

SUBSTANCE OF A SERMON PREACHED BY MR. OLDFIELD, AT GOWER STREET CHAPEL, LONDON, ON SUNDAY MORNING, 17th MAY, 1891

Text: "O send out Thy light and Thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles." (Psalm xliii.3).

This is the language of a saint of God when he was deprived of the service of the sanctuary and the communion of the saints of God. It may be the language of some of you who are not deprived of the service of the sanctuary, but you may feel deprived of the sensible presence of God. And, if so, Satan may attack you in a similar way, asking you, "Where is thy God?" (Psa. xlii. 10). You may not be able to answer him, and you may thereby be thrown into confusion. If your confusion is a means, in God's hand, of directing your souls to His mercy seat and causing you to cry unto Him as the psalmist does in this and the preceding psalm, what an unspeakable favour is awaiting you!

Just refer a little to the context. The psalmist says: "Judge me, O God." Now it is a solemn thing to come before the great Judge of all the earth to be judged. There are not many people in this world who like to be judged, and God's people are brought to this point in their own consciences. They know that they have been where the psalmist was, under the teaching of the Holy Ghost, and that they must be judged here or hereafter; and they would a million times rather be judged here than hereafter. The psalmist comes before God, and he says: "Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation" (in the margin, "an unmerciful nation"). The nation of this world is a profane nation, and even those in it who are under a great profession of religion are but an ungodly and an unmerciful nation. How unmerciful has the world ever been to the church and to the Lord of life and glory! David's most bitter enemies were, for the most part, professors of religion. He therefore says: "Plead my cause against an ungodly (or an unmerciful) nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man."

Some of you may be ready to say, "That is not my case." But, if not in the precise sense in which it was with David, it may be in another. I find an ungodly and an unmerciful nature in my own heart which is against me; and I also find there what the psalmist calls "a deceitful and unjust man." But is a saint of God a deceitful and unjust man? No, he is not; yet he has the old man of sin which is both deceitful and unjust. Hence Jeremiah says: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

(Jer.xvii.9). The man who is sensible of these things will be appearing before God at times like the psalmist, saying: "O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man." Then he continues: "For Thou art the God of my strength" - as though he had said: "I have no strength but what comes from Thee. Thou art the strength of my life - the life Thou hast given me. Thou alone canst keep it burning against all the opposition and wrath of those who are trying to extinguish it. Thou art the strength of my life, hope, love, patience, faithfulness, and so on; and Thou only canst preserve this gracious life in a heart like mine."

Then, to pass on, "Why dost Thou cast me off?" That is, as I understand it, in the sense of putting one back, not granting that peace or communication one feels to be so needful. "Why dost Thou cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" The child of God sometimes knows that God is chastening him for some particular sin; but at other times he does not know whether it is the chastisement of God laid upon him, or whether it is something for the trial of his faith or for the trial of any other grace. You see how he comes before God: he wants to know the best and the worst, how matters really stand between God and his soul. He wants God to be His God, to know whether He is or not; for he cannot always say that God is his God. But when he is blest of God, then he can say the Lord is his God. Here, then, we have a most ardent breathing of a living soul; "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles."

Now we may look a little, in the first place, as -

I. God's light and His truth.

II. What the psalmist desired: "Let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill and to Thy tabernacles."

I. (i) What is God's truth? In the first place, I may say this must be the truth as to His being, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The first thing that God taught me was that there was a God. After He had taught me this and shown me my lost and ruined condition, I feared that God, I dreaded to approach Him; and He taught me that I could not approach Him without a Mediator. Where, then, could a Mediator be found? I was a sinner, all round about me were sinners. I saw that I could not stand for myself, and I wondered who could stand for me before that God. Ah! The Lord had taught me what He was, and that no one less than God could mediate between Him and the sinner.

