

SERMON V.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY EVENING, AUGUST 19th, 1877.

"For the Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand; He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing."—DEUTERONOMY ii. 7.

IN the morning we took a little notice of what a great and unspeakable mercy it is to have an interest in the God of heaven, to know this God for ourselves, and to be able to realize, "This God is my God for ever and ever, He will be my Guide even until death, and my everlasting Portion to all eternity." But we noticed He might be the God of many who could not say that. He may be your God, yet you may not be able to lay hold of Him; your state may be good, although you may not be able to see it so. Your state may be safe although not comfortable, your name may be in the court of heaven, and I have no doubt you would empty your pockets if they were full of gold, if so be you could realize it in your conscience. A man may go to heaven without assurance, but you cannot go to heaven without faith. The Scriptures tell us again and again that, "without faith it is impossible to please God," but they do not anywhere say that you cannot go to heaven without assurance. I know that assurance is the well-being of a man, but it is not the being of grace. Perhaps God may see some of you are too anxious about the things of time and sense, you put Christ in an out-house, so to speak, therefore He will not put that crown of glory on your head; He declares, "For all these things I will be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Perhaps He may see you are too indolent, therefore He will not bless you with such a jewel as that. It is a blessed thing to have this sweet assurance, it is also a blessed thing to have faith. The Son of God went to heaven in a cloud; and the angel went up in the smoke of Mancoah's sacrifice. Jacob did not know that God was so near to him; "God is in this place, and I knew it not." Hagar was fearful that she and her child would die of thirst, then God opened her eyes, and she saw the well close to her. So it may be with some of you, the well of salvation is in your soul, yet you cannot realize the comfort of it. The great thing is to have grace; although we cannot always see it, God knows it, His eye sees every precious thing, but we should like to see it. Sometimes God will keep his people for five, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty, or forty years, without letting them know He is their God; He is such a free agent, He does not stand for any preparation, He will come when He pleases and go when He likes. This is the manner of our God." The Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand." We noticed that there was the "work of faith," the "labour of love," and the "patience of hope." Here is the mercy, as I hastily noticed, the man that knows something about these things does not labour in vain, he will not beat the air. He will run at no uncertainty, the crown is sure to him, the victory is certain, the prize he will surely gain. This made Paul say, "Be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord;" it will not be scattered to the winds, nor lost in the dust. This made the Psalmist cry out, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be

upon us, and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it." See how God comes in and clenches it, "They shall not labour in vain," let unbelief say what it may, or the devil dispute it as he will. Unbelief and the devil are no friends to you and me, nor to God; they tell such lies, but they shall not prosper. The lip of truth shall be established; this is what the lip of truth says, "They shall not labour in vain, nor spend their strength for naught; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them." What a mercy, my friends, there is no fear of coming short; what a man sows he will be sure to reap; that seed will not rot in the ground. If you look you will find it true that this work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope, is sure to get its reward. Look at Lazarus; there is the patience of hope; see him carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. Look at Stephen; see his work of faith and labour of love. "I see the heavens opened, and Jesus sitting at the right hand of God." Dear Glover, the martyr, was so fearful that God would not be with him when he came to die; he had been very dark in his mind. O, what a work of faith he had; unbelief and the devil filled him with fears and anxieties, yet faith and love carried him on to the stake. As soon as he came in sight of that, he said to his servant, "He has come, Austin, He has come." Perhaps some of you may know about dear Hudson, another martyr. When he came to the stake, feeling dark, miserable, and deserted, he dropped on his knees and entreated God, and God came down and filled him with "joy unspeakable and full of glory," so that he died marvellously happy. Another martyr said, "I seem as if I was treading on a bed of pearls," when his feet were in the fire. See what a God He is. "The Lord hath blessed the work of thy hands." He will honour that faith which enables you to follow after Him. If love moves you after Him, you will find that, whatever you may lose, you will get the chief good. Look at the work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope, displayed in the case of dear Job. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." How his friends set upon him. "Ah, Job, you are nothing but a hypocrite." "Why persecute ye me, seeing the root of the matter is found in me? Mine integrity I will hold fast. When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." God blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning. "What was written aforetime was written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope." Look at the work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope, in the great apostle of the Gentiles. See him parting with everything and going forth to testify of Christ, who could save sinners from a burning hell. Although God told him bonds and afflictions would attend him, he said, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus." Will the Son of God own His poor servant? Will He stand up for him? Will He bless that faith and love? That He will; see him, when others are asleep, so filled with joy and peace in believing, that he sings, praises, and rejoices, and finds a Paradise in prison. See how God blesses. You will find you will get more by what you lose than if you kept it to save your skin, or to feed your flesh. We also noticed this morning how God blesses the work of the hands in a temporal way. I have no doubt there are many here before God who began with a very little, just a few pounds of your own, and a little more borrowed, so you started in business. Now God has blessed the works of your hands. You are not willing to say, "Thanks to my wisdom, prudence, carefulness, watchfulness, and industry," you are willing to acknowledge, as Moses said, "It is the Lord that giveth thee power to get wealth." No doubt many of you never thought of having a banking account, but you thought if you could pay the rent of your house, and get a living you would be satisfied; now you have a house of your own. You thought if God would give you

