

THE LORD'S SALVATION, THE SINNER'S HOPE.

A SERMON, BY MR. JAMES HALLETT,

OF ALFRISTON, SUSSEX,

*Preached at Providence Chapel, Petworth, Sussex, on Monday
Evening, December 11, 1848.*

(TAKEN DOWN IN SHORT HAND).

*"My soul fainteth for thy salvation; but I hope in thy word.
Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, when wilt thou comfort me?
For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet I do not forget thy
statutes."—Psalm cxix. 81—83.*

SALVATION, in all its parts, branches, and bearings, is the greatest of all subjects; for it is the Alpha and the Omega of the Bible, and the Lord alone is the Author of it; as it is written, "Salvation is of God; thy blessing is upon thy people." And David saith, "The Lord is my light and my salvation." And Jonah saith, "They that pursue lying vanities forsake their own mercies, but I will pay that that I have vowed, Salvation is of the Lord."

But to convince the sinner of his guilty, filthy, ruined, helpless, and miserable state through the Adam fall—and of his need of salvation, which is wholly of grace through the redemption there is in Christ Jesus our Lord—is the work of God the Holy Ghost, and his only. And every elect vessel of mercy will be convinced of these things by the ever-blessed Spirit, in the Lord's own time and way, not merely in his judgment, but in his heart. With the heart he believes himself to be a guilty sinner; for he feels the guilt and burden of sin upon his conscience an intolerable load, too heavy for him to bear. He believes himself to be a vile sinner, because he finds and feels that when he would do good, evil is present with him, and how to perform that which is good he finds not. The good therefore, that he would do, he does not, but the evil he would not, that (to his grief) he does. He consents to the law that it is good, but feels himself to be "carnal, sold under sin;" and sin, taking occasion by the commandment, works in him all manner of concupiscence; and he can feelingly say, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing," but every species of evil. These things occasion that wretchedness which he is the subject of day by day. He believes in his total helplessness, because he finds that he can do nothing good. He would keep the law, and strives to do so, but feels his carnal mind to be enmity against God, and not subject to the law of God; nor can he, with all his strivings, bring it into subjection thereto. Foolish and vain thoughts possess his mind which in the eye of the law is sin, and for which he feels condemned, both by the law and his own conscience; and yet he has no power to bring them into subjection to the obedience of Christ. He feels his

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heart to be deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, even an evil heart of unbelief, that is continually departing from the Lord. Lust, envy, murmuring, self-pity, discontent, hard thoughts of God, and rebellions also—which things give rise to desperation, till he becomes like a wild bull in the net, full of the fury of the Lord and the rebukes of God. The Lord smites him: but he either resists or turns sullen under the rod. The Lord rebukes him; but he goes on in the way of his heart. The law condemns him for it. Wrath and enmity, against both God and the law, works in his heart; although he knows that “the rebellious dwell in a dry land;” and that “it is hard to kick against the pricks.” The wrath of God in his tabernacle; the arrows of God in his guilty conscience; the terrors of God in battle array against him, and the justice of God pursuing him—makes him tremble. “O that I had the wings of a dove!” is the language of his heart; “then would I flee away, and be at rest.” “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

A sinner, thus chastened and taught of the Lord out of his righteous and holy law, will prize that salvation that is wholly of grace, for that alone is suited to his case. If salvation were to be obtained in any other way, or upon any other terms, there would not be the least ground for him to hope of obtaining that blessing.

The *First* thing I shall notice in the text, is, *the Lord's salvation*. *Secondly*; the *faintness of David's soul*, and the cause of it. *Thirdly*; the *ground of his hope*, which is the word of God. *Fourthly*; of *his eyes failing for that word*. And *Fifthly*; his *confession*. “I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.”

