

Psalms - Commentaries by Russell Elliott

Angels in White: Messages of Comfort, "An Instrument of Ten Strings" Psalm 92:3 (92:3)

It has been well said,

"We learn in suffering what we teach in song,"

and though only a very few can teach in song, yet it is true of us all that our songs are the fruit of our sufferings. The children of Israel would never have sung with such triumph on the shores of the Red Sea but for their previous experience. The furnace of affliction, the recollection of the taskmasters' lash, tuned their voices as nothing else could. Indeed, ever since the entrance of sin into the world, nothing has been produced apart from toil and travail. The word to the woman was, "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children," and to the man, "In sorrow shalt thou eat ... all the days of thy life." And the mystery wrapped up in that one word "sorrow" runs through all the ages and through all human experience.

It is sometimes said the angels never sing. Why this is may be difficult to explain, but as a matter of fact we are never told that they do. We read that at creation "all the sons of God shouted for joy"; at the birth of Jesus they said, "Glory to God in the highest"; in Revelation 5 it is recorded that the number of angels "was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." But only of the redeemed it says, "They sung a new song." To account for this difference two reasons may be suggested. One is that the angels are not the subjects of redemption, and the first and last songs in Scripture are both connected with redemption. The other is that they have never had the varied experience that belongs to a redeemed sinner, and, as far as we know, they have never suffered. Of those only who have come out of great tribulation is it written that they "stand on the sea of glass ... and they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Rev. 15:23).

It is this varied experience which an instrument of ten strings suggests. To produce the finest music, more than one string is necessary, and if God is to have the best music from us, we must have more than one string to our instrument. Music is what God is seeking to get from us, and all His dealings, however painful, are only to make it more rich and full. Just as in an ordinary instrument there must be the bass and treble or there would not be perfect harmony, so God brings the darker shades into our life, as well as the sunshine, in order that the deeper tones may not be lacking — in other words, that there may be more strings to the instrument.

There is one string every Christian should possess—that is salvation. The first music God ever had from the children of Israel was when He had delivered them from their enemies (see Exodus 15). If anyone says, "Well, I am a Christian, but I have never sung like that," it is because you have imperfectly understood the gospel. If you are looking at your doings and what you are and how often you fail as a Christian, it is not to be wondered at if such a song has never come from your lips. The song is all about what the Lord has done. And when you see that He has delivered you from your sins and enemies and brought you to Himself, by the work of Christ, then you will for the first time really sing to God. You will have one string to your instrument.

"One string there is of sweetest tone, Reserved for sinners saved by grace; 'Tis sacred to one class alone, And touched by one peculiar race."

But God wants us to have others. He wants us to praise Him with an instrument of ten strings. At the end of Romans 4 and beginning of chapter 5 we see how we are brought to God. The past is all settled; we have peace. As to the present, we stand in the highest favor with God. As to the future, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Then the Apostle says, "Not only so, but we glory in tribulations also." Here is a wonderful thing: to be able to glory in tribulations — to glory, or boast, in the very thing we most dislike. Well, it is these very tribulations that produce some of the finest music from the saints of God. If you have learned to glory in tribulations, you have got another string or two to your instrument, perhaps several, because tribulations are so varied. Look at Paul and Silas in prison, their backs laid open with stripes, their feet fast in the stocks, their dungeon dark and unwholesome; yet at midnight they prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. What sounds to fill such a place, and at such a time!

Do we know anything of this? Are you passing through tribulation in some form or other? It seems a rough pathway to it, perhaps, but it is that you may sing, that God may (to speak figuratively) add another string, and thus get music from you such as He has never had before. Perhaps you say, "How can I glory in tribulations? It seems so impossible." One way is by seeing that they can benefit you as nothing else can. The Apostle does not say, "We glory in tribulations also," without indicating the method by which it is reached. "Knowing," he says, "that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope." And another thing we notice is that these tribulations stand in direct relation with the love of God — the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. This is the climax of the passage. He knew what tribulation could do for him, and so he gloried in it. And more than that, he knew that the One who sent the tribulation loved him perfectly. These two things, the conviction that tribulations are only a blessing in disguise and that it must be so because the One who permits it all loves us, will enable the weakest saint to glory in them.

Yes, it is the "knowing" what tribulation can work and the "knowing" the love which is behind it all, that enables us to praise God. As the psalmist says, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O most High: to show forth Thy loving-kindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night, upon an instrument of ten strings." And if God is allowing sorrow after sorrow to enter into your life, and calamities one after another to come upon you "just as if they watched and waited, scanning one another's motions, when the first descends the others follow" — He is only adding the strings, which are really your own experience of how He has delivered you and brought you to Himself, of how He loves you, of how He makes all things work together for your good, that thus the music may become more varied and possess greater harmony.

The history of Hezekiah presents a fine instance of this very thing. The message comes to him, "Thou shalt die, and not live," and he turned his face to the wall and wept sore. He afterwards describes his experience at this time. It seemed as though God would make an end of him. "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter," he says. "I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward." But at last he comes to this: "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." It is a blessed thing when we turn to the Lord in perfect helplessness and ask Him to help us. And to what did it all lead? At the end, after all the bitter experience he describes, he is able to say, "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption," and again, "The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day. ... Therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord" (Isa. 38). He can speak of stringed instruments, for the simple reason that he knows God as he never knew Him before. Was it not worth the pain?

Habakkuk is another example of the same thing. He learns that though everything goes, God remains. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom ... and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength." And he closes thus: "To the chief singer on my stringed instruments." Very few of us, it may be, have this string — to have nothing and no one but God, and find Him all-sufficient, so that we can rejoice in the darkest day. This is a very fine string to have on the instrument: "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

When they brought the algum trees to King Solomon, we read that he used them for two very different purposes — to make "terraces [stairs] ... and harps and psalteries for singers" (2 Chron. 9:10-11). In one case, the wood was to be trodden underfoot; in the other, it formed part of a musical instrument. There is a moral order in this as well as a lesson. The more we allow self to be trodden underfoot, the more we shall be in a state to produce music for God. Nine-tenths of our difficulties and troubles arise from the fact that in some form or other we have self before us instead of God. We are full of self-pity, or injured pride. May we be content to lie low in order that others may ascend! And if we are satisfied to be stairs, He will make us also stringed instruments.

Have you ever watched a musician and seen how he tightens the strings before commencing to play? Sometimes he turns and turns until the strings seem as though they would snap. It is to get the right tone. The musician knows what he is about. And does not God, though He may be dealing with you in much the same way and putting a great strain upon you? Yes, even though, like the Apostle, you may seem pressed out of measure, yet He knows how much we can bear. And He knows the effect the pressure will produce. The music will be all the sweeter.

