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“A Token for Good.”

A SERMON

DELIVERED BY THE PASTOR,

JOSEPH JARVIS.

On Lord's Day Morning, January 2nd, 1910.

“Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because Thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me.”—PSALM lxxxvi. 17.

WITHOUT doubt the prayer of our text, “Shew me a token for good,” was the cry of David's own heart when, from a variety of distressful circumstances, his spirit was overwhelmed within him and he longed to reach that “Rock which is higher than I.” It is in this light of interpretation that I propose chiefly to consider our subject; yet I must remind you that a greater than David is here, for while the Psalmist gives expression to the exercises, sorrows, needs, and adoration of his own soul in *measure*, these very words given to him, as they were by the Holy Ghost express the *measureless* griefs, necessities, complaints, and praises of the “Man of sorrows.” Was David “greatly afflicted”? so was David's greater Son, yea, “He was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” “It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, He hath put Him to grief.” Jehovah the Father made His soul an offering for sin, “yea, gave His only begotten Son to death and the curse, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish but have everlasting life.” 'Tis true indeed that

“Many hands were raised to wound Him; But the awful stroke which found Him
None were interposed to save. Was the stroke which *Justice* gave.”

But, returning to the parallel—of course in some particulars only—between the Psalmist and the Lord Jesus (for we must not forget that the son of Jesse was a lively type of the ever blessed Emanuel) I enquire further, Was David persecuted by innumerable enemies? so was David's Lord, and by vaster numbers, too, and all of them armed with more Satanic fury and malice than those which beset the chosen King of Israel. Did those many enemies persecute the Psalmist groundlessly? it was the same with his Lord, who could say, “It is written in your law, They hated Me without a cause.” Did the son of Jesse cry, “O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thy handmaiden; Thou hast loosed my bonds”? How much more could David's Lord make such a claim, since, according to the flesh, He was the immaculate Son of the highly-favoured Mary, whose believing reply to the wonderful announcement of the angel was, “Behold the *handmaid* of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word.” We have no doubt but David's mother was a handmaid of the Lord, and a godly woman, for twice he refers to her as such. The reference which I have already given is to be found in the 116th Psalm, and the other we have in connection with our text. The first appears to be given by way of demonstration, but the second as a plea in

prayer, "O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give Thy strength unto Thy servant, and save the son of Thine handmaid." But never besides was there such a mother as Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, and certainly neither heaven nor earth ever beheld, among all their posterity, any like unto the eternal Son of God, and yet in His humanity He became the son of Mary—Emanuel, God with us. But again. Did the royal Psalmist cry, "Shew me a token for good"? so did his almighty Lord and Saviour, and received numberless tokens too, tokens which attested His divine nature and mission, but chiefly those afforded Him at His baptism, in the hour of special soul trouble, and at the time of His transfiguration. Concerning the first record, we read, "And Jesus, when He was baptised, went up straightway out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him; and, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The second record tells us of the Saviour's reflection upon His approaching sacrifice, and you will remember that as He entered contemplatively into the deeper shadows of His awful but holy passion, He exclaimed, "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour; Father, glorify Thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." The third record informs us that about eight days after the Lord Jesus had said, "Verily, I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power," He took Peter and James and John into an "high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them." These men, you must understand, were those whom the Saviour had determined should see the coming of His kingdom on the holy mount, and become eyewitnesses of His majesty when He should receive from God the Father the honour and glory put upon Him by His attesting voice, which said, "This is My beloved Son; hear Him." What wonderful tokens for good were these to the God-man! how cheering and strengthening to His filial and spotless human nature! and on the other hand, what "tokens for good" to all believers by virtue of their wonderful relationship with Him. He was the Lord's chosen servant to bring Israel again to Him, and became both the Resurrection and Life to all, whether Jews or Gentiles, who come unto the Father by Him. The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake, who magnified the law and made it honourable. He is well pleased with His beloved Son, and for His sake with all who love and cleave to Him.

