

## The Minstrel

A Sermon

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The text is a somewhat singular one, but I hope it will suggest a profitable idea.

'But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.'" [2 Kings 3:15](#).

ELISHA needed that the Holy Spirit should come upon him to inspire him with prophetic utterances. 'Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' We need that the hand of the Lord should be laid upon us, for we can never open our mouths in wisdom except we are under the divine touch. Now, the Spirit of God works according to his own will. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth,' and the Spirit of God operates as he chooseth. Elisha could not prophesy just when he liked; he must wait until the Spirit of God came upon him, and the Spirit of God could come or not even as he pleased. Elisha had noticed that the Spirit of God acted upon him most freely when his mind was restful and subdued. He found himself best prepared for the heavenly voice when the noise within his soul was hushed, and every disturbing emotion was quieted. Having ascertained this fact by observation he acted upon it. He could not create the wind of the Spirit, but he could set his sail to receive it, and he did so.

At the particular time alluded to in the text Elisha had been greatly irritated by the sight of Jehoram, the king of Israel, the son of Ahab and Jezebel. In the true spirit of his old master, Elijah, the prophet let Jehoram know what he thought of him; and having delivered his soul, he very naturally felt agitated and distressed, and unfit to be the mouthpiece for the Spirit of God. He knew that the hand of the Lord would not rest upon him while he was in that state, and therefore he said, 'Bring me a minstrel.' The original Hebrew conveys the idea of a man accustomed to play upon the harp. Listening to the dulcet tones which were produced by a skilful harper, who very likely sang one of David's psalms to the music, the prophet waited awhile, and then the hand of the Lord came upon him. Under the influence of minstrelsy his mind grew quiet, his agitation subsided, his thoughts were collected, and the Spirit of God spake through him. It was a most commendable thing for him to use the means which he had found at other times helpful, though still his sole reliance was upon the hand of the Lord. It would seem from a passage in the First Book of Samuel that Elisha was not the only prophet who had found music helpful, for we read, 'Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and

a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy.' Elisha, like his predecessors, only used a natural means for putting himself into readiness for receiving supernatural help.

Let us see if we can bring forth the practical lesson which this incident may teach us.

I. First: here is a lesson to those who wish to serve God, and to speak in his name. LET US STRIVE TO BE IN A FIT STATE FOR THE LORD'S WORK. If we know of anything that will put our mind into such a condition that the Spirit of God is likely to work upon us and speak through us, let us make use of it. Elisha cried, 'Bring me a minstrel'; let us also say "bring me that which will be helpful to me." The harper could be of no service to Elisha for bringing him inspiration; but by putting him into a calm, equable state of mind he prepared him for the heavenly communication, and removed from his soul that which would have hindered the divine working.

It is very evident that we, too, like the prophet, have *our hindrances*. We are at times unfit for the Master's use. Our minds are disarranged, the machinery is out of order, the sail is furled, the pipe is blocked up, the whole soul is out of gear. The hindrance in Elisha's case came from *his surroundings*. He was in a camp; a camp where three nations mixed their discordant voices; a noisy, ill-disciplined camp, and a camp ready to perish for thirst. There was no water, and the men-at-arms were perishing; the confusion and clamour must have been great. Prophetic thought could scarcely command itself amid the uproar, the discontent, the threatening from thousands of thirsty men. Three kings had waited on the prophet; but this would not have disconcerted him had not one of them been Jehoram, the son of Ahab, and Jezebel. What memories were awakened in the mind of Elijah's servant by the sight of the man in whom the proud dame of Sidon and her base-minded consort lived again. Naboth's vine-yard must have come to his mind, and the stern threat of Elijah "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." 'For there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.'

