*COUNSELS TO CONVERTS.*

VI.

A

S the Lord may help us, we will meditate this afternoon on a few verses in the third chapter of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, from the 22nd verse: “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassion fail not.” (Read on to the close of verse 26.)

On these verses we will meditate this afternoon. I never undertake, according to my own judgment, to choose a. subject for meditation. When I have the prospect of preaching, I wait on God, and ask Him to direct me to a subject. So I have asked Him repeatedly for a portion for this afternoon, and this is the portion to which I felt directed. And now, may the Lord grant us a blessing! We have particularly, in the first place, to consider the circumstances under which Jeremiah wrote these words, “It is of the Lord’s (Jehovah’s) mercies we are not consumed.” We have to consider the state in which, as a nation, the Israelites then were.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.

Almost all the Jews had fallen victims either to the war, or to famine, or to pestilence, or had been carried away as captives to Babylon. Only the poorest persons were left in the land, and even these were in very small numbers. In order that the whole land might not be desolate, the king of Babylon gave orders that a few men should be left behind.

Further, Jerusalem was burned and destroyed. The walls had been broken down round about the city, and the Temple was burned. Under these circumstances the prophet says, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.” He meant to say, if we had what we deserve, we should be utterly destroyed. Not a single man would be left alive; not a single house in the country but it would be destroyed. And if any should be left, they deserve no longer to be taken up by Jehovah. That is what we deserve on account of our sins. The prophet finds that all this has come upon them in consequence of their sin.

Now, in order to make this practical to ourselves, let us ask, If we had what we deserve, what would it be? We could expect nothing but entire destruction. If we were treated in the way of justice and judgment, and not according to mercy and grace, what could there be but destruction for us?

I ask you to put the question each one to himself with regard to this: Have I been convinced that I am a sinner—and such a sinner as to deserve punishment, nothing but punishment? If you have never been convinced of this—that you are a sinner, and that, as a sinner, you deserve nothing but punishment, then I ask you affectionately to consider it now; and to consider the only ground of salvation, and whether you have yet seen that your punishment has been laid on the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you are thus a sinner, and deserving of punishment (whether you see it or not, it is a fact, revealed by the Holy Ghost), then consider that God, in mercy, that you might not be punished, has sent Christ, His only-begotten Son, to bear the punishment in our room and stead, as our Substitute.

God, in the riches of His grace did that, in order that we might escape the punishment and destruction due to us, which punishment must have been visited on us, unless He had done this. Therefore was the Lord Jesus visited with stripes, and it was that which nailed Him to the accursed tree, in order that He might bear the punishment, and that we might be saved, eternally saved; that we might be happy, eternally happy.

Now do we all see this? And if not, I ask you, prayerfully to read the first three chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. There it is plainly stated, what we are by nature and what we merit. And if you do see this truth, then I especially ask you to entreat God to help you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; for thus, and thus alone, you can escape the punishment. If you trust in Him, you shall not be punished; for through Him do we obtain mercy, even “the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace;” and if we believe, we become the children of God; “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ,” Through believing the gospel, we are “delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son.” And thus there is before us the bright and bleed prospect of eternal joy and happiness, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

SELF-ABASEMENT.

Notice particularly also here, that the prophet does not say, it is of the Lord’s mercies that these wicked Jews are not consumed, but “that *we* are not consumed.” In this he includes himself. This is particularly to be noticed, for Jeremiah was one of the holiest men then living; and yet he includes himself when he says, it is of Jehovah’s mercies that we are not consumed—that *I* among them am not consumed.

So it is with those that fear God, and are believers in the Messiah; whether believing in the Messiah which was to come, as in Jeremiah’s days, or as now, in looking back to the Messiah as having come. The more they know of God, the more they see their own corrupt nature, their own sinfulness and shortcomings. And, instead of having a proud, haughty spirit towards fellow sinners, we include ourselves with them, and say, with the prophet, “it is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed.”

