July to September 2011

Spurgeon's "Morning & Evening" (Part 2)

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About the Transcriber

Rev Dr Tow Siang Hwa, who started the RPG (Read, Pray and Grow) Daily Bible Reading Guide in 1982, is the Senior Pastor of Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. Saved at the age of ten in 1935 during the revival meetings of Dr John Sung, Dr Tow (a gynaecologist by training) has founded more than twenty churches and related institutions in over ten countries. He is author of several books including "Beyond Versions: A Biblical Perspective of Modern English Bibles" and "Footprints in the Sands of Time."

"WITHOUT SHEDDING OF BLOOD IS NO REMISSION"

This is the voice of the unalterable truth, the utterance of the Most High. In no case, by no means, can sin be pardoned without atonement, and what atonement is sufficient for sins? *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins"* (Heb 10:4). But it is only possible *"with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (l Pet 1:19).

Am I then believing in Jesus? Am I trusting in His blood, applied to my soul, to make atonement for my sins? The Word of God is clear: all have sinned, and all men need that atonement. No matter how moral, or generous, or amiable, or patriotic, God's law makes no exception. Sin will yield to nothing but the blood of Him whom God hath set forth as a propitiation (way of reconciliation) for us all.

God's way of pardon and forgiveness is here freely offered to *"whosoever will."* Why should we seek another? Yet men seek refuge in formal religion: in good works, prayers, ceremonies, and other religious exercises. All these give but poor comfort. There is no salvation apart from Jesus; no forgiveness apart from remission by His precious blood. Behold Him, the Lamb of God who took our punishment upon Himself, that we might be forgiven!

Fall down in humble gratitude, and kiss the dear feet of Him whose blood atoned for your sins. *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us"* (Tit 3:5). Evermore keep looking to Jesus, who has shed His sin-cleansing blood on the cross, and therein be assured: *"Son, thy sins be forgiven thee"* (Mark 2:5).

THOUGHT: "Nothing but the blood of Jesus."
PRAYER: Wash me in the blood of the Lamb.

ANCIENT THINGS ARE PRECIOUS THINGS

Men place great worth in antiques and vintage cars, but who knows the inexpressible worth of God's ancient gift of salvation for our souls? Let us for a moment recount those precious things of God, known only to His beloved sons and daughters.

Think of the ***sovereign choice*** of the Father, by which He elected us unto eternal life. Was it not a matter of great antiquity, for no date can be conceived for it by the mind of man? But according to the good pleasure of His will He chose us in Christ ***before the foundation of the world*** (Eph 1:4-5).

Think of His ***everlasting love*** behind the choice, for it was not a bare and impersonal act by which we were set apart, but amazing affection and divine love were in action. The Father loved us from the beginning, with an everlasting love flowing from His great loving heart.

Think of the ***eternal purpose*** by which He determined to redeem us from eternal ruin and destruction, to cleanse and sanctify us, and eventually to glorify us. Such was God's plan for every child of His: a divine plan of infinite antiquity, springing up together with His immutable love.

Think of the ***everlasting covenant*** sealed by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, who was also the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Heb 13:20, Rev 13:8). It was in Him, from ancient times, that the elect were ordained unto eternal life. In divine purpose, from the beginning, a most blessed covenant union was established between the Son of God and His elect people, which will remain when time shall be no more.

THOUGHT: It is well for God's people to appreciate these ancient things of God.
PRAYER: Grant me, Father, a heart of gratitude.

WE ARE DEBTORS

As God's creatures, we are debtors to Him. Having broken His holy commandments, we are debtors to His justice: we owe a debt which we have no means of paying. In our helpless estate, God came in the person of His Son Jesus and paid the debt for us. *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly"* (Rom 5:6). Christ our Lord has paid our debt.

Now then we are debtors to God for His grace and mercy, no longer to His justice, for He will never charge us for a debt already paid. When our Lord on the cross cried out, *"It is finished!"* He meant that His people's debt was wiped away once and for all and for ever from the book of remembrance. At Calvary, Christ satisfied divine justice to the uttermost; the account is fully settled.

From hence we become debtors of a different sort. We become ten times more indebted to God for the *"unspeakable* (inexpressible) *gift"* of His own Son; for His forgiving grace to undeserving sinners such as us; for His almighty power which has raised us from death; for His sustaining strength, preserving our spiritual life, keeping us from falling into sin; for His loving hand leading us onward in the face of many enemies and temptations. The beloved hymn says:

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to Thee:
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it –
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart – O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above!

– *Robert Robinson*

THOUGHT: I owe my life to God.
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for saving me.

REST AT NOON

The true believer has an ardent desire after Christ, a longing for present communication with Him. He asks, "Where dost Thou feed Thy flock? I will go, if I may find Thee and be fed also." Is that your desire, dear reader? Do you long for God's house? It is the "House of Prayer." May that longing be translated into action: then may you pray without ceasing, sitting at His feet.

"Tell me where Thou feedest Thy flock" is the urgent request of a hungry soul, the true child of God, hungering and thirsting for the Word of God. To Him our Lord says, *"I am that bread of life…the living bread which came down from heaven"* (John 6:48, 51). Feed on Him, my friend. He is also the Word of life. Seek Him in the Book, read it diligently, and follow Him with all your heart.

My Shepherd alone can supply my need. "To Thee I must resort, for I cannot be satisfied apart from Thee. My soul hungers and thirsts for the refreshment of Thy presence. Whether at dawn or noon, my only rest is where Thou art, with Thy beloved flock. My soul longs for that blessed rest which Thou only canst give."

Satan tries to discourage me, telling me that I am unworthy of Thy care. But I always was unworthy, and yet Thou hast loved me all along. Can my unworthiness now be a barrier to my coming to Thee? It is true I am weak in faith, and prone to fall, but my feebleness is more reason why I should seek Thee with all my heart. By Thee I shall be strengthened and find rest beside the still waters. My Lord beckons me to come: *"Come unto me,"* He says. I turn to Him and He gives me rest at noon, sheltered from the burning midday sun.

THOUGHT: Only God can give me rest.
PRAYER: Lord, feed me till I want no more.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Believer, child of God, look back and think of how the Lord thy God had led thee through the wilderness, how He fed and clothed thee, put up with thy murmurings, and thy ungrateful longings for Egypt. In spite of all thy offences, did He not supply thee water out of rock, and feed thee with manna from heaven? Think of how His grace has been sufficient for thee in all thy many troubles.

When you have looked back and recalled His unfailing love in ***the past,*** then in faith survey what love is hidden in His promises for ***the future.*** Remember Christ's everlasting covenant sealed in His own blood has more in store than what is past. He who has loved us and pardoned us in the past shall never cease to love and pardon in the future. He is Alpha and Omega. He is first, and He shall be last. He loves us with a complete all-encompassing love.

Therefore be assured by the promise of His Word: when you pass through the vale of shadow, you need fear no evil, for He is with you. When you pass through the cold floods of Jordan, you need not fear. Not even death can separate you from His love. Ponder the words of Romans 8:38, 39: *"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

May these precious words refresh your soul and renew your love for Jesus, the Lover of our souls. Surely, as we meditate on the love of God, our hearts burn within us, and we long to love Him more and more.

THOUGHT: "More love to Thee, O Christ, more love to Thee!"
PRAYER: Lord, light a fire of love in my heart that will never stop burning.

THE ROAD TO THE CITY OF REFUGE

In Canaan, the Land of Promise, cities of refuge were so provided that any man might reach one such city within half a day at the most. Within such a refuge, the fugitive would find safety. Our Lord Jesus is such a City, an ever present Saviour, and very near at hand. The way to Him is short but obstacles may stumble the unwary: beware and renounce them – your pride, your good works, your own merit – they bar your way to the City.

The access roads to a city of refuge were strictly kept, every river was bridged and every obstruction removed, so that the fugitive might have easy passage. Once a year, the elders made an inspection and saw to their order, so that nothing might impede the flight of some person and cause him to be overtaken and slain by a pursuer.

So it is with the road to God's City of Refuge. His gospel promises effectively to remove stumbling blocks along the way! At every crossroad and turning, prominent signposts bear the inscription "To the City of Refuge"! The road to our Saviour Jesus Christ is strait (i.e. narrow). It has no roundabout or complicated turns of legal requirements that must be fulfilled before the Saviour may be reached. This straight road says simply: "Come unto me: believe and live!"

The self-righteous man will find the road so hard that he will turn away. But every sinner of a broken and contrite heart will find it so easy, for he knows his need and he sees safety within the City. With eyes of faith fixed on the Saviour, he flees into the arms of the King of love. He wastes no time nor loiters by the way for he knows the avenger of blood is swift. But once within the City, he is safe for evermore.

THOUGHT: Am I still outside the City of Refuge?
PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for being my sure Refuge.

THE FATHER SENT THE SON

It is a sweet thought that Jesus our Saviour did not come forth without His Father's permission, authority, consent and assistance. He was sent of the Father, that He might be our Saviour. But too frequently we seem to ascribe the honour of our salvation more to Jesus Christ than we do the Father. This is a very great mistake which we must be careful to avoid.

Did not God the Father send God the Son? If Jesus spoke wondrously, did not His Father pour grace into His lips? Let us not forget that while there are three Persons in the Trinity, there are no distinctions of honour: in this they are co-equal. He who knows the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, never sets one before another. We see the blessed Trinity equally engaged in the work of salvation at Bethlehem, at Gethsemane, and at Calvary.

O Christian reader, have you put your confidence in the Man Christ Jesus? Are you united with Him? Of course, you say. Then believe that you are united also with God the Father, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: He is also your Father and Friend. Ponder the depth of love in the heart of the Father when He sent His Son on that greatest mission of mercy – for you and me.

Make this today's meditation: "The Father sent the Son." Contemplate the height and depth, length and breadth of God's love. Then think how Jesus works what the Father wills. In the wounds of the dying Son see the love of the Father. *"... God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself ..."* (2 Cor 5:19). Think what it cost the Father to send His Son to become the *"Son of man"* that we might become the sons of God! All glory be to the Triune God!

THOUGHT: (Read John 4:34.)
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for giving me Thine only begotten Son.

"EVEN SO, FATHER"

Read again and ponder the words of Matthew 11:25 and 26. Here is a record of a conversation between God the Son and God the Father, albeit a "one-sided conversation," for as a listener to a telephone conversation, we do not hear both parties. From the words spoken by our Lord, we learn a precious lesson: Jesus had constant fellowship with His Father. We may be sure that the Father spoke often with the Son in intimate, unceasing "heart-to-heart" communion and dialogue. It was the habit and "life-breath" of Jesus to talk with God.

Even as Jesus did, so should we. Available to every child of God is the privilege of silent fellowship with the Father. But we speak with Him words which the world understandeth not. In secret communion, His voice, unheard by any ear, brings us untold joy and peace. Aided by the Spirit, we recognise the Father's voice and receive it gladly into our hearts. And as He has spoken, let us respond with words of thanks and praise, or words of conviction and confession, or words of acknowledgment of His mercy, or of assent to some lesson of truth as instructed by the Holy Ghost.

What a privilege is this intimate communion with the Heavenly Father! It is a secret known only to His children, hidden from the world, a joy which none can take away. To us, God has wonderful words of love, but our ears must be purged and cleansed, made fit to receive His voice. May our hearts be attuned to Him, so that when the Father speaks we may be receptive and responsive. May we be like Jesus, prepared with a ready answer.

THOUGHT: How is my daily Quiet Time?
PRAYER: "Open my ears that I may hear voices of truth Thou sendest clear."

"PRAYING ALWAYS"

Many prayers have ascended to God's throne of grace from the first moment we learned to pray. Our first prayer was for ourselves; we asked God to have mercy upon us, and He blotted out our sins. Then we prayed for sanctifying grace, and for restraining grace. Furthermore, we prayed for a fresh assurance of faith, for deliverance from temptation, for help in time of need, and for succour in trial.

We go to God for everything as poor helpless beggars, and we have not known Him to disappoint. Bear witness, children of God, you will never be able to get anything for your souls elsewhere. Your spiritual bread has come down from Heaven. All your water flowed from the living Rock – Christ Jesus the Lord. You and I are totally dependent upon God's daily supply. Our prayers have been answered according to His riches in Christ our Lord.

Our wants are countless and endless, but God's supplies are infinitely great. In the words of David in Psalm 40:5, *"Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to usward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."*

Our prayers have been as varied as God's mercies have been countless.

Then have we not cause to say, "I love the Lord, because He hath heard the voice of my supplication"? For as our prayers have been many, so also have been God's answers to them. He has heard us in the day of trouble; He has strengthened and helped us, even when we doubted Him at the mercy-seat. When we remember this our hearts ought to be filled with gratitude, for God has heard even our poor weak prayers.

THOUGHT: Am I persevering in prayer?
PRAYER : *"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."* (Ps 103:2)

PRAY ONE FOR ANOTHER

Intercessory prayer – praying one for another – is the sweetest God ever hears, for the prayers of Christ are of this character. In all the prayers of our Great High Priest (Heb 4:14), now seated at the right hand of God, not a single one is for Himself, but He ever liveth *"who also maketh intercession for us"* (Rom 8:34).

Praying for ourselves we must not neglect, for this is the will of God that *"in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving"* we are to make our requests known unto God (Phil 4:6). But we ought to increase our pleadings for others, for such prayers have in them more of the fruit of the Spirit, more love, more faith and more brotherly kindness. When offered through the precious merits of Jesus, they are the sweetest oblation that we can offer to God.

Remember also, that intercessory prayer is exceedingly powerful. What wonders it has wrought! The Word of God teems with its marvellous deeds. Dear Christian reader, you have a mighty "power tool" in your hands. Use it well, use it constantly, use it with faith, and you will surely be a blessing to your brethren. Whenever you draw near God's throne of grace, remember the many who need His aid. Think of the suffering members of the Lord's body. Think of the house-bound, bed-ridden, shut-in lonely souls who spend long days and nights waiting and wondering.

It may well be that you are the only one who can do something. Be an intercessor for God: pray and go! Go for the Lord, but go also with prayer.

THOUGHT: Pray more for others, less for self.
PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to care enough for others that I will pray for them.

THE FINAL DEPARTURE

The hour is approaching when the message will come to us, as it comes to all: "Arise, and go forth from the home in which thou hast dwelt, from the city in which thou hast done thy business, from thy family, from thy friends. Arise, and take thy last journey." And what do we know of the journey? And the country to which we are bound?

We have read a little of it, as has been revealed by the Spirit, but how little do we know of the realms of the future! But we know that between us and that country is a dark valley of the shadow of death. Our God bids us cross it, promising to be with us. And once across, a wonder-world of inexpressible glory will burst into our astonished sight. No traveller has ever returned to tell but we await God's call with joyous expectation.

The valley of death holds no fears for the people of God. Our Lord went the same way and drove the gloom away. He will walk with us and lead us to that better land. There is a natural reluctance to depart from all we have known and loved here. As Paul says, *"For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better"* (Phil 1:23). What is your desire?

Dear Christian reader, are you prepared for the final departure? Have your affections been weaned off this perishing world, with all its empty joys, and are they set on the Home above? There our Saviour awaits us, to welcome us to the heavenly City – the City *"which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Heb 11:10). By faith, we can surely say, "To be with Christ, our Lord, is far better!"

THOUGHT: The question is, "When?"
PRAYER : Lord, increase my faith for the final departure.

