

"The Eternal God is Thy Refuge."

BY OSMUND HILL.

Fear not, my soul, trust thou in God, And he to thee shall succour send; Though he may chasten with the rod, His eye of love doth on thee bend. Though sorrows deepen—all seems dark— Though waves of trouble o'er thee roll; Still fear them not—behold the Ark! There refuge—safe art thou, my soul. Look up, and with Faith's eye behold Jehovah-Jesus up on high; He knows each member of his fold, And he to thee is always nigh. That blessed Elder Brother knows The sorrow that now grieves thy heart; To thee love in his bosom glows, Sympathy's balm to soothe the smart. Give up thyself to Jesus' care, Thy ev'ry footstep he will guide; Confide in him, he'll thee upbear; Thy ev'ry want he will provide. Oppressed and weary, lean thy head Where rest alone thou canst obtain; With dainties shall thy soul be fed, Christ's pow'ful arm shall thee sustain. The fiercer that the storm doth rage, The closer then to Jesus cling; His love thy heart's griefs shall assuage, And e'en with joy shall make thee sing.

Visitor Pulpit.

A WAITING GOD AND A WAITING PEOPLE.

A Sermon by Pastor C. H. Spurgeon.

"And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you; for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him."—Isaiah 30: 18.

The text divides itself into two parts; first, it introduces us to a waiting God; and then, secondly, it speaks of a waiting people.

I. First, we have here a waiting God. I shall not confine our illustration of this waiting on the part of God to the case of the men of Judah described in the text; but I shall come home to your own experience, and speak of how the Lord has waited, that he might be gracious to you. Let us behold his long-suffering toward ourselves. In so doing we shall not be leaving the Scripture, for the text as truly describes our own experience as that of the men of Isaiah's day.

The word of the Lord which is now to be considered opens first with a wonderful reason for waiting: "And therefore will the Lord wait." "Therefore"—mark the word! The Lord Jehovah does as he wills both in heaven and earth, and his ways are past finding out; but he never acts unreasonably; he does not tell us his reasons, but he has them; for he acts "according to the counsel of his will." God has his "therefores," and these are of the most forcible kind. The chapter contains a denunciation of the false confidences of the people, and because of these one might have concluded that the Lord would hasten them off forever. If they will have Egypt to lean upon, let them lean on Egypt, till like a spear it pierces their side. God might well say, "Let them alone; they are given to their idols," instead of which he cries, "Therefore will the Lord wait." He will let them see the result of their carnal confidences; he will allow them time in which to test and try Egypt, and see whether Egypt is not a boaster whose help is to no purpose.

Do you not remember when it was so with you? Perhaps you began your religious life with the great mistake of hoping to find salvation in your own goodness; you looked to your feelings, prayings, doings and professions for safety. You thought that your deliverance must come from yourself, and so you sought to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," without remembering that "it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure." You knew nothing of God's grace, you thought much of your own good works. So many prayers and tears, so many church-goings or chapel-goings, so much of sacraments, almsgivings, and the like; and this would make up a sweet-scented sacrifice, acceptable to God. Blessed be the Lord who had great patience with you. He had told you plainly enough beforehand that by the law there should no flesh be justified in his sight, and you ought not to have tried that forbidden way; but as you would try it he suffered you to run therein till a gulf

opened before you. You worked out the plan of self-salvation, and the net result was bitter disappointment; for you saw that you could not keep the law, and you felt also that if you did keep it your obedience would make no recompense for the sins of the past.

I heard some time ago of a man who let out horses and carriages. A person wished to hire, and, having heard the price, he went round the little town to all other persons in that line of business to get something cheaper; but as he did not succeed, he returned to the first person and said he would hire his horse and carriage. "No," said the other, "I am not going to let you have it. I know why you have come to me; you have been around everywhere else, and if you could have saved a shilling you would not have come to me." I do not commend the tradesman, but I do not much wonder at his conduct. See how much more patience there is in God than in man. We refuse his free salvation, and go round by way of our own merits, and everywhere else, to try and find some other ground of confidence, and then at last, when everything has broken down, we come back to God and to salvation through Jesus Christ; and yet we find the Lord lovingly waiting, graciously waiting—a God ready to pardon.

