

"O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest Thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest Thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by Thy name, leave us not."

Jeremiah 14 v.8-9.

What a warfare there is between the powers of sin and grace. The first promise of the Gospel we have as soon as Adam and Eve fell. The Lord said that He would put enmity between thy seed and the woman's seed, and that enmity is wherever the grace of God has reached the heart; that is a conflict between the powers of sin and of grace. It is a warfare that will go on to the end of life. It is a mercy if that warfare has begun! Mr Hart spoke a true word when he said, concerning conviction when one is born again -

"From that moment the conflict begins".

It will never end until we are in the grave.

"But death which puts an end to life will put an end to sin".

It is no small comfort at times to really believe that sin and a sinner can be separated. That God can love a sinner and hate his sins. We read this chapter purposely so that you could see that in the context the terrible condition in which the people were and under the judgement of God for their sins, for their idolatry, for their rebellion, and the Lord sent the judgement of dearth in the land. A terrible dearth, and Jeremiah prays, prays for the people, and I feel that the text is intimately connected with the preceding verse, it is a mistake to take it independently for the connexion is very beautiful. "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do Thou it", that is send rain, "For Thy names sake, for our backslidings are many, we have sinned against Thee". What a beautiful argument that was. The Lord allows Jeremiah - and He allows His people to expostulate with Him, to plead with Him and in the 7th verse Jeremiah is looking at the iniquities of the people which testified against them. Their backslidings, their many backslidings and their sins. He took those briars and thorns to the throne of grace, it appears that the Lord rejected them, He did in His attitude at the outset, but we shall prove in the long run the truth of that word in the Prophets, "Who will set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them". O what a mercy it is to be enabled to go and prostrate ourselves before God, make our worst condition known, take all our briars and thorns and everything that threatens our destruction and lay them out before the Lord.

He says, "Fury is not in Me". It appeared like it through this chapter. He said to Jeremiah, "Pray not for this people for their good". It was a desperate case. "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us...our backslidings are many, we have sinned against Thee, but...do Thou it for Thy name's sake". He pleads the name of the Lord. "His name shall be called Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins".

David did the same thing; "For Thy name's sake Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great". There is more in that confession and petition than perhaps appears on the surface. The prayer was very short, it was "Pardon mine iniquity", the remainder of it was the ground upon which he prayed, the first was, "For Thy name's sake", the second was, "Mine iniquities are great". O what a mercy it is then

to have this object of faith and hope set before us. But in the 8th verse there is a change, a change of direction in that Jeremiah's faith looked to a different object; but in the 7th verse he was considering the iniquities of the people and their backslidings, their sins, but in the 8th verse -

"He turns his eyes another way
To Jesus and His blood".

and it is so beautifully definite as I view it. You see a translation from self unto the Lord, "O the hope of Israel", as though his faith in the midst of his darkness and confessing the sins, the baseness, the unworthiness of the people, as though he caught a sight of the Lord, "O, the hope of Israel".

Well, the conditions of His people are variously described in the Word of God and this particular part reminds us of Ezekiel, "When I passed by thee and looked upon thee, behold thy time was a time of love", but how did he see the people? "When I passed by thee and saw thee polluted in thy blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, live, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, live", and how He dealt with the case - "Thy time was a time of love, I spread my skirt over thee, covered thy nakedness, swore unto thee, entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine". What a translation for a poor outcast filthy sinner in his blood! When the Lord passed by He should take up that case and deal with it in such a way as that that filthy sinner was clothed, beautified, washed thee with water, "I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee", clothed thee with brodered work, with badgers skins, girded thee about with fine linen, covered thee with silk. It is amazing, O the grace of God! what it can do and when faith possesses it, it takes the most dire condition to Him, but not to claim anything. That is a point I have felt with my own case. If you go to Him at all you must go as a sinner, not as a little sinner, but as the chief of sinners, as a vile sinner, but you will feel a forbidding, a check upon your conscience if you dare to take your worst condition to claim mercy. Self destroyed we are, ruined ourselves, we may take and must take that state and condition before the Lord, but beware of this, our worst wreckage and ruin gives us no claim upon mercy, not at all, we are apt to think it does, but it does not. The grace of God is sovereign, His mercy is sovereign, salvation is sovereign. He owes us nothing. but it needs great faith.

