
MY SOLACE IN MY AFFLICTION.

A SERMON PREACHED

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“For ever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abides. They continue this day according to your ordinances: for all are your servants. Unless your law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction” — Psalm 119:89— 92.

EVEN in those psalms which are not associated with any particular chapter of history we can often trace out the trail of the writer's experience, and track his soul through its wanderings. His reflections then become vivid with intense reality. The meditation now before us is evidently prompted by some event deeply carved on the writer's memory. “Unless your law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction.” We know nothing of the time or circumstance when the heart was terrified, when the nerves were shaken, when the weakness of nature asserted itself; the veil is wisely drawn over the sharp pains or sullen griefs that bowed the sufferer down, and we are simply solaced with a song celebrating his deliverance out of all his troubles and fears. Possibly his affliction was long; but certainly it reached a crisis so perilous that his life then trembled in the balance. He was then ripe for destruction, ready to have perished. Moreover, it is noteworthy that whatever his trial may have been, whether it was a sickness or a disaster, or any other manner of adversity, he refers to it as his own, and he calls it “my affliction.” It would ill become us, therefore, to pry into the cause or fashion of his grief, or to ask any further question. Quite likely I may be addressing some dear child of God who is vexed with an affliction so personal and so peculiar that he feels it to be “his own,” and would deem it an intrusion for another to intermeddle: let us not intrude, for we should only increase the grief by our enquiries. “My affliction” is an expression that bears a marked emphasis and has a tone entirely its own. I do not know whether I am more struck with its pathos or its reticence. At the sound of such words a stranger might well be touched with pity; but a

friend, however sympathizing, would shrink from prying into the secrets of a heart that so delicately conceals its own bitterness.

The one and only thing that the Psalmist was eager to tell us was the prescription that soothed his pains and sustained his spirits. On mature reflection he is confident that he would have perished under that affliction if it had not been for certain comfortable and delightful reflections concerning God's word. You and I may at any time be exposed to a like mental or spiritual depression, through one or other of those manifold sorrows which enter so largely into Christian life. There are plenty of miry places on the way to heaven; and so it will be our wisdom diligently to enquire how this good man passed through them. I like to hear how any godly man has been comforted, for it comforts me. I take a deep interest in the simple tale of any humble prisoner whose bonds the Lord has loosed; and I feel it a choice pleasure to chime in with songs of thanksgiving which warble from the lips of grateful suppliants whose cries the Lord has heard.

Observe that the Psalmist appeals to certain facts which he remembered. "For ever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness is unto all generations. You have established the earth and it abides," etc. And then he refers to certain delights which he experienced in reviewing these facts: "Unless your law had been my delight, I should have perished in my affliction."

I. Here, then, we have strong consolation IN CERTAIN FACTS WHICH HE REMEMBERED. Fly to the mountains when the enemy invades the land. Hide in the strongholds of your God.

1. Our first comfort is the eternal existence of God, which is implied in the continuance of his faithfulness and power. "The Lord lives" is the plea of souls harassed and haunted by foes without and fears within. Observe, I pray you, that there is nothing casual or accidental in the tone of the Psalmist's meditation, as if some stray thought had darted a ray of light into the mind of one who was dreary and downcast. His joy is not like a flower that blooms in the desert, or a bird that chirps merrily amidst the frost of winter; but he has abundant and even overflowing cause for joy. His confidence runs on the grand old classic lines which inspiration has hallowed. When Moses was appalled by the frailty of man he uttered his majestic ode to the eternity of God: "Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations." So here, the eternal existence of God is the first fact to which the afflicted saint clings. According to the most eminent

scholars the opening sentence should be read—"For ever you are, O Lord; your word is settled in heaven." The second verse, as you may notice, is divided into two sentences, and the poetic parallelism requires a like arrangement in this verse if the poetic rule is carried out. But this would not form two strophes unless we read the first four words as a distinct sentence—"For ever, O Lord, you are." Whether this revision be warranted or not does not matter; for, as I have already said, the fact is implied in the wording of the authorized version. God is. He is for ever the same; and his years are throughout all generations. This is a very simple truth; who but a madman or a fool ever doubted it? If there be a God he must be self-existent and eternal; but it is from simplest things that sweetest consequences flow. Bread is simple enough; you do not require some eminent chef of the kitchen to teach you the art of making bread; but see what multitudes of people are fed upon that simple article of food. And so the simplest truth is the most precious, for it sustains many more than that daintier form of truth which may be only suitable for men of strong minds or of great experience in the things of God.

