

770e
LaD389

(770e) La D 389

Sermon preached at Ebenezer, Clapham, by Mr. J. Delves,
Wednesday evening, February 9th 1955

"Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." Psalm 107 v. 43

This beautiful Psalm is, as will be observed, largely an exhortation to praise God. Why? What reason is there for this? Sometimes there may seem to be very little reason; at other times there may be a very great reason; but the exhortation is to praise the Lord for His mercy. Who deserves that? No one, not one in this chapel. For if God should be strict to mark iniquities then who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Him that He may be feared; and it is these poor people who feel their undeservedness, who value His mercy and who feel it sweet sometimes too, and are favoured to walk in the light and enjoyment of it. When that is the case with them they can say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul". And they would move others to give praise unto this God, as it is in this Psalm often repeated, a beautiful repetition too, not a vain repetition. There are no vain repetitions in the Scriptures; it does not matter how many times the same thing is repeated, if the Lord's favour is felt in our hearts, it can be sweet every time. So it is here, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men." "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever." You see the beauty of this mercy is that it comes so freely and comes to those who have no claim upon it whatever: you have none, I have none. That is why it is so sweet and when you feel it in your soul it lays you in the dust and you never felt such a 'nothing' yourself, and never felt such a sweet love go out from your heart towards Him. Praise the Lord then, and give thanks unto Him for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever. So it goes on "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men."

But who are these people who are so exhorted? Who are they? They do not seem to be the people who walk according to the course of this world, who are going the broad way that leads to destruction. They do not seem to be the kind of people Asaph speaks of in Psalm 73, do they? No, they are a very different kind of people from those. But who they? Here they are in the 2nd verse, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy." They have every reason to do so, have they not? But it is only when the bonds are broken that they can say so. It is only the Lord who can

open the mouth of the dumb; and can so open the mouth, that if it were still silent the very stones would cry, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so". It does not say, Let the redeemed of the Lord think so (although they do think so) but, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy."

One point to notice here is that, between these repeated exhortations to praise the Lord for His goodness, we find these people do get into some strange places. They are not always walking in a quiet path, or riding in a first class carriage on the railway; no, they are hungry and thirsty and faint and in the dark and in all kinds of places, brought to their wits end because of their transgressions and iniquities - all this comes in between. So it seems to be, does it not, in the experience of the Lord's people in their pilgrimage? They do not sail with a strong wind behind them all the time nor indeed very often; many find it to be battling against wind and tide with much opposition, so that they sometimes come to a stand and feel a little like those referred to here, "They reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man." Some of you have got into extreme cases but you can find them in this Psalm; if you should be in such a case tonight, you can find in this Psalm that the Lord's people, those He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, do get into these places. They are not always happy, they are not always miserable, but they have to know both sides of the question, and all this to make them sick of self and fond of Him.

It is a wonderful winding-up that is given to this Psalm! "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." So you see, it not simply or merely passing through these things in their souls, experiencing them, but in observing these things, which shows the need-be to watch carefully and prayerfully the hand of God, His leadings, His providences, His dealings with us in our souls and circumstances too, I have sometimes repeated what I have heard said, 'If we have grace to watch providence, we shall never lack a providence to watch.' So, more or less, it is with the Lord's people and sometimes particularly so. This can come into so many things, and some of them can be very trying, difficult, hard, painful, irritating, resented things.

This watching and observing, is not altogether limited to nice things, pleasant, happy, comfortable things, but it takes in some very deep, hard, difficult things. Read the Psalm and see where these travellers, these seamen, these husbandmen and others got to, the depths they went into, their griefs, their sorrows, their sin, their