And *First*. The angel said unto Mary, relative to the child that was to be born of her, that “his name should be called Jesus, for he should save his people from their sins.” Not only save from death, which is the wages of sin, but from sin itself. And the Apostle alludes to this branch of salvation, when he says, “The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this evil world.” And what the gospel (which is intended by the grace of God in this passage) teaches, both in the written and preached word, the Holy Ghost teaches in the heart of every elect sinner called by grace. He that is born of God, therefore, “sinneth not;” that is, he does not, he cannot live in the love and practice of sin; for the word of God forbids it, and the saving grace of God in his heart prevents it. For, every one that is born of God hath the fear of God in his heart, and before his eyes; and this fear is said to be “a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death.” Therefore, “the way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.”

But this is not the salvation in the text that David fainted for; and, therefore, I shall pass on to another branch of salvation. David saith, “This poor man cried unto the Lord; and the Lord heard him

and saved him from all his fears.” Ah, my friends, many are the fears, as well as the afflictions of the children of God. That a change has taken place, you are constrained to believe and acknowledge; for, whereas you were once blind, behold now you see. But you have many fears that this is not the work of God, but a spark of your own kindling; and you are certain if it should prove to be so at last, that you will assuredly lie down in sorrow. The sensible seeking sinner has many fears that the Lord whom he seeks will never appear to the salvation of his soul; and it is to such poor doubting, fearing, trembling children, that the Lord, by the mouth of the Prophet, speaks, saying, “Strengthen ye the weak hands; confirm the feeble knees.” They have “hands,” but they are at present too weak to lay hold either of the Lord, or his precious word of promise. They have “knees,” but they are too weak for them to walk by faith and not by sight, and to enable them to stand fast in the Lord and in the power of his might. The Lord not only tells the Prophet to “Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees,” but to “say to them that are of a fearful heart, Fear not; for behold your God (mark that! poor trembling, doubting sinner, your God! notwithstanding your many fears about it,) He will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense, He will come and save you.”

There is a fear also that hath torment; even a slavish fear and dread of the Almighty. This fear attends conviction for sin, and takes its rise in a consciousness of our guilt, and a view of God in his terrible majesty as a sin-avenging God, who will not clear the guilty. David experienced this, and saith, “Fearfulness and trembling hath taken hold on me, and horror hath overwhelmed me.”

There are fears, also, of being led astray by the errors of the wicked. The many “Lo here's!” and “Lo there's!” perplex the mind, and confuse the judgment of the poor sensible seeking sinner. There are fears also of falling by the power of the enemy; of being left to serve sin in the lust thereof; and of turning back to the beggarly elements of the world. Fears of being given up to a reprobate mind; of being deceived yourself, and deceiving others who think favourably of you. Fears that you are cast out and cut off as a fruitless branch; that the Lord's mercy is clean gone for ever; that He hath in anger shut up his tender bowels of compassion; and that there is no hope nor help for you from the Lord.

These are some of the many fears of the children of God. But when the Lord speaks to the poor sinner's heart, saying, “Fear not, for I am with thee (mark that! “I am with thee!” in the present tense); be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will help thee; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness”—when the Lord speaks thus, the soul exclaims, “It is enough, Lord; I will trust, and not be afraid; for “the Lord is my strength and song; He also is become my salvation.” “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my heart; of whom shall I be

afraid?" This is salvation from fears, which David's soul fainted for.

Another branch of salvation, is, deliverance from the sentence of death in a broken law, which sentence is recorded in the conscience of every one that is taught of the Father out of his righteous and holy law. This law works wrath, and genders to bondage, the galling yoke of the law, and the yoke of our transgressions wreathed about our neck. When this is the case, we know from painful experience what it is to be shut up under the law and under its curse; and all our strivings, wrestlings, and strugglings to come forth into liberty are ineffectual; for we are shut up, and cannot come forth, till the Lord saith, "Loose him and let him go." Under this yoke, the cry of the soul day and night is, "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name." But when with the heart, by the power of the Holy Ghost, we believe unto righteousness, we receive the sentence of justification to eternal life in our own consciences, and then with the mouth confession is made to salvation. This is experimentally passing from death unto life, never more to come into condemnation. The Saviour's words are now fulfilled, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." And, "If the Son make you free, then are you free indeed." The soul is comforted with the substance of these words, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." And now his mourning is turned into joy; his sackcloth is taken off, and his soul girded with gladness; the day is come when he can and will say, "O God, I will praise thee; for thou wast angry with me, but thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me." And for this branch of salvation the soul often faints.