The other day we watched a man making sweets. In the pot was a thermometer, and we wondered what that had to do with it. On inquiry, we learned that a certain heat was necessary, and unless that was registered the man knew his work would be marred. God wants sweetness in His saints, and so He heats the furnace. Trouble and affliction always have one of two effects: they either sour or sweeten. In the one case, the sorrow has been endured away from God; in the other, with God.

As we close this article, we are reminded that the century itself is drawing to a close. We should be insensible indeed were we unmoved by such a reflection. Neither time nor space will allow us to comment at length upon it here, but at least this question may be asked in connection with our present theme: How shall we spend the closing days of the old century and the opening of the new? Shall it be in praise? As we survey the past, with all its joys and sorrows, can we not see that God has been stringing the instruments that shall praise Him eternally? May we not begin now and say:

"Praise shall employ these tongues of ours, Till we with all the saints above
Extol his name with nobler powers, And see the ocean of His love;
Then while we look, and wondering gaze, We'll fill the heavens with endless praise."

A Wealthy Place: Angels In White Expanded, #13, Wealthy Place, A (66:10-12)

"Thou, O God, hast proved us: Thou hast tried us We went through fire and through water: but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place" (Psa. 66:10-12).

God's design always is to bring His people into a wealthy place. His word as to Israel of old was, "I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8). Nor is it otherwise today though the blessing may be of a different character. Our Lord said unto the woman of Samaria: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Again, He tells us that He not only came that we might have life, but that we might have it very "abundantly" (John 4:13-14; 10:10). The Apostle Paul speaks of the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts, of "always rejoicing," always confident of being "strengthened with all might," of having "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," and of being "filled with all the fullness of God."

Alas! that we should often be content with something less than God intends, and that our experience of the wealthy place should be so small. Would that we answered to the description in Jeremiah of the one "that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is! For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (Jer. 17:7-8).

How are we to reach this wealthy place? The steps are described in Psalm 66. Some of them may seem strange to us. But as Job could say, "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold."

The way to the wealthy place is described in the following words: "He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in Him . . . which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved. For Thou, O God, hast proved us: Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; Thou laidst affliction upon our loins; Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place."

The first experience on the road to the wealthy place is salvation. "He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot." This recalls the incident of the Red Sea, and the marvelous deliverance effected there. The redemption of the children of Israel caused a song to ascend from their lips such as had never been known before. "There did we rejoice in Him." Our path to the "wealthy place" lies along the same road. We must know God's deliverance. God would have every believer sing to Him for very joy of heart, and in exultation, as he sees the victory that has been wrought on his behalf. That victory has been described in New Testament language in Romans 4:3, 23-25 and Romans 5:1-2. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness . . . Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Let it be noticed that we reach the same point, precisely, as in Psalm 66 — "There did we rejoice in Him." The question is, Have we reached it in our own personal experience? For it is very certain we cannot rejoice without knowing it. Now it is quite possible for one who does not have clear views of the gospel, but still is a believer as far as his light goes, to be practically where Israel was in Egypt, sheltered by the blood. But notice that, no song issued from those dwellings, though the people were secure from God's judgment. They had not full salvation, for they were still in the land of bondage, and were not actually freed from their enemies. How different when, on the other side of the Red Sea, they saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. There they saw the great work that God had done, and they sang. Their enemies could never molest them again. Nor can our sins henceforth trouble us, if we believe God's testimony that Christ died for them and was raised again for our justification.

This is the glorious truth that we see in the portion of Scripture already quoted from the Epistle to the Romans. We see the great work God has done for us. It was He who "raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom. 24); it was He who delivered Him "for our offenses and [raised Him] again for our justification" (vs. 25). The only difference between Israel and ourselves is this: they saw it with their eyes; we see it by faith. God tells us what He has done, because we cannot understand it otherwise. Had we seen Jesus actually dying, we should not have understood the meaning of His death. So God tells us the meaning and expects us to believe what He says. And when we accept what is said because God says it, not because we feel it, then we have peace with God, and our experience will be, "There did we rejoice in Him." For He tells us how He Himself has delivered us from all our enemies. When we believe, we have peace.

In verse 9 two other reasons for rejoicing in God are given: "Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved." Not only have we redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, but we are born again and receive the gift of eternal life. We are established in a relationship with God as our Father, which even Adam in innocence did not know. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." And again, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." Our spiritual life takes its character, not from Adam, but from the only begotten Son. His place is our place: "accepted in the Beloved." His relationship is our relationship: "My Father and your Father . . . My God and your God." We are loved with the same love, "that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them." We have, in one word, the same life: "He that hath the Son hath life." This is the meaning for us of, "He holdeth our soul in life," whatever it may have meant to the Psalmist.

"And suffereth not our feet to be moved." How many of God's people can rejoice as they look back over their past history and see how true this is! Perhaps some have to say with the writer of Psalm 73, "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped." Yet you were kept. And your prayer today is, "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." As the Psalmist thinks of this, no wonder he exclaims, "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of His praise to be heard." God does indeed "keep the feet of His saints." Where should we have been otherwise? When that temptation came, He suffered you not to walk in the evil way. When you were attacked and opposed, He suffered not your feet to be moved. He who kept Abraham when Lot went astray, who kept Joseph in Potiphar's house, who kept Moses in the palaces of Egypt, and Daniel amid the seductions of Babylon, He has also kept you, and He is still able to keep you from falling.

And so today you can rejoice in Him. Rejoice because your sins can never rise against you; rejoice because you know your relationship with Him — He has put your soul in life. Rejoice because you are kept, and not until the journey is ended shall we know how much we owe to God.

But having reached this point now comes something else — we have to be proved. "Thou, O God, hast proved us." This was so in Israel's history. The rejoicing came first, the wilderness re-echoed with the song of triumph, and then, what followed? "They went three days in the wilderness, and found no water." The song died upon their lips. And those wondrous words, "Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously" were displaced by murmurs. Thou, O God, didst prove them. Why was this? There was an enemy inside, that needed to be subdued as well as outside. God had dealt with the latter. He had sheltered them when the destroyer passed through the land (Ex. 12); He had overwhelmed the Egyptians in the Red Sea. But God knew there was an enemy — the flesh — inside people. And He was too faithful not to deal with them about that, as He had been too faithful not to deal with their enemies who sought to oppress them and keep them in bondage.

