

LIBRARY OF THE
GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached at "Ebenezer" Chapel, Hastings, by
Mr. H. Dawson, on Wednesday evening, 16th July, 1952.

"And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation."—PSALM cvii. 7).

O WHAT a mercy to have some well-grounded evidence of being a heaven-bound pilgrim! "And He led them forth by the *right* way." Solemn and searching is the Word of God concerning this, for it tells us, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. xvi. 25). The things of God are of such eternal moment and so weighty that it will never, never do to *seem* to be right.

"O solemn thing a saint to appear,
To grow with wheat, and be a tare!"

If you are taught of God, it will greatly concern you, as you do some business in Heaven's market-place, to get something from God that you are indeed a pilgrim to Canaan bound. It will never be satisfactory to you to be attached to a cause of truth, however orthodox that cause may be, though you go to it with unfailing regularity, and *seem* to be right. No! You will want something from God to put the great question out of question, and to enable you to feel as you want to feel that it is well, living and dying. O, everything hinges on being right!

I would, as the Lord shall help me, look at this word from two or three viewpoints, and I would like to say something that might be helpful to poor sinners turned in to worship God aright.

"And *He* led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." The people in the text are going to heaven, and these, and these alone, will gain a happy entrance therein. Their preparation for the inheritance of the saints in light hinges upon this, "And *He* led them." O, what a glorious Leader! "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, *they* are the sons of God;" (Rom. viii. 14) and they alone.

I would look first of all at the setting of the subject; and it is a beautiful word-picture which the psalmist has drawn, being inspired of God. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." And these are the people, and these alone, whom God will lead along life's journey by the right way, and lead them into the truth and fit them for the skies. Remember this,—if you can search out in looking back, remembering the way that you have come along, that the hand of God has been upon you in this time of trouble and that, and He has granted you His divine aid, blessed you with deliverance;—if you have evidences that He has indeed led you so that you are what you are and where you are, everything arises from this blessed truth, that He *redeemed* you. Weigh it up! Seek to suck honey from it, and you will find it is a sweet, blessed truth.

"I can have no access to God,
But through the merits of Christ's blood."

How is it that you and I, as heaven-bound pilgrims, have come along life's journey hitherto? There are two scriptures to ponder in arriving at an answer: "I am the Lord; I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. iii. 6). What you are by nature within, every day and all day, threatens to consume you; a carnal mind at enmity to God, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, ever churning up if's and but's and how's; and the world that lieth in wickedness without, a tempting devil, and hell at his beck and call,—all threatening to consume you and your religion that you hope God has wrought,—your hope which you believe at times is a *good* hope through grace. But you are not consumed. Although it may be if you tell the truth you cannot say much about being lively in things divine, it is helpful, encouraging, and not to be despised, if you can aspire to this,

"Our good God and Saviour has helped us thus far,
And 'tis by His favour we are what we are."

Some of us have come along through floods and fires and, O, such slippery places; and yet, "Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day."

What is the other scripture to cheer us and help us still to journey on and hope in God? "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction" (Ps. ciii. 4). "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." Yes! And what do they say? "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not" (Lam. iii. 22).

So then the people in the text, led forth by the right way, have the great mercy to be what they are, where they are as heaven-bound pilgrims, because they are redeemed. This *should* make your life an everyday doxology, if you have some evidence of being numbered with the redeemed. Look at earth's mighty hosts. Think of the mass of mankind beneath the sun, and hundreds of millions yet who have not heard of God or godliness, nor ever yet looked into the Holy Bible, Book divine; and *you*,—"Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (I Cor. iv. 7). How it should humble you, soften you, meeken you, and how it should make you desire to live like this,

"This prayer and this ambition mine,
Living and dying to be *Thine!*"

Redeemed!

