



SUNDAY READING

MORNING SERVICE.

This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; fear before Him all the earth. The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

Let us Pray.

Almighty God, we worship Thee as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the trusts and hopes He has implanted in our hearts and minds, for His revelation of the eternal order, of the goodness and love and joy that are at the heart of all things, and of the gracious meaning and end of our earthly toil and struggle. Through His love we know Thou dost love us. Through His Sonship we came to a more zealous and living sense of our own childhood to Thee. In Him Thou hast given us the great assurance that Thou art not the God of the dead but of the living; that in Thee the dying live; that in Thee nothing that is human ever dies; that in Thee the truth, and love, and beauty lost to us on earth do not perish, but have eternal life. Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory over our doubt, and fear, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

HYMN.

The Divine Sympathy.

O Lord divine, that stooped to share
Our sharpest pang, our bitterest tear,
On Thee we cast each earth-born care;
We smile at pain while Thou art near.

Though long the weary way we tread,
And sorrow crown each lingering year,
No path we shun, no darkness dread,
Our hearts still whispering, Thou art near.

When drooping pleasure turns to grief,
And trembling faith is changed to fear;
The murmuring wind, the quivering leaf,
Shall softly tell us, Thou art near.

On Thee we fling our burdening woe,
O love divine, for ever dear;
Content to suffer, while we know,
Living and dying, Thou art near.

Oliver Wendell Holmes.

HYMN.

The Hiding Place.

BY REV. ALEXANDER MACLAREN.

Preached in Manchester, England, Isaiah xxxii. 2. And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

We may well say, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Here are distinctly attributed to one of ourselves, if we take the words in their simplicity and fullness, functions and powers which universal experience has taught us not to look for in humanity. And there have been a great many attempts—as it seems to me, altogether futile and baseless ones—to break the force of these words as a distinct prophecy of Jesus Christ. Surely the language is far too wide to have application to any real or ideal Jewish monarch, except one whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. Surely the experience of a hundred centuries might teach men that there is one man, and one alone, who is the refuge from all dangers, the fruition of all desires, the rest and refreshment in all trials.

And I, for my part, have no hesitation in saying, that the only reference of these words, which gives full weight to their wealth of blessing, is to regard them as a prophecy of the man—Christ Jesus, hiding in whom we are safe, “coming” to whom we “never thirst,” guarded and blest by whom no weariness can befall us, and dwelling in whom this weary world shall be full of refreshment and peace.

I do not need to point out the exquisite beauty of the imaginary or the pathetic and peace that breathe in the majestic rhythm of the words. There is something more than poetical beauty or rhetorical amplification of a single thought in those three clauses. The “hiding place” and “covert” refer to one class of wants; the “river of water in a dry place” to yet another; and “the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” to yet a third. And, though they be tinged and dyed in Eastern enigmata, the realities of life in Western lands, and in all ages, give them a deeper beauty than that of lovely imagery, and are the best keys to understanding their meaning. We shall, perhaps, best grasp the whole depths of that meaning according to the reference which I venture to give to the text, if we consider the sad and solemn conception of man's life that underlies it; the enigmatical and obstinate hope which holds out in the teeth of all experience—“A man shall be a refuge;” and the solution of the riddle in the man Christ Jesus.

I. First, there underlies this prophecy a very sad, a very true conception of human life.

The three classes of promises have correlative with them three phases of man's condition, three diverse aspects of his need and misery. The “covert” and the “hiding place” imply tempest and storm and danger; the “river of water” implies drought and thirst; “the shadow of a great rock” implies lassitude and languor, fatigue and weariness. The view of life that arises from the combination of all three bears upon its front the signature of truth in the very fact that it is a sad view.

