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[DECEMBER, 1935].

"THE LORD IS GOOD."

Sermon preached by Mr. H. Patterson, at "Providence"
Chapel, West Norwood, on Thursday evening,
August 8th, 1935.

"The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him."—Nahum 1, v. 7.

THIS verse is one of the many legacies that God has left for His poor people's comfort whilst they are passing through this vale of tears. It is one of those verses that is only for His people. No others understand it, no others want it. Only the poor, those that the Lord looks upon, that He thinks upon, that He loves, that He watches over, the poor man who is of a contrite heart, and broken spirit, and that trembleth at God's Word, one among the many in whatever dispensation they may live and whatever nation. There have always been a few of God's people on the earth, and there always will be until the end comes. Many imagine that this world continues for people to get gain, but it is no such thing. I believe it continues for God's purposes to be accomplished, especially His purposes concerning the calling and blessing of the whole election of grace. My firm belief is that whenever the last vessel of mercy has been called by God's grace, time will be no more.

Now there are three things in my text. May the Lord help us to look at them as they stand. The first is, "The Lord is good." The second states that He is "a strong hold (or strength) in the day of trouble." And the third says that "He knoweth them that trust in Him." So you will note that it is wholly a matter explained by God and understood by His people. It does not trouble the world as to whether God is good or bad. Yea, if there is a concern at all and they acknowledge that there is a God, and if they have any ideas of His decrees, they will soon tell you that He is a hard and cruel God. It is only God's people that learn by a blessed experience that "The Lord is good." Nevertheless, there has never been anyone who could lawfully contradict this, as when Christ was on earth, I believe that had it been possible to have found a flaw in His character, it would have been done. I believe that Satan employed those high priests and all the enemies of Christ to ransack the land, as it were, to try and find something by which they could put Him to death, but they could find none. And it is just the same respecting Him now; if they could lay anything of a sinful nature to His charge, they would do so. Devils dare not bring any railing accusation against God. One even said, "I know Thee Who Thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1, v. 24). Though they may curse God, they cannot accuse Him. But God's people, blessings on His dear name, they view Him in a different way, they are brought from the service of sin and Satan, to know

God. This is a great matter in religion, to know God. Oh! you ask Him that you may know Him, that you may become savingly acquainted with the great God with Whom the issues of death belong, Who created you: that great God Who has power with a stroke to cast you out of His presence, and yet Who has mercy, Who is good. Do you complain of God? No, you complain of yourself, you complain of the sin that doth so easily beset you. If you dare to complain of your troubles, something says, "Do you not procure them unto yourself, do not your sins bring them?" I felt yesterday that in all my attempts to approach God, I have never been able to go without my sins. Perhaps some of you may differ. You say, "I have gone into His presence when I have not felt any sin belonging to me, when I have praised Him, blessed Him, walked with Him, and lived above all these other things." You are different from me then. I verily believe that every time a sinner approaches God he is compelled, first of all, to speak of his sins. "Oh," say you, "but are not the sins of God's people all put away, does not God say, 'Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more?'" (Hebrews 8, v.12). I know that, but can you live up to God's Word? Have you a faith that always grasps it, and never doubts it, that prays according to it, that believes and rests wholly upon God's Word? I wish that I could live according to that, but alas,

"Sin is mixed with all I do."

But I would acknowledge that the Lord is good. Everything that is recorded of God is good, all that He has done. You cannot find one imperfect thing in creation; you cannot find one flaw in God's providential dealings; you cannot find one mistake or one thing in which He has ever come short in salvation matters. "He is the Rock, His work is perfect." He is good to the wicked. Have you never felt that? That He should suffer you to live when you have feared that the next moment you would be laid in the grave? He is good to His own dear people, good whilst they are pursuing the awful ways of sin, good when justice stands over them and demands their life, good when they are found at His feet crying for mercy, mercy through blood, good to them when He looks and smiles through the cloud, when He condescends to come to them and tell them that He loves them and has put away their sin, that they shall not die but live. He is good to them in all the steps that they take from their birth to their death. "The Lord is good." Every providence is good, every trial is good, every affliction is good, every bereavement, when sanctified, is good, every temptation is good, because the Lord is able to keep His people, and also to deliver them out of it. Everything that God has thought, has said, has done, everything that He is in relationship to His people, in every office He sustains, He is good. In Heaven He is good; on earth He is good. "The Lord is good." The Father is good. Oh, how good! "Like as a Father pitieth His children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear

Him" (Psalm 103, v. 13). How good He is to them! Look back, my soul, over the way thou hast come, at thy sins and thy fears, the threatenings of the enemy, has He not been good to you? When you look at this, that you have never deserved a crust of bread or a drink of water, yet He has been good in providing mercies and comforts beyond number. The Lord is good concerning all the future, because He is unchangeable; what He has been to you in the past, He will be to you world without end. The Father is good. The Son, His dear and eternal Son Who is the brightness of His Glory, He is good. Oh you cannot read about the Lord Jesus Christ without acknowledging how good He is. Oh! how good, before He came down here. How good for Him to condescend to become feeble flesh and dwell among us! How good for Him to bear the whole weight of the sins of His people in His Own body to the tree! How good

"That when the Saviour knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
He pity ne'er withdrew."