sighs, their cries, as it were, take a synopsis of it all, then say, "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." Understanding His loving-kindness here consists principally in observing these things, not going just blindly on as some people do, and say, 'O, I shall get over it, others have had worse things than this.' All that may be perfectly true, but there is a need of watching the Lord's hand in it, waiting on Him. Perhaps you have a difficult thing that gives you inward grief and sorrow - some trial. What can you do with it? Well, the one thing to do is to observe these things and in observing them perhaps there may not seem to be much loving-kindness - not any - everything may seem to be so dark, so bewildering, so perplexing, that you may say, I do not know how I am going to go through with this; and the more you look at it, the more impossible it may become. But this "observing these things" is observing the Lord's hand and the Lord's ways in His dealings with us, and in observing them we shall understand, see and experience the lovingkindness of the Lord. If you look back over your lives, in some things in particular, have you not, as you reflect, seen and understood a little of the lovingkindness of the Lord, even in some of these bitter things? There does not seem to be much lovingkindness in making a man "stagger to and fro like a drunken man" but the Lord may bring us to such a pass; and afterwards we may see much lovingkindness in it: not in our drunkenness but in the purpose of the Lord in it, eventually. So it is that the trial of faith is made precious and is found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. You see, when you are in the trial, and the fire burns and waters rise, and everything looks so dark and impossible, how can you praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works? But when the trial is made precious you can say, O that men would praise the Lord - O that I could praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to such a one.

Here we read of wise people, and some of us have to feel our ignorance; but still the Lord does make His people wise in the sense intended here. He makes them wise, and this wisdom seems to consist very largely in three things. In the first place it is in opening their eyes. Unless we have eyes to see, how can we observe these things? The Psalmist said, "Open Thou mine eyes" (which shows they were open) "that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law". If you took a poor, blind man to the top of Boxhill and said, "Do you not think this is a wonderful panorama of beautiful country?" he would have to say, I am blind, I cannot see it. So it is with us in the Lord's spiritual

dealings; in order to be wise here our eyes must be opened, and the Spirit of the Lord can, and does open the blind eyes so that there can be a right watching and observing of the Lord's dealings, of His works both in providence and in grace. There will be something to watch - there will surely be something to watch, to observe, every day, more or less. Of course, we are all naturally apprehensive, are we not? When something comes we begin to say, if this goes on what shall I do? or, if it gets worse what shall I do? Well this is where we need this wisdom, to observe these things - to watch the Lord's hand. Things may seem to be closing up to you, but often when things are closing up, when the Lord is closing one door, He is opening another. "Whoso is wise." O may the Lord give us eyes to see! There is much to see if we have sight, this spiritual sight to watch the Lord's hand and watch His dispensations, His dealings with us in all the circumstances of our lives.

Not only do we need eyes to see but we need ears to hear. Said the Lord, "My sheep hear My voice." Moreover in the Lord's instruction to the churches, it is said in The Revelation, each time, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" - but it must be a spiritual ear. O you may be walking in something very perplexing, very disconcerting, and may seem to be alone in it and then hear the voice - the still, small, voice just bringing something into your heart - and you may find it has such an effect upon you as to enable you to commit the matter to the Lord, leave it to Him and watch His hand: a little like Habakkuk, after the Lord had spoken to him very solemnly concerning what would come upon the land, he said, "I will set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved" (argued with, by the people) as though, when he told the people they would say, This is not right, that ought not to be. All kinds of things were brought up against him, and so you may find it in your own heart. Sometimes there is a lot of argument goes on within because there are two armies, and where the Lord has given faith that faith will have to battle with inherent unbelief and there will be a lot of arguing, and much conflict at times: But still faith in your heart will always speak to the honour of God. It does not matter how dark the providence, how perplexing the trial, how difficult the path, how bewildering the circumstance, faith in your heart will always speak to the honour of God - it never replies against Him; but you may feel so much of the opposite - perhaps in a day! You may start out on a journey and feel to have such a sense of the goodness and mercy of the Lord, but before you get far down the street you hear a different voice, (unbelieving voice,) and all

that is opposite comes up against it, and there you are in a conflict, and feeling like this Psalm has it, "reeling to and fro like a drunken man." But it is the redeemed of the Lord who feel like this, who have these changes, go up and down, in and out, and experience all these conflicting things.

Then there is another point in this wisdom besides having an ear to hear, and that is a heart to understand. The Lord says of His people, "I will give them a heart to know Me." Beside this, in the new covenant promises He says, "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people." Well then, when the Spirit of the Lord writes His law in your inward parts, that is in your soul, there is some right understanding of things; there is no more conjecture, imagination or supposition. No, this is altogether different; there is just a little of this heavenly wisdom now, a right understanding of things in your soul, of God, of His ways, of His dealings.