For, I suppose, notwithstanding all that we may say concerning the beauty and the blessedness scattered broadcast round about us; notwithstanding that we believe, and hold as for our lives, the “happy faith” that all which we behold is full of blessing, it needs but a very short experience of this life, and but a superficial examination of our own histories and our own hearts in order to come to the conclusion that the world is full of strange and terrible sadness, that every life has dark tracts and long stretches of sombre tint, and that no representation is true to fact which dips its pencil only in light and flings no shadow on the canvas. There is no depth in a Chinese picture, because there is no shade.

It is the wrinkles and marks of wear and tear that make the expression in a man's portrait. “Life's sternest painter is the best.” The gloomy thoughts which are charged against scripture are the true thoughts of man and the world as man has made it. Not, indeed, that life needs to be so, but that by reason of our own evil and departure from God, there have come in as a disturbing element, the retributive consequences of our own godlessness, and these have made danger where else were safety, thirst where else were rivers of water, and weariness and lassitude where else were strength and bounding hope.

So then, look for a moment at these three points that come out of my text, in order to lay the foundation for subsequent considerations.

We live a life defenceless and exposed to many a storm and tempest. I need not remind you of the adverse circumstances—the wild winds that go sweeping across the flat level, the biting blasts that come down from the snow-clad mountains of destiny that lie around the low plain upon which we live. I need not remind you of the dangers that are lodged for our spiritual life in the temptations to evil that are round about us. I need not remind you of that creeping and clinging consciousness of being exposed to a divinely-commissioned retribution and punishment which perverts the name unwelcome and terrible because threatening judgment. I need not remind you how men's sins have made it needful that when the mighty God even the Lord, appears before them, “it shall be very tempestuous round about Him.” Men fear and ought to fear “the blast of the breath of His nostrils,” which must burn up all that is evil. And I need not remind you of the last wild wind of death that whirls the sin-faded leaves into dark corners where they lie and rot.

My brother! you have not lived this long without learning how defenceless you are against the storm of adverse circumstances. You have not lived thus long without learning that though, blessed be God, there do come in all our lives long periods of rest, when “birds so calm sit brooding on the charmed wave,” and the heavens above are clear as sapphire and the sea around is transparent as opal—yet the little cloud no bigger than a man's hand may rise on the horizon, and may thicken and blacken and grow greater and nearer till all the sky is dark, and burst in lightning and rain and fierceness of wind, till “through the torn sail the wild tempest is streaming,” and the white crests of the waves are like the name of death's pale horse leaping upon the broken ship. We have all learnt in how profound a sense, by reason of outward adverse circumstances and inward temptations, by reason of the fears of a justice which we know is throned at the centre of the creation, by reason of a death which to us is a terror, and by reason of that universal fear of “after death the judgment,” storm and tempest stoop upon our paths. God made life blessed and full of safety and peace, and we have wrenched ourselves from Him and stand defenceless amidst its dangers.

Then, there is another aspect and conception of life which underlies these words of my text. The image of the desert was before the prophet's rapt vision. He saw the sand whirled into mad dancing columns before the blast which swept across the unsheltered flat, with nothing for a day's march to check its force. But the wilderness is not only shelterless—it is waterless too—a place in which wild and ravening thirst finds no refreshing draughts and the tongue cleaves to the blackening gums.

“Rivers of water in a dry place.” And what is the prose face of that? That you and I live in the midst of a world which has no correspondence with, nor capacity of satisfying our truest and deepest selves, that we bear about with us a whole set of longings and needs and weaknesses and strengths and capacities, all of which like the climbing tendrils of some creeping plant, go feeling and putting out their green fingers to lay hold of some prop and stay: that man is so made that for his rest and blessedness he needs an external object round which his fingers may cling, on which his desires may fall and rest, by which his heart may be clasped, which shall be authority for his will, peace for his fears, sprinkling and cleansing for his conscience, light for his understanding, shall be in complete correspondence with his inward nature, the water for his thirst, and the bread for his hunger.