But how can God stand between God and the sinner? By the Son of God, one of the Trinity in unity, acting in the official capacity of a Mediator. How grand this is to a sensible sinner - brought to see what the justice of God is, and how absolutely unapproachable by the sinner - when, by divine teaching, he finds that there is a Person in the Godhead, God's beloved and eternal Son, who becomes the Mediator between God and man! When the Lord was pleased to reveal this to my mind, it raised me up to a hope in His mercy - that He would have compassion on me through that Mediator. But how can God's dear Son, though He is equal with the Father, stand between God and the sinner? It is by the assumption of our nature, not otherwise. The Mediator between God and man must be God, and He must be man; hence the absolute necessity for the assumption of our nature, for the Word to be made flesh (John i.14), and for Him to live and die for His people. The Lord, in His own time, showed me that no one can know His dear, incarnate Son but by divine teaching.

Hence the necessity of the work of the third Person in the ever-blessed and glorious Trinity to reveal the way to the Father through His incarnate Son. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost (I Cor.xii.3). Many can, and do, with the lips. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt.vii.22,23). They are only presumptuous people not believers; they take it for granted that He is their Lord when it is not so by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. God's being is a Trinity in unity - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost - and this, I say, the Lord taught me many years ago. Blessed be His name for instruction as to His being; for unless we are instructed by God in this mystery, we certainly are strangers to it. No one but God can reveal God.

In the truth of God we have not only the being of God, but we have the goodness of God. And in the goodness of God we have the love of God, God's everlasting love to His chosen people. Here is goodness, love that is unchangeable (Mal.iii.6), stronger than death, love that no waters can quench (Song.viii. 6,7), no fire can consume (Isa.xliii.2), no evil powers can destroy (Rom.viii.38,39), love that is everlasting (Jer.xxxi.3), love that draws poor sinners to the footstool of divine mercy (Song i.4), and saves with everlasting mercy (Psa.cxxxvi).

In the goodness of God there is grace - grace to unworthy ones; and every one taught of God is made to feel himself an unworthy one, unworthy in the extreme. Jacob says: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant" (Gen.xxxii.10). Much less, then, was he worthy of the infinite and eternal blessing that the Lord bestowed upon him. I believe God teaches all His people their unworthiness. And then they want grace, they value grace, they want nothing but grace. They feel that nothing but grace can meet their need, comfort their hearts, assuage their griefs, or feed their souls.

Again, in divine truth there is mercy. After the fall, our first parents hid themselves, probably aware of the wrath which they justly deserved. But we find the channel of mercy opened, mercy flowing through a Saviour's blood. The Lord said to the serpent concerning the seed of the woman, which was Christ, "It shall bruise thy head" (Gen.iii.15). The Lord was the first Preacher of free mercy and of rich grace; and when the Lord preached this mercy, it entered the heart. And so it does still; for when He is pleased, by His servants or otherwise, to preach this mercy to the hearts of His people, they feel the goodness flowing from the Lord.

The truth of God signifies also His work as well as His being: the work of God in devising the plan of salvation - the work of the Father in election, the work of God's dear Son in redemption, and of God the eternal Spirit in revealing the plan. There is room in the regenerate heart for the truths of election, of special redemption, and of efficacious grace. Nothing less than these things will satisfy a regenerate one: Am I chosen of God? Am I predestinated unto the adoption of children? Am I redeemed by the precious blood of Christ? Have I received the Spirit of adoption to cry, "Abba, Father"? (Rom.viii.15).

"O send out Thy truth." Send it out of heaven; send it out of Thy fulness into my heart; there is room for it, says the regenerate one, in my heart.

(ii) Let it come and let it freely flow, and let me have the sweet and blessed possession and enjoyment of it. You see, he wanted something more than the truth; he wanted the light, and so does every regenerate soul. He does not want merely the letter of truth, or as a sound creed in his judgment; but he wants God's light in His truth. Then we have not only the truth of God, but we have the light of God. If we are God's children, we are discontented without the light.

