

“A Wealthy Place”

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

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

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

How to Reach the Wealthy Place

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

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

Salvation

The first experience on the road to the wealthy place is salvation. “He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot.” This recalls the incident of the Red Sea, and the marvelous deliverance effected there. The redemption of the children of Israel caused a song to ascend from their lips such as had never been known before. “There did we rejoice in Him.” Our path to the “wealthy place” lies along the same road. We must know God’s deliverance. God would have every believer sing to Him for very joy of heart, and in exultation, as he sees

the victory that has been wrought on his behalf. That victory has been described in New Testament language in Romans 4:3, 23-25 and Romans 5:1-2. “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness . . . Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

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

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

Two Motives for Rejoicing

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

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

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

Being Tested

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

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

God Wants Reality

And God proves us because He will have reality. It was all very well for Israel to sing because their enemies were put down, but were they willing to have the flesh, which is enmity against

God, put down within themselves? Would they submit to Jehovah’s training? Would they consent to become what He wanted them to be? It was for this He made them feel their need — but only that they might realize their need of Him — and to bring to light deeper unfoldings of His goodness. To have no water was a sore trial, and, if possible, sorer still to come to Marah and find the waters bitter. But, oh, what a revelation of God the experience of Marah brings, that He can make every bitter thing sweet! God showed Moses a tree which when cast into the waters they became sweet. So God would show us a tree — the Cross — and have us feel the depths of the love which Christ’s death there reveals. God has shown it to us in Romans 5:6-11, the love that, when known, sweetens all. Are we not already reaching the wealthy place when we have experienced this? God indeed proves us, that we may learn ourselves, but also that we may learn Him, until, in learning Him, we become unconsciously transformed.

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

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

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

Hemmed in

But there are further dealings. The trials and testings are not all exhausted. “Thou broughtest us into the net.” Does this refer to Israel’s forty years wandering in the desert? It was the result of their own self-will. Had they been fit for it, they could have reached the land in a few days. But they rebelled against God, and contemned the council of the Most High. When He wanted them to go up and possess the land, they refused. When He told them not to go, they went. Do we know anything of the net? To be hemmed in on every side by circumstances, against

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

Affliction

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

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

Tempered Clay

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

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

The Severest Testing

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

Fire and Water

The last phase is now reached: “We went through fire and through water: but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.” All forms of dangers and distresses seem comprehended in “fire” and “water.” The smith at his work uses the fire first in order to make his metal malleable, and then, after the hammering, plunges it into water. Steel acquires a hardness, it is said, by being

suddenly cooled, as by dipping in water. Many have been through this process, and what experiences they have had of God, both in the “fire” and in the “water.” “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” The “fire” and the “water” often lie on the road to the wealthy place. It was the one who could say, “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep,” who could also speak in the very next chapter of the abundance of the revelations, and of being caught up to the third heaven. But the road to paradise lay through all this. What a wealthy place to reach. But he was let down in a basket before being caught up to the third heaven (2Cor 11:33; 12:2).

An End to Sorrow Not Goodness

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

Signs of the Wealthy Place

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

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

Giving God His Due

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

rams: I will offer bullocks with goats”?

Declare His Goodness

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

Answers to Prayer

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

Possess the Wealthy Place

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

All that so unexpectedly darkens our lives, which we think we so little deserved — all those calamities which seem heavy enough to crush us, and which we consider so uncalled for — all those sorrows which fill the eyes with tears and make the heart ache — these and such like, are designed, if only we would accept them from a loving Father’s hand, to bring us to the wealthy place where we can offer praise to God and declare what He has done for us.