Again. Referring to the second public witnessing of the Almighty to His beloved Son, observe that the Father glorified His name by Christ's great work of redemption, while the end of that great work was the glorification of all those spoken of by the Saviour as the "given" ones, and whom He therefore claims, saying, "All Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine, and I am glorified in them." Thus you see these "tokens for good" granted to the Son of Man are also "tokens for good" to us who are in union with Him. But once more. Observe the gracious and rich results of the last-named "token for good" given to the Lord Jesus on the holy mount. Three favoured apostles there saw His glory, and therefore have spoken of Him as witnesses of His divinely regal authority; but blessed as was their

privilege in beholding the transfiguration of our adorable Saviour, their written words afford us a greater, for in them we have "a more sure word of prophecy, unto which we do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place until the day dawn and the day stars arise in our hearts." Indeed, there is no other "token for good" to a child of God like the witness of Jehovah's infallible Word through the Spirit to the heart. In our day we do well largely to discount dreams and visions, for they do not so frequently come from God as they did to holy men of old, when the canon of Scripture was incomplete. Trust not to visions and joyous fancies, these will fail; but remember, the hope built upon the Word of the Lord "abideth for ever, and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." We must now pay closer attention to the language of our text: "Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because Thou, Lord, hast holpen me and comforted me." In the closer consideration of our subject I shall have to call your attention to four particulars, namely, *the cause, the ground, the burden, and the design* of the Psalmist's prayer.

I. Firstly, then, we have to investigate the CAUSE OF THIS SWEET PRAYER, and this you will find given in the 14th verse. David here cries, "O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set Thee before them." We learn from this verse that the immediate cause of the Psalmist's plaintive pleading in the text was persecution and trouble. The man after God's own heart had many enemies among the neighbouring nations, and many also among his own people. Among the latter the most conspicuous and deadly were Saul and Doeg and Ahithophel. So fiercely at times did the malice of Saul and his despicable sycophants rage around him that in his earlier days he was often driven out "from the inheritance of the Lord"; nor was he entirely exempted from this grievous trouble in his latter years, for that shocking conspiracy led by his traitorous son Absalom once more forced him to flee for his life beyond Jordan. Many of his other enemies were also very bloodthirsty men who had not the fear of God before their eyes; they were, as David describes them, "assemblies of violent" or "terrible men," who had not set God before them in connection with their cruel machinations against him. That is to say, the fear of God did not restrain their malice nor modify their desperately wicked counsels against him. They were men of the bloody Claverhouse type, who, when his soldiers refused to carry out his murderous commands, blew out the brains of a godly Covenanter under the very eyes of his faithful, loving wife, and then contemptuously asked, "What do you think of your husband now?" She, poor, grief-stricken, but brave-hearted woman, while gathering up the scattered fragments of her long cherished spouse's skull and gently binding them together with her apron, replied, "I never thought so much of him in all my life as I do this day;" and then solemnly inquired, "But how will you give an account of this day's work?" To this heart-searching question the hardened persecutor and blasphemer answered, "I can give an account to man, and as for God, I will take Him into my own hands." Do you wonder that the terror inspired by such fiendish men drove David to his God in prayer, and likewise in succeeding generations thousands of other persecuted ones? How suitable the prayer of our text to such an experience,

"Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because Thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me."

