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A VISION OF THE WAY TO HEAVEN.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, JUNE 6TH, 1897,
AT PROVIDENCE CHAPEL, BATH.

BY

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"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."—ACTS xiv. 22.

OUR text speaks of the way to the kingdom of God as being one of much tribulation. Now I received the message, which I believe the Lord has given me to deliver to you this morning, in a singular manner. It came to me in a dream on Friday night. Without further preface I shall now proceed as simply as possible to narrate my dream.

All the inhabitants of the world appeared before me in an extensive open plain. As I gazed, I perceived there were great differences among them of race, locality, refinement, religion, colour, and riches. Great masses were sunk in poverty and vice. Still, there seemed plenty of gaiety, animation, and even happiness, among considerable sections. Besides, the vast plain where they dwelt was not at all an unpleasant place, it was often brilliant with sunshine, and decked with many beauties. Approaching a party of those who seemed most favoured with health and comfort, I said to one of them, "You seem to be enjoying yourselves, and

to live in a pleasant place." The person I addressed turned to me, and his countenance, just before beaming with delight, suddenly grew pale and wan as he *hissed* in my ear, "Come again when I'm alone, and I'll tell you something." I went to him again and remarked, "Many of you seem to be fairly happy, and the world on the whole appears a pleasant place." To my surprise he buried his face in his hands and groaned out, "O 'tis a *hard* way! O 'tis a *hard* way!" I said, "Why?" He replied, "Look over there," pointing at the same time in a direction towards which I now noticed the whole multitude was rapidly (*so* rapidly) drifting. Then I saw, not very far off, a long black line, covered with the most dense, dismal gloom I had ever beheld. It was impossible to discern what that awful darkness was, much less what was beyond it. Approaching, I was terrified to find it overhung an apparently bottomless abyss, into which the whole mass of human creatures was being hurled, as they came tumbling over the edge of that yawning gulf, instantly disappearing in its depths. All classes, all ages, incessantly were being forced irresistibly down in crowds, as they arrived at that point. Turning to look, I saw from the direction in which they were coming, that all the living were doomed to apparent destruction. The name of the abyss was—DEATH, and HELL lay beneath it!! With a shudder I now perceived the fatal cause (though unfelt and unthought of by most of the human race) to be the existence of two mighty forces, resting as a curse upon every person, and a blight upon every life, they were the powers of SIN and WRATH. Then I remembered some words I had once heard, "The way of transgressors is hard," and "the wages of sin is death." All by nature are involved in this ruin, because we are "all the children of wrath even as others."

Whilst I was considering these solemn things and viewing the multitude hastening to the pit, I was presently given to see a HAND secretly moving among the people and I knew

in a moment that the operation of this hand was directed by an incomprehensible LOVE. Strange it was to observe a hand of love moving among those wretched sinners, all unconscious, as even those affected by it were, of the power leading, preserving and directing their steps. While I watched, I saw to my great astonishment they were being led towards myself, and as they drew nearer, I was able to distinguish the features of one and another of my dear friends now before me, until at last there stood gathered around me all the little flock belonging to Providence Chapel, Bath!! Thus I perceived in my dream that we all by nature were in darkness, equally under the dominion of sin and wrath and exposed to eternal death; but that God had a purpose of mercy yet to be revealed.

Well, with that we began to move on together, until we came to a *gate* with the name conspicuously written over it—"Regeneration." Presently, it was opened, and I remember watching very anxiously to see who got through, and whether I myself should be among them. One by one passed in but I saw to my grief not quite all. And among those who never got through that strait gate were one or two of you who had stood longest in a profession, but I could not discern their faces. However, the gate closed, and when I looked round I saw a great many more of you had entered in than I had supposed. This cheered me. We stayed awhile and began to talk about the beginning of the way. At that time we all had burdens on our backs, and we none of us could quite understand either our position or our prospects; only we found it was a New Way. Old things had passed away, all things had become new. We had a new cause of grief—the burdens on our backs, now felt; new feelings, new desires, new longings, and quite a new sense of need. We needed a guide. This made me look forward a little, and I dimly saw some distance away, a man standing, as if waiting for us. Was it a man, or only a shadow? I scarcely knew. Then

he lifted up his hand and seemed to beckon to me, at the same time moving forward. As he turned to go, I told you I believed it was Jesus leading us, and that we must follow him. We did so, although we were all greatly bowed down by the burdens on our backs, and could only move along very slowly. Presently, as my eyes became more accustomed to view things in that strange and hitherto unknown Way of Life, I began to distinguish the guide rather more plainly, and perceived also that he had a burden on his back similar to ours. Remembering it is written: "He bare our sins;" I told you of it. Some were greatly comforted. We began to feel sure it was Jesus leading us; and some then ventured to look at Jesus too; and we commenced talking about him. He then seemed to half look round upon us with a very slight smile, as if pleased to hear us talking of him. We previously had been talking a great deal about our burdens.