The heart of God was still towards the descendants of Abraham; the compassionate heart of Jehovah was still towards the literal seed of Abraham, and the blessings which had been promised to that seed were not forgotten; so that the prophet could say, “new every morning.”

This is the language of all who really know God, of all who are acquainted with God, and who have watched His hand in any small degree. Daily do they say that the compassions of Jehovah are indeed new every morning, and that great is His faithfulness. And if it were not thus, what would become of us who have known the Lord Jesus Christ? We should soon fall back, if left to ourselves. We should soon fall into that corrupt state from which we were delivered, if left to ourselves. It is by God’s grace that we are what we are; just because He is faithful to us. Although we should be unfaithful for a time, yet He abides faithful to His people. How blessed is it to know this!

Again, “Jehovah is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him.” This comforted the prophet in the midst of the sorrows which surrounded him. The people were almost all slain by the sword, or had perished by famine or pestilence; and the few who were left were for the most part carried away captive. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Temple burned.

Very few of us can enter into the full sorrow of the prophet under these circumstances; but this is certain, that it was an immense trial to him, especially the last circumstance, that the Temple was destroyed. Yet mark, he is not overwhelmed; there is yet hope. Hope in what? Hope in the living God: “Jehovah is my portion, therefore will I hope in Him.” The living God remains to me. Though the people are destroyed, though Jerusalem is destroyed, and the walls thereof broken down, and though the Temple is burned, yet God is my portion. That is the special point of our meditation—

“JEHOVAH IS MY PORTION.”

God was all to him, and that is particularly my message to all my fellow disciples this afternoon. How is it with us regarding this? Is the living God our portion? Do we find Him to be our all? Is the living God our portion and our hope? Remember, whatever else we have, He must be our portion. Suppose for a moment that all our friends turned their backs on us, yet if God Himself be ours, how rich are we? If we were possessed of much wealth and property, and were to lose it all, yet with God Himself as our portion, we should be rich. And if we were to spend the remainder of our lives in a dungeon, yet if God remains with us and goes with us there, we can be unspeakably happy. What are all these things if we have God? Have we, my dear friends, Him for our portion? I do not ask you now, are you religious people? I suppose you are, because you are here today. I do not ask if you read the Bible; I suppose that you do. I do not ask if you go to a place of worship; I suppose that. I do not ask if you now and then pray; I suppose you do. I do not ask if you give a little money to the cause of God; I suppose that. But, I ask more than all this, far, far more than all this. Do you find in God Himself your all? I ask you nothing short of this, that you ask yourself now, as before God: Is my wife my portion? Is my husband my portion? If so, then a poor portion you have. It is right to have natural affection towards your wife or your husband. It is right and proper for parents to love their children, and for children to love their parents; otherwise it would be sinful in the highest degree. But, none of these relatives are to be our portion as the children of God; Jehovah Himself must be that. He would have us satisfied with nothing short of Himself. I ask you whether this is the case with you? With some, the treasures of this world are their portion—what a poor miserable portion You will find such are unhappy, and have guilty consciences. You will never be satisfied by the treasures of this world—never.

But others make their business their portion. They are very earnest in attending to their business. Quite right in its place this. I do not wish at all to encourage idleness in any way in reference to this; for Christians should attend carefully and attentively to their business; if they do not, they will not have God’s blessing on their business. But yet, if the business is our portion, if money-making, or rank, or standing in life, or anything in this world be our portion, or what we seek to find satisfaction in, then I say it is a poor, miserable portion, by whatever name it may be called. But if, on the contrary, we have God for our portion, if in Him we seek to find satisfaction, and in nothing else, then have we a rich portion indeed. Is He only our joy, our hope, our happiness? Are our hearts in Him? our hopes in Him? our everything in Him? Have we all this? Let us be honest before God. Let us be honest with ourselves. Have we *one* thing we care about, and is that God Himself? Or, have we two things, or ten things that we care about? There is one thing only that should be uppermost in our hearts, and that is God Himself; one thing that should be our portion, and that is God Himself. The prophet Jeremiah had this portion, and therefore could never be miserable, poor, or forsaken. All is right so long as the living God Himself is our portion. As was the case with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself when on this earth, He had only one object, and that was, to live for, and serve God, His Father, to do His work. “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me.” And so it should be with us, that everything we do should be done for the praise, and honour, and glory of God. This should be our ruling motive. All our thoughts should be occupied with God, either directly or indirectly; even our corning together to meet our friends should be with reference to God—even our eating and drinking should be with reference to Him. Do we seek strength to live and labour for God, and do we spend the strength for Him, which we may have obtained?