Elisha acted rightly, and bravely. When he saw Jehoram coming, to him for help, he challenged him thus "What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the Prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother." When the king, humbly and with bated breath confessed that he saw the hand of Jehovah in bringing the three kings together, the prophet scarcely moderated his tone, but exclaimed, 'As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.' It was fit that he should be in that temper; the occasion demanded it. Still it was not a fit preface to the inward whisper of the Spirit of God, and the prophet did not feel ready for his work: the circumstances were not soothing or elevating, and so he said, 'Bring me a minstrel.' Do you not occasionally find yourself in an unhappy position? You have to preach, or to teach a class in school, or to carry an edifying word to a sick person; but everything distracts you. What with noise, or domestic trouble, or sinful neighbors, or the railing words of some wicked man, you cannot get into a fit frame of mind. You have

had a duty to do which has caused you much pain and disquietude, and you cannot get over it, for everything conspires to worry you. Little things grieve great minds. The very sight of some individuals will throw a preacher off the rails. I know that the height of the pulpit, the thinness of the audience, the sleepiness of a hearer, or the heaviness of the atmosphere, may put the preacher's heart out of tune, and incapacitate him for the blessing. Yes, we have our hindrances even as Elisha had.

Elisha's hindrances lay mainly *in his inward feelings*: he could not feel the hand of the Lord upon him until the inner warfare had been pacified. He burned with indignation at the sight of the son of Jezebel, and flashed words of flame into his face, and, as I have already said, he was justified in so doing; but still the excitement marred the holy peace in which he usually lived, and he did not feel in a right condition to speak in the name of the Lord. Anger, even if it be of the purest kind, is a great disturber of the heart; it ruffles all our garments, and makes us unfit to minister before the Lord. I know of nothing that is more likely to put a man out of order for the communications of the Spirit of God than indignation. Even though we may be able to say, 'I do well to be angry,' yet it is a very trying emotion. The unruffled lake reflects the skies, but if it be tossed with tempest even the purest water becomes a broken mirror; even thus in the quiet of the soul the thoughts of God's Spirit are reflected, while in the rush of indignation they are broken and confused.

Doubtless, also, the prophet's spirits were depressed. He saw before him the king of Edom, an idolater; the king of Israel, a votary of the calves of Jeroboam; and Jehoshaphat, the man of God, in confederacy with them. This last must have pained him as much as anything. What hope was there for the cause of truth and holiness when even a godly prince was in alliance with Jezebel's son? This burdened the heart of the man of God. Everything was wrong, and going worse and worse. The warnings of Elijah and his own teachings seemed to go for nothing; the honour of God was forgotten, and the cause of evil triumphed.

Moreover, the servant of God must have been the subject of a fierce internal conflict between two sets of thoughts. Indignation and pity strove within his heart. His justice and his piety made him feel that he could have nothing to do with two idolatrous kings; but pity and humanity made him wish to deliver the army from perishing by thirst. Like a patriot, he sympathised with his people; but, like a prophet, he was jealous for his God. The men of Judah and Israel, whatever they might be in character, were the Lord's people by covenant; he could not let them die: yet they had broken that covenant, and how could he help them? The prophet was perplexed, and his heart grew heavy. How can we do the Lord's work when we are cast down in spirit? The joy of the Lord is our strength, and when we lose it our hands are feeble. When the heart is torn with inner conflict how can we speak words of comfort to those who are weary? We have need to escape from this inward strife before we can become sons of consolation to others. While rent with conflicting feeling, there was no rest in the prophet's spirit; and the hand of the Lord did not come upon him. Most wisely he did not