Then actually some of you began to complain, and to say that you wanted him to quite reveal himself, that you might see his face clearly. I tried to encourage you to hope that you would certainly see his face some day; but that for the present we must follow on, treading in his footsteps; and that a guide did not usually walk backwards, so that all who followed might see his face at every step. I mentioned many promises and precepts suitable to our then state, and tried to encourage you all I could, though to tell you the truth I felt very discouraged myself, because at times I saw him so indistinctly, I could hardly discern him, and was very full of fears as to whether I was mistaken, whether it really was Jesus at all. Then my burden seemed much heavier than yours, and I had to groan—My sins! my sins! Yet, each one supposed his burden was the heaviest.

I noticed that in this part of the path we walked along very peaceably together. There was no quarrelling. Each was so occupied with his own sins, he had no time nor inclination to interfere with his brethren. Now and then one

of them would give a great cry and say, "O my burden! my burden! it will sink me to hell." And really our burdens all seemed to get heavier and heavier, until we could scarcely bear their weight, or creep along at all. We cried and longed for deliverance, which as it seemed further off than ever, made us say to one another, "Can this be the way?"

At last we seemed unable to take a step further, through weakness and the crushing weight, and then I noticed our guide suddenly stopped. And I called out to you as loud as I could: "The Lord *waiteth* to be gracious." And I also tried to encourage you to press on, by telling you you would soon reach him, though I was wondering all the time how it would be with me. However, in a moment more we were at his feet, and all pressing close round him while he looked upon us all with a sweet, beautiful smile, saying to one, "Thy sins are forgiven thee;" to another, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." Indeed there was a word of comfort, pardon and consolation for each of us. Then the burdens all disappeared from our backs, and Jesus told us he had removed them, and cast them into the depths of the boundless ocean of eternal love, and some of us thought we almost saw him do it, by the eye of faith. Next we were well washed in a glorious fountain, and started off singing hymn 160—you know.

O, what a different scene now spread around us when we had time to notice it. The sun shone, the desert blossomed as the rose, the wilderness became as the garden of the Lord, the time of the singing of birds was come, the voice of the turtle was heard in our land, and we soon began to sing again.

"How high a privilege 'tis to know
Our sins are all forgiven;
To bear about this pledge below,
This special grant of heaven."—(Gadsby's, 107.)

There we sat at his blessed feet, clothed in his righteousness, cleansed in his blood, rejoicing in pardoning mercy;

and feeling quite holy and happy IN HIM, and some of us expecting to remain in this state until removed home where we longed to be, and which seemed then so near.

But, I noticed our leader looking with much compassion on us, and presently he bade me tell you that this enjoyment would not last always. Some looked very cross, and one or two began to grumble about the parson's croaking again. However, the Word declares, "We must through *much tribulation* enter into the kingdom of God." Thereupon the Guide rose up and ordered us to arise and follow him. He led us straight to a place where lay a number of crosses, with a name upon each. Taking up the heaviest himself, he said plainly: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, *and take up his cross*, and follow me" (Mark viii. 34). So each of us had to take up the cross belonging to him, and thus laden he led us out from the pleasant place and from the green pastures where we had found rest and strength, which I now began to discern was to prepare us for the journey prepared for our feet, and the cross prepared for our backs. Whenever I made any discoveries I generally communicated them to you, which was a help to some.

Well, the little company of cross-bearers went on with more assurance and confidence than before. But soon I saw some wanted to shift their crosses to a more easy and comfortable position; and after a while some began to complain of having more awkward and heavy crosses to carry than others, almost accusing the Lord of unfairness. I remember I kept the heaviest end of mine out of sight as much as possible. We all agreed, however, that our Guide had a far larger and more weighty cross to bear than any of ours. We also were generally all willing to confess that we each one needed his own cross. So we made shift to go on after Jesus. By and by I thought the path seemed getting rather rough and uneven. Looking up to see which way

Jesus went (which I often had to do) I found we were lagging behind too much. I told you so. One or two of you nudged each other and muttered something about my "grumbling again." But, on we went, and soon began to find it was an altogether different path to that which we had travelled before we realised peace and pardon. Jesus led us towards what appeared a kind of wood, where the trees were not very thick, and therefore we could see our Guide before us plainly enough, even when he was some distance in front. This was a great mercy, because the way became very ill-defined, a good deal narrower, and very much rougher. There were stumps of trees, mole-hills (mistaken by some for mountains), briars and thorns, nasty soft places into which the feet sunk all along that path through the wood. What with these things at our feet almost every step, and the crosses on our backs, some began to stumble about and even to knock against one another rather alarmingly, especially the weak-kneed ones amongst us, and the bandy-legged ones who had in infant days tried to stand before they could crawl or creep. I was very glad there was a fair share of light, enough at least to see the Lord going before us.

