

THE HIGHWAY OF HOLINESS

by

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Substance of a SERMON

*preached on Wednesday evening, July 23rd 1952,
probably at Ebenezer Chapel, Heathfield.*

Text: Isaiah 35 v. 8-9

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

You will remember we were occupied with this beautiful chapter last Lord's day, and it will be a mercy if the Holy Spirit should bring us inside of it in our experience.

We might just look again at the characters, a description of those to whom the Lord speaks, and mark this: the Lord does speak to people through His Word. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10 v. 27).

You will not hear an *audible* voice; I might say, something better - the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ *by His Spirit*, spoken into your heart, is part of the mystery of godliness in the soul - but what I am coming to is this: if the Lord speaks to you through this chapter, you will be brought into the case of these characters.

He speaks to the weak, to the feeble and fearful heart. He speaks to the blind, the deaf, the lame, the dumb; and it is important, as you see these characteristics of the Lord's people variously traced out through His Word, to examine ourselves, whether we possess those features.

And there is another character here, and you have the same thing in the New Testament. The apostle, writing to the Corinthians, distinguishes and recognises the same people: "Not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but ... God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; ... and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Cor. 1 v. 26-8); and we said on the Lord's Day how wonderful, how unceasingly wonderful is the Word of God, as the Holy Spirit teaches us here a little and there a little of it, and how suitable it is!

Well then, we have not only these characters of His people, but the *places* where He finds them: in the wilderness, in the solitary places, in the desert. He finds them in the parched ground in a thirsty land. Do you know anything about these places experimentally in your soul? It is only those that are taught by the Spirit that come into such places as this in their souls' experience, and we might, if we had time, consider what brings us there.

We might just look at a point or two, as for instance: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them" (v.1). How are the Lord's people brought into the wilderness?

And how is it that when the Lord entices, allures, attracts his people, as by making Himself precious, by revealing unto them the riches of His grace, the glory of His kingdom, that enduring substance, those heavenly treasures, that glorious righteousness that is in Him. How does He then bring them into the wilderness? Why, because when Jesus' gracious hand has touched our eyes and ears, what a dreary land this wilderness appears to become!

It is such discoveries of that kingdom which is not of this world that gives meaning in the soul to the lines of the hymn:

"Compared with Christ, in all beside
No comeliness I see."

(Toplady: Gadsby's 940)

And not only so; with such a discovery and revelation of the beauty of holiness there will also be a discovery of the wilderness of our own nature, and of the world in which we live. A solitary place, you may feel. Yes, and the way becomes more solitary than ever as your godly friends fall on the right hand and on the left. We are sure to become more solitary the nearer we get to the end. Oh, blessed people that did wander in this wilderness in a solitary way! Why? Because they can find no city to dwell in.

It is no use just *reading* this chapter, not a bit of use what I have to say about it. But *are you there?* Does it *belong* to you? Do you feel that you are looking inside of yourself, and on the abominations which you view there, together with the sin-cursed world, and all the tumult of the people? Do you feel to be solitary? The people that dwell alone are not reckoned among the nations;¹ and you will feel it.

It would be very wrong purposely to give offence to your neighbour - quite wrong; but if you possess the fear of God in your heart there will be a separation in spirit, and you would be unable to walk with them, or take them into your houses or follow their customs.

It *will* be a solitary way, and it may even be a solitary way with respect to your own soul, even apart from the Lord's people. You will have to go into secret and have dealings with God when you know your own sore, your own grief, your own besetting sins, your own mighty fears, and your own deep need.

I know we are not in the text, my friends, but all this is the way to it, because a highway shall be right there - *right there*. There are exceeding great and precious promises to these poor troubled, trembling, weak people in the wilderness, and in the desert, and in the thirsty land, and the promises are these, that "the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (v. 1). It does not mean, of course, that what *constitutes* the wilderness will rejoice; the world will not rejoice in your depraved wilderness nature, but that is what connects the verse with the text. There will be gladness and rejoicing in the wilderness, and in the solitary places, and in the parched ground, because there will be springs of water, and there will be a highway there.

Now this is very precious in experience. I have sometimes expressed it, and I feel warranted to do so. Paul intends this where he said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2 v. 20).

Now the connection as I see it with the text is this: "A highway shall be there." Blessed be His name, He condescended to wretchedness and dust, right into the wilderness, into the briars and thorns, sins and sorrows. He cast up a highway there. So, says Paul, 'The life I now live, I live upon the Son of God; I live it in the midst of the flesh.' He did not mean that he lived in the flesh, but cannot some of you feel it in your own case, that the very life of faith here below is lived in the wilderness, in the midst of it, and wrestles against the powers

¹ "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23 v. 9).

of this world, the opposition of this world, and everything that is calculated to cast us in the gloom?