We all have to learn that there is a lurking enemy within — the enemy of God and our own true happiness, and spiritual progress — the flesh, self — call it what you will. And the painful part comes when God has to deal with us about all that is in our own hearts. But God loves us too much not to do it, and it is just here we learn how much He does love us, and that His love is a reality. All that He will be to us in the tribulation, which so tries and tests us, this is the blessed experience we get. For after speaking of rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, the Apostle Paul adds, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

And God proves us because He will have reality. It was all very well for Israel to sing because their enemies were put down, but were they willing to have the flesh, which is enmity against God, put down within themselves? Would they submit to Jehovah's training? Would they consent to become what He wanted them to be? It was for this He made them feel their need — but only that they might realize their need of Him — and to bring to light deeper unfoldings of His goodness. To have no water was a sore trial, and, if possible, sorer still to come to Marah

and find the waters bitter. But, oh, what a revelation of God the experience of Marah brings, that He can make every bitter thing sweet! God showed Moses a tree which when cast into the waters they became sweet. So God would show us a tree — the Cross — and have us feel the depths of the love which Christ's death there reveals. God has shown it to us in Romans 5:6-11, the love that, when known, sweetens all. Are we not already reaching the wealthy place when we have experienced this? God indeed proves us, that we may learn ourselves, but also that we may learn Him, until, in learning Him, we become unconsciously transformed.

This is the thought surely in the next statement, "Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried." Silver is tried until the refiner can see his own image reflected. To accomplish this, the furnace must be heated, and yet must not be too hot. It is said of God: "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." To be in the crucible may not be pleasant, but the end in view is well worth the trouble, to be "refined" and "purified"! What comfort there is, too, in the thought that it is "as silver." God sees something precious there, something worth preserving, and worth purifying. This is why so many unconverted people escape chastening. They have not been born again, they are outside of Christ, and God sees only base metal. Silver speaks of what is precious. It is because we are precious to God that He tries us.

God deals with all His chosen ones more or less in this way. Abraham was tried. The nations around him were left alone and allowed to go on in their sin, but the "father of the faithful" was put again and again into the crucible. He was promised a son, who should be his heir, for twenty-five years. Then Abraham is called to offer him up to God. But in the end, he is worthy to be owned by God as His friend, and he is known forever as the "friend of God." How Joseph was tried! His dreams of a future glory bring him only hatred and persecution. Moses in the backside of the desert, and Paul in Arabia, tell the same tale. How brightly, at last, in every case, the silver shone. How wealthy they became both toward God and man. We receive the benefit of such experiences today.

If we are to reach the wealthy place, the same process is necessary. First, we must know what God has done: turning the sea into dry land, so that we are delivered from all our enemies, putting our soul in life and keeping our feet. Then He proves us to see if we are fit to be tried, as silver is tried. What a wonderful work God is doing with us and in us, in addition to what He has done for us!

But there are further dealings. The trials and testings are not all exhausted. "Thou broughtest us into the net." Does this refer to Israel's forty years wandering in the desert? It was the result of their own self-will. Had they been fit for it, they could have reached the land in a few days. But they rebelled against God, and contemned the council of the Most High. When He wanted them to go up and possess the land, they refused. When He told them not to go, they went. Do we know anything of the net? To be hemmed in on every side by circumstances, against which we rebel, yet from which there is no escape. A man in a net can do very little; the more he struggles the worse it is for him. Under such circumstances the only thing is to be still and wait. Did not the Apostle Paul know something of the net as the result of his last visit to Jerusalem? He confessed himself, "I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem" while soon after it was said to him, through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. And the warning is repeated (Acts 21:4, 11-12 and 20:22-23). Yet, in spite of all, he went. No doubt he was animated by the purest and highest motives, but no man ever got into a worse net. He was entangled on every hand. Entangled by Judaism, and by his appeal to Caesar, but there in the net he remained for more than two years, unable to visit the people of God so dear to his heart. Yet, who can doubt that all was overruled, in some way, for good? For the Apostle's own good, in the first instance, and then for ours. For himself, he gained a richer experience of what the Lord was to him in these most distressing circumstances. How infinitely touching is the assurance conveyed by the words which reached him just when all seemed to be going against him, when all his strategy had failed, and he was still in the net: "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." It assured him that the net would not be around him forever. And, as regards others, the time afforded in which to reflect on the revelations given to him which may have played an important part, as far as he was concerned, in the writing of those epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, which, more than any other writings, present Christianity in its unique and unfettered character, and in the largeness and liberty that belong to it.

What is the next means of bringing us into the wealthy place? There is ill health. "Thou laidst affliction upon our loins." God lays His hand upon our strength and turns it into weakness, then out of weakness we are made strong. Is not Job an instance of this? But what a wealthy place he reached. "The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before . . . The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:10,12). Jacob is another example of the same thing. God cannot allow His child to meet Esau as a supplanter, and so He changes his name from Jacob to Israel — a Prince. But then, neither must He allow Jacob to think anything of himself, and so the hollow of the thigh must be touched. And when the thigh is out of joint, then comes the change: "As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." The wealthy place is reached. "The sun rose upon him." It was a new day for Jacob. A new history had begun, as "he halted upon his thigh." The place of weakness is the place of power. The scheming, planning Jacob is changed; he can say, "I will not let Thee go," he has found all he can ever want in God.

What a wealthy place Paul reached by the same road. He not only knew the net, but God "laid affliction upon his loins" — in the shape of that thorn in the flesh. Oh, how he longed to have it removed, but if his request had been granted how much he would have lost, and so it was left with him, until at last he embraced it rather than asked to have it taken away. What made the difference? Christ had spoken to him those wonderful words, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." "My grace," "My strength," all at the disposal of the apostle. What wealth! "Therefore I take pleasure," he says, "in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

Is God dealing with you in any of these ways? Have you been put to the test? Do not resist or try to escape. Remember the potter can make nothing of untempered clay. It must be suitable to his purpose before he can do anything with it. If God is proving you He is conferring upon you the greatest honor, because He wants to fashion you to suit His purpose. A gentleman was standing watching a potter at work and noticed that he took all his clay from one mound, and not from another, for there were two mounds of clay near to his wheel. He asked the reason of this. The potter replied: "This clay is disciplined, tempered, prepared for use, the other is not." Then he took a small bit of the untempered clay threw it into the larger lump which he had in his hand, and said, "Now if you will watch carefully, you will see that before I have finished my work, that small bit of untempered clay will spoil the vessel I am proposing to fashion." The gentleman watched intently as the potter threw the clay upon the wheel. The vessel was responding to the potter's touch, and was growing into a shapely and symmetrical thing, when, all at once, without a second's warning, it bulged, and all the shapeliness was gone.