"O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us", and the devil, he goes about seeking whom he may devour, and he speaks the truth at times. He will say your iniquities do testify against you, they are too deep, the nature of them is so vile and corrupt, it would be presumption in you to pray. Faith says, "Though our iniquities testify against us, do Thou it for Thy names sake". Not because our iniquities are great, our backslidings are many, that is no ground at all. O the preciousness of the truth! and we need to be put upon right ground before God or He will not receive us. So that it is to be definitely noticed that the ground upon which Jeremiah pleads with the Lord is not because of their iniquities, not for their backslidings, nor for their sins, but "For Thy great name's sake". It is a more powerful plea; You can have no more powerful argument, as Job says, I will fill my mouth with arguments, and faith does, can reverently argue before God, on the ground of the merits of Christ, and only so can we come before the Lord.

But he catches a glimpse of a door of hope. A door of hope in the valley of Achor; and he was in the valley of Achor, the valley of sorrow, the valley of conviction, sin, trouble. "O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble." These are characters or relationships which the Lord has been pleased to assume toward His people, for this is not Israel after the flesh, but

spiritual Israel, and it belongs to the whole of His people throughout all time. I would say again and will continue to say while I can speak, and that for your consolation, that no Scripture is of any private interpretation. If it was most of the word of God would be obsolete and useless today, finished, but it is a living word and whatever was said to those of old remains the same today. It would not if God was not Who He is. The word would have long ago ceased in its efficacy if it was not that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever. That is the reason for it. So what is spoken in the word of God is as though it was spoken this morning, for He is the same this morning. O for the Holy Ghost to bear a fresh witness of Him to our hearts!

So He is the hope of His people. A good hope through grace. Faith and hope are two graces of the spirit, they work together, they are not the same, they can be distinguished but they cannot be separated. Faith is the premium grace, precious faith, it is the gift of God, it stands in His power, faith goes forward, the hand of faith receives what the open hand of the Lord has to give. Faith brings into the heart the truth of the Gospel, the things of Christ, hope hopes in what faith brings in, you feel that. It will be made out to you when your faith is strengthened and it is very blessed in experience. Faith works by love and you will find this too, that real vital religion is not automatic. You cannot operate your faith. The Lord brings us into such a position that everything will die that is not of the Holy Ghost, and when He brings us there, that is where the life of faith begins to operate.

"O the Hope of Israel". The hope of His people. All these graces of the Spirit are created in the heart when one is born again. It is a real birth, it is a real creation, it is complete with faculties as much as a natural infant, is born with its faculties and its senses. There is the hearing, the sight, the tasting, the feeling, and so with a spiritual life; and that life which is spiritual comes from heaven, must be fed and maintained upon that which comes from heaven. Therefore, there is nothing in this world that can feed faith, or that faith can rest upon. There is nothing in this world that faith can look upon in which it can hope. But a revelation by the Spirit, of God in Christ, is the object of faith and of hope.

"O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble". The Saviour is another character that He has been pleased to assume. How suitable this is, but to whom? Who needs salvation? It is a wonderful thing, though it seems to be very simple, but who needs salvation but those that are lost, and how essential it is to be lost. I sometimes look at my fellow men, there is not one of them that I could say, stand thou there, come not near to me for I am holier than thou, not one of them, but I see some upright men in this world, yet entirely ignorant of God. Have no desire for the knowledge of His ways and they are ignorant of themselves. If you was to say to them, do you know that you need salvation? they need it although they don't know they need it, they would say, Why, what is the matter? salvation, I am alright, what is the matter with me? What a different thing it is to be lost. I know a natural man, a naturally religious man will consider it the most miserable consideration, to talk about being lost. It is the beginning of the way to heaven, it is the beginning of true riches.

"O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble". I was thinking this morning, we pass through many troubles in life's journey, all kinds of troubles, a different nature they have. You may have adversity in business, trouble in your family, weakness and illness in your body, you may be under persecution. All kinds of troubles and we are bid to cast our burden upon the Lord, but I believe this, that sin is such a trouble and a burden that in the forgiveness of sins is the only true rest and happiness. To receive the forgiveness of sins while the blessed experience lasts, every other trouble would lose its weight and influence, I am sure of that

and you could remain exactly as you were.