II. But we must pass on and consider, in the second place, the GROUND AND PLEA of the Psalmist's prayer, and even before examination you may rest well assured that the man after God's own heart urges his suit upon justifiable grounds only, for he always discards all works of the creature, trusts alone to the free grace of God, and pleads the perfection of the divine attributes. The Psalmist, when uttering this prayer, appears to have had in particular remembrance the Lord's proclamation of His blessed and gracious name to Moses at Sinai, for he mentions and pleads the greater number of those thirteen glorious attributes of Jehovah which were then made known, such as goodness, ready forgiveness, plenteous mercy, compassion, longsuffering, faithfulness, omnipotence, and incomparable majesty. In the third verse of this psalm the inspired suppliant cries, "Be merciful unto me, O Lord, for I cry unto Thee daily." In the next, he follows his suit for mercy with a plea for the gift of soul joy, saying, "Rejoice the soul of Thy servant, for unto Thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul," and this is succeeded by a reference to the ground of all his hope and expectations which he distinctly gives in the next verse. Listen attentively to this, for the Psalmist's only ground of hope must become the only ground of hope to every distressed and broken-hearted sinner in the world; the imaginary merits of the creature are worse than useless here. David addresses himself to the Lord, and cries for mercy, urging this as his only plea, "FOR," says he, THOU, LORD, ART GOOD, AND READY TO FORGIVE; AND PLENTEOUS IN MERCY UNTO ALL THEM THAT CALL UPON THEE;" and not only so, but he further urges the enjoyment of personal experience of that mercy, saying in the 13th verse, "Great is Thy mercy TOWARD ME," and then adds, by way of demonstration, the particulars of that wonderful mercy in the exclamation, "Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell!" Passing on to the 14th verse, the Psalmist complains of proud, violent and godless men who had met in counsel to devise means to take away his life; he therefore spreads his case before the Lord, commits his soul to Him, and depending on His justice, mercy, wisdom, power and goodness, exclaims, "But Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give Thy strength unto Thy servant, and save the son of Thine handmaid. Shew me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it and be ashamed, because Thou, Lord, hast holpen me and comforted me." Thus, brethren, you see that the gracious and glorious attributes of God were King David's great arguments when pleading with Him, hence he always brought them to the front, and whenever he used other pleas, they were without exception subordinate to these, and naturally sprung from them. The first were meritorious, the second were either evidential—I mean with reference to his interest in the Lord's mercy—or else, being expressive of dire necessity, were offered with the hope of exciting the divine compassion on his behalf. Among these subordinate pleas you will notice first of all that of poverty and need, for in the first verse of this psalm the royal suppliant cries, "Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, hear me; for I am *poor and needy*," for well he knew the Lord had promised to arise on behalf of His oppressed and

needy children. Had not a most gracious declaration been already made by the Lord through His servant concerning this very condition, namely, "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him at safety from him that puffeth at him?" In the next verse the plea of *gracious relationship and faith* is urged. "Preserve my soul, for I am holy," that is, I am set apart for Thy service, I am "sanctified by the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." The marginal rendering is, "Preserve my soul, for I am one whom Thou favourest." Thus you see the plea used here is that of grace already received as the earnest of more grace; a wise and Scriptural argument, for we read, "He giveth more grace," and again, "Unto him that hath more shall be given, and he shall have abundance." The latter part of the verse furnishes the *plea of faith*, "O Thou, my God, save Thy servant that trusteth in Thee." Faith must have its reward, and this the Psalmist knew, for faith is the very "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." *Incessant prayerfulness* is next pleaded as a reason why mercy should be bestowed, "Be merciful unto me, O Lord, for I cry unto Thee daily." David knew that continuous prayerfulness was an evidence of a renewed heart, and therefore mentioned his constant cryings. The Saviour Himself teaches us that constant prayerfulness is an evidence of our election. Did He not say, "Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily"? On the other hand, it is the mark of insincerity to cry a few times and then give over, hence holy Job inquires concerning the hypocrite, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he *always* call upon God?" Brethren, depend upon it that those of you who cannot live without prayer, bear upon your hearts the evidences of a spiritual life. Your faith may become very feeble, the spirit of prayer may greatly decline, but those who possess divine life will again and again be constrained to fly to the mercy-seat, notwithstanding all their darkness, doubts, and deathly frames. Prayer is as necessary to the soul of the child of God as breath is to the body. It has been well said that "a *prayerless* soul is a Christless soul," and I am sure we have authority to add, "But a *prayerful* soul is a gracious soul." Therefore, my brethren, endeavour in spite of all discouragements—and I know, and *feel* too, that they are many—to fulfil the apostolic injunction, "Pray without ceasing." Pray with words or without words, supplicate with sighs, tears, desires, looks, and longings, for "He that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

"'Tis prayer supports the soul that's weak,
Though thought be broken, language lame;
Pray if thou canst or canst not speak,
But pray with faith in Jesus' name."