"COME UP HITHER"

Without considering these words in their prophetical context, let us read them as our Lord's invitation to His sanctified people. To each in his own time shall come the *"great voice from heaven"* saying, *"Come up hither."* This should be, to the saints of God, the subject of joyful anticipation. When the call comes, no dread of the unknown or sadness of parting shall cloud the believer's brow. Rather, we shall leave with joy that cannot be described as we wing our way to the Father.

In Christ our Lord we are not called ***down*** to the grave, but ***up*** to the skies. Our heaven-born spirits long for their native air. Yet the celestial summons may be the object of patient waiting. Our God knows best when to bid us *"Come up hither"* – the time is not ours to choose. Patience must have her perfect work. God ordains with sovereign wisdom the most appropriate and perfect time for each of us, whether to go or stay.

But until He calls, let us live out our days for Him. There is much yet undone – more sheaves for my Lord's garner, more jewels for His crown! Think of the souls you and I can win for the Lord. He reminds us: *"The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest"* (Matt 9:37-38).

While the Lord of the harvest tarries, let us busy ourselves about His business. *"... look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest"* (John 4:35) is our Lord's urgent call. Pray, dear reader, that He will show you what you can do down here on earth for Him. When your work is done, His call will surely come!

THOUGHT: Until then, let me burn out for Jesus.
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy perfect timing for all things.

A NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME

When a person is dear, everything about him becomes dear. So precious is the person of the Lord Jesus in the estimation of all true believers that everything about Him becomes inestimable beyond price. Such is the worth of the names of Christ our Lord – they are sweet in the believer's ear. Consider the beloved hymn by John Newton:

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.

Consider the names of our blessed Lord: He is called the Husband of the Church, her Bridegroom, her Friend; He is the Lamb of God, the King, the Prophet, the Priest; He is Shiloh, Emmanuel, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Every title is like the honeycomb dripping honey, sweet beyond compare.

But if there be one name sweeter than another in the believer's ear, it is the name **JESUS**. Jesus! It is the name which moves the harps of heaven to sweetest melody. Jesus! It is the source of all our joys. None other is more charming, more precious than this. Jesus! It is the name that saves unto eternal life in God's everlasting realm.

Then, the day will come, when at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

THOUGHT: May that day be soon!
PRAYER: Father in Heaven, make me to love the name of Jesus more and more.

THE SALVATION OF THE LORD

Many people, if they are asked what they understand by salvation, will reply, "Being saved from hell and taken to heaven." This is only one result of salvation, but not even one tenth of it. True, our Lord Jesus Christ redeems all His people from the wrath to come; He saves them from the fearful condemnation of their sins; but His salvation is far more than this.

Our Lord saves His people *"from their sins"* (Matt 1:21). Oh the sweet deliverance from our worst foes! Where Christ does a saving work, He casts Satan from his throne, and will not let him be master any longer. No man is a true Christian if sin ***reigns*** in his mortal body. While sin will never be expelled till we enter into glory, nevertheless it must not have ***dominion*** in our lives. The true believer has Christ as his Master, and sin is mortified.

Christian professor! Is sin subdued in you? If your ***life*** is unholy, your ***heart*** is unchanged. And if your ***heart*** is unchanged, you are an unsaved person. If the Saviour has not sanctified you, renewed you, given you a hatred of sin and a love of holiness, He has done nothing in you of a saving character. The grace which does not change a man and make him a new person is a worthless counterfeit.

Christ saves His people, not ***in*** their sins, but ***from*** their sins. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14). Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity! Lord, save me now from all evil, and enable me to honour my Saviour with my life.

THOUGHT: In Christ I am a new creature.
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for saving me from my sins. Help me to live a holy life.

VICTORY IS FROM THE LORD

"And ... David inquired of the LORD." David made this enquiry just after he had gained a signal victory over the Philistines. The enemy came in great numbers, but with God's help, David easily put them to flight. However, when they came a second time, David did not go up without enquiring of the Lord. His first victory did not cause him to be self-confident. But his trust was in the Lord: he was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14).

David's example teaches us a vital truth. Success is from the Lord: let it not go to one's head. David did not take things into his own hands. Instead, he enquired of the Lord. We too must be patient to wait upon the Lord. If we wouldst know the path of duty, take God for a compass. In steering our ship through troubled seas, let us put the helm into the hand of the Almighty. He will help us avoid many a hidden rock, with His sovereign hand in control.

"He who carves for himself will cut his own fingers." There is a great truth in this statement. "He who runs before the cloud of God's providence goes on a fool's errand," and so he does. We must watch out for God's providence leading us; if providence tarries, tarry till providence comes. He who tries to outrun God's providence will have to run back in a hurry.

Victory comes from God alone. He says, *"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go"* (Ps 32:8). This is His promise to His people. Dare you believe Him and trust Him to guide each step of the way? Leave not thy chamber daily without enquiring of the Lord.

THOUGHT: I must not run ahead of God.
PRAYER: Lord, give me a patient and obedient heart to wait upon Thee.

"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION"

What we are taught to seek or shun in prayer, we should equally pursue or avoid in action. Very earnestly, therefore, should we avoid temptation, seeking to walk so carefully in the path of obedience, that we may never tempt the devil to tempt us. He who enters the thicket in search of the lion will pay dearly for such presumption. And he who encounters him on the way, even if he should win the day, will find it a stern struggle. Pray that you may be spared the ordeal. Our Saviour, from experience, admonished the disciples, *"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation"* (Matt 26:41).

But do as we will, temptation shall come our way. Hence the prayer, *"Deliver us from evil."* God has one Son without sin; but He has no son without temptation. Man is born to trouble and temptation; the Christian man is no exception. He must be always on the alert against Satan who lies in wait for the unwary. The believer who has experienced the ways of the adversary know that there are seasons when he is most likely to attack: in this the believer is forewarned, and to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Remember the old saying: Prevention is better than cure. It is better to be so well armed that the devil will not attack, then to get involved in a conflict and endure the perils and injuries of close encounter, even though you may come off victorious. Pray then, that you may be spared from being tempted, and if temptation be permitted by the Lord, that you may be delivered from the wily foe. And never be without the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

THOUGHT: *"... Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* (James 4:7)
PRAYER: Lord, increase my faith to shield me from the enemy's fiery darts.

HOW TO ABOUND

There are many who know *"how to be abased"* but not *"how to abound."* When they are set on top of a pinnacle, their heads grow dizzy, and they are ready to fall. The Christian is more likely to disgrace his profession in prosperity than in adversity. It is a dangerous thing to be prosperous. The crucible of adversity is a less severe trial than the fining-pot of prosperity. How sad it is that the very mercies and bounties of God have been misused to bring on leanness of soul and neglect of spiritual things.

Yet such need not, and should not, be so. The apostle tells us that he knew how to abound. When God gave him much he knew how to use it wisely. Abundant grace enabled him to bear abundant prosperity. God gave him abundant grace to carry the brimming cup of material plenty with a steady hand, for he declares, *" in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry."*

It is a divine lesson to know how to be full. The Israelites learnt a costly lesson once, for while the flesh was yet in their mouth, the wrath of God came upon them. Many have asked, and received, fullness of bread, but it brought on wantonness of spirit, to their own hurt. When God has provided much, it often happens that His grace is diminished in like proportion. Abundant bounties have not provoked us to abundant gratitude. We are full and forget God. Satisfied with earth, we are prepared to do without heaven. It is harder to know how to be full than it is to know how to be hungry: this is the universal failing. Let this not be yours!

THOUGHT: "Let not the gifts Thy love bestows estrange our hearts from Thee."
PRAYER: Forgive me, Lord, for forgetting Thee when Thou prospereth me.

"I HAVE BLOTTED OUT ... THY SINS"

The Lord likens our sins to a cloud. As clouds are of many shapes and shades, so are our transgressions. Clouds shut out the light of the sun, and darken the landscape beneath. Our sins hide from us the light of Jehovah's face, and cause us to sit in the shadow of death. Our sins are earth-born things; they rise from the miry places of our fallen nature. When their measure is full, they threaten us with storm and tempest. Our sins, like rain clouds, threaten to flood us with a torrent of destruction. How can it ever be fair weather with our souls if black clouds of sin hang overhead?

But our God appears on the scene and by divine grace He intervenes on our behalf. In our helpless estate, He does what we could not do for ourselves, and He says, *"I have blotted out ... thy sins."* He at once and forever effectually removes the noxious clouds of all our transgressions. Against the justified man, no sin remains. The great transaction of the cross has eternally removed all transgressions from us who come to Jesus in faith. Thank God that *"by one offering he* (our Lord Jesus) *hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified"* (Heb 10:14).

Now let us obey the gracious command: *"return unto me."* Why should pardoned and redeemed sinners live at a distance from their Redeemer? We who have been forgiven of all our sins, let no legal fears restrain us from the boldest access to our Lord. Let our backslidings be repented of, forgiven and forgotten, and let us strive mightily in the power of the Holy Spirit to return to the Lover of our souls.

THOUGHT: Do I come to my Lord daily?
PRAYER: O Lord, restore me fully today!

"THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS"

A Christian should bear a striking likeness to his Master. We have available many biographies of Christ, but the best and most eloquent are those written out in the lives of His followers. The Apostle Paul refers to the "Christ-likeness" of the believers in Corinth as epistles *"known and read of all men"* (2 Cor 3:2).

If we were what we profess to be, and what we should be, we should be living pictures of Christ. We should bear such a striking likeness to Him that the world would not have to hold us up for close scrutiny, and say, "Well, you have somewhat of a likeness of Jesus." Consider the disciples Peter and John. They were in the eyes of the authorities *"unlearned and ignorant,"* yet they were impressed that "*they had been with Jesus."*

Dear reader, look into your own life and ask, "Have I a resemblance to my Lord that others will also say that I have been with Jesus?" Is it too hard for each of us to strive to live like our Master, to imitate His pure and sinless life so that men will see Christ in us? Think and pray this through.

Like Him! How can it be? By ourselves, it is impossible. But by His grace, we can. Let us be like our Lord in His boldness: never blush to own His name. Be like Him in our loving spirit: think kindly, speak kindly, do kindly. Be like Him in holiness, always going about doing nothing but good. Be like Him: self denying, fervent in prayers, submitting to the Father's will, patient and enduring all things. Most of all, as the highest Christ-likeness, be forgiving! Let us in all ways and by all means, so live that all men may say, "They have been with Jesus."

THOUGHT: I follow Jesus, so I must be like Jesus.
PRAYER: Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

THE FIRST LOVE

Forever to be remembered and cherished in the heart is when we first saw the Lord at the foot of the cross. There our sin burden rolled away, we received the promises of God, rejoiced in our newfound salvation, and found peace with God. It was like spring time in the soul; the winter of Satan's cold chains was past; the thunderings of Sinai was hushed, its lightnings flashing no more.

In Christ what a glorious reconciliation was ours; the law ceased from threatening, its justice demanded no punishment. Then by His blessed Spirit our hearts were filled with lovely grace gifts from God: love, joy, peace, patience, faith and many others. Our souls rejoiced with thanksgiving and our lips with songs of praise. We magnified the holy name of our gracious forgiving God.

In our gratitude we resolved before God, "Lord, I am Thine; all I am, and all I have, I devote to Thee. Thou hast bought me with Thy blood. Let me spend myself, and be spent wholly in Thy service." At that time, our hearts burned with a holy flame of devotion to Jesus. Is it the same now? Do we love Him as we first loved?

Heed our Lord's words to the Church of Ephesus: *"I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."* Alas! It is but little that we have done for our Master. Our love has grown cold. We give to God cents when we should have given dollars. We have given the dregs and kept the cream for ourselves. His gentle voice rebukes us. In repentance we turn to Him. "O Lord, quicken us that we may return to our first love and do our first works!"

THOUGHT: *"We love him, because he first loved us."* (1 John 4:19)
PRAYER: Lord, make me to love Thee as I ought.

CONSOLATIONS FOR SUFFERINGS

The blessed Ruler of Providence holds a pair of scales. In one He puts His people's trials. In the other He puts their consolations. When the scale of trials is nearly empty, the scale of consolations is nearly the same; and when the scale of trials is full, the scale of consolation is just as heavy. When the black clouds of affliction gather, His light of consolation is more brightly revealed to us. When the night descends and the tempest threatens, our Heavenly Captain is always near.

How well do you know our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ? Isn't it a fact that when we are most cast down, He lifts us up by the consolations of the Spirit? That's why He is called the God of all comfort. He sends consolations in proportion to our trials. Great hearts grow out of great trials. God uses the spade of trouble to dig a deep reservoir of comfort, and fills it with His consolation. If our hearts are full of our own man-made comforts, He breaks them down to make room for His grace.

Dear reader, despise not the chastening of the Lord (Heb 12:5) for it is for our profit. Faint not when troubles come: we are often happiest then, for troubles draw us closest to God. Is it not true that when things go well and our purses are full we spend less time in prayer? But come the storms of trial and trouble and the child of God is driven to his knees before the Father's throne of grace pleading, *"Out of the depths have I cried into thee, O LORD"* (Ps 130:1). The best prayers come from the pit of tribulations; the heartiest prayers come from the depths of the soul, through sore trials and afflictions. These draw us near to God, and nearness to God is happiness.

THOUGHT: Our sufferings are balanced by God's consolations.
PRAYER: Lord, remind me when I am troubled that Thy comfort is near.

ANOTHER COMFORTER

Our Heavenly Father revealed Himself as the God Almighty to believers of old – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and others. Then He revealed Himself in the person of His Son, Jesus, *"the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person"* (Heb 1:3). When our Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, the Father sent the Holy Spirit in the place of the Son to be *"another Comforter"* among God's people. His power was gloriously manifested at Pentecost, and afterwards.

Dear believer, how well are you acquainted with the blessed Holy Spirit? Do you know He is the ever present Immanuel—God with us? Do you feel His presence, dwelling in and with His people, quickening, strengthening, guiding and ruling in their midst? Do you thank God daily for His blessed abiding? While He is our Friend and Comforter, you must not regard Him as a common "buddy" or ordinary "pal," as some ignorantly do today. He is God the Holy Spirit, equal in substance, power, and glory with the other Persons of the Trinity.

See then, the Comforter, as God's greatest gift today, to aid us in our earthly pilgrimage. Without Him we can do nothing, but by His Almighty power, extraordinary and *"impossible"* things are possible. As our Lord promised: *"He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father"* (John 14:12), and because the Father *"shall give you another Comforter"* (John 14:16). The Comforter abides with us forever, but we must seek Him constantly, daily. Let us entreat Him to rest upon us, and to burn within us.

THOUGHT: The Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son.
PRAYER: Lord, Holy Comforter, take my life and renew it for Thy use.

NOW ARE WE THE SONS OF GOD

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." Consider who we were – worthless, hateful offenders, and enemies – and we marvel at our adoption into the family of God. *"Now are we the sons of God."* What a royal relationship with high privileges it brings! From the Father now we receive *"lovingkindness and tender mercies"* (Ps 103:4). To Him we offer our feeble but filial love and obedience. O blessed adoption which we deserve not! How can it be?