Light discovers truth; it shows one, in an unmistakable way, what truth is. When God began to teach me, the devil either personally attacked me, or he put it into the minds of men to attack me; and so I found myself from time to time assailed. I thought some that assailed me to be far more gracious and far more deeply taught of the Spirit than myself. I feared to speak lest I should expose myself to those who, on different points, assailed me; and I have been made to reel and stagger by the arguments of such men. But these drove me to the mercy seat, to flee from my own works; to draw near unto God in secret where none could disturb, and to cry for light. "O send out Thy light and Thy truth!" I wanted light to enable me to see that it was the truth recorded in the sacred pages of the Old and New Testaments.

But, again, one needs light not only to show him the truth of God, but to show him his interest in the kingdom of God. My soul has said: I see these truths in the word of God - election, redemption, effectual calling, justification by grace, pardon, reconciliation, sanctification, and glorification - but am I interested in these things? I need the light of God to show me that these things are mine - mine by God's grace and by His special gift, mine as a member of the mystical member of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need light to give us an earnest of these things. And, O, how sweet are the foretastes, the little touches and manifestations, the moments of communion, the little bubblings up of life that from time to time are realized in the heart! What pleasure and delight they bring!

II. But why does the Psalmist desire God to send out His light and His truth? "Let them lead me." What does this imply? It implies, in the first place, one's felt ignorance - that he cannot lead himself. He knows how liable he is to be

encompassed with darkness, so that he cannot see his way; he knows what it is to feel bewildered with errors that abound on every hand; and he know what it is to be sometimes almost at his wit's end. When darkness comes over me because of the hidings of God's face, and when some of the entangling errors of Satan and his agents perplex me, I seem hardly to know where I am, or how matters really stand between God and my soul. Then I am like a man lost, I value a Leader, and I beg of God to be my Leader, and to lead me by His truth and His light.

Then, again, here is a man that is not satisfied with his present condition or position. He does not want to stand still. This man is not an Arminian, or he would go to work himself. He is not an Antinomian, or he would lie down and say, "If I am to be saved, I shall be saved"; or, "If I shall be saved, I am saved." He is neither an Arminian nor an Antinomian, but he is a child of God, a son of the Most High, a living member of the Lord's church; and living members plead in this way: "Let Him lead me. I want to go on; I want to go forward, but I want to be right." Here is one with the spirit of a true pilgrim, a traveller - one who is dissatisfied with this world, its deceitfulness and its pleasures. But he desires to launch forth, to proceed in the Lord's strength and in the Lord's wisdom. What a favour if God has made us willing to go out of the land of Egypt, to go forth into the land of Canaan! What a favour if He has made us willing to go in the way He is pleased to lead us! It is often a wandering about for many years (Deut.xxxii.10).

Further, the Psalmist has an implicit confidence in God's leadership and God's truth - that God must do for him what neither he himself nor any other can do. He has proved that no arm can save but God's, no wisdom can guide but that of the God of heaven. And so, in his trouble, distress, and darkness - when surrounded by entanglements if not already entangled -

he pleads: "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me."

"Let them bring me unto Thy holy hill." Now it appears that the Psalmist at this time was far from God's holy hill in a literal sense. He was a wanderer, an outcast, running here and there. He had no settled abode, no rest for his body, and doubtless he felt still more unsettled in his mind. Perhaps there are some unsettled ones here this morning. Do you want to come to God's holy hill, where there is conflict? In His church there is a holy conflict, but it leads to a holy place in heaven above. The Lord's church, I say, is in a holy conflict, a battle, a warfare with sin, with Satan, and with an ungodly world. Here is one that wants to be with the family of peace, amongst the saints; he cannot be satisfied in any other society. The fighting is here and the rest hereafter; if there is no conflict here, there will be no triumph hereafter.

But why is the church called a holy hill? In the first place, because of elevation. A hill is a piece of ground elevated above the ordinary level; and so the people of God are by grace elevated above the common life of mankind whilst they are sojourning here below. I know they put themselves below the common level, consider themselves as less than the least, basest of the base, unworthiest of the unworthy. Sometimes they can hardly bear to think of themselves, to look at themselves, before God. They feel that, if God ever forgives them, they cannot forgive themselves.

