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Law 144

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## The Rest of the Soul

Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 9th November 1988

“Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.”

Psalm 116:7

It is, alas, the most grievous and constant propensity with even the very best of God's people to continue to seek to find rest in some other place or thing than in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is certain proof that we are poor, fallen sinners and that we, as fallen creatures, have a nature that is constantly after those things which cannot profit us. It is the continual search of our nature to try and find some peace, satisfaction, joy, rest or good in that which is not of him who is only and alone the true peace and real source of good to the believer. Our ways are like the child who is continually seeking to pursue the butterfly and cannot apprehend it. Still we search to find some something here below that shall be our peace, something in which we may find some little satisfaction and rest.

But, if we are among God's people, he will not have this, for he has said, “My son, give me thy heart.” (Proverbs 23:26) That is but a gracious, just, equal and right injunction, for if the Lord Jesus is our portion, he is worthy of all our affections, heart and mind all the time. Alas, how frequently we are found at this fruitless business of seeking something in which we may find, at least in a measure and degree, satisfaction to our natural mind, natural feelings and natural affections, which is, when looked into closely, nothing other and nothing less than idolatry. Unless the Lord has the first and proper place in our affections, then something else must have that place. So in the Lord's eternal goodness and loving-kindness toward his people he will see to it that they make this search in vain, for he will be pleased to stir things up, cause them to be emptied and bring them into deep and great disappointment, causing them from time to time to really feel the vanity of all things.

In making such a statement I do not for one moment mean that the people of God are not very grateful and thankful at times for God's providential goodness, loving-kindness and mercy manifested in those things given for our help and comfort for the journey; but they will never give us rest as being the object, aim and end of our desire and pursuit. There is only one object that can give us true satisfaction, rest and peace, and that is that rest which God has promised and provided in the gospel, and which is to be found only and alone in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, it is a painful business sometimes, yet very profitable, when the Lord is pleased to put in a thorn to wean our wandering and wavering affections.

*A thorn in the flesh they shall have,  
Their roving affections to win.*

(Gadsby's 298)

This is but the manifestation of God's goodness, wisdom and loving-kindness to his people, that they should not be left to the pursuit of those things which, in the end, can only bring them disappointment, vanity, frustration, vexation and dreadful workings in their spirit—sometimes of awful rebellion and peevishness. I suppose there never was a person who entered into this world who was in a better position to prove the value of the things of the earth and their nature than godly Solomon: never a richer king, never one in a position to possess everything that his heart and mind could wish for. He made the experiment. As he says, he gathered much knowledge, cattle, sheep, orchards, men-singers and women-singers; he planted fine gardens and vineyards, he gathered gold and silver beyond counting. After he had done all that, what did he say? “Vanity of vanities and vexation of spirit.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14) Well, I am sure that where a child of God is concerned he may truly say:

*The portion of a beast,  
Will not content my heart;*

*The God of spirits only can  
Fill up the vast desires of man.*

(Gadsby's 886)

O, if Jesus is ours and we are his, he will win our hearts, he will possess our hearts, and as we are brought from time to time to see the vanity of all below, that will put in our poor spirit the same feelings the Psalmist had; disappointment and the vanity of all our getting. It gives no rest, no satisfaction, no joy or delight.

'Return unto thy rest, O my soul.' First on account of the vanity, disappointment and vexation felt, and then, the most beautiful, sweet and blessed constraint and encouragement upon the remembrance of God's past goodness and his present goodness—'for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.'

I want to try and look a little at this word 'return' before looking at the rest of our text. 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul.' What a blessed, profitable and effectual experience this is as wrought in the heart of an exercised child of God—to be returning. There are one or two things in regard to the feeling and the exercise of that soul whose back is now turned upon everything that has previously seduced him, enticed him, tempted him and drawn him away, as he finds his heart, eyes, hands and feet are now all Christward: he is turned. Instead of being in a wandering and, therefore, in a troubled, burdened and distressed condition, he is now turned.