But as time wore away we all grew weary; some were no little bruised and shaken by falling over the many obstacles, and one began to say to another, "O, 'tis a rough path! O, 'tis a rough path!" Then the Lord seemed to turn, and made signs to me that I was tell you to "*look more to him and less at the path.*" This at the time was a seasonable message and helped us on over a few difficulties and trials, but really I found it very hard work myself to look more to him than to the path, because it was very rough just then. Spending so much strength in making such slow progress seemed very unsatisfactory. I must confess I got thoroughly weary of it, and was no little impatient. Moreover I saw in my dream, that at this stage some of you began to ask others

to help you get your crosses off or shifted, so as to give you relief from their weight and pressure. I called out to you that this was contrary to the Word, but——! I was wondering however we should get along any further, when Jesus turned and seemed to beckon me to him. When I drew near he said, "*Just look at my path.*" I did so, and saw what I think I shall never forget, as I caught a glimpse by the eye of faith of what the journey (as our Forerunner and Leader) had cost him. I can only tell you it was oh! so rugged and stony and hard! I marked also how he had torn and bruised his dear, sore, bleeding feet for our sakes, in pressing down the worst of the roughness, and removing the greatest of the stumbling-blocks. Then I learnt the reason why our way was not much rougher than it was—Jesus had gone before us. He bid me tell you that; and you quite believed it. I noticed you generally believed all I told you about Jesus. This often comforted me. One weary old pilgrim started off singing:

"His way was much rougher and darker than mine;
Did Christ, my Lord, suffer, and shall I repine!"—
(Gadsby's, 232.)

This quite cheered us up for the time. So I tried another hymn which not all of you knew. It was—

"'Tis the right way'; tho' dark and rough;
Mysterious, yet 'tis plain enough;
And if our souls the end could view,
We should approve the pathway too."—
(Denham's, 366.)

But someone noticed "*if*" and grunted out, "If—yes—*if*; but we can't see the end!" This set one or two on to try if they could peer over the shoulders of the Guide and see to the end of the way. I told them I thought it would be no use just then. In such a path as we were then in, we are not generally permitted to see any farther than the Guide. And so you found you could not see beyond Jesus.

We considered however it was a great mercy to feel or even hope that he was really leading us by the right way, and to be enabled to follow in his footsteps at all. Again we sang—

"The way we walk cannot be wrong
If Jesus be but there."—(Gadsby's, 812.)

Thus we struggled on with just now and then a word or look *from* Jesus, looking at times *to* him, and marking his footsteps. Nothing comforted us more than when we could walk in his exact footprints. The way then for a few steps seemed almost easy.

But not only did the path on the whole get rougher, it was also exceedingly lengthened out. There seemed no end to it. To have to carry the same cross on such a tedious, trying road, exercised our faith and patience sorely; and we often asked for another token, another smile, another sweet Elim rest and foretaste of the heavenly kingdom, such as we had had before, though many had almost forgotten it, and some even doubted the reality of it. My chief business was to try to show you that we should be thankful for the little helps we received occasionally; and I tried to point to Jesus with the heavier cross and the rougher path. At last I was ready to doubt whether he would ever appear to us again, when I thought a whisper reached me: "I *will* see you again, and your heart shall rejoice." "The vision is for an appointed time." This came when we almost all seemed very weary and faint. Faith failed, hope scarcely survived, love grew cold, patience sighed heavily. The stumbling-blocks were extraordinarily trying. In the strength of the whisper we had heard, and of the sort of a half-smile those nearest the Guide fancied he gave when he breathed the words, we struggled on a few more steps after him, and suddenly found we had stumbled over the last stones and difficulties in that part of the path, into a clear and open space. Jesus at once turned and bid all lay down our crosses