All that, and more, we now have through Christ, our Redeemer. But *"it doth not yet appear what we shall be."* To the world we are nothing, as Paul the Apostle said, *"we are made as the filth of the world"* (1 Cor 4:13). *"Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."* Are you downhearted at times, dear child of God? Things are not what they seem! Be content to be unknown with Him in His humiliation, for shortly we shall be exalted with Him.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God" — easy to read but not so easy to feel. How is it with you today? Are you in the depths of sorrow? Is your faith almost gone? Fear not! Trust not in feelings and failings of life. You must live simply by faith, *"the faith of the Son of God"* who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal 2:20). Things may be against us, we may be in the valley of despondency and despair. It is in times like these that we turn to God's Word: *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God."* These words hold brightest hope and contain precious promises. Today, not yet – it doth not yet appear. *"But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him."* Like the Lord – renewed, pure, immortal, forever freed from earth's corruption.

THOUGHT: I shall be like Him, when He appears.
PRAYER: Lord, empower me by Thy Spirit to strive daily to be like my Lord Jesus.

NO CONDEMNATION

Come, dear reader, let us consider what these words means. Believing in Jesus, we are actually and effectively cleared from all guilt; released from prison, we are no more in fetters, but delivered from the bondage of the law. Freed from sins' shackles, we walk at large as freemen – all because our Saviour's blood has purchased for us our full redemption.

Now no sword of condemnation hangs over our head, but we have the commendation of the Father's love to encourage us to approach His throne of grace. No flames of divine vengeance or the just demand of the Law can threaten us who have been washed, cleansed and made innocent by the blood of God's own Son. No fear of hell and its everlasting flames haunt us, for there is *"now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk ... after the Spirit."*

"No condemnation"! O how sweet is salvation's sound! And sweeter still is the Saviour's name! To Jesus, our Saviour, we owe our eternal praises and gratitude, for He kept the Law for us, and that perfectly. Then to us He gives all the blessings of perfect obedience, simply because He did for us what we could not do. Now trusting Him, with faith and believing, God imputes to us all the merits of Christ's obedience to our account – amazing divine transaction!

"A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear with Thy righteousness on,
My person and offerings to bring;
The terrors of law and of God,
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view."

THOUGHT: He did for me what I could not do.
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for saving me from everlasting condemnation.

OUR DAILY BREAD

Jehoiachin was not sent away from the King's palace with a store to last for months, but his provision was a daily pension. This is a picture of the happy position of the Lord's people. A daily portion is all that a man really needs. We do not need tomorrow's supplies; that new day has not yet dawned, and its wants are yet unborn. The thirst of June does not need to be quenched in February. If we have enough for each day we shall never be in want. Sufficient for the day is all that we can enjoy.

Dear child of the Father, covet not many things and large supplies. We cannot eat or drink or wear more than the day's supply; to have much surplus adds the care of storing and the anxiety of watching against theft. One staff is a help, but a bundle of staves becomes a burden. Enough is a feast, but surfeit will drown even a glutton. Enough is what we should ask for; a craving for more is sin. Be content with what the Father gives. He knows our needs, so receive every bounty with thanks.

Jehoiachin's provision is ours. The Father supplies us a sure portion, a gracious portion given us by the King. It is a perpetual portion, for which give thanks. Our heavenly Father knows best, and He gives us the best. From His good hand comes our daily supply, no more, no less, but just enough! He wills that we come to Him day by day for fresh supplies, our daily manna from Heaven. Day by day He sends us what He deems best. It is a sweet assurance. Wait on Him, feed on His Word, speak to Him daily, and see how good our great God is.

THOUGHT: "How good is the God we adore."
PRAYER: Give me this day my daily bread.

SHE WAS HEALED

In Luke 8 is recorded one of the most touching of the Saviour's miracles. The woman was ignorant. She imagined that virtue came out of Jesus by a law of necessity, almost mechanically. She was a stranger to the Lord's generosity and compassion, or she would not have gone behind to steal what He was so ready to give. Had she known the love of the Saviour, she would have said, "I have but to show myself to Him and His power at once will work my cure."

While we marvel at her ignorance, we admire her faith. As she was touching the border of His garment, immediately her issue of blood stopped. But fearing lest He should retract the blessing, or perhaps rebuke her action, she hid herself. Poor woman, how her ignorance made her fearful. Little did she know the greatness of our Lord's heart and the fulness of His love! But are we much better than the woman? Truly, we too must confess, we have not so clear a view of Him as we could wish. We know not the height and depth of His love.

Now here is the marvel of the poor woman. Poor in knowledge, and poor in faith, nevertheless her little faith was real, and it saved her. There was no long delay – the miracle was instantaneous. Of course the Saviour knew her approach, and her plight. His compassion reached her body, mingling in the crowd pressing upon Him. Jesus saw her, saw her little faith, and He took pity on her. Hear His gracious gentle words, *"Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."* If we have faith as a grain of mustard seed, our Lord will honour it. The question is: do you have faith in the Saviour?

THOUGHT: Am I much better than the woman in Luke 8?
PRAYER: Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief.

TO HIM BE GLORY

Heaven will be full of the ceaseless praises of Jesus. In eternity the endless years shall speed their everlasting course, but forever and forever His glory shall never cease. He is a *"priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek"* (Ps 110:4). To Him be glory. Is He not also *"the King of kings, and Lord of lords"* (1 Tim 6:15)? To Him be glory. Is He not the everlasting Father? To Him be glory. The glory of Jesus our Lord shall never end, neither shall His praises ever cease.

His glory bought with blood shall endure for ever. The glory of the cross must never be eclipsed; the lustre of the resurrection must never be dimmed. O Lord Jesus! Thou shalt be praised for ever. As long as the Father's throne endures, forever and ever, unto Thee be glory! Dear reader, the time will come when you will join the saints above in ascribing all glory to Jesus. Wait not till then to bless Him, but glorify Him now. That's what the apostle says, *"To him be glory* ***both*** *now and for ever"* (2 Pet 3:18). Will you not this day make it your prayer?

How can we on earth glorify the Saviour? Pray! "Lord, help me to glorify Thee; I am poor, help me to be contented; I am sick, help me to bear it with patience; I have talents, help me to use them for Thee; I have time, Lord, help me redeem it in Thy service; let my heart feel no love but Thine; I have a head, help me, Lord, to think of Thee and for Thee; show me Lord my life-work for Thee and help me to do it; I cannot do much, but I surrender my will and body to Thee; take me and use me. Enable me to glorify Thee now. This is my heart's prayer. Amen."

THOUGHT: *"He must increase, but I must decrease."* (John 3:30)
PRAYER: Teach me, Lord, to glorify Thee in every aspect of my life.

MAKING THE SAVIOUR GLAD

And who are thus privileged to make the Saviour glad but His people – His Church. But is it possible? He makes us glad, but how can we make Him glad? By our ***love.*** Ah! We think it is so cold, so faint; indeed, we must sorrowfully confess it to be, but still it is very sweet to Christ our Lord. Did He not delight in that love in the golden Canticle? *"How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse!"* (Song 4:10).

Beloved in the Lord, see how our Lord delights in you. When you lean on Him, you not only receive, but you give Him joy. When you gaze with love upon His glorious face, you not only obtain comfort, but you impart delight. Our gifts too are very pleasant to Him; so are our time, talents and substance laid upon His altar.

Our Lord is made glad by our gifts, not for their value, but for the loving grateful heart behind the gift. The lowly offerings of His saints are more acceptable than thousands of gold and silver pieces. Our godly living is like sweet-smelling perfume to Him. He is made glad when we forgive another; when we give to the poor and needy; when we lead a soul to Him.

Glorious thought, this: that by some feeble but meaningful act of ours we can make glad the heart of the King and Master of the universe! Go, then, proclaim His saving name to those still lost in the darkness of sin. Go to the perishing ones and lift up His cross that those who look with faith may live. By this you will gladden His great loving heart and glorify the Father in Heaven.

THOUGHT: My disobedience makes my Saviour sad.
PRAYER: Lord, make me a blessing to others and a gladness to Thee.

CONTENTMENT IN THE LORD

Contentment is not a natural quality of man. Rather, his natural inclination is towards covetousness, discontent, and murmuring. Like weeds and brambles, these need no cultivation: they flourish naturally. So we need not teach men to complain and grumble. Contentment is a precious bloom in God's garden, a flower sent from Heaven. If we would have it, it must be cultivated.

How can we cultivate this lovely quality? To leave things to nature will disappoint in the end. Our natural man, the *"old man,"* will not bring forth contentment on its own. Only the new nature or *"new man"* can produce it. But even then we must be specially careful to seek the Lord's help: He must sow in our hearts seeds of contentment, and we must take pains to nurture and cultivate them.

The apostle says, *"I have learned ... to be content."* It is a lesson he had learnt over years of experience. It must have cost him some pains to attain the mystery of that great truth. In the process, and along the way, there must have been times when he thought he had got it, and then, Oh dear! he broke down. But when at last he had mastered the old inclination, he could say, *"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."*

See Paul, old and grey-headed, shut up in Nero's dungeon in Rome. Would you be willing to share the bare and cold cell with him and say, *"I have learned to be content"*? To ***say*** is one thing, to ***learn*** is another. Only by patient waiting on the Holy Spirit, subduing that haughty disgruntled spirit through long exercise of holy discipline can we learn the lesson of contentment.

THOUGHT: Contentment is the handmaid of inner peace.
PRAYER: Help me, Father, to learn to be contented.

THY GOOD SPIRIT

Common, too common, is the sin of forgetting the blessed Holy Spirit. If it be not out of ignorance, it is folly and ingratitude. The Holy Spirit deserves more of our attention and affection, for He also is God. He shares in the threefold ascription of *"Holy, holy, holy"* which ascends to the Triune Jehovah. Unmixed purity, and truth, and grace is He.

The Spirit is good ***benevolently***. Tenderly He bears with our waywardness, patiently striving with our rebellious wills. It is the Spirit who quickens us from our death in sin, and then trains us for Heaven, as a loving nurse fosters her child. How generous, forgiving, and tender is this blessed Spirit.

He is good ***operatively***. All His works are good to the highest degree. It is He who gives good thoughts, prompts good actions, reveals good truths, applies good promises, assists in good attainments, and gives good results. There is no spiritual good in all the world of which He is not the author and sustainer. Heaven itself owes the perfect character of its redeemed to His work.

He is good ***officially***, whether as Quickener, Comforter, Instructor, Guide, Sanctifier or Intercessor. He fulfills His office well. His official duties dispense the highest good to the Church. They who yield to His influences become good; they who obey His promptings do good; they who live under His control receive good. Are you grateful to this good and blessed Spirit? Let us revere and adore Him as God; let us wait upon Him in all our holy enterprises; let us speak His praise and never grieve Him at any time.

THOUGHT: Without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).
PRAYER: Come, Holy Spirit, and make my heart Thy throne.

THE WELL LAHAI-ROI

In the land of Canaan, water is extremely precious because of its rarity. Wells of life-giving water are known to thirsty wayfarers and remembered down the ages of history. Such a well was *"Lahai-roi."* Hagar and Ishmael had once found deliverance there, but theirs was a casual visit, such as worLdlings pay to the Lord in times of need. They cry to Him in adversity, but forsake Him in prosperity.

Isaac was no casual visitor: he dwelt by the well Lahai-roi. He made the well of the living God his constant source of supply. A man's dwelling place is a test of the state of his soul. The place of the well seemed to hold a special attachment to Isaac. Had he known of Hagar's deliverance there? Perhaps. The name itself, *"Thou God seest me"* (Gen 16:13), endeared the well to him. His musings by its brim at eventide made him familiar with the well. His meeting there with Rebekah made the well even more precious (Gen 24:62-64).

But, best of all, Isaac enjoyed fellowship with God at the place of the well. That made him choose the hallowed ground for his dwelling. What greater blessing is there than to live in the presence of the everlasting God? Let us learn to live in the presence of God, and pray the Holy Spirit that everyday we may be conscious that God sees.

Come and dwell close to God's well, that delightful, comforting, unfailing source of water springing up into eternal life. His well never fails! Happy is he who dwells there, for abundant and beautiful supplies are ever near at hand. In Him we live, and move, and have our being. In Him we have life more abundant.

THOUGHT: God sees.
PRAYER: Glorious Lord, constrain me never to leave Thee, but to dwell by Thy well.

THE LORD WAS THERE

Edom's princes – the descendants of Esau – saw the whole country left desolate, and counted upon its easy conquest. But they had not reckoned with this: the Lord was there. It was His land, and He was there to see to its security. Whatever may be the machinations and devices of the enemy, God's presence is an effectual barrier.

The saints are God's people, His heritage. He is in the midst of them, and will protect His own. What comfort this yields us in our troubles and spiritual conflicts! We are constantly and presently opposed, yet perpetually preserved! Satan shoots his fiery darts but with the shield of faith we douse them all. The Lord is there.

Our good works are the subjects of Satan's attacks. He plans and plots to attack and destroy every virtue and grace in us: our bright hope in Christ, our fervent love one for another, our patient endurance, our zeal for God – everything that is good is the target of his attack. The only reason why anything virtuous or lovely survives in us is because *"the Lord was there."*

Our Lord is with us, not just for a time, but through life, even to the end of the world. Even when we die, we shall find that the Lord is there. When the time comes to cross the Jordan's chilly waters, our feet shall stand upon the Rock of Ages, and He will conduct us safely across. Beloved, from the beginning to the end of our Christian life, the only reason why we do not perish is because the Lord is there. And we know, though heaven and earth may pass away, yet our Lord never leaves us, for He is there.

THOUGHT: God never forsakes His own.
PRAYER: Lord, if Thou art for me, who can be against me?

IS YOUR LIFE A "GARDEN OF DELIGHTS"?

Our souls may wisely desire the north wind of testing if that can be used of God to draw forth the sweet-perfume of godly graces from us. If God's wintry blast is now blowing in the garden of your life, shrink not, dear reader. Did not the spouse submit to the reproofs of her Beloved? Let us, like her, entreat Him to send forth His grace, in whatever form it should come.

The storms of God's chastening are better than the calm of His indifference. The spouse had become so utterly weary of the deadness and unholy stillness that she sighed for divine visitation to stir her into action. Yet she desires the warm south wind of comfort too, the smiles of divine approval, the joy of the Redeemer's presence: for these arouse the sluggish spiritual life. She desires either one or the other, or both: her one ambition is that she may be able to delight her Beloved with the sweet spices in her garden.

She cannot endure to remain unprofitable, nor can we. How cheering a thought to know that Jesus delights in our poor feeble graces. It seems too good to be true. Come trial, come testing, even death itself, if we shall thereby be enabled to make glad the Saviour's heart. Let even the aching heart, bruised by great sorrow, glorify our gracious Lord Jesus. Let not the sweet perfumes of God's grace slumber in dormant flower cups. Let the divine Husbandman, by affliction or consolation, draw forth heavenly perfumes of faith, love, patience, hope, submission, joy, and other delightful odours of Zion. All glory be unto Him!

THOUGHT: Sweet are the uses of adversity.
PRAYER: Lord, make my life a fragrant garden for Thee.

"HE IS SO PRECIOUS TO ME"

As all rivers flow into the ocean, so all true delights centre on our own Beloved. His gracious look outshines the sun; the kindness of His countenance is fairer than any flower; no fragrance is like the breath of His mouth. Gems of the mine and pearls from the sea are worthless when measured against His preciousness.