In the song of Moses—that song which is linked with the song of the Lamb—we have an apostrophe that language could hardly surpass: "Who is like unto you, O Lord, among the gods (or mighty ones)? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" To what lofty heights of expression did the holy prophets often rise in proclaiming the grandeur of the Lord's being, the magnitude of his works, the sovereignty of his will, and the faithfulness of his promises to his people! And yet the wealth of imagery that Isaiah or Ezekiel could call up, or the melting tones that Jeremiah could utter, can but faintly display the excellence of him that fills all in all. They rehearse his praise to whom alone all worship is due, in words that swell and sound forth like the music of the spheres; or they assail the heathenish idolatry which offered its incense to graven images, or they expose the heartless treachery that withheld homage from the true God, or they denounce the unbelief which limited the Holy One of Israel, by distrusting his words. In any of these cases, if we lend them our ears, they succeed in elevating our hearts from the grovelling thoughts of our fleeting life to the infinite perfection of Jehovah's essential deity, of whom (to accommodate the idea of his everlasting existence) we are told "that one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." My brethren, we are encompassed with God on every side. In him we live, and move, and have our being. His self-existent might is our never-failing mercy. Observe, I pray you, that this simple truth is the most sublime fact

which the mind of a rational creature can aspire to lay hold of. God lives—lives as God. Get a grip of this vital reality, and it will send a glow of health through every faculty of your soul. “Believe in the Lord your God; so you shall be established: believe his prophets; so you shall prosper.” But unless God is in all your thoughts you cannot be a godly man.

Nothing happens to the Lord haphazardly. What can threaten his existence, thwart his purpose, weaken his power, dim the clearness of his eye, diminish the tenderness of his heart, or distract the wisdom of his judgment? “You art the same, and of your years there is no end.” Then recollect, child of God, you are a sheep that can never lose its shepherd. You are a child that can never lose its father. “I will not leave you orphans,” said Jesus; and therein he did reveal the Eternal Father’s heart. In direst straits we have still a Father in heaven. When a widow who had long been inconsolable sat moaning for the loss of her husband, her little child plucked her by her gown, and said, “Mother, is God dead?” That question served to rebuke the mother’s fretfulness, and to remind her that she was not without a Guardian and Friend. “Your Maker is your husband; the Lord of hosts is his name.” It opened up to her a well of refreshment, which, like Hagar in the wilderness, she had not before been able to see. Listen, child of God: you can lose your goods, but you cannot lose your God. Like Jonah, you can see the withered gourd; but your God remains. You may lose your land, but not your Lord; your savings, but not your Saviour. Even if it came to the worst, and you were left awhile as one forsaken of God himself, yet still you would not lose him; for, like the Lord Jesus on the cross, you would still call him, “My God, my God.” “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul—a portion that never can be withdrawn— that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us, might have strong consolation. He lives; he reigns. This God is our God, and he shall be our guide even unto death.

Yes: it is a simple fact that God is: but it is a fact that may often recur to us with singular freshness. I met an eminent servant of God one day in the street, a man whose name, were I to mention it, you would all honour. He was in rather a gloomy and desponding mood that morning, and in the course of our conversation he told me that he believed the powers of evil in this country would get the upper hand, that Christianity would be almost stamped out, he feared, and that in all probability I should live to see the streets of London run with blood, while anarchy would riot as it did in the first French Revolution. He went on at such a rate that I felt bound to

