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The Lord a Refuge and Portion

Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 30th November 1994

“I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.” Psalm 142:5

Do we need a refuge? What can I say concerning the matter? We do indeed, and that far above anything that we can conceive or understand. The important thing is this: do we feel our need of a refuge? Has God the Holy Spirit been pleased to discover to us our state, our standing, and those things which threaten our destruction—the storms, the foes, the fears, the many distresses that may assail us—so that we look about us for a place of refuge and safety? We shall not come to the earnest desire and the faith of the Psalmist in the verse of our text, until we have felt and known something of what is contained in the previous verse: “I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.” (v. 4)

These words were penned by the Psalmist at the time he was in the cave, hunted by Saul, who sought his life, to destroy him. But the Psalmist found and experienced that there was no help and no comfort from any man. And if indeed our danger and our trouble is of a spiritual nature, if it has to do with our soul, then who can help us? To whom can we look? Where can we go? Where is there a single person upon the face of the earth who can afford us any help or any refuge? We shall eventually be shut up to this: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68) We may be sure that if the Holy Spirit has made us feel our inescapable need of a refuge, he will also lead us in experience to know indeed that every other refuge but Jesus Christ will utterly fail us.

We have recorded in God’s Word those who have sought to find shelter in a refuge of lies. They have sought to find some safety in that which has only exposed them to greater and further danger. Now when, and if, God the Holy Spirit is pleased to instruct us, in experience, of our need, and of the vanity of the help of man, to know that more than useless is every refuge but Jesus Christ, then we shall be caused to do as the Psalmist David did in this verse: ‘I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, thou art my refuge.’ There is no other, there is no help for me but in God.

In the Scriptures we have much instruction concerning this, not only wicked persons, but also those who were possessors of the grace of God, sought refuge at times in their experience, from that which could never afford them deliverance or safety. I will only drop one or two hints concerning this. We know Abraham had as much faith as most, but he came into a season of danger on more than one occasion, when he was afraid and thought that his very life was in jeopardy. So he instructed his wife to tell a lie; he said, “Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister.” (Genesis 12:13) Although she was his half-sister, having the same father, yet it was not the full truth and Abraham thought thereby to escape that which he feared. Yes, it was a dishonest refuge, and repeated more than once.

We also read of the Apostle Peter, who came into extreme danger—as he thought and feared—and thought to escape that which he feared by denying his Lord three times. What a dreadful kind of refuge is that! And yet we possess such vile, sinful, wicked, deceitful, base hearts, it is no wonder if we should act in the same manner, until God teach and bring us to this point—that in every aspect and direction, in every season of distress and danger of soul or circumstance, there is only one place of safety for us, and that is in Christ. There is no other refuge.

Just a thought in passing, before we look more closely at the matter. When God was about to bring his people out of Egypt he instructed them to kill the paschal lamb and sprinkle the blood upon the lintel and two door posts of their houses. Now if they had done anything else, no matter what that might be—if they had gone to exceeding lengths to make their safety sure and secure—it would have availed nothing. Only those who were in the house where the lintel and two doorposts were sprinkled with the blood of the lamb, were safe—none other, *none other*. That was their refuge, that was their defence, that was their

safety and there was their deliverance. And so it matters not what you and I might seek unto, for safety and refuge—assuming a profession, having godly parents, attending to the ordinances of God’s house or whatever else we may consider—we shall find that there is no refuge there for our souls. There is only one refuge for my soul, friends. It is my mercy and yours if we are hunted out, driven out, of every false refuge and brought to know and to experience that entering into the one blessed Refuge: That refuge which God, in his infinite mercy and goodness has provided, the only refuge.

Now very briefly to notice a few of those things which are felt by God’s people, which make them to know and feel their need of shelter, and which cause them to embrace the Rock for shelter. What are those things which we are exposed to as wretched sinners? We are liable to the vindictive wrath of God upon us for our sin. That holy God whom we have displeased, sinned against: he whom we have disregarded and despised; we are deserving of his wrath—the fiery indignation of God as demonstrated in his holy law, which does but curse and condemn us sinners, and threatens to destroy us. We need a shelter. Also, there are foes that assail us. The adversary of our souls, his fiery darts, the wickedness and the guiltiness of our own sinful nature and practice, the many dangers of the way from foes, fears, sins, guilt and God’s displeasure—these, as and when they are felt in a tender conscience, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, will cause souls to greatly feel their want of a refuge.