And so we have to be proved to see if we are suitable material, and then tried as silver is tried. Then, a further, and still further process must be undergone: brought into the net, and affliction laid upon our loins, all forming part of those wise and gracious dealings that have one end in view, not to mar us but to make us.

And if anything more is needed, we surely find it in the two remaining experiences: "Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water." The heat of the furnace seems to grow more intense, the testing more severe, as the end of the process is being reached. Could there be anything more humiliating than for men to ride over our heads: to be treated as the very dust of the ground, to become a mere carpet for people to walk upon, to see others getting advantage over us, preferred before us honored instead of us? This is, if anything, hardest of all to bear. The great apostle to whom we have already more than once referred — Paul — seems to have known something even of this. Listen to how he writes to the Corinthians, "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." In spite of the great work he had done among them, he received but scant acknowledgement from the Corinthians. They even preferred "false apostles" and he has to say to them, "I ought to have been commended of you" (see 1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 12:11). Yet he could say to these very people as descriptive of himself, "As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

The last phase is now reached: "We went through fire and through water: but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." All forms of dangers and distresses seem comprehended in "fire" and "water." The smith at his work uses the fire first in order to make his metal malleable, and then, after the hammering, plunges it into water. Steel acquires a hardness, it is said, by being suddenly cooled, as by dipping in water. Many have been through this process, and what experiences they have had of God, both in the "fire" and in the "water." "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." The "fire" and the "water" often lie on the road to the wealthy place. It was the one who could say, "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep," who could also speak in the very next chapter of the abundance of the revelations, and of being caught up to the third heaven. But the road to paradise lay through all this. What a wealthy place to reach. But he was let down in a basket before being caught up to the third heaven (2 Cor. 11:33; 12:2).

"But Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." We may well be thankful for the "but." But for that, we might often give way to despair under God's dealings. Yet God's "buts" have large begettings. There is an end to our sorrows, but no end to His goodness; an end to our trials, but none to our triumphs.

Notice in the first place, what the Psalmist says in the next verse (13); "I will go into Thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay Thee my vows." The wealthy Christian is one who has something to offer. In Romans 12:1-2, we are besought to present our own bodies a living sacrifice in order that the will of God may be accomplished in us. We do this by having reached the wealthy place set before us in chapters 5-8 of that epistle. In Hebrews 13:15, we read, "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name." But the heart must feed upon Christ before there can be this "fruit of our lips."

Then, again, we are told "To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:16. See also Galatians 6:10).

A wealthy Christian, too, is one who pays his vows. "I will pay Thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble." Now while in the New Testament there is hardly any reference to vows (in striking contrast to the Old) and no hint that they are obligatory, because, no doubt, God wishes everything to be the spontaneous outcome of His own grace, yet it is sadly possible to keep back from God that which is due to Him. You have been delivered in trouble. Have you done what you resolved to do? Have you paid your vows? Or, God may have sent you prosperity, and you remember the time when you had the thought, "If God ever does bless me with worldly goods, I will use them to His glory." God has put you to the proof, and how have you come out of the test? Are you impoverishing yourself by keeping back what you ought joyfully to give back? Will you not say, in the language of verse 15, "I will offer unto Thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams: I will offer bullocks with goats"?

Then follows another mark of a wealthy person in verse 16. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." It is the man who in his experience has been through the previous part of the psalm who can do this. Are we able to do it? Not ostentatiously, or self-assertively, but with gladness and reverence. From the little some people ever speak of what God has done for their soul, you would scarcely think they had one.

In the last verses of our psalm we have another mark of one who has reached the wealthy place. He obtains answers to his prayers. "I cried unto Him with my mouth, and He was extolled with my tongue . . . verily God hath heard me; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me" (vss. 17, 19-20). This is closely connected with declaring what God has done for our soul. How blessed we are when we have a rich experience of answered prayer. If you can go to God and get what you want, you are indeed in a wealthy place. Especially when we have to do with One, who, if He denies us the thing we sought, sends us something better. There are two things to be remembered. Do not let us forget the latter part of verse 17 — to extol Him. We so often ask, and forget to praise Him for all He has done for us already. "In everything by prayer and supplication," but let it be also, "with thanksgiving" (Phil. 4:6). And then Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." We are dwelling in a barren place, instead of a rich place, if we regard iniquity in our heart. Our lips become more or less dumb, and our heart cold, and our prayers are unheard. All the process by which God leads us to the wealthy place, which we have been considering, is intended to deliver us from regarding this iniquity in our heart, and to enable us to declare what God has done for our soul.

Let us arise then and possess this land, and dwell therein. The way to it may, at times, be thorny, and the road sometimes rough and circuitous, but the end of the journey will make up for all. The furnace, and the net, and the crucible by the way are intended to give us fresh proofs that God loves us too well to leave us unproved and undisciplined.

All that so unexpectedly darkens our lives, which we think we so little deserved — all those calamities which seem heavy enough to crush us, and which we consider so uncalled for — all those sorrows which fill the eyes with tears and make the heart ache — these and such like, are

designed, if only we would accept them from a loving Father's hand, to bring us to the wealthy place where we can offer praise to God and declare what He has done for us.

Shipwrecked!: Angels In White Expanded #10, Shipwrecked! (42:7)

"And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest" (Acts 27:18).

"All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me" (Psalm 42:7).

There are, no doubt, times when shipwreck not only threatens us, but becomes our experience. We believe this experience to be very real in some lives, but it takes many forms, and affects us in many ways. It may relate to health, or fortune, or reputation, or to our spiritual experience. It is a time when, to use the expressive phrase of our narrative (Acts 27), we are "exceedingly tossed with a tempest," when neither "sun nor stars" in many days appear, when all hope that we should be saved is taken away, and we ardently "wished for the day." We are baffled, forsaken, overwhelmed, and stunned. Whatever form the shipwreck may take, it is always a supreme crisis in our life.

Often it happens on the way to some desired haven. Paul had earnestly desired to see Rome (Acts 19:21; Rom. 15:23-24). "Having a great desire these many years to come unto you," is the language in which, on one occasion, he expressed that longing. And now he is on his way to them.

So with ourselves, the storm will often burst — the shipwreck will overtake us — just as we seem to be on the high road to a success, to an achievement, or to a goal of some kind that we hope to attain.

Shipwreck does not necessarily mean complete disaster, irretrievable ruin, though it may mean the loss of certain things we hoped to have retained and perhaps thought indispensable. In Paul's case, there was the loss of the ship and all it contained, but of no man's life. Despite shipwreck there is gain as well as loss.