remonstrate with him. So I told him that I was not easily scared by such evil forebodings, for I was persuaded that God was not dead. This is our firm rock of hope: the reins of government are in the hands of the living God, and the devil cannot frustrate his decrees, nor can events baffle his will. When Herod and Pontius Pilate, and the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together against the holy child Jesus whom the Lord had anointed, how little could they effect! They had it all their own way; or, at least, they thought they had. How much did they really accomplish with their wilful counsels and their wicked hands? Hear it distinctly. They (these emissaries of Satan) did whatsoever God's hand and God's counsel determined before to be done. And thus it always will be. The adversaries of the Lord are exceedingly fierce; but you and I who believe in God can afford to smile at their folly. If it must be so, let the powers of darkness have all the vantage ground they seek, and they will reap all the greater defeat. "He that sits in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." The church, they tell us, is in danger. That depends upon whose church it is; but if it is the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. Let us in this, then, be joyous and confident. If Luther could sing when the battle had but just begun—while yet the demon of the seven hills had temporal sway; why should you and I be hanging our harps on the willows now that the fight has made the dragon bleed? Come, let us sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. And as for these Amalekites that meet us on the road, and would arrest our progress, let us, like Jehoshaphat, appoint singers unto the Lord to go before our army and meet them with hallelujahs. Let us sing—Arise, O God, and make your enemies to flee before you like chaff before the wind: yea, let them be as the fat of rams burnt upon the altar; for you, Lord, are king, and you shall reign for ever and ever. This is a flowing well of comfort.

2. Closely allied to the fact of God's eternal being is this other fact of the immutability of his word. "Your word is settled in heaven." The truth of the proposition will occur to you as simple and obvious. "Thus says the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool." His word is settled in heaven and issued from heaven, the seat of his government, and it cannot be altered on earth, this distant colony of his empire. We refer to God's word, therefore, in grievous difficulties with great confidence, because we know that every statement it contains is reliable. God's word can never change. It is established. Some persons have no settled

residence; they are always moving to and fro, and restless, finding no anchor; but God's word is not fixed on earth where things are ever on the move, but it is settled in heaven among the infinities and eternities that change not. "For ever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven." The design and purpose of God are fixed, not fickle. He knows what he intends. You and I often begin with a design from which we are bound to deviate as we see something that would be better, or as we see that our better thing is not attainable, and we are obliged to be content with something inferior. But in God's case there can be no defect of judgment which would require amendment, and there can be no defect of power which would drive him from his first determination. God has a plan, depend upon it: it would be an insult to the supreme intellect if we supposed that he worked at random, without plan or method. To some of us it is a truth which we never doubt, that God has one boundless purpose which embraces all things, both things which he permits and things which he ordains. Without for a moment denying the freedom of the human will, we still believe that the supreme wisdom foresees also the curious twistings of the human will, and overrules all for his own ends. God knows and numbers all the inclinations and devices of men, and his plan in its mighty sweep takes them all into account. From that plan he never swerves. What he has resolved to do he will do. The settled purpose of his heart shall stand for ever sure. Of what avail could the opposition of angels or of men be when Omnipotence asserts its supremacy? As you walk down your garden on an autumn morning the spiders have spun their webs across the path, but you scarcely know it, for as you move along the threads vanish before you. So is it with every scheme, however skilfully contrived, that would arrest the fulfilment of the Divine purpose. The will of God must be done. Without the semblance of effort he moulds all events into his chosen form. In the sphere of mind as well as in that of matter his dominion is absolute. One man cannot immediately operate on the will of another man so as to change its course, although he may give reasons which, by their effect on the understanding, may completely alter the inclination of his fellow-creature; but this is a well known proverb—"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turns it however he wills." God can bend the thoughts of men as easily as we can lay on the pipes, and turn the water into any cistern we choose.

His purpose is settled for ever in heaven; so, too, are his covenant and his plan. Brothers, I could imagine God changing his mode of procedure, but I could not imagine his changing his covenant. He has

entered into covenant with Christ on our behalf; the sacrifice that makes it valid has been slain, and now the covenant is ordered in all things and sure. Every jot and tittle of it is signed and sealed and ratified by the death and the resurrection of our glorious Surety and blessed Representative. From that covenant God will never turn aside. The covenant of works we broke, but God kept it, for he did what he said he would do. The covenant of grace we cannot break, for it is made with another on our behalf, who has already fulfilled it, so that the covenant of grace stands now towards the saints without an “if,” or “but,” or “doubt,” and consists simply in unconditional promises of “I will,” and “you shall.” Read that covenant for yourselves and see. Whether you choose to take the copy of it in Ezekiel, or the copy of it presented by the apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews, there it stands; a covenant without conditions, enduring for ever, never to be changed. Oh, how I rejoice in the sure mercies of David! “This is as the waters of Noah unto me,” says the Lord; “for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be wrathful with you, or rebuke you.” Now, blessed be his name, the covenant is settled in heaven.

