

SB
679
1355 v
Lapstiz

LIBRARY OF THE
GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday evening 8 February 1922

Psalm 119 v 54

"Thy statutes have been my songs in the house
of my pilgrimage"

Did you ever feel that you received the Word of God into your hearts as the very Word of God to you? and did you ever feel as if, against that word, there came suddenly a flood of horrible, unspeakable thoughts, as if when a vast reservoir suddenly gives way the whole surrounding country is inundated? You may have felt as if your faith in holy Scripture suddenly has given way. It is a very painful experience; it will shake you to pieces if you get it. But I am apt to think that it is only the people who have real faith in the Scriptures who get violent and sudden assaults against them. A steady, a growing unbelief, infidelity of the Scriptures will live in the ungodly, but an assault, a powerful assault, against the very Word of God, that you have loved and prized and praised and clung to, with your whole heart, that is an affliction. Some of us know it is. The Lord does give His Word to His people. "The words which Thou gavest Me I have given them". If we are the Lord's there will be times when He will give to us His Word, when it will talk to us, will show to us our sins, shortcomings, our failures. Show to us, in its own clear light, the old man which we have which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts and make us understand that there is no hope of getting rid of this as long as we live. To show us also that there is a blessed hope of receiving grace from time to time to subdue it, so that the promise will stand out: "Sin shall not have dominion over you for ye are not under the law but under grace." My dear friends, did God ever speak to you by His Word? Did Christ ever give His Father's Word to you? in any measure, in any part of it, making it as the living Word of God in your hearts. There is a difference between a general approval of the Scriptures and a reception of them in the power and light of the Holy Ghost. The former may consist with a smooth behaviour and a general deportment that is correct, and yet leave a person destitute of vital religion. The latter may have to do

with a crooked, perverse mind and will, with a mocking Ishmael, with many evils coming against it, and solemn providences appearing to contradict it, and yet a person, so troubled, and so blessed, will come out well at the last. Our pilgrimage is short. If we are saints we are going from the City of Destruction to the heavenly Jerusalem; we have to traverse the wilderness. There is no track in it. We cannot find a way in it. There is no sustenance in it. There are dangers in it, innumerable; fiery serpents, confusions, emptiness, a void, a waste. This pilgrimage must be entered into, and upon, by all who fear the Lord. It was this that the Apostle Paul expressed in these words which we were reading just now. "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." We are strangers and pilgrims. Said the Psalmist in this Psalm: "I am a stranger on the earth". What then? "Hide not Thy commandments from me." Do not be silent to me, that is what it is. Do speak to me. In an earlier Psalm the Psalmist said: "Be not silent to me, lest if Thou be silent to me I become like those that go down to the pit". Nothing between a sinner who is on the heavenly pilgrimage and lots of woe and destruction, but the living God in His blessed word and heavenly teachings. The pilgrimage is attended by many dangers, the chief of them in the heart of the pilgrim. That enmity, that ignorance, that vanity, that perversity which everyone confesses who has experience of the same, and here lies the chief danger. Each pilgrim will be saying from time to time, "O wretched man that I am". Sometimes it will be just as with Israel of old, would God we had died when we were at ease. We have only come on pilgrimage to meet dangers and death. And yet the face, the heart is steadfastly set to go to heaven. And this pilgrimage is of such a nature that no-one can give understanding in it but God. I can tell you, by the help of the Lord, about it. I may be enabled to describe some way of it, some little parts. I may tell you the truth, but only God can make you believe the truth and understand the things for yourselves. The Apostle Paul said to Timothy, after writing many things, "The Lord give thee understanding in all things." The Psalmist said: "Give me understanding and I shall live". Vital religion is a wonderful mystery; how that a man has nothing and yet hopes to possess heaven. That he is a sinner, and yet sometimes rejoices in holiness. That he is a poor, weak creature, with many enemies against him, as

principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places, and yet he expects victory over all. That he is distressed, and yet is not overcome; cast down but not in despair of getting by and getting through. Real religion is a great mystery. I understand but little of it, but it is a great mystery. And yet in this pilgrimage, the pilgrims do sometimes sing, and this sometimes is an added mystery, how one, burdened, distressed, distracted, shall sing. How one in pain, shall sing. How one, baffled and opposed at every turn, and in every step, shall sing sometimes. Not when these things and troubles are absent, but with them. This is, I say, an added mystery. If we sing songs there will be something in the songs. They are not empty songs, not meaningless. They will be songs out of your hearts, you who do sing. They will be songs that will set forth something of heaven, and of heavenly teaching, and of what God has said, what He has made you hope for. Thy statutes, the Word of God, Thy teachings, the words given to me, as if the Psalmist should say, what I have had out of the Word of God, what He has spoken to me; these words have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. Here I am a traveller; I have no abiding city here; I have no place of long continued rest. I am going through a desert, and here I dig a pool, and then the rain comes and fills it. Here I rest by the side of water for a time, and then I move on and I am not alone for the word of God is with me. This is what the pilgrim says. The statutes of God are the very words of God, the words which He has given, written in the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the statutes of the Lord. They are His judgements, His law, His word, His precepts, and His commandments, for all these words running through this Psalm more or less set forth the same thing, the word of the living God. Here then is a very great field. Here is something which, as opened and made over to a person, will constitute songs.

Let us begin, as the Lord may help us, just at the beginning, namely with the manifestation of God. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God". And when that took place of which John speaks - "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" - then a multitude of the heavenly host came and sang - "Glory to God in the highest. On earth peace and goodwill toward men." Here is a statute and this statute of a revealed Saviour made known in the heart of a sinner will become the song of that sinner as

he is a pilgrim in the house of his pilgrimage. O what a subject, what a song. Two or three things are essential to the singing of this wondrous revelation or statute. Let me name them. First we must know that here we have no continuing city; that here is no rest, no home. We must know that we were driven out of Eden, away from God, and from that day to this men have had their faces to the west, their backs to the rising of the sun, that is to say, they have been walking away from the light all their days. And my friends, it was no little thing that took place when the Lord drove Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden. Think of the home that the garden was. Think of its beautiful walks and think of what made them beautiful. Not their own inherent comeliness, not the fruitfulness of the trees, - all of which Adam might eat save one - No, not the grateful shadow from the sun, not the refreshing streams that ran through that garden, parting in the four rivers; not these things made the garden lovely, but the presence of God. I do not doubt that Adam had the presence of God. God did not make His creature to leave him alone. There never was loneliness in heaven. The Trinity had their own glorious, to us inconceivable, communion. The denial of the Trinity sets forth an eternal loneliness that does not consist with happiness, and God did not make man to be alone in Eden. He made an help-meet for him - an emblem, as Paul says, of the great mystery of the fellowship of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5 v 32). In Eden - man's home - he lived in peace under his Creator, acknowledging His wisdom in the suitability of his wife and an earthly paradise. But what a difference when God sent the man away from his home, turned him out of that garden and he wandered away. This is expressed by the Apostle Paul: "Without God and without hope in the world". O sinner, you who are dead in sin, that is just your case: "Without God". No hope of a good time, no hope for eternity, no hope of anything in this life but transitory pleasures, passing joys, emptiness, vanity; nothing else. Well that is all that we have. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." So Adam had no song. As a fallen man, driven away from Eden, and from his home, he had no song. That is the case with us. We have no song, nothing to sing about; only to say, woe, woe, emptiness, disappointment and death; that is all we have dear friends. Now if the Lord has taught us this, and it is essential that we should know it in that measure which God may be pleased to show it to us, I say if He has taught us this, then we know another thing which

is essential, and that is our deep and utter unworthiness through guilt. That we are dead creatures, unworthy of God. However you may have learned that, if you have learned it under the instruction of the Spirit, you have learned a great truth, an awful truth. My friends, we are just fit fuel for hell, by nature children of wrath even as others. Now if we have these two essentials, essential I mean to the reception of Christ, then He will most graciously do something, namely give us the word. "I have given them Thy Word". "The Word which Thou gavest Me I have given them." Hope is no dream; hope in God is no mere imagination. It is no natural springing up of hope through an imagination; it is a solid thing. It comes by the Word of God. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God". "Begotten again by the Word of truth", an exceeding great and precious promise given. "I have given them Thy word". Any Scripture, any promise, any part of the holy and everlasting gospel given into the heart of a poor, empty, lost, guilty creature, will become, in that sinner's, that pilgrim's heart, a song. Yes, you will sing, in the spirit you will sing, and sing of that which God has given to you. This will be the burden of your song, the truth which has been revealed. Said God to one church: "Remember how thou hast heard and received and hold fast". They had received something into their hearts. Not a notion about the Scripture, but the very Word of God they had received. Let us look at this point - and dont hurry away from it for it is very vital - whether we have received the living word of God into our hearts with unction, light, life, and power. I would not distress a child of God if I knew it, for anything, but let us be particular here. Some may say they have not so received any Scripture, but if such are led and enabled narrowly to examine their experience, they may find they have had something, which they really hardly knew to have come as I have mentioned. But if a word falls into the mind, if it works there as leaven works in meal, as light insinuates itself into this chapel when the day dawns; if the word comes and abides and speaks and instructs, and perhaps even astonishes the person in whom it is, with the truth it opens and expresses; if it turns the attention to God; if it draws the heart to Him; if it teaches a soul to pray; if, in some measure, it makes Christ, in the desire of Him, precious; if it makes Him in any degree see the loveliness of Christ, the desirableness of Christ, and the suitability of Christ and the fullness of Christ, and therewith