"O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble." Jeremiah here is filling his mouth with arguments. Job said he did. O it is a condescension in the most high and holy God to allow self-destroyed sinners to fill their mouth with arguments and come to Him "Will He plead against me with His great power, no He would put strength in me", that was faith, faith in the Saviour, hope in His mercy, the Saviour. "Have you ever known what it is to have communion with the Lord? Have you ever felt Him to be precious in His word, precious in your heart, in the need, in the desire of Him? Have you ever known what it is to be favoured with access at the throne of grace? Have you ever known what it is for the Lord to smile upon you? To receive you as He did the people? O it will be grievous when through backslidings and sins He becomes as a stranger to you, a stranger, when you lose that familiarity.

"Why shouldest Thou be as a stranger in the land?" Well, all the confession of the sins of the people that Jeremiah had made really answers this question, Why should He not be a stranger in the land? What else could be expected with such behaviour, such sins, such idolatry, such rebellion? and yet faith takes the very case and asks the Lord, "Why shouldest Thou be as a stranger in the land?" If there is a stranger in the land he is a foreigner, does not understand the language. He has no interest in the government of the land, he is simply passing through it, and how solemn it is when the Lord takes that attitude to one of His people, what a grief, when He will not allow familiarity, when He keeps you at a distance, speaks to you like a stranger. O this will go to the very heart. "O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble, why shouldest Thou be as a stranger in the land and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night", He is like a traveller, he turns into an inn and he pays his bill, has a night's rest, morning breakfast and goes on his way. He has got no interest in the inn, he pays for his accommodation and goes on. This is a real experience, and yet faith takes it up: "Why shouldest Thou be as a stranger in the land and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside for a night?" No interest in the place. Well, some of you may know what this pathway is, and what have you to say? Have we not procured these things unto ourselves? You would hardly think that this argument of faith, taking this worst condition and arguing with the Lord at the throne of grace was blessed to Him, but it is music in His ears.

You come to consider if you could see in peoples hearts, in secret, to see those that go before Him according to the text, this is an evidence of the life of God asserting itself and it will if you have got it, and the nearer you come to death the more vehement is your faith in its struggling, the death thro's of faith are very powerful. It is so naturally, if you was to hold a corpse under water it would not move, but you attempt to put a living man under water, you would very soon see that he was alive, and have you that evidence, have we been brought into such places that it is simply this, "Give me Christ or else I die", it is Christ or death, one or the other. And the honesty of this, there is no excusing of himself, but he takes the case and what really is the ground that he should say to that God against Whom they had offended, "Why shouldest Thou be as a stranger, why shouldest Thou be as a wayfaring man?" I believe we have the answer here, "Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, we are called by Thy name". In the 64th I think it is, of Isaiah we have the same condition in the church, but he comes to the point, "But Thou, O Lord, art our Father, we are the clay and Thou our Potter". O the gracious teaching of the Holy Spirit in the midst of these things that threaten to destroy.

"Why shouldest Thou be as a man astonished?". Take that attitude, and take it individually, have you ever been in a place so base, so

fallen, so contracted fresh defilement and sin that it is as though, if the Lord should look upon you He would be astonished, shocked.

It comes to mind, the Apostle writing to the Corinthians and they were guilty of some very gross sins and this astonishment he expresses, "What, know ye not that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, which ye have of God ?". By that word 'what', an astonishment as he shows those Corinthians, sunk in sin and immorality, and every kind of evil, he says 'What'. Have we ever been in a place that if the Lord should see us He would say, 'What, you, making a profession of my name, you, preaching the Gospel, "What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which ye have of God and ye are not your own ?" So here the Lord took that attitude, that He was astonished, astonished at their condition.