And as thus, on the very nature which each of us carries, there is stamped the signature of dependence and the necessity of finding an external object to rest it: and as further, men will not be tutored even by their own miseries or by the voice of their wants, and ever confound their wishes with their wants and their whims with their needs, therefore it comes to pass that the appetite which is only meant to direct us to God, and to be as a wholesome hunger in order to secure our partaking with relish and delight of the divine food that is provided for it, becomes unsatisfied, a torture, and unslaked, a ravening madness, and men's needs become men's famine; and men's thirst becomes men's death: A dry land wherein no water is.

All about us there are these creatures of God, bright and blessed and beautiful, fit for their functions and meant to minister to our gladness. They are meant to be held in subordination. It is not meant that we should find in them the food for our souls. Wealth and honor and wisdom and love and gratified ambition and successful purpose, and whatsoever other good things a man may gather about him and achieve—he may have them all, and yet beyond them all there shall be a great aching, longing vacancy in his soul. His true and inmost being will be groping through the darkness like a plant growing in a

cellar, for the light which alone can tinge its pale petals and swell its shrivelling blossoms to ripeness and fruit.

A dry place, as well as a dangerous place. Have you not found it so? I believe every soul of man has, if he will be honest with himself, and there is not one among us tonight who would not, if they were to look into the deepest facts and real governing experiences of their lives—“I thirst”—“my soul thirsteth.” And, O brethren, why not go on with the quotation, and make that which is else a pain, a condition of blessedness? Why not recognize the meaning of all this restless quiet, and say “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God?”

And then there is the other idea underlying these words also, yet another phase of this sad life of ours, not only danger and drought, but also weariness and languor. The desert stretches before us again, where there is no shelter from the blast and no trickling stream amid the yellowing sand; where the fierce ball above beats down cruelly and its hot rays are flung up cruelly into our faces and the glare blinds us, and the stifling heat wears us, and work is a torture, and motion is misery, and we long for nothing so much as to be quiet and to hide our heads in some shade.

I was reading a day or two ago one of our last books of travels in the wilderness of the Exodus, in which the writer told us how, after toiling for hours under a scorching sun over the hot white marly flat, and seeing nothing but a beetle or two on the way, and finding no shelter anywhere from the pitiless beating of the sunshine, the three travellers came at last to a little retem bush only a few feet high, and flung themselves down and tried to hide, at least their heads, from those “sunbeams like swords,” even beneath its ragged shade. And my text tells of a great rock, with blue dimness in its shadow, with happily a fern or two in the moist places of its crevices, where there is rest, and a man can lie down and be cool, while all outside is burning sun, and burning sand, and dancing mirage.

O the weariness felt by us all, of plodding across the sand. That fatal monotony into which every man's life stiffens, as far as outward circumstances, outward joys and pleasures go; the depressing influence of custom which takes the edge off all gladness and adds a burden to every duty; the weariness of all that tugging up the hill, of all that collar work which we have to do; that there has not his moods—and that by no means the least worthy and manlike of his moods—wherein he feels, not perhaps, all is vanity, but “how infinitely weary all is.”

And so every race of man that ever has lived has managed out of two miseries to make a kind of shadowy gladness; and, knowing the weariness of life and the blackness of death, has somewhat softened the latter by throwing upon it the contrast of the former, and has said, “Well, at any rate, if the grave be narrow and dark, and outside the warm precincts of the cheerful, there be that ambiguous night, at least it is the time for sleep, and it we cannot be sure of anything more, we shall rest then at any rate.” So the hope of “long disquiet merged in rest” becomes almost pathetic expression in his thinking of the grave as a bed where he can stretch himself and be still. Life is hard, life is dry, life is dangerous.

II. But another thought suggested by these words is the mysterious hope which shines through them, that one of ourselves shall deliver us from all this evil in life.

“A man shall be a refuge, rivers of water, the shadow of a ‘great rock.’”

Such an experience seems to be right in the teeth of all experience, and far too high-pitched ever to be fulfilled. It appears to demand in him who should bring it to pass powers which are more than human, and which must in some inexplicable way be wide as the range of humanity and enduring as the succession of the ages.