Faith lives in the wilderness, and so there are these promises. “Your God will come with vengeance” (v. 4). Maybe some of you may have remembered what we said about it and the difficulty. I do sometimes wonder whether seed falls into good ground, or whether it falls upon stony, thorny or wayside ground, but I cannot but hope, and feel that I can say that I have a sense that some seed falls into good ground; otherwise you would not return. It is a mercy - and how sacred it is! - to see a few people taught by the Holy Spirit, called by grace out of the world, set on pilgrimage, asking “the way to Zion with their faces thitherward” (Jer. 50 v. 5), hungry and thirsty, their souls fainting within them,² gathered under a sense of deep need, together with hunger and thirst and desire of the gospel, into little wayside lodging places, as I have sometimes felt the sanctuary of the house of God to be - lodging places for pilgrims that go to receive some fresh supplies, to make some fresh enquiries in His temple, some fresh direction as to the way you should take, some fresh guidance in the paths that lead to heaven. “Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance; He will come and save you” (v. 4).

“An highway shall be there.” This ‘highway’ intends the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the truth, the everything! He is the “new and living Way” (Heb. 10 v. 20), a way that He has consecrated Himself. A sacred experience, that! That is why it is a holy way. You think of it: consecrated, consecrated by His walking in it, becoming the way and everything that is in the way; and this He became when He condescended to become incarnate to assume human nature. Oh the importance of this nature, the beginning of this way, if we might speak of the *beginning* of eternal things; but things which have neither beginning nor end *in themselves* have a beginning *in experience*, while all that the Lord Jesus Christ is, and all that he has, and all He has accomplished had *no* beginning; yet experimentally the beginning of this highway was when he was born; then he began to cast it up; then he began to consecrate the highway – “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7 v. 26). His entrance into this world was a sinless entrance of the eternal glorious Son of God.

Oh the mystery of this highway - the mystery of this and the mercy of it! It will be there. It will be no use to you unless there is room in your wilderness, in your solitary places, in your heart, in your experience; for everyone needs the whole of the Person and work of Christ in salvation for himself as if the Lord came to save him alone. Do you feel it? Do you feel such a sinner, such a wreck, in yourself, so completely ruined, so corroded? Do you feel that sin in you is such a kingdom that it will reign and bring you into the dust of death and corruption, that you need this highway to be there, that you need Christ in the gospel in your soul? Oh, what a mystery this is, how it makes the Person of Christ important and essential!

What a beauty, a solemnity, and mystery surrounds his miraculous birth! How important to the doctrine and the blessed fact that that human nature was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Ghost - a real humanity, conceived without human agency, yet a real creature, a real man. This is the beginning of the highway; and to realise this, that the blessed Lord so came that His people might thereby be brought into an eternal and ineffable union with Him in that nature, oh, this is wonderful! Where must it be? Not to the one next to you! Oh for a *personal* religion; we must die alone. Never mind about the one next to you in the chapel. If the whole of the people in this chapel surrounded your dying bed, it would be a comfort. Oh, I would not belittle the comfort of them, the Lord’s people around a dying bed - but they *could do nothing* for you. May the Lord impress this blessed truth, this mercy, this lovingkindness of the Lord, that “a highway shall be there.”

² “Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them (Ps. 107 v. 5)

Why, do you not feel that your faith opens its arms? Do you feel your heart open and say, 'Come, Lord Jesus, into my poor heart, by becoming the Way to God, the highway; become in me my wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.'

This highway particularly refers to the Lord Jesus Christ in His work of making a way as a Forerunner for His followers to follow Him, as He trod down a way through the thorns and briars. He was "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows" (Isa. 53 v. 3). He undertook. He did not fail. He was not discouraged. He cast up this highway in rendering infinite satisfaction to God's most holy law. He cast up this highway in living a life which will be put to the account of every one for whom He was a Substitute. If ever you go to heaven, you must go to heaven on a good life; you must go to heaven on a sinless life. You must live a *sinner's* life to go to heaven, and here it is in the Lord Jesus Christ, whereas we cannot express a tithe of the sin, guilt, filth, defilement and ruin of sin, its completeness in death, neither can we express an idea of the sinless, glorious holiness of the Person, of the humanity, of the holy soul of the Lord Jesus, which could "not be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1 v. 13); but then you might say, 'But for the comfort of His people, "He was in all points tempted like as we are"' (Heb. 4 v. 15). He was, but the difference was this, that there was nothing in Him that the temptation could take hold of.

This is a mystery of godliness. There was never anything in the slightest degree tainted by temptation, and although temptation had nothing upon which it could work in the holy Son of God, His suffering under temptation was infinitely more than it is in a sinner, in whom temptation has everything to work upon.