health and strength to do the work it would be a great thing; you never expected to have a servant to wait upon you, as you now have. You may indeed say—

"When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise."

God help you ever to acknowledge Him. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths." You have proved hitherto the truth of my text, "The Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand; He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness."

What a mercy that when we go to prayer, God is all ear; then as we get into trouble, God is all eye; we are never out of His eye. What a mercy to be always in God's thoughts and affections. "He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness." Not a trial or trouble but what God knows all about; He knows just whereabouts you are, and what you need. We are just like the children of Israel; they did not like that wilderness; but then it is the bitters make the sweetener. Thousands make a heaven of this wilderness world, and a poor heaven it is; not that I would find fault with the creation of God. God made it a Paradise; our sin made it bring forth thorns and briars. There is not a man, whether a crowned head or a beggar, but finds this world a wilderness; there is some thorn or briar pricks him. The children of Israel wanted to get into the promised land without going through the wilderness; they would gladly have gone another way. I should, my coward flesh never would have trouble; I have always been plotting and planning to avoid all the briars and thorns. I have been trying and praying to see if God would let me have a heaven here. I have a faith and persuasion He has got a heaven for me, but I sometimes want a heaven here. I have often told Him, "I shall be satisfied with one heaven, and whatever wilderness I may have to pass through, choose Thou the way, Lord, but still lead on." God told the Israelites what a land He had espied for them, enough to make them say, "Let us make haste," as Pliable did, when Christian told him what glorious things were to be obtained; but Christian said, "I cannot go so fast as I would; I have a burden on my back." So you and I would get to heaven directly if we could.

"There to behold His face,
And never, never sin,
But from the rivers of His grace,
Drink endless pleasures in."

I do not wonder at Rutherford crying out, "O that God would fold up the heavens like a cloak, shovel up time and days, and take me to heaven." Where did he write this? He was in prison at the time. Our time is always ready, God's time is not yet. In walking through this wilderness we find a good many things that we should not otherwise know about. What John Bradford wrote suited me well when I read it. He says, "Lord, at times I see but little difference between me and the wicked; I seem to have as blind a mind as they have got, and to be as dark, stupid, rebellious, and stubborn as they." I thought, "I am a companion, Bradford." These things come out in the wilderness; this makes the man long to be at rest. God is not unmindful of our tears.

"Cheer up, ye travelling souls,
On Jesu's aid rely;
He sees us when we see not Him,
And always hears our cry."

When we get to the end of our journey, how it will make us sing. Whatever this wilderness is we would make it our rest, if God would let us. We would stop where the children of Israel did; they came to Elim,

"Where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees; and they encamped there by the waters;" but they had to move on again. When we get a little quiet, and things seem to go smoothly, we do not want to die. Unless a man is wonderfully blessed in his soul, when all things are easy and smooth he is in no hurry to die. As a good man was showing another his house and estate, and what he had got, the other turned round, looked him in the face, and said, "These things make a man unwilling to die, do they not?" Job said, "I shall die in my nest;" but God knocked the bottom out, and poor Job fell through; then he said, "O that God would let loose His hand, and cut me off."

