth waiting for.

The human heart is very much like the poor lame man at the gate of the temple, in Acts 3 He was looking at every passerby, “expecting to receive something:” and the heart will ever be looking out for some relief, some comfort, or some enjoyment, in passing circumstances. It may, ever and anon, be found sitting by the side of some creature-stream, vainly expecting that some refreshment will flow along its channel.

It is amazing to think of the trifles on which nature will, at times, fix its expectant gaze—a change of circumstances—change of scene—change of air—a journey—a visit—a letter—a book—anything, in short, is sufficient to raise expectations in a poor heart which is not finding its center, its spring, its all, in Christ.

Hence the practical importance of frequently turning sharp round upon the heart with the question, “ What wait I for?” Doubtless, the true answer to this inquiry would, at times, furnish the most advanced Christian with matter for deep humiliation and self-judgment before the Lord.

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And with the souls that are His own.

“ With these my happy lot is cast,

Through the world’s deserts rude and waste,

Or through its gardens fair;

Whether the storms of trouble sweep,

Or all in dead supineness sleep,

Still to go on be my whole care.”

Handfuls of Pasture: Volume 2, Forsaken One, The

There is an utterance, in the twenty second Psalm, of deep and marvelous import—a sentence to which there is no parallel in the volume of God. It is this, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Never, we may safely say, was there such a question asked before; never has there such an one been asked since; nor shall its like ever be asked again. It stands alone in the annals of eternity.

Reader, let us dwell upon it for a few moments. Who was it that asked this wondrous question? It was the Eternal Son of God, the One who had lain in the bosom of the Father before the foundation of the world. The object of the Father's infinite delight. Moreover, He was Himself God over all, blessed forever. The Creator of all things, the Almighty Sustainer of the wide universe. Finally, He was a man—a spotless, holy, perfect man—one who had never sinned, nor could sin, because He knew no sin. And yet, withal, a man, a real man, born of a woman, like unto us, in every possible respect, with one solitary exception—sin. " He did no sin; neither was guile found in his mouth." He did ever those things that pleased God. From the manger of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary, His whole life was in perfect accordance with the will of God. He lived but to glorify God. His every thought, His every word, His every look, His every movement, emitted an odor of ineffable sweetness which ascended to the throne and refreshed the heart of God. Again and again, the heavens were opened upon this blessed One; and the voice of the Eternal Father bore witness to Him in such accents as these, " This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

This, then, was the One who asked the question. He it was who said, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And is it really true that such an One was forsaken of God? Did God, in very deed, forsake His only begotten, well-beloved Son? Did He actually hide His face from the only sinless, spotless, perfect man that ever lived in this sinful world? Did He close His ear to the cry of One who had lived but to do His will, and glorify His name? Yes; marvelous to declare, God did this. God—who withdraweth not His eyes from the righteous; whose ear is ever open to the cry of the needy; whose hand is ever stretched forth for the defense of the weak and the helpless—He, even He, turned away His face from His own beloved Son, and refused, for the moment, to hear His cry.

Here we have a profound mystery on which we cannot dwell too deeply. It contains in it the very marrow and substance of the gospel—the grand basis-truth of Christianity. The more we ponder the glories of the One who asked the question—who He was, what He was, what He was in Himself, and what He was to God, the more we see the marvelous depths of the question. And further, the more we consider the One to whom the question was put, the more we know of His character and ways, the more we shall see the force and value of the answer.

Why, then, did God forsake His Son? Oh! reader, dost thou know why? Dost thou know it in its bearing upon thyself personally? Canst thou say, from thine inmost soul, " I know why God forsook that blessed One. It was because He had taken my place, stood in my stead, and taken all my guilt upon Himself. He was made sin for me. All that I was, all that I had done, all that was due to me, was laid on Him. God dealt with me in the Person of my substitute. All the sin of my nature, and all the sins of my life—all that I am, and all I have ever done, was imputed to Him. He represented me and was treated accordingly."

Say, beloved reader, has God's Spirit taught you this? Have you received this, in simple faith, on the authority of God's word? If so, you must have solid peace—a peace which no power of earth or hell, men or devils, can ever disturb. This is the true and only foundation of the soul's peace. It is utterly impossible for any soul to have real peace with God until He knows that God Himself has settled the whole question of sin and sins, in the cross of His Son. God knew what was needed, and He provided it. He laid on Christ the full weight of our iniquities. God and sin met at the cross. There the whole question was divinely gone into and settled once and forever. Sin was judged and abolished. The sin-bearer went down under the billows and waves of divine wrath. God brought Him into the dust of death. Sin was dealt with according to the infinite claims of the nature, the character, and the throne of God; and now the One who was made sin for us, and judged in our stead, is at the right

hand of God, exalted, crowned with glory and honor; and the very crown which adorns His blessed brow is the proof that sin is forever put away; so that ere ever a single sin can be laid to the believer's charge, that crown must be torn from the risen Savior's head.

But there is another element of ineffable preciousness and sweetness that enters into the answer to the mysterious "Why?" of the forsaken One. It is this, the amazing love of God toward its poor sinners—a love which led Him not only to give His Son from His bosom, but to bruise and forsake Him on the cross. Wiry did He do this? Because there was no other way possible in which we could escape. It was either a question of' an eternal hell for us, or of infinite wrath for the sin-bearer. God be praised, He chose the latter, and hence the place, which Christ now occupies is the place of all who simply believe in Him.

'Tis the treasure I've found in His love

That has made me a pilgrim below,

And 'tis there, when I reach Him above,

As I'm known, all His fullness I'll know.