Further, these people were rebels against God, and the Lord was waiting to let them fully manifest their rebellious spirit, and be made ashamed of it. The Lord allowed the people to show their rebellious character—to let all mankind know what kind of people God had to deal with, and that they might in after days have the higher admiration of his long-suffering and of his grace. I think the Lord permits many sinners to go to the full length of their tether in order that they may know in future what stuff they are made of, and may never trust in themselves. A strange "therefore" is God's "therefore"—"therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious."

The Lord would wait again for yet another reason, namely, to let them suffer somewhat of the effect of their sin. He permitted them to send their ambassadors to Egypt, that they might come back disappointed, and he allowed the Assyrians to devastate the land, that they might feel the pinch of famine, and learn that it is an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the living God. Perhaps some of us were left in the same way, and we shall never forget what we thus learned; we were allowed to go on in sin, and we did do so until we began to feel the result of it; and now we flee from it with horror. We put our hand into the fire until it was burned, and now we dread the fire.

Once more, I do not doubt that the Lord waited in this case to be gracious until the people should begin to pray, for that seems to be the turning point in this affair. The prophet says, "he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee." The Lord is listening for the sinner's prayer. How is it that you have not prayed long before, O troubled spirit? Why have those lips been dumb for years? What, with all your sense of sin, and with a clear idea of the misery that will come of it, have you yet refused to pray? Then you may well wonder that the Lord should wait.

This leads us to notice, in the second place, the singular patience of God in that waiting. What does it mean when we are told that the Lord waiteth that he may have mercy upon us? It means that he kept back the sword of justice. It is inevitable that where there is evil, God shall be angered with it. It is not a matter of arbitrariness with him, but it is inevitable that the Judge of all the earth should take vengeance upon evil and wrong. God must punish sin, this is one of the fixed and settled principles of his very existence. Here the attribute of long-suffering patience comes in and spares the guilty from time to time, giving space for repentance. Have not some of you been in positions where, if you had been killed, it would have seemed only according to the order of nature that you should be? Well,

then, bless that God who waited, and held back the punishment that was due to you!

This patience of God signifies more, however, than delay in punishment; it means the continuance of privileges; for the Lord told these people that, although he might give them the bread of adversity and the water of affliction on account of their sins, yet he would not take away their teachers from them any more, they should still be instructed, and warned, and invited to come to him. Has it not been so with some of us? We heard the gospel when we were quite young, and we have continued to hear it till we are quite old, so patient is the Lord. It may be that I speak to some who have continued to hear that gospel every Sabbath-day, and have determinedly refused it through a long life. Shall it continue to be so? Dare we always provoke the Lord? Still the white flag is hung out, and the silver trumpet knows no note but "Mercy, mercy, mercy!" Oh, that man would hear that note and turn unto the Lord!

So singular was God's patience that he even increased his holy agencies to lead the people to himself. He says; "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." Do we not remember how when the public ministry seemed to miss us we began to be bestirred by an inward force more powerful than visible ministries? Conscience cried aloud and accused us from within doors. The voice of Jesus from without seemed echoed from within. Did we contend against even this? Alas! we did, for we seemed determined to destroy ourselves. Behold, what manner of patience the Lord has exercised toward us according to the abundance of his grace.

Nay, this is not all; for all this while God was passing by our rejections of him, blotting out our sinful refusals, and insulting despisings of his goodness. You know how it would be even with your own child, if you were to say to him, "My child, I am ready to forgive you if you will confess your fault." If he would not acknowledge that he was wrong, but held out stubbornly, you might have considerable patience, but I question if that patience would last for days and weeks. Your rod would soon be spoken with. Men that have been very famous for bearing insults have at last been compelled in vindication of their own honor to put an end to the provocation. How grievously far have you and I carried our insults of God! Do I not speak to some who are carrying the provocation a long way even now? This cannot last always; men cannot always thrust their fingers into God's eyes at this rate. The wonder is that it has lasted so long.