attempt to speak in the name of the Lord, but sought for a means by which his excitement could be allayed. In the face of many hindrances we shall be wise if we imitate him. When we feel ourselves cumbered with much serving we shall act discreetly if we pause in it, and take Mary's place, for awhile, at least, and sit at Jesus' feet; or, if the service must be done at once, it will be well to use the readiest means for preparing the mind for doing it. It may be that some simple natural means will be helpful, and if so, we must not be so ultra-spiritual as to disdain to cry, 'Bring me a minstrel.' It is often pride which makes us decline the use of natural means. David went against Goliath in the name of the Lord, but he took his sling and his stone with him; even our Lord, who could open men's eyes with a word, did not refuse to use clay, or to send his patient to the pool of Siloam to wash. If you and I are out of order we must do our best to get right. If I go to do the Lord's work with a vexed or distracted mind, I shall do it badly. Perhaps I shall do more harm than good. I shall spill the cup of consolation if I am all in a tremble myself. God's servants should serve their Master well: the best we can render falls short of his deservings; but it would be a pity to do less than our very best. Occasionally we are quite out of form, cannot think, or feel, or speak aright; we have to confess that we are all in confusion, and, what is worse, we dare not even expect God come and help us till we are in a less excited condition. I know what I mean better than I can tell you. Some of our brethren are always even and calm, but others of us go dangerously up and sadly down, and are at times unfit either to receive the heavenly word or to convey it to others. At such times let us remember our text. The prophet said 'Bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.'

But what are our *helps* when we are pressed with hindrances? Is there anything which in our case may be as useful as a harp? 'Bring me a minstrel,' said the prophet, for his mind was easily moved by that charming art. Music and song soothed and calmed, and cheered him.

'Through every pulse the music stole,  
And held high converse with his soul.'

On the wings of melody his mind rose above the noisy camp, and floated far away from the loathed presence of Jehoram; the melting mystic strain laid all his passions asleep, and his soul was left in silence to hear the voice of the Lord. Well did Luther say, 'Music is the art of the prophets, the only art that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us.'

Among our own *helps* *singing* holds a chief place; as saith the apostle, 'Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in Your heart to the Lord.' Note how he connects it with peace in his epistle to the Colossians: 'Let the peace of God rule in your hearts . . . teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.' 'I cannot

sing,' says one. You need not sing as sweetly as Asaph and Heman, and other sweet birds of paradise whose names we read in Scripture; but we should all sing better if we sang more. Those with cracked voices would be kind if they would not sing quite so loudly in the congregation, for they grievously disturb other people; but they might get alone and have good times with themselves, where nobody could complain of their strong voices and lusty tones. It is good to sing praises unto the Lord, and a part of its goodness lies in the comfort which it brings. It is not without significance, that after supper, before our Lord went to his great sacrifice, he sang a hymn. Did not even he find refreshment in that holy exercise? My mind dwells sweetly on a season which I have often mentioned to you when a new lie had been forged against me, a lie of peculiar bitterness, and it vexed me. I was never particularly pleased at being slandered, though I have had my fair share of it. Well, I went alone awhile, and sung over to myself in my own poor way,'

'If on my face, for thy dear name,  
Shame and reproaches be,  
I'll hail reproach, and welcome shame,  
If thou remember me.'

By that means the sting was removed, and I felt merry again. 'Bring me a minstrel:' the restoring means may be a little thing, but if you do not look to the linchpin of a cartwheel the wheel may come off, and down will go the cart, and what is the poor horse to do then? If you can get your mind right again by such a simple thing as singing, pray do not neglect it.

Suppose, however, that singing has no such power over you; let me recommend to you the quiet *reading* of a chapter of God's word. Go upstairs and open the Book, and think upon a few verses. If you are much perplexed, read that blessed chapter which begins, 'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.' Those verses act like a charm upon many minds: many and many a time a storm has subsided into a calm by the reading of those words. Some such passage read quietly will often operate as the harper acted upon Elisha. If time be pressing, see what is the text for the day in the almanac; or choose out some one precious promise which in other days was sweet to you. It is wonderful the effect of a single verse of Scripture when the Spirit of God applies it to the soul. There is music to a miser in the jingling of his money bag; but what music can equal this? 'All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose'? If you are in poverty, what melody lies in this: 'Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.' What power would come upon the soul to calm and quiet it, and make it ready for the hand of God, if we would grasp a single line of Scripture and suck the honey out of it till our soul is filled with sweetness.