The shipwreck came to Paul after a long term of discipline in prison. For two years, he had been detained at Caesarea. He was called to pass through a variety of experiences. The quiet and seclusion of Caesarea stand out in bold relief from the commotion, excitement, and dangers of the storm at sea. But it was in the shipwreck that the discipline and experiences of prison life reached their climax. Such experiences were also a preparation for it. How often we are taken aside before some great crisis! How frequently there is the stillness before the storm, during which some message reaches us by which we are fortified against all that is to follow. It was in prison that Paul received that divine communication: "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." Amidst the wild hurricane of the storm, as they were "driven up and down in Adria," when no small tempest lay on them, and all hope that they should be saved was taken away, these words must have often come to mind and strengthened the conviction that ultimate deliverance would be given.

Shipwreck may come towards the end of our career. Paul's journeys and labors were almost over, his course was nearly up, his last witness was about to be borne, and Satan would, if possible, prevent the great apostle of the Gentiles from ever reaching the seat of the world's government, to testify of the world's Saviour. In the whole course of our experience there may be troubles and difficulties, disappointments and setbacks of various kinds, but the shipwreck experience comes, perhaps, but once, and it is like no other. It is an accumulation of distresses, in the midst of which we need all our past experiences to help us, all our powers of navigation to enable us to keep afloat, all our courage and our hope. We have to endure as seeing Him who is invisible. For "neither sun nor stars in many days appeared."

It may be noticed that though one of the greatest and most devoted of servants, and also an apostle, Paul was not exempted from this ordeal. We may be inclined to ask, Why did not God see fit to spare one who had served Him so faithfully, so long, and so successfully, and who had already been through so much, and save him from this catastrophe? God meant Paul to reach Rome. From one point of view, He was sending him. Why did He not then provide the best and most comfortable means of transporting him thither? How different God's ways are from ours! Instead of doing what we might have expected, the very opposite seems to have happened. Paul is allowed to go as a prisoner, and he appears to be the mere sport of circumstances. When he admonished those in charge and warned them that the "voyage would be with hurt and much damage," we read: "Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul." And so the ship is allowed to proceed according to the caprice of man, and the disasters predicted all follow as a consequence. Why, we may ask again, was this man, who on other occasions could work miracles, and who even was henceforth to work them, not allowed by the exercise of miraculous power to overrule the decision of the master or avert the storm? In fact, why did God permit the storm?

To fully discuss these questions would carry us too far astray from our purpose, but this one thing stands out with perfect clearness, that it is not always part of God's ways to save His people (He did not save even an apostle) from the ordinary and natural consequences of either their own or other people's acts. His way seems rather to overrule ordinary conditions, and manifest Himself in them, either by giving sustaining grace or delivering power. Thus, we gain a deeper knowledge of Him than would be the case if He spared us all trial and vicissitude. And this fact, while it does not do away with faith, necessitates ordinary foresight, and calls into exercise the various powers with which the Creator has endowed us. It is never right to say, "If a thing is going to happen, it will happen, and if it is not to be, it will not be." Such conclusions are false in every way — false to ourselves, false to God, false to the common experience of life. Paul gave the captain of the vessel and the centurion good advice, which if they had followed, the consequent "hurt and much damage" would have been avoided. It was not taken, and this want of wisdom and foresight was soon brought home to everyone by some very hard facts.

The narrative furnishes another instance of the same kind. Not only had Paul been told that he must be brought before Cæsar, but it was added, "God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." And he tells the assembled company, "there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship." Yet when the sailors "were about to flee out of the ship . . . under color as though they would have cast anchors

. . . Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.” How far removed was Paul’s mind from fatalism. He did not argue, I am to reach Rome, this is part of God’s purpose, and the lives of all have been given to me, and therefore I need take no account of anything, no matter what happens, it will be just the same. If these sailors leave the ship it does not matter. This was not his way of looking at it. He was no doubt perfectly unshaken as to God’s purpose and perfectly convinced as to His promise, for had he not just declared publicly, “Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.” But this did not blind him to another side, that is, that there are matters which require our attention and that we cannot afford to neglect them, for God uses means.

May we not also learn in passing, that it is possible to be involved in shipwreck through the mistakes of others. In Paul’s case, it was not brought about by any misconduct of his, but because his wise counsel was not accepted. He appears helpless. Having proffered his advice, he can do no more, and matters are allowed to take their course. Nor is it otherwise in our own case, sometimes. The shipwreck may not always be the direct result of our own actions. But whatever the cause, our consolation may be that God can make all serve His highest ends, and bring good out of evil. God’s providence and purpose are seen in the end to go hand in hand.

Though we are not prepared to say that shipwreck (as here described) comes into every life, is it not a very real experience in the history of not a few? There are, undoubtedly, sheltered lives, with few struggles, which are disturbed by few storms. With others, how different! For the sake of any who have passed, or may be passing, through this experience, we would endeavor to set down some of its features.

Often it is preceded by a calm — “the south wind blew softly.” We seem to be making headway, all appears propitious, the “desired haven” seems almost within sight, when the tempest bursts — Euroclydon is upon us in all its fury. We feel driven before the wind, not knowing what the issue may be. We use the accustomed “helps,” but they are unavailing. Some have known what it means to be confronted with a power against which they could not stand. Was not the psalmist in this plight when he uttered the cry: “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then Thou knewest my path.” All trace to us seems lost, but God knows the way that He takes, even though we may be driven before the winds and waves of circumstance, temptation, or doubt.

Many of the expressions used in connection with this literal shipwreck, are equally descriptive of its spiritual counterpart. In what vivid language is the scene described: “We being exceedingly tossed with a tempest,” “and when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared,” “driven up and down in Adria.” There is danger from quicksands, rocks and shoals.

More than once something of this experience seems to have come to Jacob. No small tempest lay on him when he was compelled to flee from home and go as a stranger into a strange land. Nor was it otherwise upon his return years later, and when he learned that Esau was coming to meet him, with four hundred men. And surely “sun and stars” did not appear for many days after the reported death of Joseph.

Hezekiah in his sickness knew the meaning of shipwreck. Sun and stars are blotted out of his heavens and he was “exceedingly tossed up and down.” In his distress, he cried:

“I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world . . . I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will He break all my bones: from day even to night wilt Thou make an end of me. Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.”

Does the reader know anything of “being exceedingly tossed with a tempest”? You are carried off your feet, so to speak. The opposing elements are too much for you. There seem to be dangers on every hand. And in the midst of adverse winds and currents, when the powers against you seem overwhelming, and your frail boat feels as though it will founder, have you required to know, in order that you may be fully tested, what it means for God’s conscious support and presence to be withheld? He has not really left you, of course, but His comforts have ceased for the moment — sun and stars do not appear. And then, do you know the weariness of being “driven up and down in Adria”? Oh, the tiresomeness of it all! Progress there seems none, you come back to the same point again and again, no nearer to your goal after all the tossing, and it seems as if from Adria there is to be no escape.