It is worth while to realize to ourselves these two points which seem to make such words as these of our text a blank impossibility. Experience contradicts them, and common sense demands for their fulfillment an apparently impossible human character.

All experience seems to teach—does it not—that no human arm or heart can be to another soul, that these words promise, and what we need. And yet the men who have been disappointed and disenchanted a thousand times, do still look among their fellows for what their fellows too are looking for and none have ever found. Have we found what we seek among men? Have we ever known amongst the dearest that we have clung to, one arm that was strong enough to keep us in all danger? Has there ever been a human love to which we can run with the security that there is a strong tower where no evil can touch us? There have been many delights in all our lives meditated and ministered to us by those we loved. They have taught us, helped us, and strengthened us in a thousand ways. We have received from them draughts of wisdom, of love, of guidance, of impulse, of comfort, which have been, as water in the desert is, more precious than gold. Our fellow travellers have shared their store with us, “letting down their pitchers upon their hand, and giving us drink,” but has the draught ever slaked the thirst? They but carry a pitcher and a pitcher is not a fountain. Have there been any in all the round of those whom we have loved and trusted, to whom we have trusted absolutely, without having been disappointed? They, like us, are hemmed in by human limitations. They each bear a burdened and thirsty spirit, it self needing such supplies. And to the trust, happiest, most soul-sufficing companionship, there comes at last that dread hour which ends all sweet commerce of giving and receiving, and makes the rest of life for some of us, one monotonous ashen-grey wilderness, where no water is. These things make it impossible for us to find anywhere amongst men our refuge and our fruition.

And yet how strange, how pathetic is the fact that, after all disappointments, men still obstinately continue to look among their fellows for guidance, and for light, for consolation, for light, for consolation, for defence, and for strength. After a thousand failures, they still hope. Does not the search at once confess that hitherto they have not found, else why be seeking still? and that they yet believe they shall find, else why not cease the vain quest? And surely He who made us, made us not in vain, nor cursed us with immortal hopes of humanity, and receive and requite our love and trust, and satisfy our longings, and explain the riddle of our lives. If there be not, nor ever has been, nor ever can be a man who shall satisfy us with his love and defend us with his power, and be our all sufficient satisfaction and our rest in weariness, then much of man's noblest nature is a mistake, and many of his purest and profoundest hopes are an illusion, a mockery and a snare. The obstinate hope that within the limits of humanity we shall find what we need is a mystery, except on one hypothesis, that, too, belongs to “the unconscious prophecies” that God has lodged in all men's hearts.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose how such functions as those of which my text speaks not only seem to be contradicted by all experience, but manifestly and obviously to transcend the possibilities of human nature. A man to defend me, and be himself—does he need no defence? A man to supply my wants and be his spirit then, other than mine, that it can become the all-sufficient fullness for my emptiness? He that can do this for one spirit must be greater than the spirit for which he doeth it. He that can do it for the whole race of man through all ages, in all circumstances down to the end of time, in every latitude, under every condition of civilization, who must be he who, for the whole world, evermore and always is their defence, their gladness, their shelter, and their rest? The function requires a divine power, and the application of the powers requires a divine hand. It is not enough that I should be pointed to a far-off heaven where there dwells an infinite God and a loving God—I believe that we need more than that. We need not merely “God is my refuge and my strength,” but a man shall be a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest.”

III. And so that brings me to the last point to be noticed, namely: The solution of the mystery in the person of Jesus Christ.

That which seemed impossible is real. The forebodings of experience have not fathomed the powers of divine love. There is a man our brother, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, who can be to single souls the adequate object of their perfect trust, the abiding home of their deepest love, the unfailing supply for their profoundest wants. There is one man whom it is wise and blessed to look to as the exclusive source of all our peace, the absolute Ruler of all our lives. There is a man in whom we find all that we have vainly sought in men. There is a man, who hath been to all ages and to the whole race their refuge, their satisfaction, their rest. “It behoved Him to be made in all points like unto His brethren,” that His succor might be ever near, and His sympathy sure. The man Jesus Christ who, being man, is God manifested in the flesh, exercises in one and the same act the offices of divine pity and human compassion, of divine and human guardianship, of divine and human love.