You will find it equal to bringing a minstrel, and perhaps even more efficient, if you will get alone to *pray*. That horrible Rabshakeh's letter you read it, and then you wished you

had never seen it. You put it behind the glass, but you fetch it out again, and read it again, and cry, 'What a trial is this! who can bear it?' There is a kind of basilisk power in an abominable letter, so that you feel compelled to read it again and again. Can you not break the spell? What is the wisest course? Go upstairs, open it wide, spread it before the Lord, and say, 'O Lord, thou hast seen letters like this before; for thy servant Hezekiah showed thee one.' I would say of every sorrow, 'Pray over it.' An old divine, after he had heard a young minister preach a poor discourse, said to him, 'Sir, I beg you to try and pray that sermon over.' He replied that he could not pray it over. Now, a sermon that cannot be prayed over ought never to be preached at all, and a trouble that you cannot pray over is a trouble which you ought not to have. It must be a grief of your own making; it cannot be a trial of God's sending. Tell the Lord your affliction, and the bitterness of it will be past, and you will go back to your daily service calm and quiet, fitted for the hand of the Lord to be laid upon you. Men will wonder whence your joy has come, and what makes your face to shine. The secret is that you have waited upon the Lord, and renewed your strength.

It may be you will find fittest help in *Christian association*. I commend this to those believers who are seldom fit for God to use because they are morose and fault-finding. You ought to say, 'Bring me a minstrel:' find me some praying sister whom I may talk with, or find me some genial brother who rejoices in the Lord, and let me converse with such. It may be that the Master will join you and make a third, and then shall your heart be glad. Much misery is caused by Christians attempting to go to heaven alone. You remember how Mr. Bunyan describes Christian as journeying alone at first; he soon picked up with Hopeful, and then he was more cheery. As for Christiana and Mercy, and the family, they scarcely could have gone on pilgrimage at all if it had not been for Mr. Greatheart: but when they all went in company, with Mr. Greatheart to lead the band, they could sing all the way to the gates of the Celestial City. You, my friend, who are hindered in the service of Christ, might often be put right, so that God could use you, if you would become a companion of all them that fear God, and of them that keep his precepts. Holy converse acts as a minstrel to the spirit.

What is *the duty* that arises out of this? It is this: if you get into a bad state, don't stick there. 'Ah,' says one, 'it is very close weather, and I feel depressed, so that the Spirit of God does not work upon my mind.' Then cry at once, 'Bring me a minstrel.' Do not say 'I cannot help being stupid.' You need not be: at least, not more so than you are by nature. You may get out of your dullness by making an effort, and you ought to make it. Did I not hear you say 'Everybody has gone away for a holiday, and I cannot leave my work. Trade is dull, and so am I'? But you need not be dull. Why should you always be heavy? You say, 'I do not feel fit to go to my class,' or, 'I do not feel fit to preach.' Should you, therefore, cease from the work of the Lord? By no means. Rouse yourself. Think of the way in which God has aforetime

helped you, and use the same means again. While you are helping yourselves God will help you, and the hand of the Lord will come upon you.

Do not give way to feelings which unhinge you. Fight against them and cry with David, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?' Still, do not rush into God's service in an unfit condition. Resort to such means as are within reach for calming the lower faculties, and the Spirit of God will move upon your higher powers. Act rationally. Use your best judgement and most prudent endeavours, or we shall suspect that you have no particular wish to do the Lord's work, or fancy that anything is good enough for your God. Say to yourself, 'Being in an unsuitable condition, I cannot expect God to use me. I must therefore get right. Here is my harp, but every string is out of tune. I cannot expect the Holy Spirit to play upon it until it is put in order. What can I do to help myself in this matter, for that I will do, and thus prove the sincerity of my prayer when I ask God the Holy Spirit to help me.'

This, then, is the first lesson, and I am sure there is real practical teaching in it, though some superior persons may despise it.