But all is not so aimless or useless as it appears for the shipwreck has its lessons. One surely is that we learn to estimate things at their true value.

We may suffer loss, but we discover that such things after all are not the indispensable things. In the shipwreck, which all along we have been using as our illustration, many things had to go, but the lives of all were preserved. First, the tackling of the ship was cast out, then other things went overboard. Even the wheat was cast into the sea, and lastly, the ship itself went to pieces. Yes, the use of the shipwreck is to lighten us, to enable us to lay aside every weight, to reveal to us what are the hindrances, to show us the true value of things. All this, of course, is in relation to the scene we are in, the journey we are taking, and to the goal that is before us. As the apostle reminds us, “The time is short.” “They that buy, as those that possessed not. And they that use this world, as not abusing it” (1 Cor. 7:29-31). How much tackling and sail we carry that could be dispensed with — and better dispensed with — in the circumstances. They are a source of danger and inconvenience, considering the character we are called to bear before the world, and the path in which we are called to walk. That outward show which we prize so much, which ministers to our self-importance; the many things that we think to be useful and a help — are not these the tackling and the sails that the shipwreck deprives us of? And are we not immensely gainers, in the highest sense, by the loss? As the apostle puts it, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” How apt even Christians are to think that some gain is to be got out of worldly advantage, and we are prone to carry all the tackling and sail available. And truly it all looks very fine when there is no Euroclydon nearby, but when the storm comes, how much of it has to go overboard! Yet what is essential remains — the life remains; and the life is more than meat, and the body more than raiment. Then we come to see that God is supremely occupied with what we are — the life — and not with what we have. “There shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.” “A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

But there are other gains. To Paul it is said, “And, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.” Just as life is of supreme importance in the first instance (for a man cannot bless others beyond the blessing he himself has received), so it is the lives of others that we are to seek. Apart from the shipwreck, Paul could never have had this supreme honor — that of being the means of the salvation of all on board. He could

not have felt the same concern about these people had their lives not been in jeopardy. And we have, no doubt, that this result — this salvation — though only temporal — was granted in response to his prayers. Perhaps these people never realized they owed their preservation to Paul's presence and to his petitions, any more than the world realizes today what it owes to the presence of God's people and to their prayers. If eternity reveals all relating to this great war which has ravaged the land, it will probably be found that prayer availed more than many people think, to stem the tide of the enemies' assault and ultimately to end it.

Once more, does not the shipwreck bear witness to God's preserving care and overruling providence, as well as to His method of working? He did not see fit to give His servant a pleasant journey to Rome, but He did stand by him, and He gave him wonderful words of comfort to speak to all on board. Could there be anything more sublime than the picture of that solitary figure in the storm, undismayed and unmoved, with words of cheer for everyone? It gives us to see the reason why shipwrecks are allowed — we learn in them what God can be to us, and what He can enable us to do and to bear; thus we become qualified to help others. Paul is able to say to these distressed voyagers "there shall not a hair fall from the head of any of you." And these words came to pass. We marvel sometimes at all that is allowed to happen. Does the opposite ever fill us with wonder; that is, what we are spared?

And then lastly, as we watch through the storm this noble figure of Paul, do we not become conscious of the gain? We see how God can fill a man and use him. For he is more than self-possessed, he is God-possessed. When all hope is gone, and the ship is ready to sink, we see him standing in the midst of it all, serene and still master of the situation. What words he is enabled to speak! "There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve." Mark how he is able to comfort others! "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." How spiritually great he is and yet how practical. We see him as one who receives direct communications from God, and shortly after, we see him beseeching them to take meat. Then Paul gives "thanks to God in presence of them all" and eats, giving them an example. "Then were they all of good cheer."

It may not be our lot to go through a shipwreck (metaphorically speaking) with this calm, confident spirit, feeling ourselves master of the situation. Things may happen which we do not care to remember; we may be carried off our feet. In the rough and tumble of a shipwreck — to be in a place "where two seas meet" — is not a condition in which one can always manifest great composure, or be confident as to the issue — but if it is the place where we learn our own impotence and nothingness, it is also the occasion where we are reminded that God has not forgotten us,

"So He bringeth them unto their desired haven." We reach the haven at last, though the experience on the way may be very different from what we anticipated. It was so with Paul. When he spoke about going to Jerusalem, and added "after I have been there, I must also see Rome," little do he know all that would befall him on the way thither. But how true it is: "He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still." If these experiences belong to any of us at the present time — if "no small tempest" lies on us, and much that we valued is disappearing overboard — or if we are experiencing the monotony of being "driven up and down in Adria" — the seeming sport of winds and waves without progress — let us not forget that Paul did eventually reach Rome, and that on the way, he heard the voice of God amid the storm. And, if there is the same trust and confidence on our part, what God was to him, He will be to us. And the ultimate gain will be a richer spiritual experience, and a truer estimate of what is really of value, with the consciousness that that which is highest and best remains, and is more our own than ever.

Shipwreck on an Important Journey 3

Shipwreck After Discipline 4

Shipwreck at the End 5

No One Exempt from Shipwreck 6

Shipwreck Through Others' Mistakes 10

Many Shipwrecks 11

Shipwreck Teaches True Value 14

Shipwreck Gains 17

Shipwreck Shows His Care 18

How God Fills and Uses a Man 19

1. Abide with Us #9858

2. Divine Excess #9867

3. God's Providence #9863

4. How Long O Lord, Until #9860

5. Joy in Suffering #2249

6. The Lord Hath His Way #9861

7. The Lord of Peace #9859

8. The Meaning of Suffering #9866

9. Personal Grief, Personal Comfort #3540

10. Shipwrecked! #9862

11. Trials — Their Meaning and Use #5351

12. A Wealthy Place #4532

13. Why Art Thou Cast Down? #9864

14. Angels in White Expanded Pamphlet Pack #9868

Each of these articles by R. Elliott is not currently in print in the book *Angels in White* but was included in the original printing of that title many years ago.

Why Art Thou Cast Down? *Angels In White Expanded*, #13, Why Art Thou Cast Down? (42:11)

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Ps. 42:11).

In the psalm before us, the soul is in the very depths of distress — deep calleth unto deep. Yet the one whose experience is here set forth was not one of the most wicked men on earth — far from it. He can say, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" Yet he has to say, "My tears have been my meat day and night." His soul is cast down and disquieted. He declares, "All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me." So great is his anguish that it is as if a sword pierced his bones. All this comes upon one who is godly.

