

Oh, That Men

Would

Praise the Lord

for

His Goodness.

“O Lord my God, I will give thanks
unto thee for ever.” Psalm xxx, 12.

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OH, THAT MEN WOULD PRAISE
THE LORD FOR HIS
GOODNESS.

(Psalm cvii.)

It is easy to see that the subject of this Psalm is praise. It begins, "O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever." And four times in the course of the Psalm we have the refrain, "Oh ! that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men !"

It is the first in the Fifth book, which is pre-eminently the praise book of the whole collection. There is more praise in this book than in the other four. In the Fourth book the Kingdom is anticipated and Christ is

regarded as coming as King. "He sitteth between the Cherubim." In Book V. Christ is presented as Priest, and leads the praises of His people.

The word translated "Psalms" literally means "Praises." It occurs only once in the plural form in the Old Testament—in the title of this book. It is found in the singular in many places in the Psalms themselves, and is always rendered "Praise." The word comes to us through the Greek word "Psallo," which means "I touch," specially the strings of a harp. So the whole book is a book of Praises, but the praises culminate in the Fifth division, the other four largely giving the experiences through which God passes His people, touching their hearts, in order to make them praise Him in the end. Psalm cvii announces the thesis of the Fifth book, and the first verse introduces the theme of the Psalm.

There are three things necessary to make God's people a praising people :— (1), the knowledge of redemption. (2), their gathering together unto Him, and (3), experience and exercise of soul. Let us look at these :—

“ O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever ”—verse 1. But who can give thanks unto the Lord? The answer is in the second verse. Those who are

REDEEMED.

“ Let the redeemed of the Lord say so whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy ”—verse 2. Now they *alone* can say so! Do you think any one who knows not redemption can give thanks? No! God gets no praise from any who knows not His redeeming work. From Israel in Egypt there arose nothing but cries and groans and murmurings

till they stood on the wilderness side of the Red Sea and saw their enemies lying dead upon the shore. Then their song awoke the echoes of the wilderness in lofty strain: "Sing unto the Lord for He hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea."

Would that it were understood that there can be no true praise apart from the consciousness of redemption? Man by nature talks much about praise, but never really praises. He has never yet answered to the purpose for which he was created. Why did God call man into being? It was that he might praise Him. But from fallen man no true praise can ascend until he has learned the work of redemption. May my reader know that work and learn to praise.

But in days of disruption such as these, something else is found to be practically necessary, that is, His

people must be

GATHERED.

“And gathered them out of the lands from the east and from the west from the north and from the south” (or from the sea). This suggests the second requisite in order to praise, the *gathering* of the redeemed. No doubt this refers to Israel scattered among the nations and gathered by the power of God for their final restoration. But God gathers His redeemed now. And to whom does He gather them but unto His Son? What it is to be gathered to the name of Christ, must be known before worship in its highest character can be understood and enjoyed. Alas, the true idea of worship is lost in Christendom! The word is retained, and buildings are erected and called places of worship, where all of every kind are invited to praise. There is plenty of service of

one kind or another, but little praise.

Hearing a sermon is not worship : service is not worship ; ministry is not praise. That which comes from God to man could not be worship, but that which the redeemed give to God,—thanksgiving, praise, adoration,—this is worship.

Thanksgiving, is for benefits received ; that which accrues to us from redemption's blessed work ; as, forgiveness of sins, deliverance from the enemy, salvation, or for mercies extended to us. We thank Him for these.

Praise, is for the wonderful way He has accomplished the work. God gave His only Son ! That Son came in voluntary humility, and offering Himself without spot to God was made sin for us ! He went down into death ; destroying him who had the power of it, and annulling death itself brought life and incorruptibility to

light? How marvellously grand! His blessed name be praised!