Then there is another matter which is settled, namely, God’s promise and the power to carry it out. I spoke of the promise being settled, because it is virtually a constituent element of the covenant; but now I mean that gospel promise which has been proclaimed to the sons of men. “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved”—that shall stand good throughout all generations. “He that believes in him has everlasting life”—that shall always be true. “Him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out,”—that shall never alter till the day of doom. God will not reverse the thing that has gone forth out of his lips. It was proclaimed by Christ himself; it was testified by his apostles; it was ratified by the descent of the Holy Ghost. The promises of the gospel are settled in heaven; therefore the preaching of the gospel is full of power among the sons of men. Go and preach it, dear brethren. Go and tell it, dear sisters. Never be afraid that you will make a mistake if you proclaim free grace and dying love. God has not spoken in secret in a dark place of the earth. The salvation of souls shall be the evidence of the efficacy of the gospel till every blood-bought one is brought by its power to Jesus’s feet. There is no change in the charge that is committed to our keeping: “Your word is settled in heaven.”

Moreover, the doctrine of the gospel as well as the promise of the gospel is settled in heaven. I do not know where I shall drift if I once leave the old channel to wind about among sandbanks. Certain of my brethren

delight to sail down a river which has neither buoys nor fixed lights, but plenty of ever-shifting sands; they do not steer according to any chart, but according to their own inclination. They say that they are thinking out their own strategies. I would be greatly sorry to have to think out the road to heaven without the guiding star of heaven's grace or the map of the word. Not gospel-preachers but gospel-makers these men aspire to be, and their message comes forth, not as the gospel of the grace of God, but as the gospel of the imagination of men; a gospel concocted in their own kitchen, not taught them by the Holy Spirit. It is the reverse of being "settled in heaven," it is not even settled in the mind of its inventor. I pity the hearers as well as the preachers of a precarious gospel. That which I preached to you in the beginning of my ministry I shall preach to you, by God's grace, till this tongue shall be silent in the grave. I know the doctrines better, but I know no better doctrines. There are certain things indelibly impressed on my mind, of a surety fixed, definite, true, and beyond doubt. As to ideas that are dubious, concerning which we need to be distrustful; —I leave my brethren to discuss them. Sentiments fluctuate so constantly in this nineteenth century that I suppose we shall soon require to have barometers to show us the variations of doctrine as well as the prospects of the weather. We shall have to consult quarterly reviews, to see what style of religious thought is predominant, and then we shall have to accommodate our sermons to the dictum of the last wise man who has chosen to make a special fool of himself. As for myself, I shall continue to be unfashionable, and abide where I am. "Sticking in the mud," says somebody. "Standing on the Rock," say I. Nay, if you will—grown to the Rock—immovable, not to be turned aside. If this gospel be a lie, I grieve that I ever preached it, and I will never preach it again. If it be true, truth is not a thing of almanacs and quarterlies. If true in the year "two" it is as true in the year "eighteen hundred and eighty-two;" and if it is not true today, it never was and never will be true; for truth does not come and go, and be and cease to be. Fall back, O simple hearts, upon this blessed fact—that God's word is "settled in heaven." It cannot be settled at Oxford, or settled at Cambridge, or at any other university; but it is settled in heaven. Go to heaven's book, and read heaven's word under the teaching of heaven's own Spirit, and you shall go from strength to strength in the knowledge, not of what may be true, but of what is true, having the revelation of God to conform it—an authority from which there can be no appeal.