In the next place, Christ is said to be God's "salvation." "I will keep him," saith the Lord; and give him for a covenant to the people, that he may be my salvation unto the ends of the earth." He is the salvation the Lord hath placed in Zion; He is the salvation of the Church; He is the only hope of Israel, and their salvation in times of trouble; for "there is no other name given among men whereby we can be saved but by the name of Jesus Christ." And it is a blessed consideration, that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners, yea, the very chief of sinners. He came to seek and save them that were lost (sensibly so); and is able to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him. And he is not only able, but he is willing; "For the Lord thy God in the midst of thee, is mighty; He will save;" yea, he will fulfil the desires of all them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them. And though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the Author of salvation to all them that obey him. Yea, the Lord preserveth the poor and needy, and saveth the soul of the destitute. This is good news, and glad tidings for the fore-mentioned characters; but they must have a proof and experience of these things in their own souls before they can rejoice in them; and certain I am, that every

soul that hath tasted in any small measure that the Lord is gracious, cannot rest satisfied until the Lord lifts upon him the light of his countenance. And if the soul has enjoyed the Lord's sweet endearing presence, and the Lord withdraws from that soul, he will thirst for the Lord as a thirsty land. David knew much of this experience; hence you hear him say, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee." and, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." And again; "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" Here is no want of confidence; but David is not satisfied with knowing his interest in Christ as the God of salvation; he wants the person and presence of his God and Saviour. When a man takes a woman to wife, he endows her with all his worldly goods; and pledges himself to love, cherish, and keep her until death doth them part. But if the woman hath a strong affection for the man, she will not be satisfied with this; she must have the person and presence, and enjoy the company of her husband, or there will be an aching void in the mind that nothing beside can fill. So it is not enough for me to know that I am the Lord's; for if the Lord withdraws and hides himself, and my soul at the same time is kept alive to him, I shall know what David meant in the text, "My soul fainteth for thy salvation, O Lord." But when Christ visits the soul with his love-tokens, and kisses us with the kisses of his mouth, we say with the church, "His love is better than wine." For, an enjoyment of his presence, walking in the fear of the Lord, in the light of his countenance, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, is very little short of heaven upon earth.

But the sweetest branch of salvation, is being fully and finally delivered from this evil world; from a body of sin and death; from all our fears, sorrows, afflictions, temptations, and troubles; and gathered home to our fathers and to our God, to be for ever with the Lord, in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore. This is what Simeon longed for, when he said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." And Paul, when he said, "Having a desire to part, and be with Christ, which is far better." "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan being burdened." And whilst "we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." It is better, therefore, to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord. And when this takes place, they receive "the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls."

But furthermore. David had to travel in a path of tribulation; he had to encounter the temptations of the devil, the persecutions of ungodly men (who at times came round about him like bees) with darkness set in his path, and darkness in his soul, together with almost every other evil and affliction that can be named; and many times (apparently) there was but one step between him and

death; friend and lover put far from him, and his acquaintance put into darkness; and when he loosed for some to take pity, there was none and for comforters, he found none; and very frequently, at those seasons, the Lord stood aloof from him. He cried day and night, but could get no answer. This was so trying, that he ventured to expostulate with the Lord in the following manner, "Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?" when of all times the presence is most needed. And what does David want? Why, the Lord to arise for his help; to rebuke the adversary, the devil; to disperse the dark clouds that intercept his sight of the Saviour; to remove every let and hindrance out of the way, that he may have free access to God at a throne of grace; and that the Lord would stretch forth his hand against the wrath of his enemies, and let his right hand save him. For this branch of salvation David's soul many times fainted; and so have the souls of God's children in every age of the church; for they all have to walk in the same path of affliction as David had, in a lesser or greater degree, for "through much tribulation" the kingdom must be entered.