What a wonderful mercy that God has been pleased to provide a certain, sure, precious, blessed shelter and refuge for those souls, who are caused to feel again and again, and continually, their need thereof. Hence the desire the Psalmist expressed: “I flee unto thee to hide me.” (Psalm 143:9) My friends, do we know that feeling? Does our experience fit the experience of the Word of God? Do we feel in concert with it, do we know what it is to flee unto the hiding place? “Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort.” (Psalm 71:3) It is then not once, or twice, or three times, but a constant and continual exercise of the soul to find and feel that they are in Christ and therefore safe.

How is it that this precious person, the eternal Son of God, God the Son, can be and is such a suitable and sufficient refuge for sinners, whensoever they are brought to deeply feel their need thereof? Why, my friends, he took our nature, he shed his precious blood, he conquered all the charges of the enemy. He satisfied the law’s demands and he bore the wrath of God vicariously. He is that blessed Saviour whose side was pierced, out of which there flowed blood and water. They are fitting, sweet, and suitable words of the hymn writer, “Rock of Ages, cleft for me.” O to be enabled, in sweet and precious experience, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, really to say ‘for me!’

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me;
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.*

(Gadsby’s 143)

My friends, if we are really under that precious blood we are safe for time and eternity. There is no wrath, foe, distress, or storm that will ever injure us if Christ is our refuge. We shall need him to the end, and we shall need him then.

*The storm of death draws on apace,
And who can say how nigh?*

So says the hymn writer, and where did he seek to hide?

*In that dread moment, O to hide
Beneath his sheltering blood!
’Twill Jordan’s icy waves divide,
And land my soul with God.*

(Gadsby’s 1093)

Yes, Jesus is this refuge, and it is the desire of those who feel their need, to be begging, praying, suing and waiting, that the Holy Spirit will bless and favour them with a sensible entrance into this refuge—the hiding place for wretched sinners.

Now, how many times in our little experience have we already proved that vain is the help of man? The Psalmist David said: "There was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul." (Psalm 142:4) They could not have been more careless about my woeful state and condition, they were indifferent to it, not a word of encouragement or help from man and certainly no deliverance! How many times in our little experience have we sought after shelter and found none, and proved that all refuges are false and refuges of lies; they are all deceitful and worthless? And so for our good, the Lord is pleased to shut us up to one thing, that 'The Lord is my refuge and strength,' otherwise I must perish. There is no other refuge.

This glorious person, the Lord Jesus Christ, is not only all-sufficient and a most suitable refuge for sinners, but he is a refuge nigh at hand. I must insist upon a believing and feeling entrance into him as such—nothing else will do. It will not avail us to look on it, we must enter into it. Have we not a very blessed and precious type of this in the ceremonial dispensation? God commanded that cities of refuge should be built and that the way thereto should be clearly marked, that none should mistake it, that there should be bridges wherever it was necessary, and that the road thereto should be kept in constant good repair. In other words, there should be every encouragement, and no hindrance whatsoever, to that poor soul who sought to flee thereto.

In the spiritual aspect of it, have not some of us known what it is to feel the avenger of blood at our heels? Our sin, our guilt, has lain heavy upon our conscience. We cannot deny it—'Guilty, guilty,' is our plea. We have committed evil and we are worthy of death. Now have we fled and not ceased to flee until we have got into this safety, within the walls of the city of refuge?—there to abide in safety, until the death of the high priest and then we should be free? And who is this great High Priest? Why, Jesus Christ! Where is the sinner's safety, but beneath his blessed cross, his blood, death and merit. Now is this our refuge, our only refuge?

*Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the raging billows roll,
While the tempest still is high.
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide;
O receive my soul at last!*

*Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee;
Leave, ah! leave me not alone;
Still support and comfort me.
All my trust on thee is stayed;
All my help from thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of thy wing.*

(Gadsby's 303)

A safe refuge, the only refuge, a blessed Saviour.

Well then, I say that we must know our need and that we must truly prove the vanity, emptiness, uselessness of all other, that we may cry unto the Lord: 'I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, thou art my refuge.' O, give me an entrance, let me feel the safety, let me abide in thee in the exercise of faith and love, deliver me from the wrath of God, the curse of the law, the fiery darts of the wicked one, from my own wretched, wicked heart and all the storms and dangers of this present life! "And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest." (Isaiah 32:2) "A refuge from the storm, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall." (Isaiah 25:4) O, then to be brought to know this glorious person, Jesus Christ, and be found often fleeing unto him that he might hide us and be our Sanctuary.

But the Psalmist did not stop here. I do feel, and have often felt, that we have here something which is a sure, true and blessed token of the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. For in some measure and in

some ways, a person may have a kind of natural realisation of their danger and guilt. They may have some head notion concerning the judgment that is to come, and God's wrath against sin, and therefore have some very keen and natural fears and dread of hell. For this reason they want a refuge. But we have here something which will indicate the true, blessed and right dealing and teaching of the Holy Spirit. If souls are taught of him, they want Jesus Christ as their refuge, truly they do, and they want more than that, they want him to be their portion. This is what the Psalmist says: 'And my portion in the land of the living.'