*Weary of wandering from the Lord,  
And now made willing to return.*

(Gadsby's 1060)

By this word we are to understand that it is not the first time that this character has ventured and fallen down at Jesus' feet and looked, pleaded, waited and hoped that he might be given again a felt, blessed, proved and enjoyed interest in this glorious person who is all in all.

*Thou art of all thy gifts thyself the crown!  
Give what thou canst, without thee we are poor;  
And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away.*

(W. Cowper)

Ah, Christ, and Christ only is the source and giver of all good to the people of God. If he is ours and we are his we shall find true rest nowhere else.

It is not the first time, but it may be many a time that this exercised soul has been caused to look again. That look, a believing look, a real look of the soul to Christ, is a returning. In that look there is desire, life, longing. The whole soul is in that look toward this blessed and precious person, so that to look to Jesus is to return to him. That fresh and renewed exercise of the soul in a real and felt longing for an interest in him is returning.

*Thyself bestow, for thee alone,  
My All in all, I pray.*

*Less than thyself will not suffice  
My comfort to restore.*

(Gadsby's 940)

So this soul, though feebly perhaps in regard to their own feeling, is in all reality and sincerity returning to his rest which is in Christ and nowhere else. In this returning there is always repentance, for repenting is returning. Look at the condition, the feeling, the deportment of a returning soul, returning to Christ, to his rest. That soul is of necessity a mourning and a repenting soul. There is mourning over the wandering, mourning over sin, vanity, evil ways and a mourning after him. After having sought for some rest and satisfaction in the creature and finding none, the soul is now willing to return.

But not only is there a seeking for rest in the creature and in the things of time and sense, the things about us, but alas for us, how often we may seek for some rest in ourselves. We are always hunting for something in self to satisfy us, to bring us a little comfort, consolation, satisfaction or joy, but we seek it in vain. We shall prove again and again, "In me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." (Romans

7:18) “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” (Jeremiah 17:9) Creature strength, creature wisdom, creature goodness often shows its filthy, hateful, ugly head and rises up afresh. Therefore it is necessary that the exercised child of God should be brought off himself totally and utterly. He cannot rest in himself, he tries to but he cannot, and he finds that in himself there is only that to vex him, grieve him, and cause him great lamentation. By reason of this that word and prayer of the Psalmist is fulfilled: “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity,” (Psalm 119:37) that is self, vain self, the world, the vain world, the things of time and sense and all their emptiness. “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.” What is the alternative, the blessed alternative?

*To keep our eyes on Jesus fixed,  
And there our hope to stay,  
The Lord will make his goodness pass  
Before us in the way.*

(Gadsby's 554)

Now I want to try and look a little at what this returning soul is seeking after: ‘Return unto thy rest, O my soul.’ This weary, wandering, exercised soul is seeking a fresh, sweet experience of rest. Rest of a spiritual nature is not like rest of a literal nature, for rest of a spiritual nature is that delight felt, that sweet trust and complacency in Christ, that joy and rejoicing in him which fills the soul with peace, joy, delight and rest:—ah! says the soul,

*Now I have found the ground wherein  
My anchor, hope, shall firm remain.*

(Gadsby's 96)

O, those who have found rest in Christ Jesus have found eternal rest and satisfaction. Just a drop of this, just a sweet glimpse, a sweet communication of this will satisfy the soul. It overwhelms and it fills the soul. I am sure if we could get one real smile from his blessed countenance we should be more than satisfied, we should be truly happy, we should then be able to say:

*Let worldly minds the world pursue,  
It has no charms for me.*

(Gadsby's 1100)

I have found something far, far better than this poor world can afford; I have Jesus Christ and he is the delight of my soul.

What a wonderful mercy to be returning, for we have not yet obtained, entered into or laid hold of eternal rest, but are among those poor souls being taught of the Holy Spirit and who are returning. In some past favoured moment of our souls we have known a little of it, but now things are very different with us, yet we desire a sweet believing and living faith that we might enter in. This is a part of that wonderful word in Hebrews: “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest,” (Hebrews 4:11) which is here by faith, gospel faith, and hereafter in the full, blessed and eternal enjoyment of it.