But again. To be kept from falling into scandalous sins; from mixing with the world; from a heart hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; and from the love, as well as the company of the world; from turning back in a day of battle, and from fainting in a day of adversity; and to be enabled to stand fast in the Lord, and in the power of his might; to endure afflictions, temptations, and hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ; to be enabled to fight the good fight of faith, and to resist unto blood striving against sin; and to run with patience the race set before us, saying, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may finish my course with joy;"—these things constitute another branch of salvation, and for which the souls of God's saints often faint.

II.—The next thing we have to notice, is, the *exercise of David's soul*, expressed in those words in the text, "My soul fainteth for thy salvation, O Lord." Two things are here intended; first, the earnest cravings, the vehement breathing, and fervent longing of his soul for the Lord to appear to his help, as expressed by him in the 84th Psalm, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God!" And secondly, it sets forth the weak, faint, and feeble state of his soul. He had so many trials to contend with; so many enemies to encounter, that he was greatly discouraged because of the way; his soul was brought down with hard labour, and his spirit broken with excessive sorrow; worn out with manifold temptation; sore broken in the place of dragons; and covered with the shadow of death. His soul melted because of trouble, under these heavy and complicated trials; flesh and heart failed; and he felt himself to be a man that had no strength; and he could feelingly say with the Prophet,

"When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me." Ah, my friends, these things will make the stoutest heart faint unless the Lord appears! And he oftentimes delays coming until "hope deferred maketh the heart sick;" and then the soul "faints."

It may be I have some here this evening who have been looking to the Lord for salvation, and have been waiting (perhaps for weeks, months, yea, it may be years) for the Lord to come and save you; but you are as far from obtaining the object as ever; trials multiplying, dark dispensations without, and darkness in thy mind, increasing the enemy's triumph over you. In trouble you call upon God, but get no answer; you seek the Lord, but cannot find him. "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me," is the cry of thy soul: but no sensible help comes. The clouds get thicker and darker; the storm more violent, and the tempest more alarming; despairing thoughts occupy the mind both day and night. "Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Hath he in anger shut up his tender bowels of compassion from me?"—is the solemn and important question. If you have been, or are now exercised in this way, you know something of David's experience as expressed in the text, "My soul fainteth for thy salvation."

III.—The third thing we have to notice in the text, is, *the ground of David's hope*. "But I hope in thy word." Hope was the anchor in David's soul, and God's word was the anchorage. Hope springs from faith, and both are from the Lord. If faith is strong, the soul will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost: but if faith is weak, hope will be languid: and when unbelief prevails, we say with the Prophet, "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord." Or, with Job, "As for my hope, where is it?"

By the "Word" of the Lord, three things are included—

First, the *Incarnate Word*; agreeable to this text, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The Word spoken of in this passage is a person, and this person is the eternal Son of God, begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost; God over all and blessed for evermore. And truly, there is none else to whom a guilty sinner can fly for refuge, but to Christ Jesus, the hope set before him. And where can a ruined sinner cast his hope of salvation, but in Christ, who is the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel? For He is the only Mediator between God and man, to make reconciliation for iniquity; the only healer of the breach that sin hath made between God and man. He alone is the restorer of paths to dwell in, even the paths of peace; "the path of life which is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath." And where can a poor shipwrecked, tempest-tossed soul cast anchor but in Christ the Rock of Ages, the sure foundation laid in Zion; that blessed