3. The third thing is the faithfulness of the fulfilment of that word. "For ever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness is unto all

generations.” Those men who have trusted God’s word in any generation have always found it true. In apostolic times, or further back than that, in David’s age, in the era of Moses, in the time of Abraham, in the days of Noah, in the life of Abel, whoever has trusted in God has found that he has heard prayer, that he has been the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him. The covenant, as I have already said, does not change, and the truth does not change, and though the generations greatly differ in the judgment of men, I greatly question whether God thinks them different. One generation is as like another as successive waves of the sea. We think we grow much wiser; but it is not a very strong proof that we are wiser because we think we are so. I very much question all this fiddle-faddle about the progress of the nineteenth century. True, we rush over the country by steam instead of travelling by broad-wheeled wagons, and we get smashed up all the more readily. We now go all round the world to buy a bit of bread; we used to grow it in our own fields, and it was just as good then as it is now that it comes from far. There were good people then; there are good people now. I will not decry whatever progress has been made in machinery and the arts, and so on; I thank God for it all; but about the improvement in ourselves—that is the point. I imagine that we bear a striking resemblance to our fathers. When I read the story of the children of Israel in the wilderness, I think I see their sins and their follies, their murmurs and complaints repeated in our own lives. But whether or not the race has changed, there has been no change in God’s dealings with the race. This has always been the rule of the kingdom—“According to your faith, so be it unto you.” Were I to enlarge upon all the difficulties and hardships through which God’s servants have passed, we should have to come to the one conclusion, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” That is so today as it was thousands of years ago. O beloved, this is the mercy—that God is faithful still. When I used to hear my grandfather tell of the faithfulness of God to him, my young heart was encouraged to trust in God. When I have heard my father tell of the faithfulness of God to him, I have been strengthened in my confidence in my father’s God. But I can tell the same tale myself, and perhaps I can record more instances than they of God’s goodness to those that put their trust in him. It will be the same with our children and with our children’s children. O tried brother, the Lord will be faithful to you as he has been to me. The Lord will not fail you. Therefore be not discouraged. As your days, so shall your strength be. Underneath you are the everlasting arms. You shall conquer, however hot the fight may become. Only stay yourself upon

the Lord and wait patiently for him. Fret not yourself in anywise to do evil, for you shall be delivered, and God shall be glorified in you.

4. But I must pass on to the next fact worth considering, and that is the perpetuity of the word in nature. To this the Psalmist alludes in the following words: "You have established the earth, and it abides. They continue this day according to your ordinances, for all are your servants." By the word of God were the heavens made, and it is by his word that all things consist. We talk of the force of gravitation, and the laws of nature; but in very deed the one force in nature is that God spoke. The word of the Lord is the power by which all things hold together and remain in their places.

Look at the earth. We talk of the pillars of it—the columns upon which it leans; but what does it rest upon? Our modern science does not weaken the point of the text, it rather strengthens it. The earth rests upon nothing. There it is floating in space; and yet it has never drifted from its place or turned aside from its proper orbit. There are little quiverings within its own bosom; but it does not rush away from the place where God ordained it to be. It continues its course around the sun with immutable fidelity. This world is rather larger than you are, and requires more power to keep it in its place than is requisite to keep you in your place; yet there it is: shall not the Lord hold up his servant and keep him from wandering? All the machinery in the world could not turn the globe on its axis or move it in its orbit. I suppose that no angelic force would be adequate to bring about such results as God accomplishes simply by his will. He establishes the world and it abides. Let us be confident then. Whenever God means to break his word and change his ordinances we may expect to find this earth go steaming into the sun, or else it will rush far off into space, nobody knows where. But while it keeps its place, what have you and I to worry about? Is it not the sign that the Lord will keep us also? Has he kept the stars which are the major? Shall he not much more keep us who are the minor? What are we but small specks, grains of dust, things scarcely to be seen, and yet we talk about the great power of God that we shall need to keep us in our place: let us cease from doubt as we see this huge world kept like a sapphire in its golden setting by the hand divine.