I must try and look at one or two of the characteristics or features of this blessed rest which the soul desires to return to. Happiness—why, what a word it is! How little we know of it, how very little we enjoy of it—happiness, real happiness. Well, where is it to be found, real happiness?

*Happiness, thou lovely name,  
Where's thy seat, O tell me, where?  
Object of my first desire,  
Jesus, crucified for me;  
All to happiness aspire,  
Only to be found in thee.  
Source and Giver of repose,  
Singly from thy smile it flows;  
Happiness complete is thine,  
Mine it is, if thou art mine.*

*Lord it is not life to live,  
If thy presence thou deny;  
Lord, if thou thy presence give,  
'Tis no longer death to die.*

(Gadsby's 988)

This is rest and happiness; the soul's complete joy and satisfaction in this glorious and wonderful object, Jesus Christ. Who can possibly conceive his glory, beauty, loveliness, the wonder of his glorious person to a real believer?

*How sweet the name of Jesus sounds  
In a believer's ear!  
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,  
And drives away his fear.*

(Gadsby's 135)

Christ in his glorious person, his supreme perfections and the exercise of those glorious perfections in love, power and goodness toward poor sinners for their present and eternal good.

Very briefly then, first to rejoice or rest in his love.

*The love of Christ is rich and free;  
Fixed on his own eternally;*

(Gadsby's 633)

It is sovereign, incomprehensible, boundless, a sea that cannot be fathomed, that has no brim or shore. O, what a wonderful thing to be favoured to rest in his love!

Now there may be times when we have thought or sought to rest, or to be happy, in regard to our love to Jesus Christ. It is a most blessed thing to really feel love to him, it is sweet. Love is its own reward. It does not want anything else but its object, it is satisfied in itself. That is sweet. But, my friends, how often have we any reason or cause to rest in a feeling of love in our hearts to Christ? We are often so cold, hard, and destitute of what we would feel, we cannot rest in that. But if we can rest in his love to us, that is something we can always rest in, for his love does not change; it is always the same. What we may have felt in our sweetest and most favoured moments in regard to the love of Christ to our poor souls, this love is exactly the same in our darkest moments, our worst moments; his love does not change. What a mercy to have that faith in exercise to believe and rest in his love! 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul.'

One more word in regard to that—how many of us can look back over our experience and go to a particular place or spot where we trust we really received a token of the love of Christ to our poor souls, and at that moment and under that sweet experience we said in all humility, 'I believe he loves me.' Now, if we have got that token, no matter how dark we may feel now, we may look upon it and say it was a token. In spite of all my present circumstances, I believe he loves me and I will seek of him to rest in his love.

The second thing is to rest in his faithfulness. O, the faithfulness of Christ! It is covenant faithfulness, his covenant undertaking, his covenant vows toward his church, in regard to which he has promised to do all for his people. He is faithful. We are unfaithful, and this unfaithfulness is set before us in the figure of a treacherous wife. "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me ... saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 3:20) But the same blessed Saviour says: "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord." (Hosea 2:19-20) Now here is a resting place in which the soul may delight, even in the eternal and unchanging faithfulness of the Saviour. He will not suffer that faithfulness to fail. If he has spoken to our hearts, that is for eternity. Rest in it, trust in it, hope in it, for he will fulfil his own word, engagement and promise. 'Return unto thy rest.' O, the love and faithfulness of Christ!

There is also rest in his all-sufficient and blessed work. O, what a resting place is the atonement of Jesus Christ; that infinitely valuable and blessed atonement of Jesus who shed his precious blood. Do we want to return to this rest? Have we ever known what it is for the blood to be sprinkled upon our hearts? Did we then rejoice in the effect and delight in it? Did we find rest and satisfaction there? Did we prove

that to be sufficient to take away our sin, to put God's peace into our souls? O, what a rest is the death, blood and atonement of Christ when that is applied! 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul.' What a wonderful mercy when this is wrought in the soul and there is a real returning; that is a going out of the soul in venturing once more as a sinner to him, and in the sweet experience of repentance and penitence begging to feel again a sensible interest and delight in his wonderful sacrifice.