permanent foundation, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail? for there is salvation in no other name. Hope of justification is founded on his obedience unto righteousness; in this alone all the seed of Israel are justified, and in Him shall they glory; for "by his obedience many shall be made righteous." And where can a guilty condemned sinner look for the pardon of sin, and deliverance from going down into the pit of hell, but to the blood of atonement, "In whom," as the Apostle saith, "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." In Him the church is perfect and complete; in Him alone perishing sinners are accepted. He is the only way of access to the Father; the only way to the kingdom of heaven, and the only door of hope in the valley of Achor. And blessed indeed is that person who hath the God of Jacob for his help, and whose hope is in the Lord his God. Therefore, David saith, "Let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him plenteous redemption." At another time David saith, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? hope thou in God." And he not only encouraged his soul to hope in the Lord, but saith at another time, "Lord, what wait I for? truly my hope is in thee. Deliver me from all my transgressions; make me not the reproach of the foolish." And, we are told, that "the eyes of the Lord are upon them that fear him, and upon them that hope in his mercy; "to deliver their souls from death, and to keep them alive in famine"—which are precious branches of salvation. O what a blessing and favour to be in possession of "a good hope through grace," even a lively hope in Christ; and such are encouraged to rejoice in their King, for, "Rejoice in the Lord, all ye that hope in him;" and again, "I say, rejoice."

2. The second thing intended by the "word," is, "*the scriptures of truth,*" which contain a revelation of the Lord's mind and will to the sons of men; and of his love, mercy, power, truth, and faithfulness to his elect, together with his eternal purpose, mind, will, and pleasure concerning them: and all things necessary to be known received, and believed in, are therein revealed, and that for their comfort and encouragement; for, so it is written, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." In the scripture the way to heaven is cast up, the experience of God's children traced out, the path of obedience laid down, the nature of God's love is revealed, the objects of his choice are described, the greatness of his mercy is shewn, and the exceeding greatness, richness, and superaboundings of his grace are fully made known. On the other hand, every evil work and false way is pointed out; a counterfeit experience described; the character of the hypocrite shewn, his hypocrisy detected, and his religion dissected; and the essential difference between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not, is clearly and fully made known. The scripture also abounds with invitations, and descriptions of the characters invited; with exceeding great and precious promises. It also

abounds with advice, counsel, caution, reproof, correction, exhortation, and instruction, that "the man of God may be thoroughly furnished" And frequently does the poor sensible seeking sinner's hope cast anchor in these things. The invitations in the word to the hungry and thirsty soul encourage him to hope; for they describe his feelings, wants, and character, and express the desires of his soul. And so are the invitations to the labouring and heavy-laden sinner; for, being heavy-laden with the guilt of his sins, the curse of the law, and the wrath of God; burdened also with trials in life, worldly cares, the afflicting hand of God, and a body of sin and death; labouring to bring peace into his conscience, quietness into his mind, and rest to his soul; and to his grief, seeketh rest, but findeth none. How suitable! how sweet the invitations! He looks at it again and again, ponders it in his heart, and hangs upon it as a little child upon the breast; and when he is enabled by faith to extract a little of the sweetness from the word, hope springs up in his soul; and joy and gladness, in proportion to his faith and hope, will be the consequence; for "the hope of the righteous is gladness." The exceeding great and precious promises, concerning both the life that now is, and that which is to come, form a permanent foundation for hope to anchor in. The Lord has promised to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, rest to the weary, and comfort to the sorrowful. He has promised to clothe the naked, to heal the sick, to wash the filthy, and to bind up the broken-hearted. He instructs the ignorant; he guides the meek in judgment; and teaches and leads sinners in the way they should go. He has promised to be strength to the poor and needy in his distress; to give strength equal to their day; to water them every moment; and, lest any hurt them, to keep them both night and day. He has promised to shew mercy to the guilty; to justify the ungodly who believe in him; to save the lost; and to forgive the insolvent debtor all he oweth. He has promised never to leave nor forsake his children, nor the work of his own hands in their souls; and to put his fear in their hearts to prevent their departing from him. He has encouraged us to call upon him in trouble; and has promised to hear our prayer and deliver us. He has declared that no weapon formed against his people shall prosper; that all things shall work together for their good; and that the righteous shall hold on his way, and come off at last more than conquerors through Christ who hath loved them.