"He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness." This wilderness is just a goad to move us on, and to tell us "this is not our rest, it is polluted." It is a mercy that God sends something to make us say, "I would not live away." If you notice, in the days of Noah, very few were looking out for heaven, so the Son of God says it will be at the last. "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and knew not till the flood came and destroyed them all." Poor Lot was grieved with the filthy conversation of the wicked; he was glad enough to get away from Sodom. So you find Rebekah telling Isaac, "I am weary of my life, because of the daughters of Heth." If God did not make this world a wilderness to us, we should make a heaven of it and should rest here, but as it is it makes us look out for the better country. Remember, if God has made this world a wilderness to you, and if what you really hope for, desire, and your affections are set upon, is the kingdom of God, if you can say with Moses, truly, feelingly, and sincerely, "Let me go over and see that good land, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon," then you will get there. If it be so, a little rainy weather as you travel along will not hurt you, when you are going to take possession of a kingdom. If you or I were going to be put in possession of a noble house and grounds to-morrow, though the clouds were ever so big with rain we should go. "Never mind about the rain," we should say, "we can get dry when we get there." You may have some rainy days in this life, but there is the possession to come, that will make amends for all.

"He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness." He knows the difficulties you have to meet with; He knows the trials within you have to combat with. He knows the obstacles that lay in the way, which you have to meet; He knows the temptations the devil will distress and trouble you with. What an unspeakable mercy that He knows also the sincerity of thy heart, so that you can appeal to Him, "Lord, Thou knowest Thy servant; I love and desire that which I cannot attain to." I wish that you all had got such a religion as that. "He knows thy walking." God knows who amongst you want to walk well in His sight; He knows thy honesty of heart and uprightness of purpose, and that when you come to His house, it is, "Search me, O God, and try me; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting; 'guide me by Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.' If there be any wicked way in me make it manifest to me, and give me grace to forsake it." He knows the love of thine heart that moves thee towards Him. He knows that you love Him better than you do His gifts. I am willing to acknowledge that I love God's gifts, and I praise Him for them; He has been a good God to me, I wish I could bring forth more fruit to Him, but I love Him better than I do His gifts, He knows that. Can you say so? What a mercy to be made right, straight, and honest in His sight. He is all eye as well as all ear; I have proved Him in both; I know what I speak when I say that. He knows what we are willing to part with for Him; at times we "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt."

"He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness." How many things come out as we travel along. He knows we have not so much faith as we sometimes think we have. Sometimes we think of our burning love to Him, but He knows it is not so much as we talk of; He knows our walking, so "He remembers us in our low estate, for His mercy endureth for ever." He knows that we are dust, so, "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. He knows that there is no will in our hearts till He works it, and no power until He commands it. He knows that to will and to do is from Himself; He knows how the bent of the heart is, therefore He says, "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." He knows that we often think we have more religion than we have, so at times He tries us. Peter thought he could do a good deal; "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water; I can walk;" but as soon as he saw the wind and sea boisterous, down he went. He knows thy walking. What an up and down it is; you will find the best of saints are up and down like Noah's ark was upon the waters. "He knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust." He said to Abraham, "Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield, and exceeding great reward." Now one would think that was enough to make the man as strong as a giant, make him tread unbelief under his feet, and make him strong in faith against all the difficulties that came in his way; surely he will fear nothing. Now look, he goes down to Egypt, and Pharaoh's servants tell him respecting Sarah. See what Abraham will do now; he will wound four at once. He said to Sarah, "Say that you are my sister, then Pharaoh will treat me well for your sake." Thus he will wound God's honour, he will wound Sarah's chastity, he will wound his own soul, and he will wound the soul of Pharaoh. See what man is in his best estate; you can see the best of saints are but men at the best. We should think that we are much better Christians than we are. I will venture to say, when God first set you in the way, and said, "Seek ye my face," when you came to hear the word was marrow and fatness to your soul, and when you went to God in prayer, "He bowed the heavens and came down;" then you could do anything for God; just like Peter; "Lord, though all men should deny Thee, yet will not I." The Son of God said to him, "Peter, I know your walking, when thou wast young thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but the day will come when another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." As God knows our walking, He will take care it is not too much for us. Every grace, every right thing, and every movement in our souls after Him, He knows. If we can say at times (though surrounded with many mercies and comforts), "Lord, I would not live always; this is not Thy heaven, this is not what I am contented with," God knows it. God gave Luther a little money at one time; he said, "Lord, I am not going to be put off with this," so God took him to heaven, where he could be happy and glad.

"He knoweth Thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the Lord Thy God hath been with Thee." How that proves the faithfulness of God, does it not? We often find this to be true,

"An earthly brother drops his hold,
Is sometimes hot and sometimes cold,
But Jesus is the same."

"Whom once He loves, He never leaves."

If God has ever dropped His grace in thy heart, you may have lost the comfort and sweetness of it, but He has not taken away the root.

"Now they believe His Word,
While rocks with rivers flow;
Now with their lusts provoke the Lord,
And He reduced them low."