Do we know what it is to delight in the glorious robe of Christ's righteousness? O, what perfection, what perfection of beauty, how lovely it is, how suitable! We cannot possibly rest in our own righteousness, we have none, we have not a spot of it. It is impossible that we should find any joy in ourselves in regard to our acceptance with God, but we may find delight in Christ's perfect obedience. Here is the rest, here is the delight, peace and joy which we may have by a felt interest in it. Once more, 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul.' Thy rest, yes, thy rest, that in which in past seasons thou hast been blessed and favoured to find and delight in. This is something which the soul will never be weary of, that is, finding rest in Christ over and over again. The wanderings, weariness and burdens are those things which will make us find rest so attractive, so sweet and desirable.

Next there is rest in the intercession and advocacy of Christ. If it is realised that we have an interest in his all-prevailing prayer, that is something to rest in. He does constantly, unceasingly represent his people in heaven, and his intercession is a constant and prevailing intercession.

*Our great High Priest, before the throne,  
Presents the merits of his blood;  
For our acceptance pleads his own,  
And proves our cause completely good.*

(Gadsby's 1107)

Can you be pleased with your prayers? Why, they are so feeble, poor, wandering, and prayerless often. Our poor hearts, at times, are almost prayerless, hardly a word seems to go out, perhaps just a groan. O, we cannot rest in our performance! God does not require our prayers or resolves to pray. We have no merit, but O, the merit, worth, power, and efficacy of Christ's intercession! Ah, that is rest; a place in which to delight once we have a proved interest in the advocacy of Jesus Christ the righteous.

One more point and I will go a little further. We can also rest in his will. What can I say concerning the will of the Lord Jesus Christ? He cannot err; it is a will that is ordered and manifested in perfect harmony with his love, kindness, grace, wisdom and goodness. Now what do we come to and what are our feelings when we seek to find satisfaction in our own will? Nothing but grief, sorrow, disappointment, frustration, bitterness and hardness. But O if we might be privileged and favoured with unreserved and sweet acquiescence in the will of Jesus Christ, we shall find rest. All the time that his will and ours are at variance there cannot be rest. All the time there is some difference between that which we want and desire and that which he has designed and desired according to his wisdom, and all the time there is variance, there will be no rest, there will be quarrelling, disappointment, questioning and suspicion. But when his will and ours are made one, then there is rest and peace in the soul. O, when we are brought feelingly to say—

*How harsh so'er the way,  
Dear Saviour, still lead on,  
Nor leave us till we say,  
Father thy will be done.'*

And when we can continue,

*Choose thou the way, but still lead on,*

(Gadsby's 307)

then we find rest. Then there is peace, joy and delight in the will of God and a desire that his will shall be done.

So the rest to which the soul desires to return is all that Christ is and that which he has done and what he is now doing in his love, faithfulness, goodness and mercy. That is rest. In this the exercised soul will find peace, delight, joy and happiness. I am sure that there will be times in our experience, particularly when it is the Lord's purpose that we should be driven and drawn—driven by need and drawn by his

sweet attraction—that we come and fall down at his feet. He extends a most gracious, unreserved and unconditional welcome to the needy: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matthew 11:28)

*Jesus ready stands to save you,  
Full of pity, joined with power.*

(Gadsby's 723)

Now one great argument that bore upon the spirit of the favoured Psalmist was remembrance of past and present renewings of God's bounty toward him, for he says: 'for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.' Well, I want to notice first, that which is past—'hath'—past experience, and secondly that brought to remembrance for present encouragement and exercise of soul in the returning unto that rest.