Peter tells us that Jesus is precious, but he could not tell us how precious, nor can any man compute the value of God's *"unspeakable* (inexpressible) *gift"* (2 Cor 9:15). No words can describe the preciousness of the Lord Jesus to His people, nor fully assess how He is their unsurpassed satisfaction and joy: His worth is simply beyond man's comprehension.

In the midst of plenty, we experience famine if our Lord were absent. Should He hide Himself, all our world would be black even on a sunny day, and night blacker still. What a howling wilderness is the world without our Lord! Without Him our flowers wither, pleasant fruits turn sour, birds become songless, and all our hopes are overturned. Without our Sun of Righteousness, our days are over-shadowed with gloom.

How shall we sing the praise of Him who is the Soul of our soul, the Light of our light, the Life of our life? What would you do to wake up in the morning without Him? To face the day's battles without Him? To cope with the world's temptation without Him? Or when you come home at night, weary and worn, if there were no place of fellowship with your faithful Friend? Blessed be His name for Jesus never forsakes His own. To you who believe, He is ever so precious!

THOUGHT: Do I remember the hymn, "He is so precious to me"?
PRAYER: Lord in Heaven, draw me near to Thy wounded side.

EQUIP FOR TOTAL WARFARE

We are engaged in total warfare with the adversary. Every weapon within our reach must be used. Preaching, teaching, praying, supporting, all must be brought into action. Even our mean and meagre talents must be employed. Coulter, axe, mattock, spear and sword, may all be used to slay Philistines. Even rough and unprofessional tools may deal lethal blows. Each moment of time, in season or out of season; each fragrant of ability, educated or simple; each opportunity, favourable or otherwise, must be used, for our numbers are small and talents few.

Our tools need sharpening; we need quickness of perception, readiness of energy, and promptness in response, in fighting the Lord's battles. Our Christian enterprises suffer because our Gospel thrust lacks the "cutting edge." We need more initiative, more earnestness, more intensity in God's service. If need be, learn from our enemies, and make the Philistines sharpen our weapons! Our whole method of warfare needs revision through and through.

With the enlivening of the Holy Spirit, let us make a new start. Observe how earnest and devoted the heathen devotees are, what pains they willingly endure in the service of their idols. Observe the prince of darkness, how persevering in his endeavours, how daring in his plans, how energetic he is in all he does! Then see ourselves, servants of the most High God, so lethargic in our witness, so poor in our devotion, so tardy in appearing before God on His Day! O that the Holy Spirit of God would renew our feeble zeal, revive our flagging spirits, and recharge our spiritual dynamos. Equip us, O Lord, for total warfare against the adversary! Amen.

THOUGHT: *"... the children of this world are ... wiser than the children of light."* (Luke 16:8)
PRAYER: Forgive me, O Lord, my tardiness and lethargy. Fill me with Thy Spirit and renew my zeal for Thee.

"LESS THAN THE LEAST"

The apostle Paul felt it a privilege to be allowed to preach the gospel. He entered upon the ministry with intense delight. With all his successes, he was greatly humble: the fuller a vessel the deeper it sinks in the water. Beginners indulge in a fond conceit of their abilities, being yet untried; but the earnest worker soon realizes his own weakness.

If you seek humility, try hard work. If you would know your nothingness, attempt some great things for Jesus. If you would feel how utterly powerless you are, attempt to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ among the heathen, and you will know, as you never knew before, what a weak and unworthy thing you are. Recall our Lord's words: *"without me ye can do nothing"* (John 15:5). We are but *"earthen vessels"* (2 Cor 4:7).

Paul realized his nothingness apart from the Lord. Follow his example in all your efforts to serve Him. From first to last, Paul preached Christ, only Christ, and nothing but Christ. Let *"Jesus Christ, and him crucified"* (1 Cor 2:2) also be your recurring theme. For Christ's service, be like these lovely spring flowers which open their cups to the sun, as if saying, "Fill us with thy golden beams!" So should every Christian be filled with the sunshine of God's grace.

O yield today to the Sun of Righteousness! Let Him fill your empty vessel, thoroughly cleansed and emptied of self, and made to overflow with all the abundant goodness of God. He can make you useful and mighty, even though you are *"less than the least of all saints"* (Eph 3:8).

THOUGHT: *"... Moses was very meek, above all the men ..."* (Num 12:3)
PRAYER: Lord, Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.

GOD'S FURNACE OF AFFLICTION

Comfort yourself with this thought, that God says, *"I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."* These words are like a cool shower, soothing the fierceness of the fire. Let affliction come – God has chosen you! Let poverty walk in at my door, but my Lord of all resource is in the house already. He is with me, for He has chosen me! Sickness may lay me low, but God's balsam brings me healing – He has chosen me!

Whatever betide me as I walk this vale of tears, I am not down-hearted, for I know that He has chosen me. In the sorest trial, remember that the Son of Man walks with you in the furnace (Dan 3:25). In your secret chamber of prayer, there sits with you One whom, having not seen, you love (1 Pet 1:8). In your suffering, it is He who makes your bed of affliction, and smooths your pillow of rest. Be comforted therefore! Your divine Friend is never far away!

Are you lonely? Are you in poverty? Wherever you are, in every house of His chosen ones, the Lord of glory is a frequent visitor though unseen. He loves to come to you in your isolation and loneliness. He is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Can you not feel His gentle touch, His voice of cheer, the warmth of His nearness? Even the valley of the shadow of death loses its power, for He is with thee, to guide thee each step of the way.

In all our fiery trials, His presence is our comfort and safety. With Job we may confidently say, *"But he knoweth the way ... when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold"* (Job 23:10).

THOUGHT: The fiery trial will try us (1 Pet 4:12).
PRAYER: Lord, may I never be ashamed to own Thy name because of affliction.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD DESCENDING

As the Spirit of God descended upon the Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church, so He also descends upon the Church, the members of His mystical body. There is often a singular rapidity about this descent; before we are fully aware, He impels us onward and heaven-ward beyond all expectation. Yet there is none of the hurry and flurry of earthly haste.

Quietness is the essence of the Spirit's operation, which is nothing like today's noisy effusion of "tongues" and confused noise. The Spirit still works by that *"still small voice"* and, like the dew from heaven, His grace and power is distilled in silence. The dove is the chosen type of purity; the Holy Spirit is holiness itself. Where the presence of the Spirit is, everything that is pure and lovely, and of good report, abounds, and sin and uncleanness depart.

Peace reigns where the Spirit comes with power; like Noah's dove, He bears the olive branch of peace. Gentleness is a sure result of the Spirit's transforming power: hearts touched by His benign influence are meek and lowly. Harmlessness follows, as a matter of course, and as our example: we must learn to be harmless as doves. Then comes love, for the blessed Spirit is full of affection. The soul indwelt by the Holy Spirit abounds with love: love to the brethren, love to enemies, love to others, and above all, love to the Lord Jesus.

The brooding of the Spirit of God upon the face of the waters produced order and life. Brooding within our hearts He give us new life and light. Blessed Holy Spirit, as Thou didst rest upon our dear Redeemer, even so rest Thou upon us from this time forth and forevermore.

THOUGHT: "Holy shouting," "holy clapping," "holy dancing" and "holy utterances" are not of God's Spirit, but of another spirit.
PRAYER: Open my eyes, O Lord, to Thy teaching in Thy Word about the Holy Spirit.

"MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE"

If none of God's saints were poor and tried, we should not know half so well the consolations of divine grace. We see the starving pauper, surviving on bread and water, who has not lost his trust in Jesus; the bereaved widow, overwhelmed with grief, yet finding comfort in Him who said, *"I am the resurrection, and the life"* (John 11:25); the patient Job who cries out in his affliction, *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."* O what honour it reflects on the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord!

God's grace is proved and magnified in the poverty and extremity of believers. Believing Romans 8:28 that all things work together for their good, true believers bear up under every discouragement. Out of apparent evil, our God is able to work real blessing. He will either work deliverance speedily, or most assuredly He will support them through the trouble, as long as He is pleased to keep them in it.

This patience of suffering saints proves the power of divine grace. Be not dismayed when the tempests of affliction rage around you: the Spirit's consolations are more than sufficient for every trial and testing. For if the adverse winds of life did not blow, how could we tell how firm and secure the faith within us was? The master-works of God are those men who stand in the face of overwhelming difficulties, steadfast, unmoved,

"Calm 'mid the daunting cry,
Confident of final victory."

THOUGHT: Our God never fails those who put their trust in Him.
PRAYER: Hitherto have I trusted in Thee. Lord help me trust Thee to the end.

"THEY SHALL BE ABUNDANTLY SATISFIED"

Sheba's queen was amazed at the sumptuousness of Solomon's table. She marvelled equally at the company of servants who feasted at the royal board. But what are these compared to the hospitalities of the God of all grace? Ten thousand times ten thousand of His people are fed and nourished by His hand, and not one remains unsatisfied. Our Lord has enough for each, enough for all, enough for evermore: there is no exhausting of His bounties.

At Jehovah's table each diner has his proper portion of meat. Think of the grace one saint requires. Our Lord of infinite resource spreads His table, not for one, but for many saints, not for one day but for a thousand; not for years of time but for the endless years of eternity. The guests at our Lord's banquet are satisfied, nay, *"abundantly satisifed,"* and that not with ordinary fare, but with the fatness or richness of God's own house. Such feasting is assured by a faithful promise to all those children of men who put their trust in Him.

Once I thought: if I might only get the scraps at God's back door, I should be more than satisfied; like the woman who said, *"the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table"* (Matt 15:27). Away with such unworthy thoughts! No child of God is ever served with scraps and left-overs. The King's own table welcomes every child. We are simply amazed at the marvellous richness of God's grace which He gives us to enjoy. We *"shall be abundantly satisifed."*

THOUGHT: Of God's grace, none but His loved ones know.
PRAYER: Heavenly Father, feed me till I want no more.

"LET US NOT SLEEP"

There are many ways of promoting Christian wakefulness. For Christians, let me strongly recommend that they talk together concerning the ways of the Lord. *Christian* and *Hopeful* (in *Pilgrim's Progress*), as they journeyed toward the *Celestial City,* said to themselves, "To prevent drowsiness in this place, let us fall into good discourse."

Christian enquired, "Brother, where shall we begin?" *Hopeful* answered, "Where God began with us." Then *Christian* sang this song:

When saints do sleepy grow, let them come hither,
And hear how these two pilgrims talk together;
Yea, let them learn of them, in any wise,
Thus to keep open their drowsy slumb'ring eyes.
Saints' fellowship, if it be managed well,
Keeps them awake, and that in spite of hell.

Christians who isolate themselves and walk alone are liable to grow drowsy. Hold Christian company, and you will be kept wakeful, refreshed, and encouraged to make quicker progress toward Heaven. But take care that the theme of your conversation is the Lord. Let the eye of faith be constantly fixed on Him. Let your heart be full of Him, and let your lips speak His worth.

Friend, live near the cross, and you will not fall asleep. Remember, you are on your way to the *Celestial City*! Then you will not go to sleep on the road. With hell behind, and the devil trailing you, you will not loiter. Press on with haste toward the pearly gates opened to welcome you! 'Tis not the time to sleep!

THOUGHT: *"... it is high time to awake out of sleep ..."* (Rom 13:11)
PRAYER: Lord, teach me to watch and pray.

"PRIDE GOETH ... BEFORE A FALL"

It is an old saying, that "Coming events cast their shadows before them." A haughty heart is the prelude of evil; pride is the sign of coming destruction. When men have ridden the high horse, destruction has always overtaken them. It is deadly perilous for man to exult in his own greatness and glory. History has many sobering lessons for those who care to learn.

See Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty builder of Babylon, down on all fours, eating grass like an ox, his nails had grown like bird's claws, and his hair like eagles' feathers (Dan 4:33). Pride made the boaster a beast, for our God hates high looks, and will surely bring them low. The arrows of God are aimed at proud hearts.

O Christian, is thine heart haughty? Pride can get into the Christian's heart as well as into any other person's. It can delude him into dreaming that he is *"rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing"* (Rev 3:17). Are you glorying in your graces or your talents? Are you proud of yourself because of your spirituality and sweet experiences? Beware, reader, destruction is on the way!

Your proud poppies of self-conceit will be pulled up by the roots, your mushroom graces will wither in the scorching heat of God's wrath, and your self-sufficiency shall become straw for the dung-hill. For safety, live in lowliness of spirit at the foot of the cross. *"He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord"* (1 Cor 1:31).

THOUGHT: *"... God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."* (James 4:6)
PRAYER: Lord, may all glory and dominion be unto Thee for ever and ever. Amen.

HAVE FAITH IN GOD

Faith is as feet to the soul, to walk in the paths of righteousness. Love can make the feet move more swiftly, but it is faith which carries the soul onward. Faith is as oil to the wheels of holy devotion and godly piety; without this oil the wheels grind slowly and heavily. With faith I can do all things for God; without faith I shall neither have the inclination nor the power to be of any use to Him.

Are you looking for men who serve God best? Look for those who have the most faith. Little faith will save a man, but little faith can do no great thing for God. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, poor *Little-Faith* could not face up to *Apollyon*; it needed *Christian* to do that. Poor *Little-Faith* could not have slain giant *Despair*; it required *Great-Heart's* arm to knock the monster down.

Little-Faith says, "It is a rough road, beset with sharp thorns, and full of dangers; I am afraid to go on." But *Great-Faith* remembers God's promise, *"Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be"* (Deut 33:25); and so she boldly ventures on. *Little-Faith* cries with despondency, but *Great-Faith* sings, *"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee ..."*

Reader, why are you discouraged? Why wallow in the slough of gloom and little faith? Have faith in God and ascend to the sunshine of His grace. Covet and pray for more faith. Soon, God will give you songs of victory.

THOUGHT: More faith comes from more trusting, obedient praying.
PRAYER: Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief.

TRUST ONLY IN THE LORD

The constant temptation is to rely upon the things which are seen, instead of resting upon the invisible God alone. Christians often look to man for help and counsel, forgetting the noble simplicity of purely relying upon their God. Reader, are you anxious about some temporal matter? Consider this: you trusted in Jesus, and only in Jesus for your salvation. Why then are you troubled? Has your Saviour lost any of His power?

"My care is very great," you say. And so it is, but it is also written, *"Cast thy burden upon the LORD"* (Ps 55:22). Look not at thy burden, but look to the Lord, *"casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you"* (1 Pet 5:7). Prayer makes the difference! *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"* (Phil 4:6). The result? The peace of God which passeth all understanding is yours!

Our God can solve your problem. He who saved you from everlasting death can surely save you from passing evils. This is His promise: *"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"* (Rom 8:32). Rest on the precious promises of His Word.

Our God is able! Why seek help from another? Why do you take the earth for another foundation? He is our everlasting Foundation, even the Rock which cannot be moved. Build thereon, and be firmly established! He is strong enough to bear any weight. Trust only in Him and He shall bring it to pass. With God nothing is impossible.

THOUGHT: Confidence in man is poor confidence.
PRAYER: Lord, in Thee and Thee only do I put my trust.

TRIBULATION BEFORE THE KINGDOM

It was never designed by God when He chose His people that they should lie on beds of roses. Rather, they were chosen for the furnace of affliction, not for a life of ease. Freedom from sickness and pain was never promised. But when our Lord drew up the Christian's charter, He included chastisements among other things which should be their early portion and experience.