What a grievous, dreadful, solemn portion is that of the lost! What can we say concerning it? What do they know whilst they pass through this world, what is their portion on account of the fall? Nothing but trouble, sorrow, anguish, distress, disappointment. They seek for peace, but their life from beginning to end really is one long catalogue of distress. The best that they can have or know is but fleeting, fleshly and without substance—and alas for them, that is the best that they will ever know. The worst is to come. Yes, the worst is to come! The day of death is the worst day in an unbeliever's life, for it means that he will drop into the eternal pit.

But what of the portion of God's people? What do they desire to be their portion? Why, Jesus himself! Nothing less will satisfy them. No, their souls have been quickened into divine life, and therefore, as living souls, they cannot be satisfied with anything less than to know something of these feelings. There is a beauty, a loveliness, an attraction in the glorious person of the Lord Jesus Christ; such an attraction as makes a living soul long and pine for him and after him and that they may be privileged and favoured to lay hold upon him as their portion.

The Psalmist said: "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance." (Psalm 16:5) What more can God give and what more can our poor souls desire than Jesus himself? O the longings of souls sometimes that they might be favoured in experience to adopt the language in the Canticles: "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine!" (Song of Solomon 6:3) A wonderful thing to be able to say, under the witness of the Spirit, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28) The presence, visits, smiles and words of the Lord Jesus Christ, as felt in the heart with divine power, is heaven upon earth. Where is trouble then? Where is fear and distress then? And O how the soul longs that they might have him always:

*More frequent let thy visits be,
Or let them longer last;*

(Gadsby's 251)

My portion! My portion is the Lord. If we have this blessed possession, then with Christ we possess all things.

If Christ is indeed our portion then it is in him we shall find our *happiness*—overwhelming when it is given here, and hereafter an intense happiness which will fill the soul to all eternity to overflowing, with delight, happiness and peace.

If Christ is our portion then he is our *strength*. Do not some of us know so very keenly, know so very well, that we are impotent, that we have no strength at all? But if Christ is our portion then he is our strength and he is our righteousness, and that alone is acceptable to God. O, what a portion is this! "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." (Isaiah 45:24)

If he is our portion then he is our *peace*. This peace is such as passeth all understanding. What peace have we apart from Christ? What can this poor world promise us?—and if it does, has it ever kept its promise? O, sad fact, sad truth, if this should be our rest! May God be pleased to bring us to this point in our experience—that there is nothing that can satisfy us but the God of our salvation.

*The portion of a beast
Will not content my heart.*

(Gadsby's 886)

The portion of Esau cannot suffice us; God has said that he will not give so much as a foot breadth of Esau's portion to Israel. (Deuteronomy 2:5) No, it is Jacob's portion, not Esau's; and yet how often we may in our wickedness have sought to break bounds. But God has said, and I believe that it is of great spiritual significance, as well as to any providential matter, that God has fixed the bounds of our habitation, our dwelling, and spiritually that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the bound of our habitation

and his fullness, love and favour is the portion of those who seek him, not only to be their refuge but also to be their portion.

O, what a mercy to see and feel from time to time those earnest, heavenly, divine longings in our hearts! 'O, come unto me, make thyself to me a living, bright reality, reveal thyself.' Why! if for a few moments we are favoured and privileged to feel that Christ is ours and we are his, we shall not for one moment, under that influence, envy the world or anything of that portion which God has given to the world. Many years ago now, I should think forty at least, I was working hard at night, all night by myself, and in the middle of this I was full of self-pity and rebellion against God, for I thought that everyone else seemed to be resting and at peace and here was me so troubled and well-nigh worn out in every way. And those words of good Bunyan flowed down into my spirit:

*He that is down needs fear no fall,
He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide:
Fulness to such a burden is
That go on pilgrimage:
Here little, and hereafter bliss,
Is best from age to age.
I am content with what I have,
Little be it or much:
And Lord, contentment still I crave,
Because thou savest such.*

(J. Bunyan)

Just for a few moments I felt I was the richest man in the world. I had a portion that the world knew nothing of, and instead of envying them, I pitied them. I wish that there might be a renewing of the feeling that I then had, of complete and perfect contentment for a few moments. I was satisfied with Jesus Christ and felt him to be my portion. A number of times that visit has been called into question since, and I have feared that I was a reprobate and would have my portion with the wicked. But O, friends, if we can come in here with the Psalmist: 'I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.'

May the Lord grant that it may be so.

Amen.

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