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 101. Psalm 147:2

“J. N.,” Earlestown. We do not consider that Psalm 147:2, has any reference to the church. We believe that Jerusalem means Jerusalem, and Israel means Israel. No doubt the church may draw precious instruction from this passage of the Word, as well as from many other scriptures which primarily refer to Israel; but it is of the very last importance to be able rightly to divide the Word of truth. Serious damage is done to souls, and to the truth of God, through ignorance of what is called dispensational truth. We should seek to put things where God puts them and leave them there.

Short Papers, Motto for the Year 1872, A

Dear Reader, we want you to accept a little motto for the year on which you have just entered; and, if we mistake not, you will find it a precious motto for every year during which your Lord may see fit to leave you on this earth. It consists of two short but most weighty passages from the divine volume. You will find them in Psalm 119 The first is this: “ Forever, Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.” (Ver. 89.) The second is this: “ Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” Verse 11.

These are, in good truth, golden sentences for the present moment. They set forth the true place for the word, namely, “settled in heaven” and “hidden in the heart.” Nor is this all; they also link the heart on to the very throne of God, by means of His own word, thus giving to the Christian all the stability and all the moral security which the divine word is capable of imparting.

We do not forget—God forbid we should—that in order to enter into the power and value of these words, there must be faith wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost. We would remember this. But our present subject is not faith, nor yet the precious work of the Spirit of God; but simply the word of God, in its eternal stability and its holy authority. We esteem it an unspeakable mercy and privilege—in the midst of all the strife and confusion, the discussion and controversy, the conflicting opinions and dogmas of men, the ever shifting sands of human thought and feeling—to have something “settled.” It is a sweet relief and rest to the heart that has, it may be, been tossed about for many a long year, on the troubled sea of human opinion, to find that there is, after all, and spite of all, that on which one may lean with all the calm confidence of faith, and find therein divine and eternal stability.

What a mercy, in the face of the unrest and uncertainty of the present moment, to be able to say, “ I have gotten something settled—settled forever—settled forever in heaven!” What effect, we may ask, can the bold and audacious reasonings of infidelity, or the sickly vaporings of superstition have upon the soul that can say, “ My heart is linked to the throne of God by means of that word which is settled forever in heaven?” None whatever. Infidelity and superstition—the two great agents of hell in this very day in which we live—can only take effect upon those who really have nothing settled, nothing fixed, no link with the throne and heart of God. The wavering and undecided—those who halt between two opinions, who are looking this way and that way, who are afloat, who have no haven, no anchorage—these are in imminent danger of falling Tinder the power of infidelity and superstition.

We invite the special attention of the young reader to all this. We would sound a warning note in the ears of such. The present is a moment of deep and awful solemnity. The arch-enemy is putting forth every effort to sap the very foundations of Christianity. In all directions the divine authority and all-sufficiency of holy scripture is being called in question. Rationalism is gaining ground, to a fearful extent, at our seats of learning, and polluting the fountains whence the streams of religious thought and feeling are emanating over the land. Truth is at a discount, even amongst those who ought to be its guardians. We may, now-a-days, behold the strange sight of professing christian teachers taking part at meetings where professed infidels preside. Alas! alas! men who are professed infidels themselves may become pastors and teachers in that which calls itself the Church of God.

In the face of all this, how precious, how weighty is our motto, “ Forever, Lord, thy word is settled in heaven!” Nothing can touch this. It is above and beyond the reach of all the powers of earth and hell, men and devils. “ The word of our God shall stand forever.” The Lord be praised for the sweet and solid consolation of tins!

But let us remember the counterpart: “ Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” Here lies the great moral safeguard for the soul in this dark and evil day. To have God’s word hidden in the heart is the divine secret of being preserved from all the snares of the enemy, and from all the evil influences which are at work around us. Satan and his agents can do absolutely nothing with a soul that reverently clings to scripture. The man who has learned, in the school of Christ, the force and meaning of that one commanding sentence, “It is written,” is proof against all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Dear reader, let us earnestly entreat you to ponder these things. Let us remind you that the one grand point for the people of God, now and at all times, is obedience. It is not a question of power, or of gift, or of external show, or of numbers; it is simply a question of obedience. “ To obey is better than sacrifice.” To obey what? The Church? Nay, the Church is a hopeless ruin, and cannot therefore be an authority. Obey what? The word of the Lord. What a rest for the heart! What authority for the path! What stability for the whole practical career! There is nothing like it. It tranquillizes the Spirit in an ineffable manner, and imparts a holy consistency to the character. It is a divine answer to those who talk of power, boast of numbers, point to external show, and profess reverence for antiquity. Moreover, it is the divine antidote for the spirit of independence, so rife, at the present day—for the haughty uprisings of the human will—the hold assertion of man’s rights. The human mind is tossed like a ball from superstition to infidelity, and can find no rest. It is like a ship without compass, rudder, or anchor, driven hither and thither. But thanks be to God for all those to whose hearts the Holy Ghost has interpreted our motto for 1872. “ Forever, Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.” “ Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

The Christian Shepherd: 2004, His Presence in the Storm

“They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters... see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep” (Psa. 107:23-24).

It is in the day of trial and difficulty that the soul experiences something of the deep and untold blessedness of being able to count on God. Were all to go on smoothly, this would not be so. It is not in gliding over a tranquil lake that the reality of the Master’s presence is felt, but when the tempest roars and the waves roll over the ship.

The Lord does not hold out to us the prospect of exemption from trial. He tells us we shall have to meet it, but He promises to be with us in the trial. God’s presence in the trial is much better than exemption from the trial. The sympathy of His heart with us is sweeter far than the power of His hand for us.

The Master’s presence with His faithful servants while passing through the furnace was better far than the display of His power to keep them out of it (Dan. 3). We would frequently desire to be allowed to pass on our way without trial, but this would involve serious loss. The Lord’s presence is never so sweet as in moments of appalling difficulty.

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