Adoration is the recognition of what He is in Himself. Sovereign in love, He is the source of all blessing, the motive being found in His very nature—Love! This is all of the nature of worship. Gathered in the power of the Spirit from the forms of men to the name of the Lord Jesus, how good it is to break bread in remembrance of Him! His love there spread before us produces in us thanksgiving, praise and adoration, as led into the various phases and characteristics of that love.

Then thirdly, God puts His people through exercise of soul that they may worship Him. They are kept in tune and led to make Psalms (melody), in their hearts, by that which He orders for them in the way of:—

EXPERIENCE.

Notice that some of the Psalms are

headed "To the Chief Musician on the stringed instruments," others "To the Chief Musician on the wind instruments" (or the reeds or flutes). But to-day God is not worshipped with harps and organs. The time for these is gone or yet to come. David speaks of an instrument of ten strings; but better instruments than these sound forth His praise to-day! The human heart, with its capacities for sorrow and for joy, is an instrument of a thousand strings; and the human voice more melodious than the sweetest flutes! And God touches these hearts playing upon their affections and making them vibrate to His touch produces for Himself the sweetest and most harmonious melody and praise. Yes! The human heart is better than a harp, and the human voice is better than a flute!

But before this wonderful music can be produced God often has to put the

heart through various and painful exercises so that it cries out to God. Paul was thus afflicted, and three times he cried out for relief. Perhaps we have to cry more than three times and yet find no comfort. It is well to pray on, and pray on, until relief comes, and this is often not until His hand touches us in a still more tender spot, and at last trembling under His touch He wins from us a higher note of praise than could be otherwise rendered.

It is in this way He exercises His people, not that they may know how to handle the harp and the organ, but may at length learn to praise Him with heart and voice. So skilfully does He instruct His people through their afflictions that some there are who glory in their infirmities, if by this means they may be able to give to God a more triumphant note of praise ; who are so happy in Him that " E'en amid

their sorrows a joyful song they raise."

And now let us look more particularly at the four varieties of experience in our Psalm which lead to the offering of praise to God. First His people through unbelief become

WANDERERS.

"They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way ; they found no city to dwell in, hungry and thirsty their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them out of their distresses " —verses 4-6. This refers to the wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Notice, "they *wandered* in the wilderness." Now the *wilderness* was right enough ; they *must* go through it to get to the land ; it was the *wandering* that was wrong.

There was but eleven days' journey from Horeb to Canaan, but they entered

not in because of unbelief. For this the people were turned back to wander in the wilderness for 38 years, and during all that time they sung no song! They sang as they entered the wilderness: "Sing ye to the Lord for He hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." But it was not till they returned to Kadesh, the point of departure, and the brazen serpent was lifted up,—type of the recognition of Christ having set aside man at the cross; and the springing well was opened,—figure of the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to overcome their enemies, that the song was again renewed. They did not sing for 38 years. What were they doing? Murmuring! Yes, alas! Murmurs had displaced the song.

So it is with believers to-day. They too must go through the wilderness to reach the land, but need not be

there as wanderers. They sing when they are first converted, and very many not again till their death-bed. A dear saint once said,—I cannot help singing; why I was born singing! Yes, we are born priests as born of God and we were born singing, for the first note of life is a praise note. But how awful it would be if, after a few days of joy and song, we should praise no more until our death-bed!

Yet many wander about the wilderness, and that is neither the place nor state for singing. Therefore the Lord puts the wanderers through soul exercise. He makes their very unbelief an occasion for producing praise! But they must go down, down, right to bed rock, that they may learn that they have no help but in God. Hungry and thirsty their soul faints in them. Oh! the misery of soul hunger and soul thirst in the wilderness. Then they cry unto the

Lord in their trouble, and praise Him for His deliverance. The deliverance may be their desire, but praise is His purpose. Many, like the prodigal, or nine of the ten lepers, would snatch the blessing from the hand of God and go away to enjoy it selfishly. Hence the Psalmist says: "Oh that men *would* praise the Lord for His goodness," for such praise is God's object in the soul distress and the manifestation of delivering power.