You might not think it so, but for infinite inexpressible holiness to have imparted to his Holy Son that defiling filthy thing, sin, was suffering indeed, but it did not *touch* Him. For that innocent holy Victim to have the curse of His divine and loving Father, like fire in his sacred bones, was suffering indeed. There is a place that sin never touched the Lord Jesus Christ. It never touched His conscience. The beauty of it is this, that His precious atoning blood is such, that it *will reach your* conscience.

He went forth "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53 v. 3), in order to become a highway to heaven. Have you ever loved Him when you have seen Him by faith? Look at this:

"But what can poor lost sinners say,
When once they get a view;
And hear the blessed Spirit say,
'All this was done for you.'"

(D. Herbert: Gadsby's 680)

When you read the Scripture does it bring you to a standstill? Ask yourself the question, 'Where can "there" be?' Look out of the window. It is not in the field. "*There.*" When this work of salvation is brought by the Spirit to your soul, there will be only one place that "there" means: it is in the hearts of poor sinners, in their experience; it constitutes their salvation. That is where you want it. I do. And so you can follow this highway *through death.*

His divine Father showed Him the Way of life. We read in the 16th Psalm that the way of life was through death.³ Oh my friends, the character of the Lord Jesus Christ as a Forerunner for His dear people - to see in that Forerunner your Redeemer, to see in Him your Substitute, Surety, and Friend, what a sight it is! I will tell you what it will do. It will make you *run* if you see Him. You will say with the Psalmist, "My soul followeth hard after thee" (Ps. 63 v. 8).

"His track I see, and I'll pursue
The narrow way, till Him I view.

(Cennick: Gadsby's 144)

³ "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (v. 10).

This highway, blessed be His name, goes right through the valley of the shadow of death, and He does not leave His people. He was not taken to heaven from Gethsemane! Oh, what a solemn day our day of death would be if it was so, if He was just a Substitute for this life, and then left us at death! The highway goes *through* death, and that sacred word in Romans shows the connection: "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life" (Rom. 5 v. 21).

"An highway shall be there," through death to glory; but this I say, "An highway shall be there, *and a way*." That these are two things, not *different*, but to be *distinguished*, we will feebly try to show, in the Lord Jesus. There is to be an experience of it in the work of the Holy Ghost, and that is the way itself. It is a way of experience.

Take for example an illustration: there may be a stranger here, or down across the fields, who asks his way to Tunbridge Wells, and you tell him that the highway⁴ will bring him there. Well, being right off the highway, he says, 'Well, how do we get up onto the road?' There is a way of experience *into* the highway. "An highway shall be there, *and a way*."

As we spoke of the beginning of this highway, so there is a beginning to the way, and the beginning of this way is regeneration. "Ye must be born again" (John 3 v. 7). This is the greatest declaration of the Scripture with regard to experience. If you never have an experience of being born again, and you have a lot of religion (and you may have a lot), the sooner you get rid of it, the better. Again, there is *no beginning* of vital godliness or experience or knowledge *until* you are born again.

"An highway shall be there;" but there is a way *to* it. There is a way to an experience of Christ and experience of what is in that highway, which is the gospel, wherein "is the righteousness of Christ revealed from faith to faith" (Rom. 1 v. 17): to be born from above, to be born of God, to be made a new creature in Christ Jesus, to have deposited in our hearts an incorruptible seed.⁵ If we have not got that, we are dead; and if we have religion without it, it is bodily exercise, and that, my friends, speaking my own feelings, is why I am so loth to recognise or support religious innovations which do not constitute the provision of God's house, which He has promised to bless - religious activities, side shows, sales of work, Bible classes, which in my experience have manifested much religion without any root.

I would say this (the point we are on is the *beginning* of the way; "Ye must be *born again*"). There are in Zion certain provisions which God will bless. One is the Word of God. Secondly, there is the preaching of the gospel. Thirdly, there is prayer. Fourthly, there is praise, for it is very evident that the Lord Jesus Christ sanctioned the singing of hymns at the Lord's Supper. Now, in all tenderness, my dear friends, beware of anything outside of those things. The sociability to seek after (and oh that we would have more of it!) is that described in Malachi: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another" (Mal. 3 v. 16). "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133 v. 1). But beware of those things that appear as though the provision of God's house is not enough and we must add.

One minister many years ago came to my house at Wadhurst and was so upset with me because we had no Sunday School at Shovers Green. He said, 'How do you expect to get a future congregation?' I had only one answer. It was this:

"What! has the Holy Ghost forgot
To quicken souls that Christ has bought,
And lets them lifeless lie?"

⁴ The road running past Heathfield chapel is the main road to Tunbridge Wells.

⁵ "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible" (1 Peter 1 v. 23).

No, thou almighty Paraclete,
Thou shedd'st thy heavenly influence yet,
Thou visit'st sinner still."

(Hart: Gadsby's 715)

You might not get a chapel full of people, but you will have the blessing of the Lord.

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