How low God's saints put themselves! But, whilst they are putting themselves low, God is lifting them up, He is showing them to the world and to the church. He shows the world that there is a difference between His people and themselves. He shows the church also where He is making this

difference. The Lord's people sometimes look at one another with wonder and with delight; they see a change, they esteem the grace that has produced the change, and they feel a union of heart and soul to such. And so they are, as it were, hills; their hearts are elevated by grace to the joy of God's family, though to the scorn and derision of the world.

But, again, they are God's holy hill in the sense of firmness and steadfastness. Some of you may be ready to say: "There is no firmness or steadfastness in me. What a shaky, unstable, wavering being I am! I don't seem to know my own mind for hardly two minutes together." You may feel all this, but don't you know your mind about a Saviour, and that God alone can save your soul? You know that it must be in a Trinity of Persons - that no salvation but that of the Father's devising, the Son's accomplishing, and the Holy Spirit's revealing, will ever take you to heaven? Are not you at a point about these truths?

"If ever my poor soul be saved,

'Tis Christ must be the way." (678)

I am as steadfast as can be upon this point, and nothing will ever convince me to the contrary, or take this confidence from me. I was once speaking upon this point when, at the close of the sermon, an old man said: "There is something which the devil will never make me believe, though he has tried many times to make me believe it; and that is that free will can take me to heaven." And, speaking for myself, Satan has never made me believe that, since God taught me what a sinner I am. Since God has taught me, I have been firm on this point. So God's holy hill is firm and steadfast in this matter, whatever His people may be in themselves. They have no faith or hope but in God. They know that if God, in His Trinity of Persons, does not save them fully, finally, and eternally, they must be lost. The children of God want to come to His holy hill, and to be among these people. They do not want a yea-and-nay gospel - that is too shaky; but they want something solid and



firm, something that will support them in affliction; something that will do for life, for death, and for eternity. They long to be where a holy God is, and where there are people that love and breathe after holiness. And they will never be satisfied until they are as holy as God is holy in the regions of eternal bliss in heaven above.

"And to Thy tabernacles." The real child of God is not fully satisfied, you see, with being among God's family and made unmistakably one of God's children, nor even with the Holy Spirit bearing witness to his heart that he is an heir of glory; he wants more than this - "and to Thy tabernacles!" That is it. No doubt the Psalmist had a sacred love to the tabernacle service; his first duty was to go to the tabernacle, which was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. He wanted to be where the Lord's people were assembled together, for this was often made a tabernacle of the Most High.

Now this particular chapel has been the Lord's tabernacle to some of you many a time; you have found the Lord here, and the Lord has found you and revealed Himself to you. You may afterwards have been deprived of the service of the tabernacle of the Lord's house here. How you have then longed for the time to return, when you might come again to meet with Him and with His people! His children value the assembling of the saints. These are sacred spots to them, near and dear to their hearts.

"But," some of you may say, "cannot we read our Bible at home - pray and worship at home?" and so on. David could doubtless read in that wilderness some portions of the Scriptures which he may have had in manuscript; but he nevertheless wanted to pray and read with God's people. I have desired this ever since God put His holy fear into my heart: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb.x.25). This exhortation is needful;

and if it is set aside, God will hide His face or chasten in some other way. O, what a favour to be as the Psalmist, pleading for the tabernacles of God's house - where He is pleased to manifest Himself from time to time, and where again and again He is pleased to communicate His rich grace! The Lord does not come into the tabernacles, the assemblies of His people, empty-handed. There are times when He comes with a chastening rod, but (blessed be His name!) He does not always come in that way. And, even when He does come in that way, it is dipped in love. He has a loving heart, and He manifests His love even when using the rod, the sanctified effect of which is that His love is tasted and felt (Psa.cxix.67). We then wonder at a kind and gracious God taking the trouble to chasten us, that He might bring us to His feet and give us another proof that we are His children (Heb.xii.6).

This is, then, what the man of God wanted - to meet with God's people on earth, those who are hoping to spend an eternity in heaven. What a favour to have a place to meet in! O, what a blessing to have a heart made willing to unite with the people of God - to have room made in our hearts for the Lord's family as well as for His blessed truth! May the Lord add His blessing!