But mercy follows them and they are led forth by *the* (not *a*) right way that they may go to a city of habitation, for there is no city in the wilderness. "He satisfieth the longing soul and filleth the hungry soul with goodness"—verse 9. And from a filled and satisfied heart praise ascends: the Lord receives the overflowing. Very gracious is this word, He satisfieth the longing soul! It means one may have as much of the divine supply as is

desired, for it is immeasurable. If one is without it, if the soul faints there is neither the desire nor the faith to appropriate the blessing.

Perhaps temporal blessings are more desired? This shows the heart is as yet untouched by His grace, for He creates the desire that He may satisfy it. But if you esteem the words of His mouth more than your necessary food, you will be abundantly satisfied. Now satisfaction is better than hunger and thirst, and praise is better than wandering.

In this first class we may notice that priesthood and guidance are brought before us and refused by an unbelieving people. The second refers to kingship and the government of God, and the people come out as—

REBELS.

“Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in

affliction and iron; because they *rebelled* against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the Most High: therefore, &c."—verses 10-16. This is a people that would not have God to reign over them. Primarily it is Judah. The gates of brass and bars of iron, is an allusion to their deliverance from Babylon.—(see verse 16).

Turning to Isaiah xlv. 2, we read "I will break in pieces the gates of brass and cut in sunder the bars of iron." This is God's word to the Persian monarch Cyrus and was uttered by His prophet 150 years before that monarch was born. It refers to the time of Belshazzar's drunken feast, at which time God sent Cyrus to destroy the City of Babylon. After much unseen work higher up the river he diverted the waters of the Euphrates into another channel and marching his army along the dry bed of the stream, entered through the gates of brass,

which were left open on that night of drunken revelry and impiety, capturing the city and subsequently liberating the people of God, who had cried long to Him.

But what brought the people into Babylon? It was their rebellion against the government of God. And what corresponds to Babylon to-day? It is that great system of man's religion which so admirably suits nature, for in it is found all that the heart of man desires. In Rev. xvii. we see what the final development of Babylon is, as a great religious system, which controls the commerce of the whole world. The earth is ransacked by it, of its products and wealth, to minister to the desires of the fallen human heart.

How do souls get into Babylon to-day? Alas! the descent is easy! It is only to refuse the government of God in the Assembly and to leave

the place where the Lord delights to put His name, and the transition into a system which satisfies man's heart in its religious instincts is assured. Then if the soul gets into Babylon the praise song ceases.

Did Israel sing in Babylon? Never! They were 38 years in the wilderness without song. They *wept* 70 years in Babylon! They wept when they remembered Zion (Psalm cxxvii.) and hanged their harps upon the willows, they could not sing the Lord's song in a strange land. And not till Cyrus had 70 years after broken the gates of brass and cut the bars of iron assunder, and brought deliverance to them, did they sing again. "Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing." (Psalm cxxvi. 2.) So it is now! There is plenty of music in Babylon, choral demonstrations and services of song, but no true praise.

Is it possible to be delivered from such a state? Yes! it is only to get down before God and cry to Him in the trouble and He delivers from all distresses. No sooner is the cry raised than deliverance is at hand. May the Lord deliver His people who are held captive in religious Babylon and enable them to praise Him! He may keep the soul there until He has accomplished His purpose in it. "The mill of God grinds slowly, but it grinds exceeding small." But once His end is attained, all is over. God does not rebuke a broken heart!

The word of the Lord to His people in Babylon is: "Come out of her my people." God wants His praise from us now. Now is our time to praise amid the groans of creation: in heaven He will secure it by His power. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of

men." How much better is it to praise than to be held captives in Babylon ?

The third class are transgressors and they are called here—

FOOLS.