“And so the Word had breath, and wrought With human hands the creed of creeds In loveliness of perfect deeds, More strong than all poetic thought.”

The dreams of weary hearts that have longed for an impossible perfection are all below the reality. The fact surpasses all expectation. It is more than all prophecies, it is more than all hopes, it is more than all praise. It is God's unspeakable gift. Well might an angel voice proclaim the mystery of love, “Unto you is born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” The ancient promise of our text is a history now. A man has been and is all these things for us.

A refuge and a hiding-place from every storm. Adverse circumstances sweep upon us, and His mighty hand is put down there as a buckler, behind which we may hide and be safe. Temptations to evil storm upon us, and enclosed within Him they never touch us. The fears of our own hearts whirl like a river in flood against the walls of our fortress home, and we can laugh at them, for it is founded upon a rock. The day of judgment rises before us solemn and certain, and we can await it without fear and approach it with calm joy. I call upon no mountains and hills to cover me.

“Rock of ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee.”

“Rivers of water in a dry place.” Hungry and thirsty my soul faints within me. I longed for light and beheld darkness. I longed for help and there was none that could come close to my spirit to succour and to give me drink in the desert. My conscience cried in all its wounds for cleansing and staunching, and no comforter nor any balm was there. My heart, weary with limited loves and mortal affections, however sweet and precious, yearned and bled for one to rest upon all-sufficient and eternal. I thirsted with a thirst that was more than desire, that was pain, and was coming to be death, and I heard a voice which said: “If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink.”

“The shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” And my heart was weary by reason of the greatness of the way, and duties and tasks seemed toils and burdens, and I was ready to say, “wherefore hast thou made me and all men in vain?” “Surely all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” And I heard one that laid His hand on me and said, “Come unto me, thou that laborest and art heavy laden and I will give thee rest.” I come to Thee, O Christ. Faith and perishing, defenceless and needy, with many a sin and many a fear, to Thee I

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turn, for Thou hast died for me, and for me Thou dost live. Be Thou my shelter and strong tower. Give me to drink of living water. Let me rest in Thee while in this weary land, and let Thy sweet love, my Brother and my Lord: be mine all on earth and the heaven of my heaven.

HYMN.

Way, Truth, Life.

O Light: whose beams illumine all From twilight dawn to perfect day, Shine Thou before the shadows fall That lead our wandering feet astray: At morn and eve Thy radiance pour That youth may love, and age adore.

O Way: through whom our souls draw near To yon eternal home and peace, Where perfect love shall cast out fear, And earth's vain toil and wandering cease: In strength or weakness may we see Our heavenward path, O Lord, through Thee.

O Truth: before whose shrine we bow, Thou priceless pearl for all who seek, To Thee our earliest strength we vow, Thy love will bless the poor and meek: When dreams or mists beguile our sight, Turn Thou our darkness into light.

O Life: the well that ever flows To slake the thirst of those that faint, Thy power to bless, what seraph knows? Thy joy supreme, what words can point? In earth's last hour of fleeting breath Be Thou our Comforter over death.

E. H. Plumtree.

Collect.

O Thou who bringest back the morning, causing the sun to rise on the evil and the good, lit up the light of Thy countenance upon us that in Thy light we may see light: light upon every hidden unworthiness; light upon every doubt and fear; light upon every cross and care; light upon every worldly interest and every path of duty. Shine upon our ignorance as the light of knowledge; shine upon our perplexity as the light of faith; shine upon our sin as the light of purity; shine upon our sorrow as the light of joy; shine upon our broken hopes as the light of immortality. Quickened our minds and purify our hearts to receive the light of Thy truth and love. And when on the morrow we return to our daily life and labor do Thou give us grace to be faithful to the light we have received in communion with Thee. Amen.

Benediction.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.

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