One thing more before I leave this waiting God, and that is, there is a final success to all this waiting. When the waiting turns to a glorious transaction of grace upon the sinner's heart and conscience, then the time of love has come. Observe that it is written, "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry." When God has waited for the soul, that soul is brought to wait on him. God's patience is not in vain towards his chosen. When God deals with his redeemed he does not deal in vain. The Almighty is not defeated. That is implied in the nineteenth verse: "They shall weep no more"—then they did weep till he forgave. Their tears and prayers are flowing; for he declares, "he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry."

Now also they listen eagerly to the gospel; for they count it a privilege that "their teachers shall not be removed into a corner any more." They value their ministers, and look at them with careful love, as it is here written; "Thine eyes shall see thy teachers." Those whom they formerly despised they now esteem and delight in. They begin also to obey the voice of the Lord; for they hear the voice behind them saying, "This is the way." This great change comes to transgressors when God deals with them in his own effectual manner; then they mourn for sin, then they pray for mercy, then they listen with attentive ears to the message of love, and then they bow

themselves down before the present God, and desire nothing so much as to be at peace with him.

Meanwhile, one of the chief and most evident tokens of their change is their casting away of the sin they formerly loved. The love of God reigning in the heart makes a man hate his sin. God never forgives sin without making us forsake sin. When he casts our sins into the depths of the sea he causes us to do the same. When the Lord says to our sin, "Begone from my memory," we say to it, "Begone from my heart." Repentance, faith, holiness, zeal, all follow upon the effectual working of divine grace. Oh, that all of you were under its power.

II. Now learn the lesson of the whole subject. Under our second head we have a waiting people—"Blessed are all they that wait for him." God's waiting people wait upon God only. They are not trusting to the arm of flesh, nor looking to the changeable creature. They do not rely upon themselves, nor depend upon their own experiences, or their mental acquisitions. Here is their song:

"My spirit looks to God alone; My rock and refuge is his throne; In all my fears, in all my straits, My soul on his salvation waits."

Dear friends, you can judge whether you are the people of God or not by this: Can you say, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him?" "Trust ye in the Lord forever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

God's waiting people wait upon God expectantly. They are looking for everything from him, for he is their all in all. They have had a great deal from God, and they expect more from him. They are not waiting in despair, nor even in hesitation; they are waiting in hope, a joyous and assured hope of blessedness in reserve. They confidently expect to find their way in the Lord grow brighter and brighter, and still brighter, from the twilight of the morning to the shining of the perfect day. Oh, my brethren, let us wait and watch even as men look for the dawn, because they know that it will not fail them.

But say you, What are they waiting for? I answer, God's people are waiting upon him patiently for many things. Sometimes they wait for the tokens of his grace: they are believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet they may not for the moment enjoy the peace and comfort which are theirs by faith. If they had more faith their peace would at once be as a river; but it is well if they have faith enough to wait for that peace. At times faith may be very weak, and then it is well if it clings and abides in its place. A man may believe and be saved, and yet he may not be sure of his own salvation, nor discern the safety and blessedness of his condition in Jesus Christ.

O soul, if thou canst not get out of the dark, believe in the dark. If thou hast light enough just to look to Christ by faith, though thou canst not perceive all his beauties and his glories, yet remember thou art bidden to look, and art saved by looking, however dim the light may be. If thou canst but look to the cross so as to trust wholly to the Lamb of God, he hath taken away thy sin. All the joy of the Lord, and all the peace and all the rest that come of faith do not come at once; but thou must wait for them.

Possibly you are looking back to your own past history, and sighing: "What peaceful hours I once enjoyed, How sweet their memory still!"

Those years which the locust hath eaten shall be restored to you; only be thou hopeful, trustful, and obedient. Lean heavily upon thy God. It is a poor faith which only believes as far as the eye can see. If thou canst not rejoice in the light of his countenance, yet rest in the shadow of his wings. Yes; we must be a waiting people; and assuredly we may not complain; for we caused the Lord to wait for us many a day. What patience he has had! Cannot we be patient?