and rest awhile. It was a place of green pastures and living streams! How beautifully smooth and inviting they looked after the rough path we had travelled through! The heavens and the earth then combined to refresh our weary spirits. Grace and providence united to prove to us that after all he had led us by the right way. Jesus led the thirsty ones to the still waters and bade them drink. He made the weary ones lie down at his blessed feet, and taught the needs-be for the rough path, and the meaning of the word "*afterward*" in Heb. xii. 11. Then we said, "Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah, we found it in the fields of wood." Sweet was the rest, welcome the streams, delightful the greenness of the grass after the ruggedness of our previous experiences. Our Guide became our Entertainer, and fed us with many sweet fruits as well as the finest of the wheat and the freshest milk, and most enlightening honey imaginable! Promises and doctrines richly enjoyed made precepts easy to obey all the while we stayed in this place. The Lord was our Shepherd, and led and fed us. Our wounds were healed, and sorrows of the past seemed wonderfully soon forgotten. Nothing now was wrong; all was right. The voice of praise and blessing resounded throughout our little camp. Passage after passage from the Sacred Oracles was unfolded and applied, and now at last we understood in some degree that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom" of God's grace and love and mercy in the sweet experience of the same, as well as in a larger sense into the kingdom of God's glory. Joys abounded. Especially were the green pastures of covenant love thrown wide open in faith's blessed realization of our oneness with Jesus. We were made to understand that it was because we were chosen IN HIM that every cross and every trial, as well as these sweet moments of enjoyment, were all appointed for us in covenant love, and that each dispensation was a sure earnest and evidence of our participation in the inheritance of the saints in light. Some

of you, I think, caught some tolerably clear glimpses of the gates and walls of the New Jerusalem, but it was as yet very far off.

After most comfortable meditations in this spot, a thought occurred to me which rather filled me with consternation. It was this: That in these places of enjoyment we did not seem to make so much real progress towards the end of the journey as in times of trial and sorrow! I puzzled over it a long time; but the more I thought about it the more I saw it was even so. Very anxiously I looked at our Leader, assured he knew every secret thought of my heart. He only smiled, and said again to us all, "Follow me!" Once more we took up our crosses, but we found on resuming them this time that they seemed very much lighter than before, partly because we were greatly strengthened by the good rest we had enjoyed, and indeed, by the previous exercise through the wood; and partly because the pathway now for a considerable distance lay along a pleasant valley on soft grass, with a sweet brook meandering along, and various gardens filled with flowers and fruits on either side. One belonged to Solomon and was called the Garden of Nuts, or the Song of Songs, because it was a poem of loveliness; another charming spot belonged to Ruth the Moabitess on her union with Boaz, and another palatial mansion we passed belonged to Queen Esther, where some tragic events had taken place; with many others, about all of which I told you at intervals as we passed by. Presently the valley grew narrower and the path less easy, until we left the fields and the valley behind, and reached a different kind of country altogether. I noticed that these changes of scene at first had rather a bad effect on some of us. We seemed more occupied in looking at our surroundings than in watching our Guide. But, a word to the wise was sufficient; and on fixing our eyes more intently on him, on whom hung *all* our hope of being led right—for none of us knew in the least what lay

before us—we found he was leading us along a fairly level path towards what in the distance appeared like a dense dark, and very high wall. As we drew nearer I saw it was the thickest, darkest forest I have ever beheld in my life. I had heard of the Black Forest, and supposed this must be it. It certainly at a little distance seemed absolutely impenetrable, no opening was visible. Yet Jesus was leading us straight up to it! As the gloom and shadow of that dark forest fell upon us, it awed us into a silent and trembling fear as to what we might have to go through. However, our Guide went on. So we supposed he could see a way where we could see none. At length on getting close up, a very narrow opening between the trees came into view, looking like the entrance to a long black tunnel. The Guide went on into it, and seemed swallowed up in those depths of darkness. We thought for the moment we had lost him. It was the first time we had quite lost sight of him for a long while. Just at that moment I observed quite a number of persons, whether spirits, devils or human beings I could not discern, standing and moving in the thick shade. Their object was soon manifest. By lies, by threatenings, by flattery, and even by blows, they tried to hinder us from following Jesus; but it was useless. We were all determined to follow him, let the consequence be what it might. However, we got some nasty knocks. One or two particularly received ugly wounds in the head from one I well knew named Agnostic,* from which they did not recover for years. When that wound smarted, as it did periodically, one poor man used to rub his head and complain of *infidelity*. At those times he seemed quite dazed, and thought his heart was fatally affected; but it was only his poor brain muddled by the blow, and he got over it in time.

* *Agnostic* is a Greek word signifying "Know-nothing"; the Latin is *ignoramus*. Agnosticism almost invariably begins in conceit and ends in pessimism or despair.