Oh how good to lay down His life for His sheep! "Therefore doth my Father love me"—it was such a good thing—"Therefore doth my Father love Me because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father." (John 10, vs. 17,18). How good of Him to espouse unto Himself a people, and for you and me to hope that we are a part of that blessed number whom no man can number, chosen from all eternity to be the Bride, the Lamb's wife. Oh, this is good! When we did not deserve any such thing, neither did we seek it or want it, but He loved us because He would, and in due time He called us and told us He loved us with an everlasting love. How good, Thou blessed Lord Jesus! If we complain, it is our want of love to Him, it is our lack of faith in Him, it is that we follow afar off, it is because of this wretched independent nature, this unbelieving spirit, that we possess; but we cannot, we would not complain of our Lord. How good is the Holy Spirit that He should come down from Heaven, sent by the Father and by the Son, Who sits at the right hand of God, to put life into a dead sinner! How powerful His hand, to bring us out of the horrible pit and miry clay! How wonderful that He should condescend to teach us all good! That He should humble us in the dust, lay us low with cries and sighs and desires, Heavenward, Godward. What patience He possesses to bear with such foolish, dull scholars! Oh He is good that He should lead a poor sinner on day by day, and teach him all that is profitable for him. "The Lord is good": He ever will be. "I am the Lord, I change not" (Malachi 3, v. 6), therefore if He was God, He is good; He ever must be good. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever" (Psalm 107, v.1). It

may be profitable for you if you take a reference Bible, and trace out the different times that Israel made use of those words: "O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever."

Now we pass on to the second thing in my text. It says that He is "a strong hold in the day of trouble." His people have days of trouble. The world, they have their days of trouble, and if they are ever helped out of trouble, it is God that does it; but they do not know it, they do not acknowledge it. But God's dear people, their troubles are sanctified for their souls' profit, and the honour and glory of His great Name. His people are subject to various kinds of trouble. The best of all trouble is soul trouble. There are many of our troubles that, as we view them, are the fruits and effects of our sins, but soul trouble is not. It is the Holy Spirit that puts life in a poor sinner's heart and brings him into deep concern about his never dying soul. At the first there seems to be no way out, no hope that deliverance will ever come; everything seems to be against that poor sinner who is troubled because of his sins. He only knows God as a just God at the first, and those Scriptures where it says that the wicked shall be turned into hell, and where it speaks of the justice of God in dealing with sinners, all seem to be against the poor exercised one, and he is persuaded that he is a dying sinner, and immediately at death he will be cast into everlasting punishment. How many of us have had it? Ask yourself this question, have I ever known what such trouble as this is? I do not mean that you may have done something wicked, and having been found out, were ashamed of it, confessed you were wrong, and asked others never to say anything about it, asked them to keep it a secret as long as they lived. That may have been trouble. "I hope so-and-so will never find it out. They would not think so well of me if they knew that I ever did that. Do not tell anybody." Ah! but that—it is not soul trouble. When you are brought into soul trouble, you learn that there is a God Whose eye searches you through and through. When you are brought into soul trouble you are like a person apprehended, brought to justice, your secret sins laid open before God, and you are compelled to say, "Guilty, guilty," and by so doing, you judge and condemn yourself. And yet this good God is a strong hold at such time. "A strength to the needy in his distress" (Isaiah 25, v.4).

In what way is God a strong hold or a strength to those in this kind of trouble? I will tell you. He has provided a Saviour, and a mighty Saviour, too, One Who is able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. He has provided for such, a Remedy; the healing balm of Jesus' precious blood. He has provided a sacrifice for sin, an atonement, reconciliation has been brought about through the Lord Jesus Christ standing in the place of His people, bearing their sins, enduring their hell, dying their death. Oh! have you ever known what it is to fly to the

Stronghold? The Scripture says, "The Name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Proverbs 18, v. 10). Flee to Christ, poor condemned sinner, tarry not in the plain.

"Pore not on thyself too long,
Lest it sink thee lower;
Look to Jesus, kind as strong—
Mercy joined with power;"

Look not to the law, you will never get help there. You have broken that, you must flee to Calvary. It says, flee to Christ, look to Jesus, you are sin bitten, you are dying, there is the brazen serpent, the anti-typical brazen serpent—look to that. Everyone in the wilderness that looked,—lived; and everyone given faith in the Person and merits of God's dear Son that looks to Calvary, in His own time, loses his burden. They look,—they live (John 3, 14-16).