Trials are part and parcel of our lot; they were predestinated for us in God's everlasting decrees and incorporated in Christ's last legacy. As surely as the pathways of orbiting stars are fixed by His almighty hand, so surely are our trials alloted to us. He has ordained their timing and place, their intensity and effect. Good Christian men must be prepared for these divinely prescribed troubles.

The Old Testament saints had their share. Patient Job bore them in his time. Abraham, enduring much trial and testing, came through with colours flying and became the "Father of the faithful." Read again the biographies of the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and observe how they were all made to pass through God's fires of affliction, and how they all came through victorious.

Our God has ordained that His people should bear the cross of suffering as the royal mark of honour and distinction, for His own Son bore His cross to Calvary for our sakes. "This is the way the Master went; should not the servant tread it still?" And when finally we reach the everlasting Kingdom, it will more than make amends for the *"much tribulation"* which we had endured along the way.

THOUGHT: "It will be worth it all, when we see Christ."
PRAYER: Lord, grant me grace sufficient for each day.

AFFLICTION BUT A MOMENT

To every matter there is a bright as well as a dark side. Rachel was overwhelmed with the sorrow of her own travail of birth and death. Jacob though mourning the mother's loss, also saw the joy of the child's birth. For the believer, while the flesh mourns, faith gives the victory in divine faithfulness. In every dark circumstance of life, we see God's gracious providence.

Observe then, dear child of God, the marvels of God's grace. The stormy sea, wild and forbidding, yields its fishes for our tables. The torrential rain washes away the noisome pestilence; the biting frost loosens the soil for the spring sowing. Dark clouds drop refreshing showers; black earth grows bright flowers. A vein of golden blessing is to be found in every mine of strife.

Ponder then, those glorious words of assurance written by God's servant Paul as divinely inspired: *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (Rom 8:28). In the flesh of our trials we are overwhelmed with the deadly gloom of sorrow; but in the spirit of our heavenly calling we are uplifted to God's consolation *"according to his purpose."*

That is the "faith way," seeing events in God's light, accepting them as God-sent trials for our good. Faith's way of walking is to cast all care upon the Lord, and then to await good results from the worst "mishaps." Even death's darkness brightens in the light of the blessed resurrection, assured for everyone who believes.

THOUGHT: "Every dark cloud has a silver lining" – for the believer.
PRAYER: Lord, give me the faith that triumphs over circumstances.

"HE IS ALTOGETHER LOVELY"

The superlative beauty of Jesus is beyond earthly words: it is not so much to be admired as to be loved. He is more than pleasant and fair: *"He is altogether lovely."* We can find no better words to express our warmest devotion and deepest love. "He is the fairest of ten thousand to my soul." Above all, He is the second person of the Godhead, the eternal Logos. *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

O disciple of Jesus, recall His promise before He left for His Father's throne, *"lo*, *I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"* (Matt 28:20). Each morning I turn to Him, and He speaks to me in my secret chamber words of heavenly comfort and wisdom. Do not His words burn within our hearts as He talks with us *"by the way"*? The Emmaus blessing awaits you and me each day.

How we worship and adore Him, the altogether lovely Lord of our salvation! His countenance has majesty and excellence exceeding the cedars of Lebanon; He has charm in every feature; His whole person breathes divine fragrance. Therefore our love is set as a seal upon His heart of love; it is fastened upon His arm of power also. We anoint Him with the sweet spikenard of our affection. Stop and gaze again on Him who is nothing but loveliness, and make Him your model and example. Imitate Him! Make your life a close copy of His, for He is altogether lovely!

THOUGHT: Daily reflect His loveliness in my life.
PRAYER: Help me to grow to be like Jesus.

"ABIDE IN ME"

Communion with the Lord Jesus is the cure for every ill. He lightens our weight of sorrow and keeps us from the enchantment of worldly delight. Live close to the Lord, Christian reader, then it is of little importance whether you live on the mountain top of success or in the deep valley of humiliation. Living close to Jesus, you are covered with the wings of God, and underneath are His everlasting arms of love.

Let nothing stop you from that hallowed communion which is the covenant privilege of one wedded to the WELL BELOVED. Be not content with the hurried interview, but always yearn and learn to retain His company, for only in His presence is there comfort and safety. Let us not regard Jesus as the occasional friend to call upon now and then, but make Him our constant companion along life's way, "walking and talking" with us evermore.

Before us, the way to heaven is beset with many a difficulty. But even should there be a fiery furnace, the Son of God will walk us safely through. Our own corruptions, like Jericho's mighty walls, will crumble if we have the Captain of the Lord's host in the lead. Like Jacob going to meet Esau, our Lord takes us to Jabbok's brook and through a night-long encounter, equips us for the test.

"Abide in me": our Lord's loving invitation has wondrous charm and power. Daily, He is able and available to meet our every need. We neglect Him to our own sorrow and loss. Seek Him in our Quiet Hour, seek Him through the busy day. Abide in Him here and now; soon we shall abide with Him above for everlasting years.

THOUGHT: Without Him, I can do nothing.
PRAYER: Heavenly Father, draw me to Thyself at my daily Quiet Hour.

THE PROSPERITY TRAP

Give a man wealth; let his ships bring home rich cargoes; let wind and wave always be in his favour; let his crops yield a hundredfold; let sun and rain increase his harvest; let success attend upon success; let him rise high as a successful merchant; let his health go from strength to strength; let him with intellectual brilliance and cultured dignity march high, through society. Give him the buoyant spirit; let him have the song of sweet success perpetually on his lips, let his eye ever be sparkling with joy. And the natural consequence of such ease and prosperity to every mortal will be **presumption**!

Even David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14), said, *"I shall never be moved."* And we are not better than David. No, not half as good! Beware! Prosperity is a trap: her ways are smooth – and **slippery**. Many a man has fallen. So, thank God for rough going. Rocked in the cradle of prosperity, or dandled on the fleshy knees of fortune or intoxicated with the wine of pleasure – all these are perilous preludes to disaster. Beware, O man of God, prosperity is a trap!

We bless God for our afflictions. For poverty, also thank Him. "Sweet are the uses of adversity" drives home a sobering lesson. Bless God for the recession, for loss of employment, even for loss of health, and loss of wealth. In Christ we *"rejoice evermore."* Paul says, *"for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound"* (Phil 4:11-12).

THOUGHT: *"For the love of money is the root of all evil ..."* (1 Tim 6:10).

LIFE IS A VAPOUR

Do yourself a favour. Before you fall asleep tonight, remind yourself of this mournful fact, that life is a vapour, that it may help you to hang loose by earthly things. It may not be pleasant to be reminded that we are not beyond the Last Call that comes to every mortal, but it is certainly a humbling thought. It serves as a warning against those roots which we are sinking too deeply into this earth from which we shall soon be removed, to be transplanted into God's garden.

Here we have no firm tenure, only a frail hold on our ***temporal mercies***. All the trees in this earthly garden are marked for the woodman's axe. Why then are you building your nests in them? We have our loves, but let us love with the love which anticipates death, ever ready and prepared for coming separation. Our ***dearest relations*** are but lent to us for a period, and even now the divine Lender's hand may be at the door. The hour will come when what is on loan must be returned. Have you prepared for that hour?

The same applies to our ***worldly goods***. Do not riches take wings and fly away? So it is with our ***health***. Like the faintest blooms of the fields, they flourish but a short day. *"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven"* (Eccles 3:1). There is a time appointed for sickness, when we shall have to glorify God by suffering. Beloved, set not your affections upon things of earth, but upon things above. That is true wisdom: for man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. But thank God this sad lifetime is only a vapour!

THOUGHT: Prepare, therefore, to meet thy God!
PRAYER: Lord, give me eyes of faith to see the things which are invisible.

SIN EXCEEDING SINFUL

Beware of light thoughts of sin. At the time of conversion, the conscience is so tender that we are afraid of the slightest sin, a holy fear of offending God. But alas! Soon the sensitive plant of young piety under the influence of the seductive world turns into a mature willow, pliant and yielding to the winds of temptation.

It is sadly true that many a zealous Christian, by degrees, grows hard and insensitive to the sins which once alarmed and troubled him. By degrees, men grow familiar and conditioned to sin. The ear in which the Holy Spirit's warning once sounded like booms no longer hears at all. Every sin once loomed large, soon we minimise them into "nothing to worry about."

So the tempter advances by degrees, as we give in by degrees. Soon, we palliate sin; we throw a cloak over it; we call it by dainty names; we become experts in cover-up. Christian, beware the snare of thinking lightly of sin. Take heed lest you yield once a little, then twice, and so the slide goes on. Our adversary wants us laid low, tripped and stumbled, and rendered useless for God.

See sin in the light of God's Word. No sin is small or slight. Every sin is exceedingly sinful. It was sin that girded our Redeemer's head with thorns; it was sin that sent Him to the cross. It was for our sins He bore the anguish and pain and woe. See sin as the dreaded, venomous serpent bite. Then fly from it, abhor it, shun it as you would shun a cobra. See every sin, small or large, as exceedingly sinful!

THOUGHT: He who commits sin is the slave of sin.
PRAYER: Lord, may I seek only to please Thee and not sin.

"SOUGHT OUT"

The surpassing grace of God is seen in that we were not only sought, but ***sought out***. Men seek for some lost things by sweeping the floor of the house, but in such a case there is only seeking, not seeking out. Ours was different: we were lost in abominable mire, or like a priceless diamond ring lost in a rubbish heap. Only by careful, painstaking and diligent searching is the ring recovered. We were ***sought out*** by the loving Saviour, delivered from the mire of a lost world.

Alternatively, to use another illustration: we were as lost sheep, so desperately lost in a hostile and strange country, far from the fold and off the beaten track, that it did not seem possible that even the most experienced and caring shepherd could track our devious wanderings. But our Good Shepherd persevered with patient searching, sparing no effort and overcoming every peril, until He found us. Glory be to infinite grace, we were ***sought out***!

The lives of some of God's people would fill us with holy amazement. Strange and imponderable are the ways of God in searching out His own. Blessed be His matchless name, He never gave up until the lost sheep are ***sought out*** effectually. They are not ***sought out*** today and cast off ***tomorrow***. His salvation work is complete and comprehensive. With Him there is no failure. That we should be *sought out* is grace beyond degree! And all because of God's own sovereign love for unworthy sinners such as us. Praise God, we wear the gracious name, *"**Sought out**."*

THOUGHT: The initiative is with God.
PRAYER: Lord, teach me to seek Thee with all my heart.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

What neighbour, you ask? Perhaps he rolls in riches, and you live in a shabby cottage near his lordly mansion. You see him in all his finery, feasting at sumptuous banquets. God has given him abundance, but covet not his wealth, nor think any hard thoughts concerning him. Be content with your lot, and do not cast a green eye at him, or wish that he were as yourself. Love him, think kind thoughts, and you will not envy him.

On the other hand, maybe, you are rich, and nearby lives some poor neighbours. Do not look down with scorn upon them, but play your part to love and be kind to them. Some might call them "inferior." In what way are they inferior? Did not God make of one blood all people that dwell upon the face of the earth? You may dress better, but that does not make them inferior! They are men, and you are no more than that. With the love of God, love your poor neighbours in every practical way.

But perhaps you say, "I cannot love my neighbours, because for all I do for them they are ungrateful." So much the more room for you to show love. Love does not keep accounts of wrongs. "Who dares, wins." The pathway of love may be rough. True love – God's love – is "through thick and thin." In so loving we heap coals of fire on their heads (Rom 12:20), our souls are enriched, and the Master is pleased.

THOUGHT: *"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."* (Rom 12:21)
PRAYER: Lord, help me to love as Thou lovest.

"TO WHOM BELONGEST THOU?"

No neutralities can exist in spiritual warfare. We are either under the Banner of the Cross, to serve Him and fight the Lord's battles, or we are slaves of Satan. *"To whom belongest thou?"*

You ask, "How can I know whom I belong to?" Have you been *"born again"*? If you have, you belong to Christ; but if not, you cannot be His. In whom do you trust? Those who trust in Jesus and believe in His Gospel are the sons of God. Then another question: Whose work are you doing? The one whose work you do is your master. What company do you love to keep? If you belong to Jesus, you will fraternise with those who follow the way of the cross. "Birds of a feather flock together." By the friends you cultivate, it will be evident to whom you belong.

What is your conversation? Is it heaven-oriented or earth-oriented? What have you learned of your Master? Servants learn much from masters to whom they are apprenticed. If you have served your time with Jesus, others will make you out, as it was said of Peter and John, *"they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus"* (Acts 4:13).

To whom do you belong? If you are Christ's, rejoice and be exceeding glad; and be sure that He knows you by daily communion of prayer and the Word. If you are not, you are serving a cruel task-master! Flee from him while you may, and enter into the service of Jesus, the Lord of life and Lord of love. Then obey Him, love Him, trust Him, and take a stand for Him.

THOUGHT: Will others, taking knowledge, be able to tell that I have been with Jesus?
PRAYER: Gracious God, I will follow the Lamb all the way. Amen.

A STORY OF LEPERS

Read the story of the four lepers. In the face of slow but certain death by starvation, they reasoned, *"Why sit we here until we die?"* Mark their position which is a picture of those without Christ, the God-sent *"Bread of life"* (John 6:48-51). If you are yet without Christ, and remain where you are, you will surely die. He, our Saviour, waits to give you life.

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained" is the old proverb, and in your case the venture is no great one. If you sit in silent despair, know this, your ruin is on the way. Jesus awaits your coming to Him in faith. He delights in your look of faith. Those who refuse to look to Him shall not escape: these have spurned His gracious invitation, *"Come unto me ... I am that bread of life ... the living bread ... from heaven ..."* (Matt 11:28; John 6:48, 51). O why will ye die?

The Ninevites faced certain destruction until Jonah's preaching stirred people and monarch to repentance. Then they said, *"Who can tell if God will ... turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"* (Jon 3:9). To perish is awful, but avoidable. Stretch out your hand and take, as from the Lord, the greatest gift: forgiveness of sins and a new life from God.

On the authority of God's Word, be assured that if you seek Him, He will be found of you. *"All that the Father giveth me ... and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"* (John 6:37). You will not perish if you trust Him. You will find treasure far richer than what the lepers gathered in the Syrian camp.

THOUGHT: Without health and without food, but not without sound common sense.
PRAYER: Lord, I pray for sanctified common sense.

THE DOVE FOUND NO REST

Wearied with her wanderings, the dove returns at length to the ark, her only resting place. For over a year she had her safe shelter within the ark, together with Noah's family and the rest of the air-breathing animals preserved from the flood waters. Released by Noah to test if the flood had subsided, *"the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark"* (Gen 8:9).

Notice that the bird did not fly into the ark of her own accord, but it was Noah who *"put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark."* Was the dove too weary, or too fearful? Whatever the reason, we can be sure that Noah kept an anxious lookout through the day, waiting to see if she might return. As it turned out the only place of safety was still the ark, so back to the ark she returned.

The wandering sinner will find no rest until he comes to Christ, the Ark of our salvation. Our merciful God keeps a lookout for you who have not found rest outside. "Only return" are the two gracious words of God the Father. What! Nothing else? No, "only return"! The ark is ample, able to take in *"whosoever will."*

Come to the Saviour without delay. He alone can "pull you in" – into the safe haven of God. Every moment of delay only increases your misery. Struggling in your own strength outside of the ark merely exhausts you. You will find no rest. *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matt 11:28).