"Fools because of their transgressions and because of their iniquities are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, &c. (Verses 17 22.) We have here a reference to the refusal of the prophet by the children of Israel, just as in the first class we had the refusal of the priest, and in the second the refusal of the king. Now the prophet was raised up when the priest and the king failed, and formed the link with God, bringing the Word of God to bear upon the consciences of the people. If he was refused their case was still worse. Turning to Amos viii. 11-12 we read : "Behold the days come saith the Lord that I

will create a famine in the land, not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord, &c." That is it ! The people refused the word of the Lord by the prophet, and He threatens to make it precious—of great price, and for a long time it was not sent to them.

So to-day, when a man refuses to listen when the word rebukes him, and transgresses that word, he gets away into the world and loses all that he had until his soul abhors itself. These are true backsliders, for those who refuse the word of the Lord always go back and the word itself becomes a sealed book to them. There is no singing then ! Ah ! No, the afflicting hand of the Lord is heavy upon them, for He must bring them down to the bed rock of sorrow and affliction. "Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw near to the gates of death." Time was when

they esteemed the words of His mouth more than their necessary food. Now, all food is abhorred because of soul hunger. Deep is the misery of it ! Will they ever sing again ? Yes, even *they* may sing again, soul sick as they are !

It is but to cry to the Lord in their trouble and He delivers even *them* out of their distresses. It is special work with such. He sends His *word* and heals them. Not a priest nor a king, but His word. Thus He delivers them from their impending destructions.

Now the restored soul can say, "Thy word is unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Oh ! the joy of being healed again. It is indeed a second conversion. Praise is once more awakened. "And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving and declare His works with rejoicing." Better indeed it is to praise than to

remain at the gates of death through the folly of transgression.

The fourth class may be taken to represent the Lord's

SERVANTS.

"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep." (Verses 23-28.) We have here the discipline necessary to make servants of the Lord efficient, and to teach them that praise is better than their service. In the gospels we have two beautiful boat scenes. The one—as in Matthew xiv. sets forth the experience of one who would reach Christ, and enter into true church position. The other—as in Mark iv, 35-41. exhibits the disciples as His servants with the Lord in the boat. In this scene Jesus is presented not as priest, king, or prophet merely, but as the present,

living *Messiah*, and as such He was rejected by the people. Then He calls His disciples to pass with him over to the other side of the sea. They take their place with Him in the boat, accompanying Him as His servants.

The first thing to understand in connection with service is, that the Lord cannot use us nor anything we have, unless all is set at His disposal. The servant who works in his own wisdom and energy, will soon be at his wits end and be the prey of the enemy. A young man with intelligence and education, with a fluent use of words, may think he is qualified to serve, but the Lord will not accept his service on that ground. He may devote himself to service, but will have to learn that the Lord is Master and the terms of service are with Him. But the moment he comes to an end of himself and says, Lord, here am I, send me

and use as Thou wilt ! then the Lord will give him a commission. But one who thinks he can use his cleverness and volubility : his strength and wisdom in the service of the Lord will not be accepted. Should such go at his own charges and dependent upon his own resources, Woe unto him ! When the storm comes he will surely go under.

But even those sent of the Lord will have to encounter the storm. They must learn what it is to be tossed from billow to billow, until they are at their wits end and cry unto the Lord in their trouble. When the disciples boarded that boat with the Lord, no voyage ever opened with such promise of a calm and prosperous end. But the storm came down upon them and the devil did his best to wreck that boat. Then in answer to their cry Jesus rises in the majesty of His power and the wind and the sea

obey His word. So He brings them to their desired haven. Yes, the servants too must be brought down that they may learn how precious to the Lord is praise.

It is not really a question of what we can do. No one of us can do aught against the tremendous powers, not only of nature, but of Satan, that oppose. God alone can work. In I. Cor. xii, 4-6, we learn that the trinity of the Persons of the Godhead, are the only effectual workers, whether as source, or agent or power. True, God can use anyone as an instrument, but a very imperfect instrument is any human being at his best to-day, only God could use such. If He brings them down to the dust in their helplessness and distress, it is that they may cry to Him and so experience His ability to carry them through, that they may praise Him in their service and learn that there is something

better even than service, namely, praise.