After we had all plunged thus strangely and suddenly out of the open country, with its light and sunshine, into the forest, and our eyes became a little accustomed to the obscurity and gloom of the place, all the elder ones felt satisfied that Jesus was going before us, although even we could only distinguish the form of our Guide very dimly; but some of the little ones began to cry through fear of the dark, because they could not see their evidences, and had lost their enjoyments! It was hard work to comfort them then. Besides, I myself found it was much easier to tell you to "walk by faith and not by sight" than to do it myself. And as I got fidgetty and anxious, not knowing what to do, in my dream it seemed to me my cross kept catching in the trees. But again Jesus said, "Follow me." We knew his voice, and pressed on together in this the very darkest path we had ever known. Fear kept us pretty close on the heels of our Guide, although the way became so narrow that there was often only room for one to pass at a time. This made me quote those lines to you rather frequently—

"For 'tis decreed that most must pass
The darkest paths alone."—(Gadsby's, 308.)

However, it was not such bad walking, though we could not see the path, only now and then it felt a little slippery. Whilst we were being taught by experience how to walk by faith and not by sight, to my surprise, it presently grew even darker than before, and looking up to the narrow opening between the tops of the trees, I saw the few stars which had often cheered me with their feeble light, were now obscured by thick clouds; which so increased the gloom beneath that we learnt what it was to "walk in darkness and have no light." However there was no other way. Presently strange sounds were heard like the roaring of a lion, the hooting of owls, and the screeching of dragons which startled some, and made it more dismal. Meanwhile the intense darkness became very oppressive; every gleam of light from

above faded away as the clouds gathered thicker and thicker. Were it not for such words as the following spoken at intervals by the Guide, whom we really could not see at all then, some of us would have sunk to the ground through fear and dismay, namely: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not." "I will make darkness light." "Light is sown for the righteous." I noticed also that the voice of Jesus seemed remarkably distinct in the dark, and that directly he spoke all other sounds ceased. Therefore, with a firm persuasion wrought in our souls that Jesus was leading us, we groped along after him. But, ere long to our great distress Jesus became silent to us, and when the comfort of hearing his blessed voice failed, our faith failed too. To the trouble of the darkness was added the greater trouble of his silence, and then one and another of you began to groan out—"O, 'tis a dark path! O 'tis a dark path!" Those groans went to my heart; and feeling I could not endure his dreadful silence, I as it were forced myself forward to speak to him and begged him to tell me where we were. He said—"GETHSEMANE." I knew then. Next, he told us all to stop awhile, at the same time bidding me tell you about the place called Gethsemane. I did so. Don't you remember? While I was telling you, Jesus moved a little farther off. After that I hardly know what happened for a time, until he returned and seemed to rouse us up; and the heavy clouds having in some measure rolled away, I saw what looked like drops of blood upon his vesture; and in the dim light observed that "his visage was marred more than any man's." Once more he bid us follow him. The thick darkness closed round us all again until it was indeed a horror of great darkness. We could see nothing, understand nothing. At length I could just see the great black cross he carried *standing upright*, and looking again, I *felt* rather than saw that he was hanging upon it! O, the horrors of that moment! I trembled with the fear lest after all—But I dare not say what I

felt in my dream as I thought the Saviour was vanquished; especially when a doleful voice reached our ears crying in the Hebrew tongue—"Eloi, Eloi, lama, sabachthani?" We all understood that. We experienced it. When Jesus the Light of lights was enveloped in that darkness, when he the Life died, where could hope find anchorage? All things seemed with the dying Saviour to be hastening to destruction. The moment came. He bowed his sacred head and died. That moment the darkness suddenly dissolved into the brightest, most dazzling radiancy of heavenly light! The cross unlocked the gates of paradise. The veil of the Temple was rent; the holiest of all, the innermost sanctuary, stood wide open to access; and I saw the whole church in Christ enter into the glory of the kingdom of God. One glimpse was vouchsafed of the blessedness of the saints in heaven with Christ their Head, who having borne his cross, followed his steps and been made partakers of his sufferings here below, were now glorified with him, and as I woke from my sleep, the words came with power and understanding as never before—"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." The Lord grant his blessing.

*The following is taken from the "Gospel Standard,"
April, 1920.*

On Jan. 10th, 1920, EDWARD CARR, pastor of Providence Chapel, Bath, entered into rest.

The removal by death of my late beloved husband came most mercifully. He had got out of bed about 12.30, and fallen asleep in his chair about 12.50—his head dropped, his spirit had fled. He was sitting with hands clasped, as was