Let us then ask ourselves the question,

“IS GOD HIMSELF MY PORTION?”

I do not ask you, without asking myself the question, What is my portion, my happiness, my *all*? Is it God Himself, or the things of this world? I answer for myself, I could not be satisfied with anything short of this, that God, and God alone, should be my portion, day by day, and week by week, and month by month, and year by year. Oh, beloved friends, stop short of nothing till you come to this, that God Himself is your only portion. The consequence of having Him for your portion will be, that whatever be the circumstance in which you are placed, whether there be war, or famine, or pestilence, or whatever be the circumstances connected with your present life, still you can be happy in the midst of them all. Let it be sickness, or danger, or even the prospect of death itself, God is yours, and you will yet be happy; but if God Himself be not your portion, you are dependent on, and affected by circumstances, and you will be more or less miserable in accordance with the things which surround you. But if you can say “Jehovah is my portion,” you can look forward to brighter and happier days. Jeremiah had this hope, and he looked forward expecting that the people would be brought back again, that Jerusalem would be built again, and that the Temple would be restored. And so it was, after about seventy years. Because the promises were from the living God Himself to the descendants of Abraham, therefore he could say, “The Lord is my portion, therefore will I hope in Him.”

But people will say, this was very well in the days of the prophets and the apostles, but now, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, we cannot expect such things. I believe no such thing. Why should not the people of God be as happy in their God, as ever the prophets or apostles were? Why not? Is not He the same God? Is His power not the same? Is His love to His children not as great as ever it was? Is His willingness to help His children not as great as ever it was? Certainly it is. The blessed Book remains with us; the precious promises are still there; and therefore we ought to remember, that to trust completely in the Lord, and to be happy in Him, is yet as possible as it was to the children of God in the middle of the first, or the beginning of the second century. Why not? There is nothing at all to hinder. You and I are certainly not apostles or prophets, but the blessing of peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and of the blessed promises, we may enjoy now in the nineteenth century as much as these believers of old; and, together with the prophet, we may say, “Jehovah is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him.”

Again, “The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him.” What an especial encouragement this is with regard to the trials and difficulties of life. All of us have sooner or later to pass through difficulties and trials, our path is not always smooth. Yet, in these circumstances, let us lay hold on such a word as this, “Jehovah is good unto them that wait for Him.” To all that wait for Him, He is very good. Let us go and make known our requests to Him, and seek His help, and wait till it comes. For the promise is, “Jehovah is good unto them that wait for Him.” There is something to be had by waiting on the Lord. He is good to them that seek Him. This is especial encouragement to any who may be here who know not the Lord, who are not yet believers in Him. Here is the promise: “The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh. Him.” What they have to do is, just to ask God to have mercy upon them. And they will find that He is good to the soul that seeketh Him. To any inquiring about the things of God, I would say, the soul that seeks Him will have blessing.

And especially is this comforting to us, the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever our trials, perplexities, and difficulties, there is the promise, “The Lord is good to them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him.’ There is no such thing as seeking God in vain; the seeking soul shall find. He will not seek blessing, comfort, instruction, power over natural evil tendencies from the Lord in vain. Whether we seek power over our temper, or pride, or high-mindedness, or wilfulness, or whatever may be in us, contrary to the mind of God, let us just bring the case with childlike simplicity before the Lord, and we shall find that it is not in vain to seek the Lord, but that “He is good to them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him.”