THOUGHT: All mankind came from those within the ark.
PRAYER: Lord, give me no rest till I find my rest in Thee.

TAKE HEED!

It is a curious fact that there is such a thing as being proud of grace. A man says, "I have great faith, I shall not fail; poor little faith may, but I never shall." "I have fervent love," says another, "I can stand; there is no danger of my going astray."

He who boasts of grace has little grace to boast of, not knowing that the stream must flow constantly from the fountain head, or else it will soon run dry. If a continuous supply of oil comes not to the lamp, though it burn brightly today, it will smoke tomorrow and its light will be snuffed out.

Take heed that you glory not in your graces. *"But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord"* (2 Cor 10:17). Let all our glorying and confidence be in Christ and His strength, for only so can you be kept from falling. Be much in prayer. Spend more time in holy adoration. Read the Scriptures more earnestly. Watch your lives more carefully. Live nearer to God. Make Christ your example, and imitate Him. Live so that men may be aware that you have been with Jesus.

Live close to Heaven, ever with the expectation of being summoned into His royal presence soon. Search your own heart constantly; check on your own life. Can you say, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"* (2 Tim 4:7)? Then run on with holy fear, with confidence in Jesus alone, *"looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith"* (Heb 12:2). He alone can keep you from falling.

THOUGHT: Pride comes before a fall.
PRAYER: Uphold me according to Thy word, O Lord.

"I WILL TAKE HEED"

Say not in your heart, "I will go here and there, and I shall not sin." You are never so close to sinning as when you boast of security. On a muddy road, greatest care can hardly keep your garments from soiling. We move in a world of pitch. Constant vigilance may just keep your hands clean. Temptation lurks at every turn, and only by your Father's keeping power will you ever reach the heavenly Home.

We are in spiritual warfare. Never be off guard. A soldier carrying an explosive device takes special care not to go near a bare flame. You too must take heed lest you fall. The world is not our friend. There is nothing in this world to foster a Christian's piety, but everything works to destroy it. Let your gaze not be focused on the world but on God. Pray without ceasing: "Father in heaven, hold me up and I shall be safe."

Our Lord Jesus' words to the drowsy three in the garden of agony speak to us all: *"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matt 26:41). Watch, therefore! *"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil"* (Eph 6:11). No man ever fell through being too watchful. May the Holy Spirit guide us in all our ways, so shall we always please the Lord. Amen.

THOUGHT: *"... wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction."* (Matt 7:13)
PRAYER: Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: be Thou my Helper.

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD

Christ our Lord has grace without measure, and all for the blessing of His people. *"... of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace"* (John 1:16). He is full of grace in order to dispense to us. Like a fountain, He fills our empty pitchers and our thirst is satisfied. Or, like a tree, He bears sweet fruits, not to hang as ornaments but for the feeding of the needy multitudes.

Grace to pardon, cleanse, preserve, strengthen, enlighten, quicken, restore, is our Lord's inexhaustible supply to us – free, to be had without money, without price. Nor is there one form of the work of grace which He has not bestowed upon His people. Blood flows from the heart, its source, but it belongs equally to every member, so the influences of grace flow to every saint united in the body of Christ.

Christ is the Head, the Fount of every blessing. On His head the oil of anointing is poured, and it flows to every part, even to the feet, so that the meanest and lowliest saint receives an unction of the precious fragrance which fell upon the head. *"I am the vine, ye are the branches"* (John 15:5). By this vital communion, the sap of grace flows from vine to branch, as day by day we receive grace from Jesus.

Realising that all our goodness comes from Him, how precious is that communion between us and the Lord. Indeed, His grace is marvellous, so rich and free. And He delights in our drawing evermore from His boundless supply. Such is our Lord's matchless grace.

THOUGHT: The law was given by Moses, but grace came by Jesus Christ.
PRAYER: Lord, make me a channel of grace to others.

"WITH ALL HIS HEART"

It is the general rule that those men who do their work with all their hearts prosper, while those who go to their labour leaving half their hearts behind are almost certain to fail. God does not give rich harvests to idle men except harvests of weeds, nor is He pleased to send wealth to those who will not dig deep for hidden treasure. If a man would prosper, he must be diligent in business.

The same rule applies in religion. If you would prosper for Jesus, let it be ***heart*** work, done with ***all*** your heart. Devote all your heart and soul, mind and strength, zeal and earnestness, to the work of God. The Holy Spirit Comforter (*"Alongside Strengthener"*) helps our infirmities, but not our idleness. God loves cheerful and energetic workers.

These are the most useful men in any church: those who undertake for God with ***all their hearts***. In the Sunday School the same applies: the most prosperous and productive teachers are the most zealous, men whose hearts are on fire for the Saviour, who long to see souls won to the Lord. Whole-heartedness shows itself in perseverance. Should failure come, the earnest worker is not defeated, but he encourages himself in the Lord and returns with renewed zeal to the task.

Our Lord is our perfect example of heart-work. With the shadow of the cross falling across His path, He could say, *"... the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up ..."* (Ps 69:9). On the cross He poured out His whole heart to win salvation for His people. He was in earnest. Are we lukewarm?

THOUGHT: *"... a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise"* (Ps 51:17).
PRAYER: Give me a heart like Thine, dear Lord.

"A STRANGER WITH THEE"

Yes, O Lord, ***with*** Thee, but not ***to*** Thee. All my natural alienation from Thee, Thy grace has effectually removed; and now in fellowship with Thyself, I walk through this sinful world, a pilgrim in a foreign land. Thou art a stranger in Thine own world. Men forget Thee, dishonour Thee, and acknowledge Thee not.

When Thy dear Son came unto His own, His own received Him not. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. Alas! He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Even His brethren believed Him not. It is no marvel, then, that I, His follower and disciple, should also be a stranger here on earth.

Lord, I count not myself a citizen where Jesus was counted an alien. His pierced hand has loosened the cords which once bound my soul to earth. Now, I find myself "a stranger in a foreign land." But, O the joy to know that I am not alone! For I have Him whose nail-scarred hand holds me fast, who says to me, "You are mine and no stranger to me. I have laid down my life for you."

My heart burns within me to know that I have my blessed Lord as fellow alien and stranger on earth; but I am far more blessed than those who sit on thrones, and more at home than those who dwell in mansions fair. For I am bound for the *"better country, that is, an heavenly"* (Heb 11:16), for God has prepared for me a city.

THOUGHT: My sojourn will soon be over.
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for preparing me a city.

"KEEP BACK THY SERVANT ... "

Such was the prayer of the man after God's own heart. If David needed to pray thus, how needful must the same prayer be for us! It is as if he said, "Keep me back, or I shall rush headlong over the precipice of sin." Our evil nature, that inner corruption, like an ill-tempered horse is apt to run away, out of control. May the grace of God put the bridle upon it, and rein in our old Adam, that it rush not into mischief and destruction.

Thank God that He puts checks and restrains upon us in providence and grace, to keep us from presumptuous sins, that we may not plunge headlong into disaster and bring dishonour to His name. The psalmist's prayer is directed against the worst sins – those committed with deliberate wilfulness: even the holiest need to be *"kept back"* from the deeds that break forth from *"the body of this death"* (Rom 7:24).

The Apostle Paul warns in similar manner: *"Mortify therefore your members ... fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry"* (Col 3:5). Such warning serves for all, old and young. Years of experience give no security against temptation and presumptuous sins. We shall surely trip and stumble if we look away from Him who alone is able to keep us from falling, age and experience notwithstanding.

"Lead us not into temptation." Remember the Lord's prayer? Today, harden not your heart, but yield to the Spirit's leading in the paths of righteousness. There we shall be delivered from evil – kept back from presumptuous sins.

THOUGHT: God's Word will keep me from sin, or sin will keep me from God's Word.
PRAYER: Lord, help me to love Thy law and to keep it.

"YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ME"

Why does God allow so many of His children to be poor? He could make them all rich if He pleased. He could easily enlarge our income, send us abundance of material supplies, as once He sent quails in heaps round the camp of Israel, and rained bread out of heaven to feed them. There is no necessity for God's people to be poor, except that He sees it to be best. He does nothing without great wisdom and divine purpose.

Why does God allow some of His people to suffer want? One reason is that our God gives us who are favoured with enough, an opportunity of showing love to Jesus. In singing of Him and praying to Him, we express our love. But the poorer brethren in church afford us the sweeter privilege of showing our love to God, even by our alms-giving. God has ordained that we should prove our love not in words only, but in deed and in truth. If we truly love the Lord, we shall love those who are His, and love them in a real, practical and material way.

To go to the aid of the poor of God's flock is our blessed privilege – remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, *"Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."* Surely this assurance is sweet enough, and this motive strong enough, to cause us to help others with a willing hand and a loving heart. Remember: whatever we do for His people is graciously accepted by Him as done to Himself.

THOUGHT: Have I done it *"as unto the Lord"*?
PRAYER: Lord, may I seize every opportunity to love the brethren, for Thy sake.

"BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS"

This is the seventh of the beatitudes: and seven is the number of perfection or completeness. The child of God who would have perfect blessedness, as far as it can be enjoyed on earth, must attain to this seventh benediction, and become a peacemaker.

Notice the verse which precedes. It speaks of the blessedness of *"the pure in heart: for they shall see God."* God's Word tells us that we are to be *"first pure, then peaceable"* (James 3:17). Our peaceableness is never to be a compromise with sin, or a toleration of evil. We must oppose everything which is contrary to God and His holiness. Purity of soul must precede peaceableness of conduct.

Then notice the verse which follows. However peaceable we may be in this world, yet we may still be misrepresented and misunderstood: and small wonder, for even the Prince of Peace, by His very peacefulness, brought fire upon the earth. He Himself was *"despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"* (Isa 53:3). Lest the peaceable in heart should be surprised when they meet with opposition, God's Word assures: *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt 5:10).

How blessed it is to be a peacemaker! Lord, give us more grace that we may attain this, the seventh beatitude! Evermore cleanse our minds that we may be *"first pure, then peaceable,"* that through us, the fruit of righteousness may be sown in peace (James 3:18). Amen.

THOUGHT: Without the God of peace there can be no peace.
PRAYER: May I not compromise the tenth for the sake of peace; and may I be willing to be persecuted for righteousness' sake.

WE ARE CHILDREN OF THE FATHER

The fatherhood of God is common to all His children. You may at times feel discouraged, being weak in faith and fearful of stumbling even at a straw in your pathway. Then you wonder, "Am I truly a child of the Father?" Away with such unfounded fears, O child of God!

Peter and Paul, the highly-favoured apostles, belong to the family of the Most High; and so do you! The weakest believer is no less a child of God than the strongest and the most able.

"This cov'nant stands secure,
Though earth's old pillars bow;
The strong, the feeble, and the weak,
Are one in Jesus now."

All our names are in the same family register. One may have more grace than another, but God our heavenly Father has the same tender heart towards all. One may do mighty works, and bring more glory to the Father, but he whose name is least in the kingdom of heaven is as much a child of God as he who stands among the King's mighty men. Let this cheer and comfort us, when we draw near to God and say, *"Our Father."*

But let none rest contented with a weak and faltering faith. Like the apostles, let us pray, *"Lord, increase our faith"* (Luke 17:5). May God grant us that faith which honours our Master, and may He give us abounding joy and zeal of service. As filial children, let us live daily to the glory of the Father, until He calls us to Himself.

THOUGHT: *"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God"* (Rom 8:16).
PRAYER: Father in Heaven, lead me ever with Thy loving hand.

GOD'S EVERLASTING LOVE

As the Father loves the Son, in the same manner Jesus loves His people. What is that divine method? God's love is ***without beginning***, and thus Jesus loves us. *"I have loved thee with an everlasting love."* You can trace the beginning of human affection, or your love for Christ, but His love for us is a stream whose source is hidden in eternity.

God's love is ***without any change***. Christian, take this for your comfort that there is no change in Jesus Christ's love for those who rest in Him. Yesterday, you were spiritually uplifted and you said, "He loves me." Today, you are in the valley of humiliation, but He loves you ***just the same***! On mountain top, you heard His voice so sweetly inspiring; now with sea-billows breaking over you, He stays you with the voice of calm and full assurance.

The Father loves the Son ***without any end***; thus does the Son love His people. Friend, are you fearful of the "last call"? Fear not! His love for you will never cease. Rest confident that even through the valley of shadow, the Lord is with you, to guide you safely to the everlasting City of God.

Finally, the Father loves the Son ***without measure***, and the same immeasurable love is ours from the Son. He loved us and gave Himself for us. His love is beyond comprehension. What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus our Lord! Immutable, precious, without beginning, without end: He loves us with an everlasting love.

THOUGHT: O love that will not let me go.
PRAYER: Lord, teach me to love Thee as I ought.

STRONG IN FAITH

Reader, guard thy faith! For faith is the only way whereby thou canst obtain blessings. If we want blessings from God, nothing can fetch them down but faith. Prayer cannot draw them down from God's throne except it be of the man who truly believes. Faith is the unseen channel between the believer and the Lord in glory. Let that channel be withdrawn, and we can neither send up any prayer, nor receive any answer.

Faith is the telegraphic wire which joins earth to heaven. By it, God's messages of love fly so swiftly that before we call, He answers, and while we are still speaking, He hears. But if that wire of faith is snapped, how can we communicate with God? In trouble I can obtain help, by faith. Does the adversary buffet me? I find safety in my dear Refuge, by faith. Take faith away and in vain do I call to God.

Faith is a wonderful channel of communication, open to me at all times, in all seasons. Faith clothes me with the power of God. Faith avails me of the omnipotence of Jehovah. Faith is my all-round defence: by faith I defy the hosts of hell. It makes me triumph over the enemy.

Waver not, my friend, in the Lord! He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. He will not receive anything of the Lord. O watch well thy faith! By faith you have victory, no matter how poor or insignificant you are. In Christ our Lord, all things are possible, by faith.

THOUGHT: *"... faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (Heb 11:1).
PRAYER: Lord, perfect faith in me, for Thy own name's sake.

CHRIST IS ALL IN ALL

Whenever we are privileged to eat of the bread which Jesus gives, we are like Ruth, fully satisfied. Not one who feasts at His table goes away empty. Our ***head*** is satisfied with the precious truth which Christ reveals; our ***heart*** finds contentment in Him, the altogether lovely One: our ***hope*** is satisfied, for whom have we in heaven but Jesus?

Ours is a wonderful Lord. He heals our ***conscience*** till all is perfect peace; He perfects our ***judgment*** with the wisdom of His teachings; our ***memory*** is sweetened with recollections of what He has done; and our ***imagination*** with the prospects of what He is yet to do. As Ruth was sufficed and left, so it is with us.

The bounties at Christ's table are overabundant and inexhaustible. The greatest sinner marvels at His infinite mercy that pardons all of his sins, and with merit to spare. When our hunger of spirit has found relief at the feast of sacred love, there is abundance of spiritual meat still remaining. What we have savoured of the sweet things of God's Word is but a foretaste of more to come.

One day, the Lord said to the disciples, *"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now"* (John 16:12). So it is with us today. Our Lord has yet many graces awaiting those who seek Him, places of closer fellowship and heights of communion which we have yet to attain.What blessedness is ours to belong to Him that filleth all in all!

THOUGHT: Without Him, I have nothing.
PRAYER: Father in Heaven, I thank Thee for Thy unspeakable gift.