II. My second word is to those who have not yet found the Lord. WE SHOULD USE EVERY MEANS TO OBTAIN THE TOUCH OF THE DIVINE HAND. There are some here present who do not yet know whether they are believers in Christ or not: and I am sure I cannot tell them. I hope they are believers, for they are sincerely desirous of eternal salvation, but sometimes I am afraid they are not, for they do not appear to understand the meaning of the finished work of Christ. What are those, who are earnestly seeking the Lord, to do? There is but one answer, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' Faith is the one and only course commanded. But some one replies, 'Alas, I cannot get at that.' But, my friend, you must get at it, or perish. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Still, to help you, let me urge you to do this which lies near at hand if you cannot feel that the Spirit of God will bless you as you are, call for some minstrel, who may aid you in your search after the blessing. If there be any subordinate means which may be helpful, use it with a view to the higher and better thing. I would first say 'If you feel that you have not the faith which you ought to have, *use what faith you have*. It is wonderful what an immense amount of possibility lie in a mustard seed of faith. It is a very small, tiny thing; but sow it and it will grow. You have not enough faith to believe that Christ *will* save you, but you have enough to feel sure that Christ *can* save you. That is something: hold to it and follow it out to its fair conclusions. If a man has not money enough to pay for a week's provisions, let him not starve; but let him spend what he has, hoping that more will come. Have you a small dust of faith? use that, and it will multiply.

If you want to feel the hand of the Lord, I would next say, Go and *hear a sound, earnest, lively preacher*. I am advising you to do as I acted myself. I was muddled, and could not exercise faith, and so resolved to obey that other precept, 'Hear, and your soul shall live.'

If you long for faith, listen to the preacher who preaches the gospel most simply and most forcibly. Perhaps you say, 'I have been listening to a very clever minister, a very intellectual minister, and his word has never been blessed to my soul.' Then shift your place, and say. 'Bring me a minstrel;' for then it may be that the hand of the Lord may be upon you. It is better to go a hundred miles to hear a faithful minister than to listen to a man from whom you get no good because he happens to preach near you. Men go many miles to a skilful physician, or a healing fountain. When we are in earnest to find Christ we shall have the sense to go where he is most honoured and most spoken of.

'But suppose I have attended such a ministry, and have found no good; what shall I do?' Why, the Scripture says, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ ' and thou shalt be saved.' Still, if you cannot get at this for the moment, *attend earnest meetings* where souls have been converted, and many have been brought to Jesus' feet. Trust not to preachers or meetings; but, still, go where the rain is falling, and there may be a drop for you. If a ministry is blessing others, resort to it, praying, 'O Lord, *bless me.*' Our immediate need is the hand of the Lord, and we may be made ready to receive it by hearing the gospel; therefore let us diligently incline our ear to the heavenly word.

Let me also advise you to *read gracious books*. Ask Christian people what writings were blessed to their conversion, and carefully study the same. There is no book for saving souls like the Bible. Say, 'Bring me a minstrel,' and read the Scriptures again and again. The Lord Jesus feedeth among the lilies: get among the beds of lilies, and you will find him there. Oh, how many have found Christ when they have been searching the Scriptures to see 'whether those things were so.'

I would also strongly recommend you to *get a good deal alone*. You poor souls, who cannot find Christ, and do not seem to understand what it is to believe in him, should think much, and meditate much, upon Jesus and his cross. David said, 'I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.' If you want a minstrel, think of your sin, your sin against your God, till it breaks your heart; then think of Christ, his nature, his work, his love, his deeds of mercy: think of the Holy Spirit, and his power to renew, regenerate, comfort, sanctify: think over those precious truths of the word of God, which are set there on purpose to be beacons to light souls to Christ, and while you are thinking of these it shall be to you as when the minstrel played, and the hand of the Lord came upon his prophet. Get much alone; but still recollect there is no hope for you if you trust in being alone, or trust in reading the Scriptures, or trust in hearing, or trust in anything but Christ. What you want is the hand of Jesus laid upon you: one touch from him, and you will be made whole. If you can but touch the hem of his garment, virtue shall come out of him to you. I am merely mentioning these things because sometimes they lead up to the one thing, and when a man is in earnest to obtain the one thing needful, he will be willing to attend to anything by which he will be likely to attain it, and to attend to any secondary means which