The last of these subordinate pleas which I shall notice is that of *evident and transparent sincerity*. For David, in the fourth verse, cries, "Rejoice the soul of Thy servant: for unto Thee, O Lord, do I *lift up my soul*." The Psalmist's devotions were not heartless and formal, his worship was not of a merely external nature, but it was rendered "in spirit and in truth;" his very heart was bowed before the Lord, and his soul was *lifted up* in His presence. He was anxious that the great Heart-searcher should try His reins and examine the secret springs of

his soul; he was willing to stand before Him in all his trespasses, to have every wound probed, and every thought laid bare, that he might be healed and saved by sovereign mercy alone. His inmost conviction was expressed in that remarkable sentence, "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand? but there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." The Lord help us to feel and do likewise.

III. In the third place, I call your attention to the BURDEN OF THE PSALMIST'S PRAYER. Here we approach the very heart of our subject, for we learn the nature of his request; and what is the real burden of his petition? Listen, "Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because Thou, Lord, hast holpen me, and comforted me." But you may still ask, what is a "token for good"? Before definitely answering this question I would remind you that it is something which many godly people have desired. Moses desired a token; Rahab cried, "Give me a true token;" Gideon cried, "Show me a sign (or token) that Thou talkest with me," yea, nothing short of three tokens could satisfy Gideon that the Lord would be with him; Hezekiah wanted a token; David, in the text, cries for a "token for good"; and Ahaz was bidden to ask for a sign or token, "either in the depth, or in the height above." Besides all these, many of us have earnestly called upon God for some token of interest in His mercy, for some evidence that we have passed from death unto life, and I should not wonder if some of you are now praying with the poet,

"Show me some token, Lord, for good,	Oh, seal my pardon to my soul,
Some token of Thy special love;	And then proclaim my peace with Thee;
Show me that I am born of God,	Thus make my wounded conscience whole,
And that my treasure is above.	And that will be for good to me."

But now, coming to the nature of true tokens, I remark that the Lord gives a variety of "tokens for good," according to the necessity of the case. Moses received three distinct tokens from the Lord, in evidence of his call to become "king in Jeshurun." Two out of three of these tokens were evidently miraculous, nor was the other less so in reality. The Lord's servant was very fearful and backward in entering upon the work divinely appointed for him; he objected that Israel would not believe that he had received a commission from God to become their deliverer. So the Lord, in order to comfort him by a token of His promised power and presence, commanded him to cast his rod upon the ground, and it became a serpent; he was then ordered to take it by the tail, and it at once became a rod again in his hand. The second token was given to Moses when, at the divine command, he put his hand into his bosom and drew it forth leprous, even to a snowy whiteness; he repeated the action, and his hand was restored like the other. The third token was given in this manner. Moses enquired, saying, "Who am I that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" and the Lord, to comfort him, replied, "Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token unto thee that I have sent thee. When thou hast brought the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain," and thus it came to pass, as you all know. The true token given to Rahab was the "scarlet line," which she bound in the window, and that token, remember, when Israel took Jericho, seen by the hosts of the Lord, was the means of salvation both to Rahab and all her father's house. That scarlet line was a symbol of the Saviour's great atonement,

which, when received, trusted in, and confessed by the soul that feels his need of a refuge from heaven's avenging hand of justice, becomes his eternal salvation. Hezekiah desired a token which necessitated an inversion of the divinely constituted laws of nature, for said he, "It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees; and Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord, and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz." Thus it is always spiritually with those who, like Hezekiah, have been delivered from the "pit of corruption," they want tokens of the Lord's favour far beyond those which can be found in the common gifts of providence. A token for good concerning the salvation of our souls must come from God Himself, and if we are among those who are born from above, we shall not rest without the Lord's own tokens for good. Well, among the many tokens kindly given by the Lord, I feel inclined specially to mention life tokens, grace tokens, love tokens, and blood tokens, by which last-named denomination I mean tokens of our redemption.