So all, in every class, wanderers, rebels, fools, and even His servants, must be brought down, broken, and smashed to pieces ; then they are called upon to praise the Lord. Ah ! but it is better to be brought down as a servant, than as a fool or a rebel or a wanderer. Now do you wish to serve ? Then get down into the very dust of self distrust and humiliation before Him. He is surely, in a day such as this, saying, " Whom shall I send and who will go for us ? " Say with Isaiah, after he had been humbled to the very dust before Him, on account of the condition of his people and himself—the live coal having touched his lips. Here am I, send me ! Perhaps you reply, I fear the storm ! But man, the boat will not sink with Jesus in it ! All His power will be there to carry you through.

Jesus wrought a wonderful miracle to allay the fears of His poor disciples in this boat—a kind of double miracle indeed. For, when the wind raises the waves, its continued assault upon their crests prevents them from rising beyond a certain height. But if the wind falls suddenly, they rise higher and are more turbulent than ever. Now here it is recorded, “The wind ceased and there was a great calm.” He will bring you through, only permitting the storm that you may praise Him in the end. This is the object of all His dealings with His servants. They may wish to serve, but He desires praise! Are you praising Him? Praise is the highest function any creature can perform, and it is wonderful that God should redeem such as we are, from guilt, and so deal with us as to touch our hearts that they may vibrate like well tuned instruments to His praise.

Having learnt to praise Him, one question remains : Is there a special place of praise ? Where should God be praised ? The answer is,

IN THE ASSEMBLY.

The redeemed gathered company of His saints. "Let them exalt Him also in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the elders." (Verse 32.) But, you ask, "Can I not praise Him alone?" Yes, but individual praise is not adequate to the glory of God, nor is it the highest character of this blessed exercise. The grateful sense of the blessings which believers enjoy in common is greatly enhanced in the assembly of God, that is the church of the living God, where His living people praise Him. There, praise reaches its topmost height, and from the church alone does God receive due praise in the midst of this groaning creation.

Are you praising Him with His people? Ah, one says, I have many troubles that oppress me! Well God has an object in passing you through those troubles; it is that He may bring you to an end of yourself that you may find your all in Him, and praise Him out of a full heart. There is a beautiful expression of praise on the occasion of the dedication of the House, in Psalm xxx. 11, 12. "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness: to the end that my glory may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto Thee for ever!"

Can you not come into the House and make such a note your own? Why not? Has not God turned your mourning into dancing? Has He not put off your sackcloth? Why has He done this? It is that your

glory may sing praise to Him, that is, that all you rejoice and glory in, all that Christ is to you, may cause your heart to burst forth into praise to Him, leading you to exclaim in higher notes than the Psalmist could reach, O *God* my *Father* I will give thanks unto Thee for ever.

May He give us such a sense of His ineffable glory and goodness that praise and adoration may flow easily from us to Himself, the only worthy Object.

G.J.S.



BY THE SAME :

THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

NOTES ON GALATIONS. (Six Lectures.)

PROVISION FOR THE WILDERNESS. (Six Lectures.)

WISE OR FOOLISH? Matt. xxv.

THRICE LOST. Luke xv.

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CHRIST'S TEMPTATION. Matt. iv.

POWER ; AND ITS APPLICATION.

THE ASSEMBLY ; AND ITS HEAVENLY
RELATIONSHIPS.

THE HEART UNVAILED, OR CHRIST AS
OBJECT AND ITS EFFECTS.

THE PRIEST, HIS CONSECRATION.

THE LEVITE, HIS SANCTIFICATION.

THE MEAT OFFERING.

CLEAN AND UNCLEAN

THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.

BETWEEN THE TWO EVENINGS.

BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT.

THE PLEDGE, POWER, PROTECTION AND
GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT.

GOD'S YEAR OF RELEASE.

THE STOWAWAY.

IS IT THE TRUE GOSPEL ?