"MY BELOVED"

This was the golden name which the ancient Church in her most joyous moments gave to the Anointed of the Lord. No sweeter sound was heard than that of God's people as they sang, *"My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies"* (Song of Sol 2:16). Their one refrain in the song of songs was to repeat His delightful name: *"My Beloved."*

Even in the long winter of Israel's backsliding, God's prophets would break forth with these words of praise, *"Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard"* (Isa 5:1). His face, they had not seen, for as yet He was not made flesh, and no man had beheld His glory, yet He was the consolation of Israel, her one hope and joy, the *"beloved"* of God's chosen people.

What says the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ today? No less than ancient Israel, we speak of Him as the beloved of our soul, *"the chiefest among ten thousand"* (Song of Sol 5:10), the altogether lovely One. It is His matchless love that binds us to Him with a bond which nothing can ever sever, not even persecution, distress, affliction, peril, sword and even death.

"My sole possession is Thy love;
In earth beneath, or heaven above,
I have no other store;
And though with fervent suit I pray,
And importune Thee day by day,
I ask Thee nothing more."

THOUGHT: *"We love him, because he first loved us."* (1 John 4:19)
PRAYER: Lord, make me a grateful recipient of Thy love.

AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH

Who but Christ our Lord could say, "Imitate my life; make me your example"? Only His life has perfect virtue, and only He can point to Himself as our model. We who name His name, and have received the adoption of sons (Rom 8:15), should never rest contented until we reflect His wonderful grace.

We speak to husbands in the Church. Look to the Lord and make your life a copy of His. If you truly are a Christian, be such a husband as Christ was to His Church. The Lord Jesus cherishes the Church with a peculiar affection. He sets her above the rest of mankind: *"I pray for them: I pray not for the world ..."* (John 17:9).

The Church is the ***elect*** of God, the favourite of heaven, the treasure of Christ, His crown, the centre of His love. A true husband loves his wife with a ***constant*** love, for thus Christ loves the Church. He does not tire of His love. It is an ***enduring*** love, for nothing *"shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom 8:39).

A true husband loves his wife with a ***hearty*** love, fervent and intense. No lip-service! Love as Jesus loved the Church: He gave His life for her. Dear reader, you admire Jesus' love, don't you? You wonder with amazement: O what love! But how genuine a disciple are you? Are you imitating Him? Do you love your wife *"even as Christ also loved the church"* (Eph 5:25)?

THOUGHT: True love lasts – "till death us do part."
PRAYER: Lord Jesus, mould me, make me to be like Thee.

ALONE

The fellowship of the Garden of Sorrows was reserved for the selected few. The majority of the disciples were not qualified to behold the mysteries of the divine agony. Like them, most Christians today are still mere babes as to the spirit of the Gospel.

Of the twelve, only eleven were privileged to enter Gethsemane and see *"this great sight"* – never witnessed before, and never to be repeated after. Of the eleven, eight were left at a distance. They had fellowship but not of the intimate sort to which men greatly beloved are admitted.

Only three highly favoured ones were admitted to view our Lord's suffering, but beyond the veil even these must not intrude; they remained a stone's throw removed. The Son of God must tread the wine-press ***alone***. No human could share in His sorrow.

To the three selected spirits, it was given to see the agony and hear the pleadings of the Saviour. To them was granted the *"fellowship of his sufferings"* (Phil 3:10) to strengthen them for future conflict, and for the benefit of others. That night, they witnessed what our Lord bore for our sakes.

But the secret place of the Saviour's woe was exclusively His own. It was an inner chamber shut out from human observation and knowledge. There, God the Son suffered – ***alone***.

It was alone the Saviour prayed
In dark Gethsemane;
Alone He drained the bitter cup
And suffered there for me.

THOUGHT: Jesus was the Man of Sorrows - for me.
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for suffering for me.

"CANST THOU ... ?"

When inclined to boast of your abilities, look up into the night sky, and the grandeur of the universe shows how small and insignificant man is. We cannot move the least of the twinkling stars, or block so much as one beam of the dazzling sunrise. Man boasts all sorts of power, but the heavens laugh him to scorn.

The sky or firmament is a vast open book to humble the proud. Joseph Addison's hymn says it:

The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
Their great original proclaim.
Th' unwearied sun, from day to day,
Does his Creator's power display,
And publishes to every land
The work of an almighty hand.

Let us learn to see things, as much as is possible, as God sees. Constantly looking at ourselves and our achievements causes deadly myopia. Look far! Isaiah 40:26 says, *"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power ..."*

In God's sight, men are mere grasshoppers (Isa 40:22). What can we do? Lift up our eyes on high! Look unto the Lord, for He alone doeth wondrous things!

THOUGHT: Besides the Lord there is none else.
PRAYER: Teach me Thy way, O Lord.

THE SAVIOUR PRAYED

Our Lord's prayer in the hour of trial has lessons for us. It was ***lonely prayer***. He withdrew even from His three favoured disciples. So should we in times of trial be much in solitary prayer. Family prayer, public prayer in church, group prayer, are all needful and precious, but there is no substitute for ***solitary prayer*** (you alone with God).

It was ***humble prayer***. He *"fell on his face, and prayed."* Luke says He knelt (Luke 22:41). How do you position yourself in prayer? What dust and ashes should cover thy head! Humility must be our foot-hold in prayer. There is no hope of prevailing with God unless we abase ourselves that He may exalt us in due time.

It was ***filial prayer***. *"Abba, Father."* It is a stronghold in the day of trial to plead your adoption. As a child, nothing can forfeit your access to the Father's protection. In your hour of need, cry to Him, "O Father in Heaven, hear my humble cry!"

It was a ***persevering prayer***. Our Lord prayed three times. Cease not to pray until you prevail. Be like the importunate widow, whose persistent coming earned what her first supplication could not. Continue thou in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.

Lastly, it was the ***prayer of resignation***, *"not as I will, but as thou wilt"* (Matt 26:39). If we let it be as God wills, He will determine what is best for us. Be content, leave thy prayer in His hands. He knows when to give, how to give and what to give.

THOUGHT: How is my prayer life?
PRAYER: Father in Heaven, teach me to pray as Jesus prayed.

"WITH ME WHERE I AM"

O death! Why dost thou touch the tree beneath whose shade the weary find sweet rest? Why dost thou take away the goodly cedars of Lebanon in whom is all our delight? If thou must use thine axe, go cut down the barren useless trees. O stay the axe and spare the righteous!

But no, death smites the best of our friends: the generous, the prayerful, the saintly, the most devoted. Why is this so? Might it not be in answer to our Lord's prayer: *"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am"*? It is Jesus' prayer which bears them on eagle's wings to heaven.

Every time a believer leaves this earth for paradise, it is in answer to Christ's prayer; many times contrary to His people's prayer. A son prays for his sick mother: "Father in heaven, I pray that my Mom whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am." But our Lord prays, "Father, I will that she, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." The two prayers are at cross purposes with each other. Which request shall prevail with the Father?

Dear reader, do you catch the point? Our Lord and Saviour has a higher will, a better way for those who are His. When we realise this, we should always qualify our prayers with *"not my will, but thine, be done"* (Luke 22:42). And when we remember that to be with Christ is far better (Phil 1:23), should we not also have a different emphasis in prayer?

THOUGHT: *"... absent from the body ... present with the Lord."* (2 Cor 5:8)
PRAYER: Lord, may I learn to pray with the Spirit and with understanding.

STONES WOULD CRY OUT!

Can stones truly cry out? Assuredly they could if He who opens the mouth of the dumb should bid them lift up their voices! Certainly if they were to speak, they would have much to testify in praise of Him who created them by *"the word of his power"* (Heb 1:3); they would extol the wisdom and power of their ***Maker.***

Consider this: we who have been created anew, shall not we speak well of Him? And should we not sing praises of Him who, out of stones, raised up children unto Abraham (Matt 3:9)? Ancient rocks tell the story of God's creative handiwork. Cannot we talk of God's decrees, and of God's great work in a bygone age, in all that He has done for His Church?

If stones were to speak, they would tell of their breaker, how he took them from the quarry, and made them fit for the temple. And cannot we tell of our glorious ***Breaker,*** who broke us with the hammer of His Word, that He might build us into His temple? If the stones should cry out, they would magnify their builder, who polished them for the palace. And shall we not extol our great ***Architect*** who formed us into the temple of the living God?

Stones might well cry out, but we will not let them. We, as lively stones, will break forth into sacred songs of praise, and bless the majesty of the Most High. Through all our days, we shall glorify Him, the Shepherd and Stone of Israel, even the Rock of our salvation.

THOUGHT: *"Sing, O ye heavens; ... shout, ye lower parts of the earth: Break forth into singing, ye mountains..."* (Isa 44:23)
PRAYER: Let the whole creation praise the Lord!

"HE … WAS HEARD IN THAT HE FEARED"

Did this fear arise from the foolish suggestion that Christ was utterly forsaken? Surely it is one of the worst sorrows to be utterly forsaken. Satan built on this proposition: "See, Thy Father hath shut up the heart of compassion against Thee. Not even an angel will stretch a hand to help Thee. All heaven is alienated from Thee. All Thy earthly companions have forsaken Thee. See how the trusted three slept through Thy passion in Gethsemane? Thou hast no friend in heaven or earth!"

Such would have been the devil's attack directed against our suffering Saviour. It may be, this was the tempter's arrow. We believe it was, because *"there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him"* (Luke 22:43), removing that fear. *"He ... was heard in that he feared."*

Praise the Lord He was heard! He was no more alone, heaven was with Him. It may be that this was the reason for His coming three times to His disciples. He could see for Himself whether it was really true that all men had forsaken Him. He found them all asleep, but they were sleeping not from treachery, but from sorrow and fatigue. The spirit indeed was willing, but the flesh was weak.

Our Lord was *"in all points tempted like as we are"* (Heb 4:15). He feared, He was heard! My soul, thou that fearest, thou shalt be heard also!

THOUGHT: *"... He is able to succour them that are tempted."* (Heb 2:18)
PRAYER: Lord, hear me when I cry to Thee.

JESUS REJOICED IN SPIRIT

The Saviour was *"a man of sorrows"* (Isa 53:3), but deep down in His innermost soul He carried an inexhaustible treasury of heavenly joy. In the entire human race, never was there any man who had a deeper, purer or more abiding peace than our Lord. He was anointed with *"the oil of gladness"* above His fellows. His vast benevolence must have afforded Him the deepest possible delight, for benevolence is joy.

On a few occasions, this joy manifested itself. *"In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth."* Christ had His songs though it was a dark and dreary road He trod. The prospect of bringing many sons to glory through His suffering (Heb 2:9-10) enabled Him to sing praise unto God. In this, the Lord Jesus is a blessed picture of His Church on earth.

The Church marches along a thorny road; through much tribulation, she makes her way to the crown. To bear the cross of suffering and scorn is her appointed lot. Yet the Church has a deep well of joy, of which none can drink but her own children. There are stores of hidden manna in the midst of Jerusalem, upon which the people of God are sustained and nurtured. Sometimes, as in our Saviour's case, we have our seasons of delight, for *"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God ..."* (Ps 46:4).

THOUGHT: Believing Christ, I rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.
PRAYER: Evermore fill me with heavenly joys.

BETRAYING THE SON OF MAN

"The kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Therefore, be on your guard when the world puts on a smiling face! Whenever a man is about to stab religion, he usually professes great reverence for it. The apostle of apostasy puts on a face of godly piety. Knowing the deceivableness of unrighteousness, we must be wise – even wise as serpents – to frustrate the evil designs of the enemy.

The young man, void of understanding, is led astray by the kiss of a strange woman. So are the amorous advances of the world: behind the smiling face hides the devil's deadly embrace. May we seek the Spirit's gracious instruction and protection so that the *"much fair speech"* of the world will have no effect on us. O Lord, let me not be betrayed by a kiss!

At the same time, let me examine myself. I have been baptised in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; I am a member of the Church; I sit at the Lord's table: all these are like "kisses of my lips." Am I sincere? If not, I am another Judas. Do I call myself a Christian and live like the world? If I by my conduct and lifestyle bring shame to His name, I am little better than a Judas, and it were better that I had never been born.

Lord, keep me true and faithful to Thee. Preserve me from every false way. Never let me be disloyal to Thee in even the smallest thing. I love Thee, Lord Jesus. It is my desire that I remain faithful to Thee even unto death. Let me never, never, be a Judas, to betray Thee with a kiss.

THOUGHT: *"... woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! ..."* (Matt 26:24)
PRAYER: May my life prove the declaration of my lips, O Lord.

"THE SON OF MAN"

How constantly our Master used the title *"Son of Man"*! If He had chosen, He could always have spoken of Himself as the Son of God, the everlasting Father, Wonderful, Counsellor, the Prince of Peace. But no, behold the lowliness of Jesus! He prefers to call Himself simply the ***Son of man***.

Here is a lesson in humility from our Saviour. Let us never crave after great titles nor proud degrees. Jesus valued manhood so much that He delighted to honour it. He conferred the greatest dignity and honour on manhood by being born a man to take on human form. Man was the crowning glory of His creation, and He, in choosing to become a man, has done us the highest honour.

Son of man – whenever Jesus used the term, He set a seal on Adam's race. Yet there is perhaps a more precious thought. In using the term, Jesus expressed His oneness and sympathy with His people. He shows that we may approach Him without fear. As "one of us," we may take to Him all our griefs and sorrows, for as ***Son of man*** He is no stranger to human woes. In that He has gone through the same experiences, He is able to succour and comfort us.

All hail, Thou blessed Jesus! We see Thee, our great God and Saviour, now seated on high in supreme glory. Thou ***Son of man***, a brother and near kinsman to all the redeemed, we thank Thee and worship Thee. We adore Thee for Thy inexpressible humility, grace and love.

THOUGHT: He *"took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men"* (Phil 2:7).
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for coming for me.

ONLY CHRIST DIED FOR US

Blessed be His name, the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). In Him was no sin: neither original nor actual sin had defiled Him. Therefore, death had no claim on Him. No man could have taken His life from Him justly, and none could have slain Him by force. *"... I lay it down of myself ..."* (John 10:18) said our Good Shepherd. *"Greater love hath no man than this ..."* (John 15:13).

Herein is the love of God revealed, the mystery of the atonement: God sent His Son to be *"the propitiation for our sins"* (1 John 4:10). Man sins and his Maker suffers. Justice was made a mockery by us, but found its satisfaction in Christ. Nothing that we could have done could have availed for the removal of sin: not rivers of tears, mountains of offerings, lifetimes of service – nothing but the blood of Jesus.

At Calvary, He was cut off for us, and the cause of wrath was removed at once, for sin was put away for ever. Herein is God's wisdom: by substitution – God dying for man – full atonement was made, once and for all. No more is there any need for penance, self-mortification, pilgrimages, or any other man-made ways of gaining merit with God. The Lamb of God has paid our debt ***in full***. On the cross, He cried, *"It is finished"* (John 19:30)!

Dear reader, do you see the Saviour bleeding for you, in your stead? Look to Him, God's own Son, your representative, bearing away your sins, every one of them. Look only to Him, not to any other person, not to any priest or pastor, not to Mary or any beautiful image. Only Jesus! No one else died for you, only He, our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: *"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: For I am God, and there is none else."* (Isa 45:22)
PRAYER: I look to Thee, and Thee only, Lord Jesus. I thank Thee for saving me.