These are a few of the many things God has promised; and the accomplishment depends upon the love, oath, power, and faithfulness of Him who hath promised, and not on any thing in us or done by us. No; their accomplishment does not even depend on our faith (although our enjoyment of them does); for, "if we believe not, He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself;" Every promise, therefore, being "yea and amen in Christ Jesus," confirmed also with an oath, that it might be more sure to all the seed, forms a blessed basis for hope. And there are times, when reading, musing,

and meditating on the scriptures, that hope springs up in the soul; and when this is the case, we can say, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." And, at these seasons, we esteem the words of the Lord more than our necessary food. But, on the other hand, unless faith is in exercise, the letter of truth will be to him a dry breast. He may have light to see the way to heaven, see his own path cast up, the feelings of his heart shewn, and the desires of his soul expressed; but unless the Lord by the word speaks to his heart, he can neither hope in the word, nor suck any sweetness from it. Therefore,

3. *Thirdly*, by the "word" is intended *a word spoken personally and specially to the person's heart*; as the Saviour saith, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and I will speak comfortably to her." But it reads in the margin, "I will speak to her heart." The Lord spoke to Abraham, saying, "Fear not, for I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." And He told him that Sarah should bare him a son: and Abraham's hope was founded on the word which the Lord spake to him. The Lord told Jacob to arise, and return to his native country, and promised to be with him: this Jacob pleaded when he wrestled with the angel to be delivered from the fear of his brother Esau; and which clearly shews that Jacob's hope was in the word of the Lord spoken especially to him. And David saith, "Remember the word unto thy servant on which thou hast caused me to hope." The Lord speaks to the heart; faith believes the word spoken; and however improbable or impossible its accomplishment may appear, hope fully expects it, and the soul pleasingly anticipates the event. But there being a lapse of time between the word spoken, and its accomplishment, gives rise to the experience spoken of by David in our text, which is the next thing we have to consider.

IV.—*"Mine eyes fail for thy word*, saying, when wilt thou comfort me?" By the "word," in this part of the text, I understand David to mean its accomplishment. The Lord will assuredly try the faith of his children; and if there was nothing to try our faith, there would be no room for patience to have its perfect work. It is in the trial of faith we need patience, and it is at this time that patience is brought into exercise. One way in which faith is tried, is, the Lord's delaying to answer prayer. This the Prophet found very trying, and saith, "How long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? cry out even of violence, and thou wilt not save?" And David, when he saith, "I cry in the day-time, and thou hearest not; in the night season, and am not silent." And the Prophet experienced the same; for he says, "When I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer." Now a soul that is kept long watching and waiting for the Lord to answer his prayers, goes again and again to a throne of grace; pours out his heart before the Lord, and shews him all his trouble; he cries, wrestles, intreats, and importunes the Lord; he confesses his sin, pleads the merit of the

Saviour, and the promise of the Lord. But he gets no answer: Satan and unbelief suggest to him that his prayers are the prayers of the hypocrite; despondency works in his mind, and despair hovers over the soul. Under these things the spirit sinks, the heart faints, and the eyes fail.