enables the sinner to say, O if only He were mine, and draws him out in humble, fervent, supplication to that gracious One, causing him to say, do come, and that, not once, not twice, but all through his pilgrimage, ever growing in beauty, and in loveliness and in desirableness to this person, this poor pilgrim; then one may say this, there has been given to that sinner, that pilgrim, the very Word of God which he is to sing about, which shall constitute a song for him. Come saints and sing of that Jesus you have seen by faith, that Lord proclaimed in the gospel, proclaimed with some light and life in your hearts. Come, while deploring your sinfulness, and while sometimes afraid of the dangers in the way, and your view of your own weakness, and inability to take a single step in that way by yourself, come and sing of Him who heavenly Joshua-like as He is, says, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not. I will lead them in paths that they have not known. I will make darkness light before them and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them." You would like - in another frame of mind you would like - to have the crooked things taken away and the darkness to be dispelled, but, says the Lord, I will make the crooked things straight and the rough places plain. Then you wont want to get away, you wont want to run out of the path God has put you in of tribulation. You will be content to walk therein, and sing to the praise of Him who has done so much as to speak to you; speak in your heart. O that is a great thing, and a very great vital point in experimental religion, that God should have said something to you. And even it may have been said - This is the way, by faith in the bleeding Lamb, faith in His justifying righteousness, faith in the eternal love of God, faith in the omnipotence of Jesus Christ and in the infinite wisdom of Him also, of Him in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are. By faith in Him you will walk through deserts dark as night and see before you by occasions a wondrous thing, a city descending from heaven, a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. And, swift as thought your whole affections will be in that city, with that blessed God of whom you get a view, and you will see the track of the dear Redeemer. A track of suffering I see and I'll pursue the narrow way till Him I view. "Thy statutes", Thy holy gospel, "have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." Faith here is a wonderful grace. It does many things and among them is this that it makes the person who receives the statutes of the Lord in

unctuous power prophesy of good things which he has yet to receive and enjoy. You may sing a song like this, made first in your heart. Music is there first, then you sing. Yes, you can sing as the Psalmist did: "The Lord is my Shepherd" That is a truth; it goes forward - "I shall not want". Faith can prophesy of good things to come. The law was a shadow of them; Christ is the substance of them and He, made known to you, brings this to pass: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Yea, you continue to sing with that good man, looking forward into the future unknown, and say: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Now there is a song made up of the statutes of God. The promise of eternal life, the promise of a gracious guidance, the promise of a dear Redeemer in His mercy brought home with some light and life and you begin to sing this very statute of the Lord in the house of your pilgrimage. And sometimes you may sing as one has written it in our hymnbook

Yes, I to the end shall endure
As sure as the earnest is given
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven

Well it is a great thing to sing thus. But dear friends, I am rather going forward and omitting for the moment to speak of another matter which strictly and correctly should have gone before what I have just said. We are poor, afflicted people - if we are gracious people I mean; sin is an affliction - but moreover and worse, if worse can be that we are sinners, we are very apt to go astray, to turn aside. What said the Psalmist at the close of this Psalm? "I have gone astray like a lost sheep". That is a solemn thing but very common. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep". And what does the Lord do when you go astray? He sends some affliction to bring you back. He sends affliction to drive you home again to anchor in His grace. And that will bring you to sing a song, a beautiful song with a base note for the foundation of it. This is it: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn Thy statutes." Good for me that I have not missed the rod, that God has had enough care for me and love to send a rod to me and lay it on and bring me to my senses. Before I was afflicted I went astray. Now I have learned Thy statutes. I have