THE GLORY OF HIS FATHER

If we have been sufferers together with Jesus in His shame, we will be sharers with Him in the lustre which will surround Him when He appears again in glory. Dear reader, are you a follower of the Lamb, a soldier of the cross, a partaker of His reproach? You will doubtless be with Him when the cross will be exchanged for a crown.

But be very careful: judge yourself. If you have not received Him in regeneration, neither will you be with Him in the glorification. Following Jesus today may cost you your status or wealth, but never give up or return into the world. Constantly remind yourself: soon the King whom I serve will come, and all His holy angels with Him.

What! Are angels with Him? These are mighty glorious beings. And yet He took not the form of angels. He took the seed of Abraham. Come, my friend. If you are of His beloved, you cannot be far from Him: you are His chosen bride. If His friends and neighbours are called to share His glory, what honour is yours, who are married to Him?

Recall His words to His beloved: *"I will betroth thee unto me for ever; ... in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness ..."* (Hos 2:19) and *"... the Lord delighteth in thee ..."* (Isa 62:4). The darkest and saddest experience today will be dispelled and forever forgotten in the exceeding brilliance of the glory which shall be revealed.

THOUGHT: *"... the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"* (Rom 8:18).
PRAYER: Lord, keep me stedfast, unmoveable.

ALL THE DISCIPLES FORSOOK HIM

They had all been warned of the danger, and had professed their loyalty. They would rather die than desert their Master. Yet in the hour of trial, they all forsook Him. This is but one instance of the frailty of Christians if left to themselves. At best, they are but sheep: they flee when the wolf appears. In cowardly fear they do what they have vowed never to do, just to save their own skins.

Today as you are beginning the day, it may be you have braced your mind to bear some trial for the Lord's sake. You feel pretty confident of your own fidelity. But be careful, *"let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"* (1 Cor 10:12). Beware the evil heart of unbelief, which may cause you to depart from the Lord as did the disciples.

To promise is easy, to perform is not. It would have been to their eternal honour if they had stood by the Lord. By His side! Where else could they have been safer as near the Son of God? But no, to their lasting disgrace they panicked and fled away. We may say, "They played the fool." Would you and I have done better? God knows.

But the day of their conversion and transformation was not far away. At Pentecost, the Spirit descended and "timid as rabbits" they became "bolds as lions." What the Lord did for the disciples, He can do for you and me. Make no rash promises today, but simply pray everyday that the Spirit will cleanse and fill you, and make a new man out of you.

THOUGHT: *"... when I am weak, then am I strong."* (2 Cor 12:10)
PRAYER: Lord, may the power of Christ dwell in me.

CRUMBS FROM THE MASTER'S TABLE

In her misery, this woman of Canaan found comfort by thinking great thoughts of Christ. The Master had talked about the children's bread. She reasoned within herself, "Since you are the Master of the table of grace, and a generous housekeeper, there is sure to be abundance of bread – bread more than enough for the children, with crumbs spilling onto the floor for the dogs."

All that the poor woman wanted the Master to do was to give her "a crumb of mercy" in comparison to the bread on the table for the children of the house. *"O Lord ... my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil."* To her it was a very great thing, and she would receive what the Lord would give, as a dog would find a feast beneath the master's table. "Lord, please spare a crumb for me, a Gentile dog."

The way to God's blessing is a low road, a humble path to royal comforts. Let our thoughts of self also be lowly, but thoughts of Christ be high and lofty, and honourable. "My sins are so many, but it is nothing to Jesus to take them all away. The weight of my guilt crushes me, but it is only a small thing for Him to cast the whole burden into the sea."

The woman opened her mouth expecting crumbs; the Lord filled her with His divine love. Dear reader, you do likewise. She came in faith, believing good things of Him. She gained the victory. You too may receive great blessings by thinking great thoughts of the Master.

THOUGHT: *"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies ..."* (Ps 23:5)
PRAYER: Lord, help me today.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST

The love of Christ in its sweetness, its fullness, its greatness, its faithfulness, surpasses all human comprehension. What language can describe His matchless and unparalleled love towards the children of men? For the love of a lost humanity, the Second Person of the holy Godhead, forsook heaven's glory for lowly earth and the depths of shame.

We cannot understand or even imagine His previous glory and majesty, when He was enthroned in the highest heaven with God the Father. By Him were the heavens made, and all the hosts thereof. His almighty hands upheld the spheres in countless billions of galaxies. The praises of cherubim and seraphim perpetually surrounding Him, with chorus of hallelujahs flowing to His throne. Our Lord Jesus reigned thus before His incarnation.

Just to become a man was already an inexpressible sacrifice. But to be *"a man of sorrows"* far exceeded the former. Christ came to suffer, to bleed and die, to hang on the cross of shame and cry in bitter anguish *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* (Ps 22:1). Such was the depth, the height, the length, the breadth of His divine, infinite, condescending love.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that He should give us His Son! And what manner of love that the Son should become as one of us to take our place, bear our burden, and die our death! Such love flows only from the Lord of love, the Lover of our souls, Jesus the Christ.

THOUGHT: His love conquered my heart, and made me His captive for life.
PRAYER: Lord, teach me to love others too.

A SWEET SAVOUR

The merits of our Saviour are as a sweet savour to the Most High. Whether we speak of the active or passive obedience of Christ, there is an equal fragrance.

There was a sweet savour in His active life by which He honoured the Law of God, and made every precept to glitter like a precious jewel in the pure setting of His own person.

Such too was His passive obedience, when He endured with perfect submission, hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, the agony of Gethsemane, and the insults and cruel scourging of the soldiers.

These two (the active and the passive obedience) are precious before the Most High. By these Jesus takes away our ill savour and makes us acceptable before the Father. The cleansing power of His blood takes away our every sin and makes us acceptable to the Beloved.

Dear reader, our acceptance by God is sure and irreversible, because it is ***in Him***! Take care never to doubt your acceptance in Jesus. The Father's gracious eye sees the righteousness of His Son and you ***in Him*** appear righteous, accepted always and for all time.

Look therefore only to Christ the Lord whose finished work is constantly before God the Father as a sweet savour, and makes every filial child dear to the Father's heart. Therefore, lift up a song of praise, and a prayer of thanks that these may ascend before the throne also a sweet savour.

THOUGHT: I am acceptable in Him alone.
PRAYER: Lord, make my life fragrant for Thee.

MADE PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING

God's Word tells us that the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering. We, His followers, must not be surprised if we too are called to suffer. Shall the Head be crowned with thorns while the body lies on a bed of roses? Must our Lord pay the price of blood to win the crown, and we gain heaven without lifting a finger?

No, our Master leaves us in no doubt as to what is in store for true believers. He says to us, *"In the world ye shall have tribulation"* (John 16:33). The Apostle Paul says, *"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake"* (Phil 1:29). His was the path of suffering, and ours is but to follow:

"It is the way the Master went;
Should not the servant tread it still?"
– Horatius Bonar

We remember with deep gratitude the martyrs of old who defied "dungeon, fire, and sword" for the sake of the faith. Every suffering of God's people has the sympathy of the Saviour, for He is *"not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities"* (Heb 4:15). One dying martyr said to his tormentors, "I can bear it all, for Jesus suffered, and He suffers in me now. His sympathy makes me strong."

Believer in the Lord, think of this in times of suffering. Thoughts of Jesus strengthen and comfort you as you follow in His steps. Our Lord was made perfect through suffering, and we too, if we do it for His sake.

THOUGHT: If I suffer for His sake, I shall also reign with Him.
PRAYER: Lord, make me perfect through suffering.

"HE GAVE ME NO ANSWER"

When answers to our prayers are not forthcoming, it may be that God is trying our faith. Do we have the patience to *"wait upon the Lord"* (Isa 40:31)? Our pleas seem to echo back from a sky of brass. Our knocks on God's golden gate fall as it seems on a solid immovable wall. Like Jeremiah we cry, *"Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through"* (Lam 3:44).

Thus have faithful believers continued long in patient waiting without reply. How do we explain it? It is not because of lack of fervency in prayer, or because the prayer was unaccepted, but because our God is sovereign and gives answers according to His own pleasure. Our God is very patient with us, and must we not be patient with Him? He has His perfect will, and does all things in His perfect time.

It is good for us to remind ourselves: we are no more than beggars before the Almighty King. Beggars must not be choosers. We are in no position to demand answers from God to please ourselves. But God's delays are not denials, and we must not let Satan shake our confidence in the God of truth by pointing to our unanswered prayers.

Try and picture this: God has a super computer for our prayers, kept in a registry in the court of heaven where every prayer is recorded. Grief-stricken believer, your tears are collected in the Lord's tear bottle. Our God of all compassion has not forgotten you. Think! God's time is better than our time. By and by, as we wait upon Him in persevering prayer, He will send the long-awaited answer and our mourning will turn to rejoicing.

THOUGHT: Let patience do her perfect work.
PRAYER: Lord, keep me always fervent in prayer.

"NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS"

Why did Jesus suffer Himself to be *"numbered with the transgressors"?* This divine condescension was necessitated by powerful reasons.

a. **That He could better become their advocates.** The counsellor identifies with the client to stand with him and for him before the judge. Now, when the prisoner is brought to the bar, Jesus is there to answer the accusation. He points to His side, His hands, His feet, and pleads the case for the accused. He pleads His own blood shed for the one who identifies with Him. Seeing this, the judge proclaims, "The ransom is paid! Let the prisoner go free!"

b. **That He might feel their hearts drawn towards Him.** We feel a kindred spirit toward One whose name is written in the same list with us. We are constrained to turn boldly to Him, and to confess our guilt. Numbered with us, He will ***not*** condemn us, but He is become our salvation. In the words of the Psalmist, *"He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me"* (Ps 18:16, 19).

c. **That they might be written in the roll of the saints.** He is holy and written among the holy; we are guilty, and numbered among the guilty. He transfers His name from that list to this black list, and our names are taken to be written in the roll of acceptance. He takes our part to bear our misery and sin; and gives us His blood and righteousness. By His boundless grace, He numbers us with Him in a mystical union to make us His, forever.

THOUGHT: One day soon, a great multitude which no man can number shall stand before the Lamb which was once numbered with them.
PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for being numbered with me.

"LET US ... TURN AGAIN TO THE LORD"

The loving wife longs for the absent husband's return, for "absence makes the heart grow fonder." Separation from one's spouse is a sorrow exceeded only by death. We who deeply love the Saviour must see the smile on His face or our days would be mournful and cheerless.

Loving children who honour their father with filial affection are greatly grieved if he should cast a reproaching glance, or point an accusing finger. So it is with every true child of the Father. Should He reprove by a Scripture text, or apply even if lightly the rod of affliction, we would go at once to the Father's feet crying, "Show me my fault, O Father."

Is it so with you? Are you content to follow the Lord afar off? Can you bear to have your Beloved walking contrary to you, because you are walking contrary to His law? Have your sins stood between you and your God, and you are not alarmed? O be warned: it is a perilous thing to live happily without the smile of the Saviour's face! It is a great evil that you feel little love for your dying Saviour, little joy in His presence and little fellowship with Him.

Awake! O Christian! Grieve over your hardness of heart. Think again how you first found salvation, how the Saviour received you with tender loving arms. ***Go at once to the cross.*** There your spirit will be quickened and revived. No matter how ungrateful and unfilial we may have become, let us return to the Lord in our rags and defiled state. At the foot of the cross, the loving Saviour's cleansing flow – that fountain filled with blood – will wash us once again, and we will be restored to simple faith and tenderness of heart. But we must turn again to the Lord.

THOUGHT: Without Him life is worthless and tasteless!
PRAYER: Revive me again, O Lord.

"WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED"

The Roman scourge was a most horrible invention of physical torture. It consisted of a lash of ox sinews (or tendons) bearing on its surface pieces of bone, almost razor sharp. Used on the bare body of captives, each lash would tear into skin and flesh, causing fearful lacerations.

Pilate delivered our Lord to the officers to be scourged, a Gentile subjecting the Prince of life to the most heartless and degrading punishment, for our sakes. God's Word says, *"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted"* (Isa 53:4).

Gaze upon Him, the King of glory, bearing the lowest form of torture for our sakes. Then raised on the cross of shame, He draws all men to Himself; and all who look to Him in faith are instantly healed of their soul's disease. *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:14-15).

Can you say, "He was wounded for ***my*** transgressions, and with His stripes ***I am*** healed"?

THOUGHT: When I think of Jesus' suffering for me, have I ever shed a tear?
PRAYER: Jesus, keep me near Thy cross.

LOVE STRONGER THAN DEATH

Behold how Rizpah mourned for her sons! From the *"beginning of harvest"* her smouldering grief was not quenched *"until water dropped upon them out of heaven"* (2 Sam 21:10). Neither the summer heat nor the night dew and drenching rain could deter from her lone vigil over her departed boys. Sleep had deserted her weeping eyes: her heart was too full of memories for slumber. Such was a woman's love for her sons. Love is indeed stronger than death.

How, by comparison, is our love for our Saviour? How do we respond to the little inconveniences in our service for Him? Are we like the three disciples in the garden, too heavy-eyed to watch with the Master and sympathise with Him in His suffering? Compared with Rizpah, many of us are mere cowards. Single-handedly she guarded her sons' remains from birds of prey and wild beasts of the field. But some Christians sit with folded arms, unwilling or afraid to confront the enemies of the Gospel.

Rizpah owed nothing to her sons, but we owe the Lord an unpayable debt. It was our sins that caused His death. Our offences and transgressions crucified the Lord. His dying love redeemed us to Himself. O what boundless, inexpressible love! He came to pay a debt He did not owe, for us who owe a debt we could not pay. Can we not watch with Him one brief hour? Do we strive to honour Him by the way we live? Turn your eyes now to the everlasting Saviour and hear Him say to you, "Go, be my witness!" With love, respond to the Master's call. Thus may we love Him in return.

THOUGHT: *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13).
PRAYER: Lord, teach me to do whatsoever Thou commandeth me.

HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH

He spoke much and often to bless the sons of men, but before Pontius Pilate the Son of man uttered not a word for Himself. The temple officers had been astonished by the gracious words that came forth from Him: *"Never man spake like this man"* (John 7:46). And yet for His own defence never man was dumb like Him, *"insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly"* (Matt 27:14)

His extraordinary silence was the hallmark of His perfect sacrifice. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews said, *"Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me ... Lo, I come ... to do thy will, O God"* (Heb 10:5, 7). Bound with cruel bands, He stood, an unstruggling and uncomplaining victim, to do the Father's will.

Bearing our sin He stood in our place speechless, defenceless – guilty. Divine silence is the best reply to a gainsaying world, better than human eloquence. The best defenders of Christianity were the martyrs. The anvil of silent truth wears out the hammers of vile men's wrath. The Lamb of God furnishes us with a supreme example of that wisdom from above.

By His silence, our Lord fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: *"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth"* (Isa 53:7). Because our Lord made His soul an offering for sin, *"the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand"* (Isa 53:10). Indeed, the pleasure of the Lord has prospered beyond measure.

THOUGHT: I bow in worship before the Lamb of God.
PRAYER: Be with me, Lord Jesus, and in the silence of my heart, let me hear Thy voice of love.

Nœlles

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