God has blessed in the case of others. He will be willing to be taught by a child, if peradventure God will bless him in that manner. He will say, 'Bring me a minstrel;' 'Bring me a good book;' 'Bring me a godly minister;' 'Bring me a Christian man accustomed to speak to troubled hearts;' 'Bring me an aged Christian whose testimony shall confirm my spirit, and be the means of working faith in me: for I must get to God; I must get salvation. Tell me, tell me, where Christ is to be obtained, and I will find him if I ransack the globe to discover him.' I do not believe any person who has desires to find Christ will seek in vain. I am certain that when people hunger and thirst after Christ they shall be filled, and when they say, 'We will do anything by which we may be led to Jesus,' they are not far from the kingdom of heaven, and the Holy Spirit is at work in them.

III. Thirdly, WE SHOULD MORE ABUNDANTLY USE HOLY MINSTRELSY. Saints and sinners, too, would find it greatly to their benefit if they said, 'Bring me a minstrel.' This is the world's cry whenever it is merry, and filled with wine. The art of music has been prostituted to the service of Satan. Charles Wesley well said,'

Listed into the cause of sin,  
Why should a good be evil?  
Music, alas! too long has been  
Press'd to obey the devil.  
Drunken, or lewd, or light, the lay  
Flow'd to the soul's undoing;  
Widen'd, and strew'd with flowers the way  
Down to eternal ruin.'

It is for us to use singing in the service of God, and to make a conquest of it for our Redeemer. Worldlings want the minstrel to excite them; we want him to calm our hearts and still our spirits. That is his use to us, and we shall do well to employ the harper to that end.

Let us give instances: I will suppose that this morning you were thinking about coming up to the assembly of God's people, and you felt hardly up to the mark. It would have been wise to do as I did this morning. I read at family prayer the eighty-fourth Psalm, 'How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God.'

What a sweet piece of Sabbath minstrelsy it is! How often have we been quieted and prepared for sanctuary worship by [Psalm 84](#):

'How did my heart rejoice to hear  
My friends devoutly say,  
'In Zion let us all appear

And keep thy holy day!”

When the house is full of trouble, and your heart is bowed down, is it not well to say”Bring me a minstrel, and let him sing to me the twenty-seventh Psalm. “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.” You need not confine the harper to that one strain; for David has written many psalms for burdened hearts. It is wonderful what provision God has made of sacred minstrels to play us up out of the depths into the heights if we will but make a right use of them.

I will suppose you are in a state of alarm; it may be there is a thunderstorm, or possibly a disease is stalking through the land. Did you ever sing in such times that forty-sixth Psalm: ‘God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.’ Such music is like the breath of heaven. How comforting are the words of the ninety-first Psalm when diseases are abroad, or when the thunder rolls through the sky: ‘He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.’ I remember being in a family one night when I was but a lad, when everybody in the house, strong men though some of them were, trembled and were afraid. A child was upstairs and must be brought down, but no one dared pass by the window on the staircase. Well do I remember fetching the child, awed but not alarmed, and then I sat down and read aloud the ninety-first Psalm, and saw how it quieted both men and women. Ah, my brethren, David as a musician is one of a thousand; we need no other minstrel. The word of God hushes the tempest of the soul, and refreshes the heart with a celestial dew. ‘Bring me a minstrel,’ but let him sing us one of the songs of Zion.

Do you ever get depressed in spirit, beloved friends? I fear you do; and are you ever troubled because you seem to have more affliction than anybody else? Have you watched the wicked and seen them prosperously sailing while you have been tossed to and fro on a raging sea of troubles? Do you want to get peace to your mind by the power of the Holy Spirit? Then say, ‘Bring me a minstrel’ and let him sing that thirty-seventh Psalm, ‘Fret not thyself because of evildoers.’ Or if you would have a change from the thirty-seventh, turn the figures round, and let him sing the seventy-third, and the notes will run thus: “Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.’ You will not be long before you will rise to the

note”Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.’