And now the context tells us,—and it will help us in approaching this subject to notice some of the characteristics of the people in the text, heaven-bound pilgrims as they are,—"and gathered them." At the first glimpse of this word before us, you might find the children of Israel rising in your thoughts as the people primarily referred to. No! "And gathered them out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south." People of every

kindred, tribe and tongue, gathered all the world over by the glorious Person referred to in the text: "And He led them forth by the right way." "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts ii. 4). The Holy Spirit is doing that to-day. Remember that! Much the Holy Spirit is doing that you and I know nothing whatever about; but we rejoice that He is working, and His word is, "I will work, and who shall let it?" (Is. xliii. 13). The devil himself cannot hinder what the Holy Spirit purposes to do, let alone Stalin and others of like ilk. Listen! It is said concerning Jesus Christ, Who is the Redeemer, and by Whose infinite merits the people in the text were redeemed, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Is. liii. 11). And what did He say? Read it, and ponder it. In this world of chaos and confusion, "Upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18). Gathered. A very suggestive word. I love that scripture. "And unto Him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. xlix. 10). This word "gathered" gets us down, in the contemplation of it, to bedrock truth. The keystone in the arch of truth is the sovereignty of God. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Ex. xxxiii. 19).

Gathered,—gathered out. Couple it with the word in the text, "And He led them *forth*." A very significant word, a deep truth enshrined in it. It would have read straight on, "And He led them by the right way;" O, but the Holy Spirit puts in a word and shows us one essential characteristic in the right way: "And He led them *forth*." This will help you to understand it: "Out of self to Jesus lead." "Forth." A coming out. And there must be that in your life, a coming out of this, that and the other that is a hindrance to you in your profession of Jesus' Name. You must be quit of it. And to make sure you are quit of it, you shall have a thorn in your nest, and that shall stir it up; and then you will come forth out of this and that which is such a let and hindrance, and go forth and follow Him in the right way, Who says, "Follow Me." This line of things is very scarce amongst people nowadays.

Let us look again at this word "gathered." Gathered out. Gathered out of the world. Separated from it. I might add, gathered before Jehovah's bar. Gathered at Sinai's mount, there to be stripped of all our fancied meetness to approach the dread I AM. O, solemn experience, O, *necessary* experience! "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified" (Rom. iii. 20). So this glorious Leader in the text ever gathers out poor sinners and brings them first of all before Jehovah's bar. "Convince us of our sin"; then, then let that same sinner be gathered at Calvary's cross, and let him know somewhat of the meaning of the word "redeemed" as he beholds "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

Gathered. If our eyes could be opened as God alone could open

them, you would see at this evening hour, gathered from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, a mighty multitude of poor sinners at Jesus' feet, looking unto Him for that which He alone can do for their never-dying souls; each one, every one, exercised unto godliness; each one, every one, after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit, and to be led in the right way by the Spirit of God, and fitted for the skies. Gathered.

Then it says of these same people in the text, and this is suggestive, although I must not go too much into the details, "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in." Wandered. A surprising word! But the meaning is—here you might ponder the Israelites of old in their wilderness wanderings: They never knew any day that dawned but what the cloud might rise up from above the camp and go on, and they would have to strike their tents and move. And where? Follow the moving of the cloud; and when the cloud rested, then they would set up their camp again. And meanwhile, wander. Sometimes go backwards in the wilderness and not forward; and sometimes be quite close to the land of promise and be able to look across Jordan and see the beauty of it, and then turn again and go back in the wilderness, wandering. "Thou tellest my wanderings" (Ps. lvi. 8).

"They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way." Some of you, if you weigh matters up before God and think of where you are as you are living your life,—the sphere that you fill, and how God in His mercy has enabled you to fill it, and by His grace has made you what you are and put you where you are,—you will see what it is to be led by God as you weigh matters up like that. "And He led them forth by the right way." Remember this,—some of you, where you are nowadays, are not where you purposed to be long years ago when, in youthful days, you had your thoughts, your plans, your schemes, and lawfully, and prayed over some of them,—“We will do this, if the Lord will; we will do that;” but God, as He led you, what did He do? “I will overturn, overturn, overturn” (Ez. xxi. 27). And what can you say as you weigh matters up where you are? Will you humbly, thankfully, venture to say, “This is the Lord’s doings, and it is marvellous in our eyes,” “He hath done all things well”? Or will you harbour—do think of it!—will you harbour in your breast the thought that the way you have come hitherto has been all a wrong way, and the word “right” must not come into your conception of it as you look back through the long, long years? No, no! You are not going to back-answer God in what He has done for you like that! Though His dealings with you have been hard to be understood, you will humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, if in a right spirit, and honestly confess, “It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good” (1 Sam. iii. 18). Yes!