Then there is another point to add to this - the Lord will bring you to see the wisdom of His dealings - and that is not always so, is it? It is only as the Lord is pleased to shine into the darkness that we can see the wisdom of His ways. Some of you may have had a little favour in your souls in a time of trouble so as to be able to say, Thou art too wise to err, too good to be unkind; and yet, perhaps, a few minutes after, you find your own natural resentment rise up and you are fighting against the Lord as hard as you can fight. O what poor things we are. But in this Psalm, you see it is the same God who raises the stormy wind who makes it a calm again: He gives the command. Indeed it can be true literally, but it seems to bear more particularly on the spiritual experience and pathway of the Lord's people - "He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind." You say, O if it were not for this head wind it would be so much better. No, it would not - not if the Lord commands it, because what He commands is always commanded for the best; not to be pleasant, possibly, but it is commanded for the best in His purposes. We often see, in the Lord's dealings with His people, that He puts them sometimes into a great trial of faith, even in their circumstances. That seems strange, does it not? but more often it is in the trial, in the hard, painful thing, that the Lord's people see His lovingkindness. It is the redeemed of the Lord who see it. We know the world have their trials, losses, bereavements and some very distressing things, but they do not see the lovingkindness of the Lord in anything: it is only those wise people who see that. Perhaps you say, O I

wish I was wise then, for I can only seem to see everything against me. Well, the best thing you can do, if that is the case (and it is not the case with everyone) is to observe these things and there may be much more of the lovingkindness of the Lord in them than ever you could anticipate.

There is another side to this. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things (that is the Lord's goodness and mercy manifested to them) when He comes and blesses their souls, touches their heart, sheds His love abroad, breaks their bonds, and brings them out into a wealthy place, it is sweet to observe these things. You can look at the good things and the dark things and, just for a few minutes, see mercy in both, and as the Psalmist says in another Psalm, "Sing of mercy and judgment." Unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing." He does not say, I will sing of mercy and complain of judgment - no, he says, I will sing of them both. Well, if you can look back and see how the Lord binds together the links in the chain of Providence in your life, perhaps you can sing of them both, and say as here, "O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men."

"Whoso is wise and will observe these things." What things? Well, there are many things in this Psalm and this seems to piece them together; it sums them all up. There is a description given of these travellers, these seamen, and others, and the places they got into and it is summed up in this, "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." What is there to observe then? Well, in reading the Psalm, you can perhaps see a portrait of yourself. They were to observe how the Lord had gathered them out from the East, the West, the North and the South; He had gathered them out from those lands. The Lord knows where His people are, and, while this may refer to the children of Israel as such, does it not refer to His spiritual Israel whom He gathers from this place, and that place, and another place? There is something to observe in that, and something to observe in the way the Lord brings matters about, to open their blind eyes; sometimes some circumstance, or service. He has His own way, but He gathers them out, out of the world, separates them from it and forms them to be a "people for His praise." Let us observe these things then.

But another thing to observe here is the way He leads them - and that is not always so easy to believe, is it? "He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." "He led

them forth!" When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, the Lord led them forth, but not by a straight way, to get there as quickly as possible; no, they had to turn about and face insuperable difficulties: but, "the right way!" Yes, it was the right way, because the leading was so clear, so distinct - there was no mistake about it. But why through the Red Sea, and to become seemingly trapped - no way out, and their enemies pursuing them? But it was the right way, was it not, for the Lord to manifest His way in dividing the waters, so that they went through the flood on foot - it was the right way after all. But how can it be the right way when a poor thing comes, apparently, to the Red Sea and to destruction too, and it seems there is no way out? It has never been so with God yet: it may seem so to us, but with God nothing is impossible. Whoso is wise and will observe these things - that He led them forth by the right way that they might go to a city of habitation.