learned the way of Thy testimonies. In this Psalm you will find the Psalmist saying: "I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies." When you think on your ways you will be very much ashamed. No child of God can think on his ways without shame. They are such foolish ways, such base ways, such yielding to sin sometimes, such turning aside to vanity, such setting the heart and the eyes on vanity, so as you have had to pray often: "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity", and again "Let my heart be sound in Thy statutes." And here the rod of God, according to the Scriptures, will be the means of giving you a song. Nay, the very rod itself will constitute part of the song. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn Thy statutes." That I may learn, not only my foolishness, and weakness, and vanity, but also learn that Thou art a good God. Now there is a statute you find in another Psalm; this is it: "With the Lord there is mercy that He may be feared and with Him is plenteous redemption." You will need it. You will feel your need of it. You will feel, but for that plenteous redemption, for that mercy, there would be no hope for you, and when the Lord brings in some testimony of His mercy and of His plenteous redemption, and these come and meet you, and help you, and comfort you, then you will say that it was good for me that the Lord did not leave me in that folly. Good that He did not leave me long to get my heart and conscience hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Good that He did not leave me to go on in my own way and have my own will but that, on the contrary, He sent after me, sent a messenger after me, sent trouble after me; that He hedged up my way so that I could not find my paths. "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage". Dear friends, affliction will, as it is sent and sanctified to you, become part of your song, and you will bless God for afflicting you. But this always, when you sing rightly, will be mixed with it, render it a certain sweet thing to you to sing, mercy mingles with judgement. "I will sing of mercy and judgement, unto Thee O Lord will I sing". This singing is called making melody in your hearts unto the Lord. It is called bringing the sacrifice of praise to Him, the fruit of your lips. Well it is a great thing to be led and instructed so to sing.

And now one more word and I close. The pilgrimage is coming to an end. Israel's wandering finished, finished according to God's

Covenant in the land of promise. All their wanderings finished there. They entered the goodly land and then they ate the corn of that land, drank of the rivers of milk and honey, partook of the goodness of God, dwelt in houses they did not build, and had the fruit of vineyards they planted not. Their pilgrimage ended. This is typical. This may be in us, in our hearts. We are not to be pilgrims for long. Comparatively, it is a minute, a moment, as Paul says in the Corinthians in the chapter preceding the one I read. "Our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." "For", he said, "we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God", and he looked at it. We look at the things not seen, we look at that building of God which is not seen, and for which the Lord has wrought us and prepared us. "He that has wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit" in our hearts. That is the end. "Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." Nor is this a vague thing. No this has a certainty. "We know not what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." O pilgrims, there is coming an end, and the end is heaven, the end is rest. No more dangers, no more sickness, no more devils, no more wanderings and no more loathing of the light food, no more temptations. I think that when it pleases God to give an afflicted child of His a view of that that remains to him and is reserved for him, it produces in his heart a forth-reaching unto that which is set before his faith. "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." The tabernacle is to be struck one day. It is pitched for a short time. It is to be struck, taken down, and the poor pilgrims who rested in it for a short time will fly away; escape as a bird out of the snare of the fowler. Fly away and be at rest. Have not you sung sometimes

Had I the pinions of a dove
I'd fly to Thee and be at rest

That is coming. Therefore poor, wearied, tried, tempted, harassed

pilgrims, often wondering where the scene will end and how you will get through, because you see no track, no way, remember this, who brought you into the wilderness, who has preserved you? Whose was the cloud that covered you, whose the light that showed you which way to go again and again. You must say, the Lord's, the Lord's. He shone, He covered, He blessed, He helped. Well then the end will be just this, that that same good God will, when He has brought you to the very verge of the heavenly city, open the portals and take you in. But while here below what a mercy to sing sometimes, to sing "The Lord is my Shepherd". To sing, He has made a promise and He is faithful. To sing "God that cannot lie". To sing to the dear Redeemer whose sufferings were so infinite, so wonderful, and vicarious withal. To sing to Him who went lower than you can go, went so low that you may rise to heaven. Sing to the blessed Spirit who has done so much for you and in you. Sing to Him who made the Word of God spirit and life in you, and made it profitable to you. "Thy statutes", Thy holy Word, "have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage". One says, I have got no song at all. Many complaints; yes. Ah, think again, as one says, think again. Were half the breath spent vainly in complaints, he says, to heaven in supplication sent, your cheerful song would oftener be, "Hear what the Lord has done for me." (394) May we be corrected where we are wrong, saved from all the mistakes of our natures, and the sins of our hearts, and have the living word of God in us, to talk to us, reproofing us, comforting us, teaching us, revealing God to us, and bringing us into union with Him.

AMEN.