“They wandered.” Some of us have wandered, too. But this

is the next consideration: “And He led them forth by the right way.” The Psalmist is very explicit: “They wandered in the wilderness.” Now that is exactly what every heaven-born pilgrim finds the world to be. Do you? You may have this world’s goods, and that is lawful as long as you use it rightly and do not abuse it, and remember your responsibility before God, and say to Him, “Of Thine Own have we given Thee,” in what you do. You may have your nest lined with earthly comforts; rent day causes you no anxiety, you live in a house of your own; and your table is spread, even in days of rationing. But if you are a heaven-bound pilgrim you will find this,

“I cannot here contented live
With all the dainties earth can give.”

Every day that you try to live the life of the righteous and are led forth by the right way, you will find the world in which you live is to you a wilderness, and everything in it is like the law of gravitation, and can only bring you down, down, until you find, through being in contact with the world, you are like the woman in the gospel who was bowed down by a spirit of infirmity and could in no wise lift up herself. A wilderness! What can this world produce that you need for your never-dying soul if you are indeed a grace taught pilgrim to Canaan bound? This world can produce nothing whatever to assist you in living the life divine. Remember that! “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven (John iii. 27).

The people in the text wandered; but whenever they wandered, (thinking of the Israelites of old,) there was the cloud leading. Do remember this, you will get hidden manna for your soul and water that flows from the Rock of Ages only if you are where the cloud moves and you are led forth by the right way. Do you get something to eat for your soul? Do you know of a truth “there is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God” (Ps. xlvi. 4)? This can be known only in the “right way,” as the cloud moves on, leading you. Remember that! If you make a move without the cloud moving, it will not matter where you move; you might even move where the gospel is preached powerfully and faithfully, but you will get no hidden manna, no living water, thereby.

“And He led them forth by the right way.” Look at this word, too: “They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way.” Now that brings us down to individual dealings with God. Good it is to be as you are, having, I hope, collective dealings with God in the worship of His holy Majesty; but what happens when the “Amen” closes the service? Each of you taught of God, each of you who are pilgrims indeed, will have to go a solitary way. The mother goes her way and the father goes his; and the son goes his and the daughter goes her way. “A solitary way.” The meaning is that you have got to do with God and be exercised unto godliness, and something must go on between Him and you. So we read how, in the great

time of national mourning, the family of the house of David and their wives mourned apart; the family of the house of Nathan and their wives apart (Zech. xii. 12). So it will be with you and me if we are indeed taught of God. Especially as you get older, you will find this word "solitary" will come into your vocabulary as you seek to tell all the truth at Jesus' feet. *Your* case seems to be an out-of-the-way one, one unusual, and maybe you sometimes try to tell the truth about it from that viewpoint: "O Lord, I seem to be forsaken and alone; I get into touch with Thy people here and there, but none of their cases seems to be in agreement with what is *my* case, and I seem to be alone, solitary." And yet the blessed Spirit is leading you, poor sinner, in the specific way that you are in. You see, each one of us must have some religion of God for ourselves. A very elementary truth that may seem to you, but it needs to be weighed up and considered. "God be merciful to *me*," sinful, guilty, miserable, hell-deserving *me*. Are you the "*me*"? A sinner? Solitary? You will feel at times to be a solitary sinner. You will gather with the people of God, and they sing the songs of Zion, and sometimes they climb up a little and sing on high notes, and you remain sad at heart and silent. Solitary. "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way."