1. What shall we say concerning *life tokens*? Most of you are aware of the solemn fact that Holy Scripture declares our ruined human nature "dead in trespasses and in sins," and that in order to possess spiritual life we "must be born again." Moreover, you know that this spiritual and eternal life is in God's eternal Son, and that "he therefore that hath the Son hath life, but he that hath not the Son hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Now you might reasonably conclude that when the eternal Spirit is pleased to communicate this life, there is speedy evidence of it in its favoured possessor. This is so indeed. One of the earliest tokens of life is found in the painful sense of sin and need which quickly resolves itself into a real heart-cry for mercy. The children of God do not come into the kingdom of grace singing, but crying. Other beautiful and sure tokens for good soon succeed these, but I must mention that only of "hunger and thirst after righteousness," and to the blessedness of this spiritual condition one of the beatitudes in our Lord's sermon on the mount bears infallible witness. Wherever there is spiritual life there will be hunger for the Bread of life, and the divine promise is that such shall be "filled."

2. A word next concerning *grace tokens*. We read these in the sweet fruits of grace, and perhaps first of all in the voluntary solitariness and separation from the open evils of the world which are visible in the captives of grace. The Word plainly declares that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world." Another grand token that we have been made partakers of divine grace is found in a real love to both the doctrines and experience of grace. We cannot believe that any regenerate soul can ascribe to himself the praise of his new creation, and say, "Well done I," as though he were the author of his own salvation. Impossible! We know that he will take the very opposite position, and cry with the Apostle, "By the grace of God I am what I am." It is also a blessed token for good to possess the humility which grace inspires, to feel the heart sometimes melt with wonder, love and praise, as one experiences but "a good hope through grace," and the best token of all when the heart pours forth with holy

joy its highest adoration and worship at the feet of its great Author, "weeping, loving, praising, blessing, crowning Him Lord of all, and shouting, Glory to the God of sovereign grace!"

3. Concerning *love tokens* I must only remark that none are more conclusive than that given by the Lord through Jeremiah: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: THEREFORE with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." "Who grants us to know His drawings below will endless salvation and glory bestow."

4. We must now pass over very much which should have been said, and speak finally of *redemption tokens*. After all, there are no "tokens for good" like *blood tokens*. Was not ancient Israel saved by blood? yea, verily, for "by faith they kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest He which destroyed the firstborn should touch them." Jehovah's direction and promise was and is, "And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you." Brethren, have you this "token for good?" are you sheltering under the sprinkled blood? Is the scarlet line of the Saviour's atonement bound in your window? Do you know, or at least long to know, "redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace?" There is eternal salvation for all who live under the blood tokens, but the flaming sword of Justice destroys everywhere besides. I was riding through my native parish, wide of Hastings, not many days since, when I saw a striking illustration of this solemn truth. That part of Sedlescombe through which I was passing produces much wood, and that on my left hand—perhaps an acre of it—had been lately cut down; but many beautiful young saplings had been spared the woodman's axe. The means of their preservation was obvious, for a bold, blood-red band encircled each stem, which served as a token of safety from the devastating axe of the forest-feller, forbidding him to strike, and reminding one of the divine charge given to the man with the slaughter-weapon: "Slay utterly old and young, but come not near any man upon whom is the mark." But I saw also a point of instructive divergence as I gazed upon that woodland, for I knew that those trees had been spared and chosen to life because of their inherent beauty and excellence, for they were tall, graceful, symmetrical, and full of vigour. What a contrast to the laws which govern the kingdom of grace. Harken, my beloved brethren, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, yea, and things that are not, hath God chosen to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence." While I mused upon these matters the fires of gratitude and love began to burn, and ere I was aware I found myself singing the beautiful lines of McCheyne:—

"Chosen not for good in me,	By the Spirit sanctified;
Wakened up from wrath to flee,	Teach me, Lord, on earth to show
Hidden in the Saviour's side,	By my love how much I owe."

We must close, leaving our last point untouched. But may the Lord grant every one of us some visible "token for good," and He shall bear the glory. Amen.

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