Nor, brethren, is it this world alone, vast though it may seem to us, yet a little planet amidst the larger spheres; the Lord upholds all worlds comprehended in one vast system. "They continue this day according to your ordinances." Every star maintains its place. "One sun by day, by night

ten thousand shine;” yet these constellations, and all other creations of God’s hand, observe each one the ordinance of heaven. God does not swerve from his own statutes, nor does he suffer the shining hosts to break their ranks. They may not rush about in wild confusion; they are the sentinels of heaven. He calls them all by name, as he musters and marshals their crowded ranks. Are they not all his servants, waiting at his feet as maidens attend their mistress? They all do his bidding. Ought not this to cheer our hearts and inspire us with courage? If the heavenly bodies—as we are wont to call those inanimate creatures of the Most High—are upheld by his power and disposed of by his wisdom, why should we discredit the Omnipotence which preserves our souls, or the Omniscience which orders our steps? If a unpillared arch stands without buttress, cannot my faith rest on the promise, though no means of support are visible?

Those mighty orbs to which we have been referring are under law, and subject to the divine statutes, alike in respect to the motions they perform and to the influence they produce. All the creatures obey their Maker except man. There is no rebellion to our knowledge anywhere in the universe except among fallen angels and fickle mortals like ourselves. What, then, am I troubled about? Opposing forces cannot injure me. If God wills, he can send a squadron of angels to help me. He can bid the stars in their courses fight for me if it be needful. All are his servants. The perpetuity of the laws of nature is a proof of the continuance of the word of God. Strengthen your confidence as to things not seen by the steadfastness of the things that are seen.

“His very word of grace is strong
As that which built the skies;
The voice that rolls the stars along
Speaks all the promises.”

5. There is one other fact which I will only touch upon: the perpetuity of the word in experience. “Unless,” said the Psalmist, “your law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction.” We know by experience what he means. The trouble is a thing of the past, but the trembling is still present to our memory. We were mercifully delivered when we might have been utterly destroyed. My brethren that same word which has made the earth to keep its place has hitherto been sufficient to make you keep your place. Some of you have passed through deep waters, and yet you have not been drowned. I have a sympathy with young people

when they are doubting, because they have not seen the mighty works of which their fathers have told them; but if you have been sustained for forty years in the wilderness you ought to know the faithfulness of God, and I am ashamed of you when you get disheartened, and discourage your brethren. Most of all, I am ashamed of myself whenever I fall into despondency. Admiral Drake had been around the world. He had survived all sorts of storms and battles. One day, when coming up the River Thames, he was caught in such an ugly wind that he was likely to be wrecked, and the admiral cried, "No, no, I have been round the world, and I do not intend to be drowned in a ditch." I want you to be animated by a like courage, for the Lord will not leave you. Surely he who has preserved you in all your previous distresses will not desert you in your present adversities. If you had not taken delight in God's word you would long ago have perished in your affliction; look back upon the past, then, and see that God has been sufficient for you up till now. What reason have you for the suspicion that he will not befriend you even to the end?

II. Having thus drawn your attention to the facts that the Psalmist recounts, I pass on, in the second place, to speak of THE DELIGHTS WHICH HE EXPERIENCED IN THE TIME OF HIS TROUBLE.

"Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward," said one of Job's comforters: though I fear he got little enough of comfort out of that sage reflection. Those troubles, however, that are common to men are often the occasion of uncommon anguish to persons of sensitive nature. Some men and women receive a shock from which they never recover; they gradually droop and languish, health and happiness alike failing them. It is in such seasons of acute distress, when this world has no comforting to offer, that God's word can minister infinite delights to soothe the distractions and heal the sorrows of the heart. These psalms—most of them written by David, and the rest written by disciples of the David school—compass almost every conceivable form of adversity that our poor suffering humanity is exposed to. And there is another thing which I am sure you will find it sweet to muse upon; it is this,—in all cases the sigh was turned into a song before it was admitted into the sacred calendar. This is a law of the kingdom of heaven over which I linger with unspeakable delight. In fact, I can take a survey of your troubles, as well as of my own, with much composure when I perceive that they are all capable of being turned into joy.