They have other kinds of trouble. They will never escape trouble whilst they are down here. God has not decreed that they should have their heaven down here, that they should have every comfort without trouble. The troubles of God's people are caused by various persons and things. Much of our trouble is caused by having two natures. There is a constant warfare between the powers of grace and sin. Much of our trouble comes because of Satan's hatred of us. He hates all who bear the image of Christ, he hates all who walk with God, who call upon His great Name, who love His appearing, and he worries them. He cannot destroy them—he barks but cannot bite. Much of our trouble down here is caused by our own sins. Yes! you may have been sinned against, but how small the trouble had you not retaliated. This affliction may seem strange to you, but how much of your sin is there in it? This temporal trouble seems to be very trying, but is there not an amount of your sin in it? Sometimes it is God's chastening hand *for* sin, or *from* sin, sometimes it is to make us pray, or to hurt our pride, stain our pride. Sometimes it is to prove how vile we are by being determined to be independent of God, sometimes it is to show us how deadly a thing it is to have our own way, sometimes it is to wean us from idols that God brings something to bear upon us we call trouble. Sanctified trouble is a great blessing. Whenever you are in trouble, do not whine about it and tell others, but try, as helped, to get to God, for He is "a strong hold in the day of trouble," and His Word is, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me" (Psalm 50, v. 15). Never you expect to live without trouble. If you are free from trouble for five minutes you will get light and play the fool. We have not spoken of future troubles, or fears, or dangers. Leave them: they will come, but the same God Who has helped us in the past, will help us all through our journey. The hymnwriter says—

"He Who has helped me hitherto,
Will help me all my journey through;"

The third and last thing in my text is, "He knoweth them that trust in Him." He knoweth His people. "Well," say you, "I know God is good, I believe I know a little of the day of trouble, but really, I cannot speak about trusting in God. I seem to be so full of unbelief, I would believe if I could, and I have to cry out, 'Lord, help my unbelief.'" Do you ever get anything for believing? Some tell us that they do. I never have, I have never received anything from God and been able to say, "Ah, I have received that because of my faith in God." Yet people tell you plainly that that is why God blesses them more than He does you, but I would rather go to God and confess my inability to do anything without the aid and power of God.

"He knoweth them." He knows all His dear people, He knew them from all eternity, He foreknew them, He predestinated them to be conformed to the image of His Son before creation. He knoweth His own people, their names are written in Heaven. "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And; Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2, v. 19). He knows them, He has sealed them with His love, He has marked them for all eternity, they never were Satan's, they never will be his, He held them when Adam ruined all his future race. There were, and always will be, the two seeds. There is the seed that belongs to Satan, there is another part that never has and never will belong to him because they are the chosen of God, they are the beloved of the Lord, they are the redeemed of Christ, they are to be called, they are to be justified, glorified. He knows them, and when in their unregeneracy His eye is upon them,

"When, in the slipp'ry paths of youth,
With heedless steps I ran
Thine arm, unseen, conveyed me safe,
And led me up to man."

You could not come to an untimely end, because you were a vessel of mercy afore prepared unto glory. He knew you, and acknowledged you when he said, "Arrest that man." Who is he? "A vessel of Mine, a jewel of Mine, a child of Mine." Oh! poor sinner, what a mercy if you and I are numbered with that people that God knows, loves, cares for, watches over, supplies, blesses and keeps, and will at last present before His Father's Throne with exceeding joy. He knows them all, they bear His image. He knows them, they speak His language, they follow Him. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John 10, vs. 27, 28).

"He knoweth them that trust in Him." Perhaps you say, "That cuts me off." No it does not, your faith may be feeble, you are like that one who said,

"Our faith is feeble we confess;
We faintly trust Thy Word;
But wilt Thou pity us the less?
Be that far from Thee, Lord."

You trust Him. Have you never been brought to trust your soul in His hands? Have you never been able to say,

"Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it;
Seal it from Thy courts above!?"

Have you never had a trouble where God has said to you, "Take it to the Lord, cast it upon Him, 'Cast Thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain Thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved?'" (Psalm 55, v. 22). And you have trusted Him, you have got up from your knees refreshed—you felt you had left your case in His hands. You have been enabled to watch and await events, and in due time, though your patience may have been greatly tried, though the enemy told you that it was no use trusting in God, though unbelief put up a fight and said, "Curse God and die," yet, you have been enabled in the strength of the Lord to hold on, and you have found that He has come to you in His own time. "Trust in Him at all times," said David, "Ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us." (Psalm 62, v. 8). "He knoweth them that trust in Him." Are they lost?—they are brought to trust in His blood and righteousness. Are they poor?—they are enabled to trust in His fulness. Are they ignorant?—they are brought to trust in His wisdom, "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1, v. 30). Are they weak?—they are brought to trust in His Almighty power. Are they full of fears respecting the future?—the Lord comes and says, "Be not afraid, only believe." When they come to the end, though the old man will still be alive, and if left for one moment he will almost drive you to despair, yet, the Lord will appear, and when He comes and gives you a sight of Himself, and shows you that He is "Jesus Christ"—the sinner's Friend—"the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," you will still be found clinging to Him, and begging of Him that He will save you in making you a miracle of grace, so that you may praise and bless Him to all eternity. Is it not a wonderful verse? May God feed our souls with it. Amen.

Copies can be obtained from Mr. Hubert J. Patterson, "Kinfauns," 54 Appleton Road, Linthorpe, Middlesbrough, Yorks; and also c/o 25 Canham Road, South Norwood, London, S.E.25.

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