You take it in the first instance when Adam fell. He knew he was naked, he did not know it before, O the beautiful innocence in which Adam was created ! he was covered with shame, he fled from the face of God, he never fled before, to hide himself, and when the Lord called for him it was as though He was astonished, He said, "Adam, where art thou ?" 'Where is that beautiful image in which I created you ? you are now deformed, ugly. Where is that innocence ? Sin has flowed into your veins like a flood. Where is that life ? you have fallen into death, death of sin. ' "Where art thou ?"

Well, the Lord speaks thus to His people, but you look at it; faith takes the whole case up, makes no excuse. That is one thing, faith makes no excuse, and faith does not take the worst condition to claim anything. Mark that, you cannot claim anything because you are self destroyed, but there is everything to plead and there is a ground to plead upon.

"Why shouldest Thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save". O have you known it ? You may have been helpless in the dust, broken your own bones, fallen into a pit, a horrible pit, and for the Lord to take that attitude toward your helpless case, like a mighty man that cannot save. O there is a deep experience in these verses, but the sweet hope! I do find that there is a stronger hope manifested in the depths than anywhere else. It is very sweet when faith rejoices in the Lord, basks in the light of His countenance, in the sun of righteousness. But O the conflict of faith in the depths !

"Why shouldest Thou be as a mighty man that cannot save ?". The woman with an afflicted daughter had faith. The Lord took that attitude toward her, as though He was a mighty man but would not save. He would take no notice of her. O that the Holy Ghost would open our eyes to behold wonderful things out of this precious Book, this Word and reveal more of what we are and Who He is !

"Why shouldest Thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save ? Yet Thou, O Lord." What a change ! what a mixture, and so there will be where there is the life of God, because there is a mixture in us. Paul said, "The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God". Why should he say, "The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God ? He did not mean to say that he lived according to the flesh, but he was in it, and the flesh was in him, and if you have the treasure of the Gospel it is not only in an earthen vessel, but it is in you, where there is a body of sin and death and therefore, to live a life of faith upon the Son of God while we are here is that it has to be lived in the flesh in conflict with adversaries, oppositions, enemies. "Yet Thou, O Lord art in the midst of us". O what a confidence this is, in the midst

of it, he is rising, he is rising. He is rising upon the wings of faith because he has had a glimpse of the hope of Israel. "For Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us." What a great thing it would be here, for us as a people, to have evidences of this. "Yet Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us". What a great thing it is for a person, a sinner, to have ground for this confidence. 'Thou, O Lord, in the midst of me'. But O He is in the church of God, "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, God shall help her and that right early", and what is said in promise to the church belongs to His people individually, and the Lord Jesus is responsible for the very least one to be brought safely to heaven.

"If one poor sinner may be lost,
It follows so may all".

Not one will be left behind, "All that the Father giveth Me, shall come to Me". O the absolute sovereignty and immutability of God is a solid Rock.

"Yet Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, we are called by Thy name". Margin says, Thy name is called upon us, and it is true both ways if we are the Lord's, because the church is His bride and a bride is always called by the name of her husband.

But the prayer is in the last three words, "Leave us not". That runs through the whole really, That is the prayer from beginning to end and you could attach those three words to everything through this text, and it would give great meaning to it. You take it ~~through~~, "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us...leave us not", "our backslidings are many...leave us not", "we have sinned against Thee..leave us not", "O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble...leave us not", "Why shouldest Thou be as a stranger, as a wayfaring man, why shouldest Thou be as a mighty man astonished..leave us not". And that might be just your prayer, and the arguments he brought of faith. Jacob, we were reminded of that this morning, Jacob said, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me," he got hold of omnipotence and omnipotence allowed him to overcome Him. Wonderful when omnipotence permits a poor sinner to overcome Him. "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me...leave us not".

Well, if He leaves you, what is left? that is an important point. The worlding would say if the world was gone what have I left?, but can you say, if the Lord leaves you what have you left? In my own self, I do feel if the Lord has nothing to do with me and if He leaves me, there is nothing left. Well, I have not the ability to say much about the text, but may the Holy Spirit open the blessedness of it and grant us like precious faith, that we may fill our mouth with arguments and prove what the Lord says, "Fury is not in Me, who would set the thorns and briars against Me in battle? I would go through them, or let him take hold of my strength and make peace with Me, and he shall make peace with Me".

Amen.

(Transcribed verbatim and
not edited for publication).