"Yet, when they mourned their faults,
He hearkened to their groans,
Brought His own covenant to His thoughts,
And called them still His sons."

How they provoked God in the wilderness; "Forty years long," says He, "was I grieved with that generation;" yet He brought them into the promised land. Forty years He fed them, humbled them, proved them; led them about, and instructed them, but He never left them; He never forsook

"The people that He chose."

Some of us have been forty years in the wilderness; what a good God we have proved Him to be; how we can say truly, "Unto us belongeth shame and confusion of face, because we have sinned against Him." How faithful is God. Poor David said, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul; if I am to have the kingdom, I must go through blood to get it." Forty years did he reign as king, seven in Hebron, and thirty-three in Jerusalem. We did not think we were so bad as we are, we never thought there was such devilishness, pride, ambition, and self-interest in our hearts, as we have proved there is. We have proved everything to be true that God has said in His Word. See how faithful God is, though He is not so quick in His doings at times as we are in our expectations and desires, yet He will fulfil and do all He has promised. He said to Abraham, "You shall have a son; and in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thee." We should think God would begin to perform His promise fast and quick. Let us see; it was twenty years after that before Abraham had a son, Isaac was forty years old before he took a wife, here are sixty years pass, then Rebekah has no child for twenty years. Surely God has forgotten the promise, here are eighty years gone, and then only Jacob and Esau; but when the time of the promise drew nigh, the people grew and multiplied, God made them stronger than their enemies, and the fear of them fell upon them. You know it all came true, God fulfilled His promise. When God set you in His ways, it was "Seek ye My face," in the power of it, in your heart. We want to know whether we have been effectually called. How many times I have wanted to know that. More than forty years ago I heard a godly man preach from these words, "All things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose;" and when he described the calling of God, I thought I should have cried out in the chapel, "I am called." What a mercy to have an echo in the heart! Perhaps some before God may say, "I wish I knew I was called." If you are effectually called you will find an echo in your heart. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Do you know what that echo is? God says, "Return, ye backsliding children for I am married unto you." Do you know what it is to say, "Behold, we come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God? Has God at any time said to you, "Believe?" Do you know what the echo is, "Lord, I believe?" "Yes, I know what that is," say some. God has got fast hold of you, the cord of everlasting love has got hold of your heart, and the other end of that cord is in God's heart. The love of God flows to His people through the merits and obedience of His Son, it is brought into our hearts by the Holy Ghost; so a Three-One God is the salvation of His people. Nothing less than a Three-One God will do for me. I must have the Father's eternal love in the choice of me, I must have the love and blood of the Son to wash and to cleanse me, and I must have the inhabitation of the Holy Ghost to sanctify me and make me meet for the kingdom of heaven. You may not be able to define it, or read it plainly and clearly in your experience, but if you have not got a Trinity in your salvation, when you die hell will be your portion, as sure as you are a living man or woman;

if you have not got the love of the Father, the blood of the Son, and the quickening power of the Holy Ghost, you will not see the face of God with joy. Thousands of poor simple folks know nothing of the doctrine of the Trinity, but they know the feeling of it. If I were to talk to them of the love of God, they would say, "I know what that is." If I were to talk to them about being reconciled to God by the death of His Son, "We know what it is to have our sins removed," they would say. If I were to talk to them of sanctification, "We want it," they would say.

"The Lord thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing." What a testimony for God! God will make His people speak well of Him to the last; whatever becomes of them they will speak well of God and His salvation. Moses knew what these Israelites were, yet, says he, "You have lacked nothing." He brought them before God, "Can you look me in the face and say you have lacked anything?" as if He would say. They had murmured, rebelled, kicked, and spit in God's face, they had told God He had deceived them, that it was no land of oil olives and honey, so they would have a captain and go back again into Egypt. Now Moses had been forty years with them, and he says, "You have lacked nothing." Here are a million people, but there is not a dissenting voice to that truth. You find Joshua says, "I am going this day the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass: deny it if you can." Now he says, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." "It is all true that you have said," say they, "so we will serve the Lord." Whatever trials you may now be in, I am sure when you come to die you will clear God, and acknowledge there has been nothing wanting but gratitude in your heart. You will say, "Goodness and mercy has followed me, many things I feared and trembled at, but I have "lacked nothing;" God has outdone and gone beyond me, so I will speak well of God with my latest breath." I am persuaded of this, my friends, if you can speak well of God in reality, in faith, and in love, God thinks well of you.