And do ponder this word, "They found no city to dwell in." You see, all these pilgrims of old had to live a tent life. Go back to Israel to illustrate it, in all their wanderings. Take the tabernacle in the beautiful plan of it that God gave to Moses of old. There was no floor, no boarded floor, no chairs were allowed. The priests had to stand and do all they did by standing and moving about, because it was all to suggest that this life is a pilgrimage. *You* cannot build a city. You may gather materials to do it, but you will find that this word is a very salutary word if you are indeed led forth by the right way: "They found no city to dwell in." There is that in us as we are born that is for making a nest and lining it, and if you get a little ease you attempt to settle down. Fool to do it! So we read in this same psalm, "Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." And that is one thing that a fool does that makes him to be a fool, though he be a man of God. O, to think of building a city beneath the sun and get two heavens if possible, or somewhat of a heaven before you reach the haven to which you hope by the grace of God your feet are tending! No! If you should attempt to build a city to dwell in, especially when you are old and grey-headed, and, as the world calls it, "retire," God will bring it about you in ruins, and then He will lead you forth by the right way. And what will He say? "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28).

In the right way you have to learn that you are always to be like Noah's dove that found no rest for the sole of its feet outside

the ark. It was only *inside* it could be succoured and safe and settle down. Never use that word "settle" in your vocabulary, only as it relates to what God is in your soul's experience. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psalm xxxvii. 7, 4).

"They found no city to dwell in." Remember there is a verse like this,

"Thy whole dependence on Me fix,
Nor entertain a thought
Thy worthless schemes with Mine to mix,
But venture to be nought."

Did you ever feel anything like this? —

"I'm but a stranger here;
Heaven is my home.
Earth is a desert drear;
Heaven is my home.
Danger and sorrow stand
Round me on every hand;
Heaven is my fatherland;
Heaven is my home."

I have sometimes felt troubled—those of us who try to preach often do not say much about heaven, and those of us who are heaven-bound pilgrims indeed seem to know O, so little of heaven in our souls' experience. And why? You let your conscience tell you the answer, why. There could be, I believe, more of heaven known and felt in our souls' experience if there could be a deeper concern about getting earnest of going there. You think upon it!

Then this word tells us about these people in the text, "Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them." Now that is how they found the earth to be a wilderness, as I have said. There was something wrought in their breast from the moment the Spirit of God began to lead them forth out of the world and make them heaven-bound pilgrims, and that something was an aching void which the world cannot fill. Test your religion alongside that standard! Look round this world and all it can offer you, and then weigh it up as before God. Have you got something like this wherewith to address the Majesty of heaven? —

"Let others stretch their arms like seas,
And grasp in all the shore;
Grant me the visits of Thy face,
And I desire no more."

A wonderful mercy to turn your back on the earth, and to be led forth in the right way by the Spirit of God. "Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them." You have known that, some of you, many a time, year in and year out. Yes,

"I hunger now for living food,
And my poor heart cries out for God."

"My soul thirsteth for God," the dear psalmist says elsewhere. "Hungry and thirsty, their soul *fainted* in them."

Then there is this outstanding characteristic which is an evidence beyond all questioning that one is indeed a heaven-bound pilgrim led forth by the right way: "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble." You see, the right way is the way of prayer. Now it is a great mercy when whatever comes on us in the way of life is so overruled to that blessed issue.

"Trials make the promise sweet,
Trials give new life to prayer,
Trials bring us to Christ's feet,
Lay us low, and keep us there."

You sometimes hear people say,—from a pastor's viewpoint I have heard it many times,—when they give their testimony, especially, before the church of Christ, "O, if ever I prayed in my life, it was then." You remember this Holy Bible tells us, "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord His God." You can remember some outstanding seasons, and you can declare what the Lord did for you then. "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble." What a mercy it is when you can find *in* a trouble a little prayer ascending, a little moving after God and godliness in it. Left to what you are by nature, your immediate reaction will be self-pitying thoughts, wrong thoughts, questioning thoughts—why should this be? and why should that? And you will be ready to arraign God at reason's bar as to why He has allowed this trouble to come upon you or yours. O, how good it is when what you are by nature is quelled and grace is uppermost, and you can feel,

"Lord, I would indeed submit,
Gladly yield my all to Thee;
What Thy wisdom sees most fit,
Must be surely best for me."

"And He led them forth by the right way"; and that right way will always have in it a humbling of yourself under the mighty hand of God in His dealings with you, a holy resignation to whatever His will is in this matter or that. Remember, He is "infinite in wisdom, excellent in counsel and wonderful in working," and though His dealings with you and yours may be hard to be understood, yet in the end it shall be well. What you need is grace to be still.

"Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble." Go back and search out the waymarks that you have set up in the right way that some of you are in, I am sure, and I will guarantee this, every waymark you have set up was in trouble,

"When trouble, like a gloomy cloud,
Has gathered thick and thundered loud."

When you entered it you were like the disciples long ago; "They feared as they entered the cloud." Like dear Jacob farther back still, "All these things are against me." And how did these things work out? Surely it was in accord with the psalm before us, "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." Think of that word again; it will help

you to get some concrete evidence that you are being led forth by the right way: "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble; and He delivered them out of their distresses."

Now that is the crucial test of being in the right way. All along the right way, here and there, will be Ebenezers, Hill Mizars, and they denote deliverances. The hand of God was upon you for good here and there. "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps," the word of the Lord is; "set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest" (Jer. xxxi. 21). "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee." And look you, do not misquote that couplet from our hymnbook,

"My memory bad, but what is sad,
Can folly still retain."

No, it is not that memory that retains folly that will at any time remember the way God has led you along; it is that memory that comes with a new heart, a new spirit; and it is declared, "Thou shalt remember." "He shall bring all things to your remembrance." "He led them forth by the right way;" and that same glorious "He" will help you by His grace to remember His dealings. What you need is grace to be exercised about it, not to bring forth any quotations from a fatalistic viewpoint as being excuses. No! "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; (2 Cor. ix. 8) and the word of the Lord is, "I will . . . be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them" (Ez. xxxvi. 37).

Then that brings us back to our starting point: "And He led them forth by the right way." What is the way that you are in at this evening hour? You say, "O, it is such a way, I never, never thought I should tread; O, it is such a rough way, a way wherein I meet difficulties and know not how to go forward therein or what to do." What you need is this, a right spirit, and that way you are in will be seen then, with faith as a grain of mustard seed, to be the right way, and that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; and he *delighteth* in his way" (Ps. xxxvii. 23). Think of Kelly's words:

"When we cannot see our way,
Let us trust and still obey;
He Who bids us forward go,
Will not fail the way to show."

"And He led them forth." Ponder that word "forth" again. "Forth" out of Egypt the Israelites of old came, and they turned their backs on it and went forth into the wilderness until their wanderings terminated in the land of promise at length. I repeat what I said at the outset, for it is of importance to weigh up, day by day, "And He led them forth by the right way"; and it means you must be led forth out of what you are by nature. Yes, and be led forth with humble submission to whatever the will of God is for you. Remember, "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master" (Matt. x. 25). "And He led them forth by the right way."

A Leader ! Then you must remember that Jesus Christ as the sinners' Friend is going before. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps" (I Pet. ii. 21). And however rough the way *you* tread as you go on in life's journey, when self-pity threatens to overwhelm you and you have feelings that make you say, "O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to Thee" (Ezra ix. 6).—"Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in *your* minds" (Heb. xii. 5). Think of the cross that Jesus bore, that *your* cross which He has chosen for you might be sanctified to your soul's eternal profit and peace.

"And He led them forth by the right way"; and you will find this, it will give you a right experience; and you will have to say, when out of the abundance of the heart the mouth is speaking, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him" (Nahum i. 7).

One more word as I come to the Amen. "And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." The people in the text are a people afore prepared unto glory. You often hear preachers speak of heaven as "a prepared place for a prepared people"; and it is not stereotyped phraseology. No, it is a blessed reality. "That they might go to a city of habitation." Beneath the sun "no city to dwell in"; but O, if you are being led forth by the right way, sometimes there will fall from your eyes as it had been scales, and faith will be active, and you will get a glimpse of heaven. O, how sweet and blessed it is! Then you will have this feeling,

"The city to which I am journeying
Will more than my sorrows repay;
And the toils of the road will seem nothing,
When I get to the end of the way."

"A city of habitation." The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the blessed Trinity, is there; and the angelic host, and countless multitudes of the redeemed; and the greatest mercy that you and I can know in journeying on in life is to be assured that the way is indeed a right way, and that heaven is at the end of it; and to be able to feel as you go on,

"We are travelling home to God
In the way our fathers trod;
They are happy now, and we
Hope their happiness to see."

Amen.