Now we come to the last verse upon which we will meditate at present. “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.”

HOPING AND WAITING.

In the first place, “It is good that a man should hope for the salvation of Jehovah.” Regarding the word salvation here, it is to be understood as it is generally used in the Old Testament, riot merely deliverance from sin and punishment, as it is generally used in the New Testament, but in the wider sense of the word, deliverance generally. Thus it does not here mean only deliverance for the soul—though that is not excluded—but it means deliverance generally from trial, temptation, sorrow and difficulty. For this salvation or deliverance, it is good for us to hope in the Lord. All of us at times find ourselves under circumstances from which we need deliverance; then it is good to hope for salvation from Jehovah. Are we doing so? It is the will of the Lord regarding us. It is here stated that it is good to do so and you will find it is good—practically and experimentally you will find it to be good in your own soul. The devil’s aim, when trial and affliction come, is to whisper to your heart—“Ah, this may last for ever?” “I shall never get out of this.” You are looking forward anticipating a life-long burden. Listen to Jesus, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” Leave everything in the hands of God. Aim at being in such a position, that you can look to Him, and seek from Him, grace for the present day; and He will give it. As for tomorrow, if it comes, the Lord will give grace for it also.

Remember, when the thought comes into your mind, “I shall never get rid of this;” that it is good for a man to hope for the salvation of Jehovah; He will deliver. Trial and affliction will come; well, never mind, deliverance will also come, for the Lord is good. If you do not hold fast this hope, if you lose it, and give up the comfort that God would bestow upon your soul, then you will find yourself losing the comfort and strength you would otherwise have. Therefore I say, hold it fast.

Remember the memorable passage in Psalm xxvii. 13, where David says, “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” All my strength would be completely taken away, except I were expecting to see better days. That is what we have to do, to be looking out for brighter and happier days, more blessed and cheerful days, which the Lord will send if we wait for Him. That is the thought which comes from the Spirit of God; the other thought, that of hopelessness, comes from the evil one in order that, if possible, he may make us wretched, and that we should give up hoping in God, and should sit down in despair, as if no good were possible. But “it is good that a man should hope for the salvation of Jehovah.” And this is not all; it is said, moreover, it is good that he should quietly wait for the salvation of Jehovah. Thus, we have not only to hope, but we have to wait, and wait quietly. This you and I cannot naturally do. We want to have our deliverance at once; we would have it today, and do not want to wait, or that it should be delayed. And if it does not come when we want it, the temptation is to think ourselves wiser than God, to begin to complain, to be dissatisfied, and even to begin to murmur, because it is so. Now, all this is dishonouring to God, and should not be. The will of God is, that we should make known our requests to Him; in the meantime leave ourselves in His hand. And, for our comfort, remember the words, “All things work together for good to them that love God.” This should sustain us in the meantime, together with the hope that He will finally deliver us. And if this deliverance is not yet, then our business is, quietly to wait., and by quietly waiting, to honour God; because then it will be known to those who see us, that we have a Father in heaven, a Father who cares for us; and that we are watched over and cared for; and that we trust and rely upon the Father in the assurance that “all things Work together for good for them that love God.” Let us seek to carry away a blessing.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER.

First of all, then, let us remember that, whatever trials or afflictions befall us, it is nothing at all to what we deserve. We all deserve eternal punishment, even hell. Therefore let us say with the prophet, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning.”

The next point is, that Jehovah Himself is our portion and our hope. Let us be satisfied with nothing short of this, that God Himself is our all.

The third point which I desire you specially to carry away is, that when trials and afflictions come, as come they will, we remember that “it is good to hope and to wait for the salvation of Jehovah;” and not only that we begin to wait, but that we go on quietly waiting till the deliverance comes. And then it becomes us to bless and praise God for what He has done.