Another point to observe is, He brought them down when "they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High:" "Therefore He brought down their heart with labour; they fell down and there was none to help." Even this was over-ruled, not to condone their evil ways, but to fulfil His gracious word; so that when they came to that pass, they fell down and there was none to help. As in Isaiah, "whom no man can comfort;" but even there they cried unto the Lord in their trouble. This seems to keep coming up. It is another very beautiful repetition - when they got to these passes they cried unto the Lord in their trouble; again and again when they got down into these extreme circumstances the Lord regarded them. There is something very sweet about this, which shows and sets forth the longsuffering of a covenant-keeping God. He did not fail them; no, when they cried unto Him in their trouble, He saved them out of their distresses and gave them deliverance again and again. So it has to be; this is what the apostle evidently felt when he said, "Who delivered us from so great a death and doth deliver, in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us." O, what a mercy it is that the Lord is so longsuffering to us, in and amidst all our provocations. Let us observe these things!

Has there ever been a time with you when you have, as it were, fallen down and there was none to help? No, there has never been such a time; there may be no creature to help, but even then you have found there is One to help, He is the Lord Himself. It is these poor, helpless things whom He does help, not those who can help themselves, but those who are brought to feel their own helplessness; and this is where faith is so needful and so strengthening when the Lord gives it. A poor weak creature can be strong in His God. We read in the epistle to the

Hebrews, "Out of weakness were made strong." Out of weakness! Whoso is wise will observe these things....

Another point is that the Lord "sent His word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions." He sent His word! And what is this word spiritually but His precious gospel? The healing balm of Gilead is this and it will heal the sickness of the soul and also remove all fretfulness and rebellion against the Lord's ways, and bring a sweet submission to His sovereign will. Well, it is a mercy to have a God to go to and feel to have some access to Him in your heart, especially when burdens press so heavily upon you. Whoso is wise and will observe these things. O, sometimes it is sweet to look back and observe things in the past. But there may be something particular just now, in which you may need to observe the Lord's hand. Whoso is wise and will observe these things. I cannot go into all the things mentioned here but you can read them. Here it is said of Him that "He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble." Do you know any thing about that? Yet the same God "makes the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still."

Then there is something very speaking about these poor things who have feared destruction and been filled with terror by the sight of those high and boisterous waves - "Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desire haven." O what a gladness there is when the Lord appears to deliver, quietens the billows and makes the storm a calm. - "Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven." He turns the tables too, sometimes. "He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell there." "He turneth the wilderness into a standing water - just the opposite - and dry ground into watersprings." I did not intend reading all this Psalm but I did not know where to leave off, so read through all of it. He reverses things here and He can reverse things for you.

"For the wickedness of them that dwell therein." The Lord withheld the rain because of their wickedness - very painful, there was no food for them to eat; but when the Lord sent the rain again (as He did sometimes in answer to prayer) He turned the wilderness into standing water and dry ground into watersprings. That was literally true and is it not also spiritually true, and true in your circumstances? Has not the Lord dried something up in the sense, as it were, of Elijah at the

brook Cherith? After a time the brook dried up and Elijah had to go to Zarephath. But when the Lord dries one stream He can open another, for He has command of all; He can turn the tables, make the rivers a wilderness - bring "it to pass"; and He can do the others, turn the wilderness into watersprings. Has He not done this sometimes? Has He not with the sweet rain of His grace made the wilderness as standing water and the dry ground into watersprings? O this dry, hard, cracked ground! Even in this country the ground becomes so hard you cannot make any impression, but when the rain comes it softens the surface of the earth and makes it so impressionable under us! So it is when the Lord comes! "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth".

"Even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord". You see His lovingkindness in His dealings. Lovingkindness appears to men; the love of God is manifested in practical ways, in His personal dealings with us. "They shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." Are there not some here who have been given a little of this wisdom and grace to observe these things? Some things have been very sweet to observe. Have we not in our humble measure just a little understanding of the lovingkindness of the Lord?

May the Lord continue His mercies, and cause that we may be favoured to see His lovingkindness, and in the circumstances, trials and difficulties of life, may wisdom be given to observe these things and to understand the lovingkindness of the Lord!

FOR FURTHER COPIES PLEASE WRITE TO:

I. Fuller & Friends, 9 Sibella Road, Clapham, London SW4 6JA