Another way in which the Lord trieth faith, is, in hiding himself in times of trouble; as the Prophet saith, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself from the house of Israel, O God the Saviour! The ark, which was an emblem of the Lord's presence, was in the hand of the enemies for twenty years; and, we are told, the whole house of Israel lamented after the Lord. And, no doubt, during that long period hope almost gave up the ghost, their hearts fainted, and their eyes failed, while they waited for the Lord. It may be I have some of you here to-night who have been seeking the Lord for a long time, and have been favoured with helps by the way, tokens for good, and intimations of his love, which has encouraged your soul, and kept hope alive. But hope deferred hath made your heart sick; and you begin to say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" "I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living: for mine eyes fail in looking upward." "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." Perhaps some of you have a heavy cross to carry, a set fast trial to endure: it may be you have carried your troubles to the Lord again and again, and requested him to deliver you out of trouble, or give you increase of strength to bear it. And you have at times been enabled to cast your burden on the Lord, with faith to believe that he would appear to your help, which will beget hope in the soul. But, instead of this, your troubles increase, and you are brought into similar experience to Israel in Egypt, when Moses was sent to them with the glad tidings that the God of their fathers was about to deliver them out of that house of bondage, and that he was sent down for that purpose. They believed his words, and a lively hope of speedy deliverance sprang up in them. But the reverse of this was the case; for Pharaoh made the yoke heavier, and added grief to their sorrow, by increasing their labour, and setting them an impossible task to perform. Consequently, when Moses addressed them the second time, and assured them that the Lord would deliver them, notwithstanding their present bondage, they believed not his word for cruel oppression and vexation of spirit. How often does the poor captive sinner have his hope revived, and his expectation of deliverance raised under the word preached, or by some precious word dropping into his soul! But upon the back of this, his bondage increases; darkness keenly felt, invades his mind; his faith is staggered; and his hope, as to the exercise of it, perishes; his heart sinks, his spirit faints, and his eyes fail.

A great deal of this experience is pointed out in the Psalms, which proves that David had frequently to walk in this painful path wherein his eyes failed, saying, "When wilt thou comfort me?"

And he tells us, that "his throat was dried, and his eyes failed, whilst he waited for his God." He wants, therefore, to know how long the wicked are to triumph? how long is he to take counsel in his soul, having sorrow in his heart daily? and how long the Lord will forget? But David could get no reply to these enquiries. Only this—"The vision is yet for an appointed time." It is not for David, nor for us to know the times which the Father of mercies keeps in his own power. But it is a great blessing, whether we can take the comfort of it, or not, that the Lord "waiteth to be gracious." And when the set time is come to favour the soul, the vision will speak, and not lie; for the Lord will avenge his own elect, although he bear long with them: then the soul will say, "This is our God! we have waited for Him. He will save us; and we will be glad in his salvation!"

V.—The last thing we have to notice is, *David's confession*, "I am become like a bottle in the smoke." This is a singular metaphor to set forth the state of his soul by, and the only place that I am aware of where it is used to that intent. But it is a significant one. In the Eastern countries, they made bottles of the skin of beasts; and, we may gather from the text, that these bottles were (occasionally, at least) placed in the smoke. Now they must of necessity in that situation become both black and dry. And when the spouse in the Songs confesses her original deformity, and what she was still in herself, she saith, "I am black." And although David's eyes failed in waiting for the Lord; yet he saw clearly that he was in himself, a guilty, vile, polluted, and black sinner. He also felt his dryness, deadness, barrenness, and unprofitableness in the things and ways of God; and his soul was almost parched up with the fiery darts of temptation; the sun of persecution that beat on his head; and with thirsting after God as a thirsty land.

But the unfavourable situation of the "bottle," did not at all effect the liquor it contained, being, as we term, 'air-tight.' In like manner, whatever may be the state, frame, feeling, and experience of my soul, these things do not effect the grace of God in me. No; that new wine is preserved in its native purity.

It is evident, from the closing part of our text, that David was, in this trying path, kept in the fear of the Lord; for he says, "Yet do I not forget thy statutes." He was a strict observer of what God had enjoined to his people, notwithstanding the many trials in the path. He frequented a throne of grace; he was found in the sanctuary; and God was with them that called on the name of the Lord, and worshipped him in spirit and in truth. God's word was his rule of faith and practice in the world, in the church, and in the family. On his word he meditated day and night; and he found it to be a light to his path and a lamp to his feet. And he was enabled to cleanse his way by taking heed thereto according to the word of the Lord.

But I must conclude. May the Lord bless what has been said as far as consistent with his will. Amen.

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