Happily, you are not always depressed: there are times of great joy with you, and then you long to have communion with God. If you wish to have fellowship with Jesus, you will find it helpful to say, ‘Bring me a minstrel;’ and when he asks, ‘What shall I sing?’ say to him, ‘Sing the Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.’ Then shall you find utterance for your heart in some such canticles as these: ‘Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?’ Possibly your tongue will take up notes like these: ‘As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.’ ‘My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the daybreak, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of division.’ The whole book is full of utterances which may seem strange to worldly minds, but which exactly suit those who know the Well-beloved. Read that third verse of the eighth chapter of the Song. Did you ever sing it? ‘His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please.’ ‘Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.’

When we come to die we will breathe our last breath to music. Then will we say, ‘Bring me a harper,’ and like Jacob and Moses we will sing ere we depart. Our song is ready. It is the twenty-third Psalm: ‘The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.’

This is the kind of minstrel for me. Say you not so, my brethren? When you are in trouble or distress, will you not remember your son in the night? If such be the strain, I am of the same mind as Martin Luther, whose words I have copied out to read to you. His language is always strong. Luther speaks thunderbolts. ‘One of the finest and noblest gifts of God is music. This is very hateful to the devil, and with it we may drive off temptations and evil thoughts. After theology I give the next place and highest honour to music. It has often aroused and moved me so that I have won a desire to preach. We ought not to ordain young men to the office of preacher if they have not trained themselves and practised singing in the schools.’ That is pretty strong. I fear many would not have been preachers if they must first have been singers. Still, there is a power about song; and to sing the praises of God in psalms such as those I have read to you is most consoling.

Suppose you have done with the minstrelsy which I have now mentioned, there is next *the music of gospel doctrine*. I confess to you that, when depressed in spirit, I love a little of thorough Calvinistic doctrine. I turn to Coles on Divine Sovereignty, and relish his plain speaking upon sovereign grace. The doctrine of election is noble music: predestination is a glorious hallelujah. Grace abounding, love victorious, truth unchanging, faithfulness invincible: these are melodies such as my ear delights in. The truth of God is fit music for angels. The harps of the redeemed never resound with more noble music than the doctrines of grace. Every truth has its melody, every doctrine is a psalm unto God. When my heart is faint, 'Bring me a minstrel,' and let him sing of free grace and dying love.

If these do not charm you, fetch a minstrel from *experience*. Think how God has dealt with you in times of sorrow and darkness long gone by, and then you will sing, 'His mercy endureth for ever.' That one hundred and third Psalm might last a man from now till he entered heaven, he need not change the strain,"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.' He may keep on chanting it until his song melts into the hymn of the angels, and he adds another voice to the chorus of the redeemed above.

If you want music, there is yet a sweeter store. Go fetch a minstrel *from Calvary*. Commend me for sweetness to the music of the cross. At Calvary I hear one piece of music set to the minor key which bred more joy beneath the skies than all else. Hear it: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Jesus deserted is the comfort of deserted souls: Jesus crying, 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' is the joy of the spirit that has lost the light of God's countenance. That grave and solemn note can lift despair into delight.

But if you want another hymn of the cross to be sung with the accompaniment of the high-sounding cymbals, or with trumpet and sound of cornet, let me commend you to this other song of the cross, 'IT IS FINISHED.' All music lies there. Condensed into those three words you have the harmonies of eternity, the melodies of the infinite. Angels themselves when on their loftiest key did never sing a canticle so sweet. '*Consummatum est*' is the consummation of song. 'It is finished;' sin is blotted out, reconciliation is complete, everlasting righteousness is brought in, and believing souls are saved. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! 'Till the day break, and the shadows flee away,' 'Bring me a minstrel,' and let us sing unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON'Psalm 136; [2 Kings 3:1-15](#).

HYMNS FROM 'OUR OWN HYMN BOOK'"136 (Song II.), 166, 229.