But how does he regard these afflictions? Does he say, "This is all I get for seeking God?" On the contrary, he seeks to rally his soul to hope and praise. Let us see how this man carries himself under this weight of trial (surely greater than that experienced by most of us), and as we watch him closely, it may be we shall learn some deep lessons and come to regard our own sorrows and sufferings in a clearer and calmer light.

When his soul is cast down and when God seems to have forgotten him, with enemies reproaching him and their continual jeer ringing in his ears, "Where is thy God?" (Psalm 42:3,10), this is what he says to himself: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him" (vs. 5).

Although the sorrows and the trials continue, he repeats this to himself, and continues to address his soul in this hopeful and inspiring language. (See vs. 11.) Here is a divine balm, calculated to dispel all worry and to prevent its reappearance. Let us repeat it over and over again until we cease to fear and fret. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him."

How much these words suggest. First of all, they imply that we may not be able to help feeling depressed when something disastrous occurs. In our infirmity we may no more be able to help a first sensation of pain and depression than we can help staggering under the impact when some heavy person runs suddenly upon us. The great concern is, does hope or despair succeed after the first shock? Do we challenge our soul as the Psalmist does his? "Why art thou cast down? Why art thou disquieted?" Is our hope in God? Do we say, "I shall yet praise Him"? It makes all the difference whether we nurse our sorrow as a grievance or not, and also whether our gaze is intent on the grief or on God. Think over again all that this man had to endure: "My tears have been my meat day and night." "O my God," he says, "my soul is cast down within me." He speaks of God's waterspouts and God's waves and billows. He had to bear oppression and reproach. He is no novice in the school of suffering and discipline. May we not think of him as one who has passed through the whole curriculum of painful experience in its acutest form and taken his degree? And he says to his own soul, and to yours, "Hope thou in God." Yes, hope, and that in the anticipation of being yet able to praise. Has he not a right to speak to you? Can your affliction be greater than his?

What a perfectly human, as well as divine, document is this psalm! Who does not know the meaning of being "cast down" and "disquieted"? Very few are exempt from such experiences. The Apostle Paul, even with all his power of intellect and strength of character, was not immune from times of depression. His language in one place implies that he was cast down, but he adds, "God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us." If we know the one (and who does not?), we may also know the other. How wonderful that it should be characteristic of God's ways to comfort those that are cast down! How many from various causes are in this mood? Yet God is not too busy to attend to you, if you require His comfort. He cares for you as if He had no one else to care for. He loves you as if He had no one else to love.

Great comfort is to be found in the thought that the Lord Jesus Christ was not exempt from this experience. This very psalm contains expressions descriptive of what His own soul passed through. He above all men could say, "My tears have been My meat day and night, while they continually say unto Me, Where is Thy God?" For was He not the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? Especially verse 7 may be applied to Him. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts; all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me." No one could say this as He could. Yet, at the same time, whoever panted after God as He did? All this reminds us how perfectly able He is to enter into what we are feeling, however deep the anguish.

"He knows what sorest trials mean, For He has felt the same."

Could anything yield greater comfort than the thought that there is a man upon the throne, seated above the highest heaven, who has felt every trial and faced every trouble that belong to human experience, and who is qualified to succor and sympathize? "Blest be the sorrow,

kind the storm” that drives us to Him. And verse 8 was as true of our Lord as any of the other verses. His trust was always perfect, His faith never shaken. He did not complain, however bitter the cup or heavy the burden.

“Yet the Lord will command His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with Me, and My prayer unto the God of My life” (vs. 8).

He knew God’s love, and that sustained Him. “Therefore doth My father love Me,” He could say, “because I lay down my life.” “His song” was with Him in the darkest night — even the night of unutterable anguish, the night of the dark betrayal and Gethsemane. He could sing in the face of all that was to follow. Nor was prayer ever wanting unto the God of His life. Thank God, His experience of His Father’s comfort may be ours.

“The Lord will command His loving-kindness the daytime.” Such are the words which come in the midst of this psalm of anguish. Sometimes He commandeth and raiseth up the stormy wind, and it seems as if nothing but desolation and disappointment came into your life. But wait, and He will also command His loving-kindness. In Psalm 78 we read, “He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by His power He brought in the south wind.” What a contrast there is between these two — the east wind and the south wind. If you have been experiencing the former then expect the latter — “By His power He brought in the south wind.” God’s love is the best thing He has, and He puts that at your service. His loving-kindness waits on you! He who can command angels and they shall minister to you, and who can bestow every good gift, commands that which contains within itself all good gifts and all ministries — His loving-kindness; that shall attend you — that shall be shed abroad in your heart. Just at the bitterest moment, all the sweetness of it shall be yours. Just at your weakest moment, all its strength shall be yours. Just at the moment when you are ready to despair, all its hope shall be yours. Just at the worst, God will reveal to you His best. He will command His loving-kindness in the daytime. He will command as He did of old, and the water of affliction shall become the wine of joy, and at the last you will be able to say, “I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord and the praises of the Lord.”

“And in the night His song shall be with me.”

“His song.” What must that be like? the song of the Infinite? The song of endless millenniums? The song that never had a beginning and will never have an end. “When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy,” that was not even the commencement of it. It is the song of creation, of redemption, of coming glory. It is the song of songs. Is His song with you? and in the night? It was at night the shepherds heard the angels saying, “Glory to God in the highest.” But this is His song. Have you heard it? Have you learned it? It is the song of Christ. “In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee.” It is the song of resurrection. Death is vanquished, the night disappears, and the resurrection morn has dawned. If His song is with you, there can be no fretting — you cannot be downcast. You will catch the strains of that triumphant note, and as He sings you will sing. But it is “His song” not your song; ours is only an echo of His. And if sleep will not come to your eyelids, something better will come, for if His song is with you, your heart will be merry though it is night and you are alone.

Thus we have day and night — the complete round of our life. Loving-kindness in the daytime. His song at night. What a contrast to verse 3. “My tears have been my meat day and night.” What an exchange — loving-kindness and song for tears!

And then what comfort is found in those other words. “My prayer unto the God of my life.” How real prayer becomes with the recognition of this fact, that God is the God of our life. To recognize that our life belongs to Him — that He holds it, superintends it, fashions it, orders and arranges it, takes an interest in everything that belongs to it — will make all the difference to our prayers. “My prayer unto the God of my life.” How individual this is and how intensely personal! Just as truly is He the God of my life as if I were the only one living on earth. And the connection of prayer with this fact delivers us from every fatalistic tendency. I pray to Him about my life — tell Him all my hopes and fears, my questions and desires, my joys and sorrows, my strivings and struggles, my defeats and victories, my aims and efforts — and so my life is to a certain extent the result of my own praying, as well as of His fashioning. My prayers make a difference.