Well, what is it for the Lord to have dealt bountifully with us as remembered in past experience? If he has called us by effectual grace he has been very bountiful to us. I am sure that we shall never be able to be thankful enough if he has manifested his favour to us in calling us by his grace. O, what favoured, singularly blessed, happy souls they must be whom God has called! If he has dealt bountifully with you in that one particular you have every reason and ground and cause to return to your rest and bless God who has shown so much favour and been so bountiful toward you. That grace flows so effectually, powerfully and savingly through Christ Jesus, the blessed source and channel of all good, for the apostle John says: “And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ... and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” (John 1:15-16)

If the Lord has heard our supplication he has dealt bountifully with us. I feel that it is impossible for us to really conceive the wonder of this, that the almighty God, the eternal God who is so infinite in his greatness, majesty and glory should bow down his ear and should condescend to hear the cries of one poor sinner, and not only to hear that cry but also to answer it, and manifest his bountifulness in his kindness as a God that heareth and answereth the petitions of his people for his own glory and for their good.

*His love in time past forbids me to think  
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;  
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review  
Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through.  
...And can he have taught us to trust in his name  
And thus far have brought me to put me to shame?*

(Gadsby's 232)

'Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.' He has given thee grace, and heard thy prayers, which is an amazing and wonderful favour, and according to his bountifulness has shown thee mercy.

Well, has he ever shown us mercy as we look at our past experience? The many seasons of guilt, distress, bondage and temptations, difficulties in soul, trials in providence; has he manifested mercy? Mercy that is free, that is abounding, that is unconditional, sovereign, and flows through that one gracious channel, the sufferings of Christ. Mercy through blood has been the comfort and delight of our souls and it has made us glad. The Lord has dealt bountifully with us if he has dealt mercifully—and that not on one occasion but on so many occasions. Has he heard our cry in our necessity, and fed our souls with food convenient for us, granted us a crumb of his mercy, a word from his sacred lips, a precious promise that has been sweetly impressed upon our hearts? He has dealt bountifully with us if this is the case.

No matter how feeble and how small we may feel our experience of these things to have been, or how small the communications of God's grace and favour may have been toward us; if we are enabled to look at the opposite and see the abounding of evil, the power of temptation, the enormity of difficulties and view the abounding of grace over all that, it is an indication of the character of God in his covenant purposes and in his disposition and heart toward his people. For God does not give as man giveth—niggardly, backwardly and half-heartedly. God gives bountifully, according to his name. He gives freely

and sovereignly. This is so exceedingly sweet and precious when we are caused to feel our own utter unworthiness and ill-deservedness of it. This proves the bountifulness of it.

We see how bountiful God was to his people in the wilderness in spite of their provocations, wanderings, unbelief and backslidings—ah! God is bountiful.

*A feast is now prepared for thee,  
In spite of all thy unbelief.*

(Gadsby's 897)

Now, my friends, have we any ground to feel that he has dealt beautifully with us in the past? Has he many times heard our cry, many times manifested his faithfulness and favoured and visited us with a token of his goodness?

Now, one last thought. 'For the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.' The immediate past, we might almost say the present. Have we a present, sweet experience of the Lord's bounty? How recently have we had an answer to prayer? It may have been in providence, but if he has heard our prayer, what a wonderful thing that is! Whatever matter it may be, the Lord has dealt bountifully with us if he has heard our cry, if he has appeared for us in our poor souls and granted some relief and deliverance in our souls from darkness, fears and dejections. He has dealt bountifully with us if he has touched our hearts with some sweet word, or gracious influence, some token of his favour, be it never so small, if it is real, he has been bountiful to us.

If he has been bountiful to us, it is a powerful and gracious argument for our poor souls to go to Jesus, return to him, implore his help, plead with him, beseech him that he would favour us to cast our souls upon him and to rest in his finished work feelingly, and to rejoice in him as our Saviour. That is a returning to our rest. Once more to have that sweet and blessed feeling in our souls that he is ours and we are his, and that the precious blood which he shed was shed for us—that is a returning to rest. This is the delight of the believer now. It is vain to seek for any true happiness, satisfaction or rest elsewhere. He is a jealous God and he will have the glory, and when we are in our right frame and in our right mind, we desire that he shall have the glory. Yes, whole-heartedly we desire that he shall have all the glory and we are then ready and willing, feelingly, to put the crown upon his head and to rejoice in the Lord alway, and again to rejoice.

The Lord grant us the experience of it for his name's sake.

Amen.

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