Sometimes God's people have to wait for the fulfilment of his promises. Every promise will be kept, but not to-day nor to-morrow. God's

word has its due season, and His times are the best times. We may also have to wait for answers to our prayers. Prayer will be heard, ay, it is heard the moment it is uttered; but it may not be answered just yet. Pray on! Wait on! Knock, and if the door be not opened, knock again and if the door still be closed, knock again with greater earnestness than before. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." If thine importunity be wrought up to the pitch of enthusiasm, it shall be well with thee; for "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

Frequently we may have to wait for temporal blessings. It may not be safe for us to obtain the desire of our heart, because our heart is as yet too much occupied with the world and the things thereof. We may have to wait for deliverance from trouble, for as yet the furnace may not have accomplished its refining work. You may be ill, and you may pray God to make you well, but he may still allow his beloved to be sick; to you sickness may be healthier than health. You are very poor, and you would like to struggle out of abject penury. By all means struggle on; but do not murmur if you should not be successful; poverty may be a richer state for you than wealth. There may be somewhat in your character which cannot be perfected except by suffering and labor; and it is better that your character be perfected than your substance increased. None of us can come to the highest maturity without enduring the summer heat of trials.

Brother, wait cheerfully. If God sees fit to say, "Wait," do not thou be angry with Him.

Why give way to hurry and worry? Oh, rest in the Lord. Your strength is to sit still. One of the most lovely flowers of the new creation is entire submission to the divine will; he who hath it is not far from heaven. Yet you will have to wait a little for glory which is yours by a covenant of salt. Do you not at times suffer a heavenly homesickness? Do you not grow weary of these wildernesses, and long for the mountains of spices and the gardens of the blessed? Do you not long for the wings of a dove? I am afraid you would not manage them if you had them; dove's wings would hardly suit this cumbersome clay.

It is not easy to long for heaven and yet to wait; yet we are better where we are than attempting to fly where the Lord has not called us. Wait; for there is yet more business to be done for your Master. Wouldst thou go to thy rest before thy day's work is fairly finished? Wait; for it is needful for others, if not for thyself. Wait and work on! How many years were wasted ere thou didst come into the vineyard! How little hast thou accomplished since! Wait! for the vision of glory is sure; assure as though it were to-morrow, or to-day at this very hour.

Heaven is nearing! How much further? Count the milestones one by one! No, no counting—only waiting Till the glory has begun.

"The Voice of Jesus Through a Tract."

"In one of the best known parts of the New Town of Edinburgh a lady was lately distributing tracts. She offered one at a door and it was rejected with scorn. At that instant a poor passed by, and saw the look of disappointment and vexation on the poor distributor's face. 'I'll take it,' said he; and away he went with it to his own home. His mother was lying in weariness and despondency near to the gates of the golden city, but doubtful whether she should ever enter there. The Master's summons had come for her to leave earth, and bid farewell to all she loved below. The little despised messenger which had been rejected so rudely but a short time before, was now the glorious instrument of bringing light and joy to that sad soul. It lifted her up out of the mire of despondency, and gave her a boldness to enter in 'through the gates into the city.' Her husband coming in shortly afterwards was handed the tract with the words, 'Read that, every word seems as if it were written for myself!' Truly this was the voice of Jesus speaking through a tract. Here

then, is encouragement for the desponding tract-distributor! His tracts may be rejected by some, they will be far more than welcomed by others, and the great day alone will declare what broken hearts they have bound up, what weary souls they have made glad, what aching spirits they have filled with the joys of paradise!"—Sel.

Benevolence is not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth. It is a business with men, they are, and with human life as drawn by the rough hand of experience. It is a duty which you must perform at the call of principle, though there be no voice of eloquence to give splendor to your exertions and no music of poetry to lead your willing footsteps through the bowers of enchantment. Benevolence is not merely a feeling, but a principle; not a dream of rapture for the fancy to indulge in, but a business for the hand to execute.—Chalmers.

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