What a grand life this psalm reveals to us! It is full of pathos, full of anguish — “Deep calleth unto deep” — but it is also full of God, and what He is to the soul that knows Him. Are there any “deeps” in our life? There must be if our experience is to be deep.

But, for this blessed experience to be ours, three things are necessary:

First, we must be able to take up the language of verses 1 and 2. Our soul must pant after God, thirst for God, long for God’s presence. The line of all true progress is indicated here. Only as we come to a fuller knowledge of God and a deeper desire after God are we making true progress. So often we are content with being saved simply from punishment. We think of Christ’s death as a means of escape from hell, and as a passport to heaven, and that is all, or nearly so. No wonder our experience is shallow, and our Christian life unsatisfactory. Christ died, not merely to save us from punishment, but to save us from sin, and above all, to reveal God to us, that we may be truly holy and truly happy. It makes all the difference to our life as Christians whether we view His death from the one standpoint or the other.

It is this knowledge of God which the Bible everywhere puts before us as the supreme good. And nothing is really right with us until it is attained. God was always reminding His ancient people of this. (Read carefully Jer. 9:23-24, Hos. 6:6). The New Testament is full of the thought that the mission of Christ was to make God known. For this He lived and for this He died. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18). “No man knoweth who . . . the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him” (Luke 10:22). The Apostle Paul lays down the conditions of all true growth when he speaks of “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). Or, as it might be rendered, “Growing by the true knowledge of God.” Again and again in his second epistle the Apostle Peter refers to the knowledge of God. (See chapter 1:2-3; 3:18). As we come to know God through the service and suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ, the effect will be to make us long after Him, as our Psalm describes. And what comfort such knowledge will be to us amidst all our earthly experience and how it will steady us amid life’s discipline they who possess it know well.

Second. We must live in the presence of God. The psalm we are dwelling upon frequently speaks of this. The marginal rendering of certain words in verse 5 is, “His presence is salvation.” To be continually in God’s presence means constant deliverance, and it is a source of unfailing strength and joy. This is sometimes described as “the practice of the presence of God.” Whatever we may understand by such a

term, it represents a great truth. When God said to Moses, “My presence shall go with thee,” He was offering him His best. In Psalm 80 three times over we have the words repeated, “Cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved” (vss. 3, 7, 19). What is Israel’s blessing at the end of Numbers 6, but the same thing? The shining of God’s face means life and health and peace. And the promise in Ephesians 5:14, if we fulfill certain conditions, is that Christ will shine upon us. What comfort and joy are here guaranteed to us even though circumstances would cause the soul to be cast down and disquieted!

And, lastly, if the experience of verse 8 is to be ours and we are to be cheered by God’s loving-kindness and by His song, and our prayers are to have free play, we must know how to accept God’s discipline and the trials that may come upon us. If we rebel or murmur, communion is at an end; we do not abide in His love, and consequently we lose our joy. Few things are more wonderful than such an experience as is unfolded in this psalm. Privation, affliction even anguish are experienced, yet the deepest trust and confidence in God are never for one moment absent. Indeed, the longing after God seems intensified as the agony grows deeper.

The psalm reminds us of the aphorism, “All’s well that ends well,” for it closes with a repetition of verse 5 — with the psalmist challenging his soul to hopefulness and praise. And in this respect the psalm is a reflection of the whole Bible, and of all God’s ways. Nothing is clearer, nothing more certain, than that everything is to end well for God and His people. Instance after instance of this rises up before us. Both the promises of God, and the record of what men and women have already experienced, afford guarantee after guarantee that for the righteous it shall be well. Few lives on record have darker pages than the life of Joseph. Sold as a slave by the very men who should have loved and cherished him; slandered and wrongly imprisoned; the subject of ingratitude and neglect, until the iron entered into his soul — yet, few histories have a brighter ending. When made known to the very brethren who had hated and ill treated him, he is able to say to them, “Tell my father of all my glory in Egypt.” He who had been so low as to be a slave and a prisoner ends at the very top of the ladder.

We read of Job, after all his vicissitudes, “The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.” And the divine comment on his history from the pen of the Apostle James is “Ye . . . have seen the end of the Lord.” The “end”! — that is what we must always wait for. What an end there is to the book of Ezekiel. Chapter after chapter unfolds the blackness of Israel’s history and the calamities in store for them. Yet the closing statement is this: “And the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there.” Could anything be more full of promise or blessing? And how does the book of Revelation end — that book so full of human wickedness and divine judgment, of darkness and tempest, that we read — “Out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices”? Before it closes we are permitted to hear the music of the river of the water of life and instead of a world overwhelmed with judgment, the new heaven and new earth come into view, and the Bible ends in the very presence of earth’s Sovereign and Lord ready to return and take possession. And how do the Psalms end? An undercurrent of sadness and suffering — sometimes of bitterness and anguish — runs through many of them. In no writings, inspired or uninspired, do we find such expressions of pain and sorrow, and yet they end on the highest note conceivable. The last five all begin and end with “Praise ye the Lord.” All His angels; all His hosts; sun and moon, and stars of light: all above the earth, and all upon it, yea everything that hath breath, are called upon to praise the Lord. And so human agony ends at last in the universal harmony.

May not each sorrowing one, then, who knows God, take up the language of our particular psalm and say “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”

In this last sentence lies the secret of all true happiness and progress. Our spiritual health comes from contact with God. “They looked unto Him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.”

Contents

How the Soul Rallies 3

This Psalm Expresses Christ’s Experience 7

Sustained Day and Night 8

A Song in the Night 11

Real Prayer 12

Deeper Desire 14

Knowledge of God 15

The Presence of God 16

Accepting Discipline 17

The Secret of True Happiness 21

Titles in This Series:

1. Abide With Us #9858

2. Divine Excess #9867

3. God’s Providence #9863

4. How Long O Lord, Until #9860

5. Joy in Suffering #2249

6. The Lord Hath His Way #9861
7. The Lord of Peace #9859
8. The Meaning of Suffering #9866
9. Personal Grief, Personal Comfort #3540
10. Shipwrecked! #9862
11. Trials — Their Meaning and Use #5351
12. A Wealthy Place #4532
13. Why Art Thou Cast Down? #9864
14. Angels in White Expanded Pamphlet Pack #9868

Each of these articles by R. Elliott is not currently in print in the book Angels in White but was included in the original printing of that title many years ago.

clickbible.org