Our sympathies are stirred continually by the bereavements one and another of us are called to suffer. The ties of kindred and friendship are

being broken all around. Each day has its obituary. This goes on from generation to generation. But the sharp pang of losing those we love is in no wise lightened by the fact that it is so general. Some of us today live in dread; others have drawn down the blinds. He is gone on whom you leaned for succour. She has been snatched from your side of whom you could say that none upon earth excelled her. Your nurslings, the flowers that bloomed around your hearth, have faded. I hear your desolate moan; but there is music not far off. All creatures are shadows; yet there is substance. At length you turn to these Scriptures, and as you read, "The Lord lives; and blessed be my Rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation," your soul revives. You leave the treacherous sea and reach the solid rock, when you repeat the words, "Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations." Alas, dear mourner, your thoughts have wandered, like the dove from out the ark, o'er the watery waste; but now again Noah's hand encloses you. There you have calm and peaceful rest. Here is the pillow on which your aching head can lie at ease: "You art the same; of your years there is no end." Such delights can sustain a sinking soul.

David was himself often in such a condition that everything seemed shifting and unpredictable. Nothing about him was fixed. Those whom he had most trusted seemed to be his worst enemies. His fortunes changed. He was driven from the home of his father and from the palace of the king, to wander in the wilderness and lodge in caves of the earth, and he himself became distrustful at times of his own destiny, for his heart was heavy, whereas once he had been the gladdest of the sons of men. Oh then, this was his delight—he fell back upon the eternal settlements. "Your word is settled," said he. "I have no settlement. I have to go off to Gath to try and find a shelter there, but every place seems to cast me out. The men of Keilah will deliver me up. I am hunted and harried by Saul. Nothing is settled to me; but O, my God, your word is settled." Now peace comes like a river to his spirit. His delights are in the word, and his heart is full of holy joy.

So, too, sometimes he felt that his own faith failed him, and that is a desperate failure. When your vision is obscured, and you walk in darkness, you are sorely molested by doubts and haunted with fears. You can believe nothing; you can hardly grip at anything that others believe in: this is terrible. Your own frailty, your own unfaithfulness to God, your own waywardness, your own fickleness disquiet you with feverish dreams, and waste every particle of your strength. Then what a grand comfort it is to stand upon the divine faithfulness,—“Your faithfulness, O God, is unto all

generations. You have not changed.” Oh, do try, dear troubled ones, and may God the Holy Spirit help you in the trying, to get a hold of this delightful truth; and while you mourn your own unfaithfulness, do rejoice in the faithfulness of God and the immutability of his covenant. David’s Bible was of much smaller compass than ours; but there was one passage in it which I dare say he often read and deeply pondered. It was that which tells us how, when Abraham was lonely and desponding, “The Lord brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if you are able to number them.” How often have those ordinances of heaven-sent beams of light into the heart of the spiritual mariner while he has been heaving to and fro on the troubled sea of life. So did David look right up to the deep serene of heaven and rest in God, the stable and abiding.

Last of all, when none were his servants and all helpers failed him—when he was alone and none would do him homage, he found comfort in this thought—that all are God’s servants, that all the powers of nature wait upon the princes of the blood royal, and do homage to the children of the King of kings. You are not poor; your father is rich. You are not deserted; God is with you. You are not without helpers; the angels are bidden to keep watch and ward about you. Oh, that I could touch the mourner’s downcast eyes and let him see the mountain full of horses of fire and chariots of fire round about Elisha. Oh, that I could touch the heart of some of God’s desponding servants, and make them see how God is working for them even now, and how surely they shall be helped. Perhaps you remember the story of a conversation between the mayor in Hamburg and holy Mr. Oncken when he first began to preach. The mayor said to him, “Do you see that little finger, sir? While I can move that little finger, I will put the Baptists down.” Mr. Oncken said, “With all respect to your little finger, Mr. Mayor, I would ask you another question. Do you see that great arm?” “No, I do not see it.” “Just so,” said Mr. Oncken, “but I do; and while that great arm moves, you cannot put us down, and if it comes to a conflict between your little finger and that great arm, I know how it will end.” It was my great joy to see the mayor sitting in the Baptist chapel at Hamburg, among the audience that listened to my sermon at the opening of the new chapel. The little finger had willingly given up its opposition, and the great arm was made bare among us. Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength. God bring us all to that, both saint and sinner, for Christ’s sake. Amen.