

Paul, the Ready

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"I am ready." [Romans 1:15](#).

I THINK Paul might have used these words as his motto. We had once a Saxon king called Ethelred the Unready. Here we have an Apostle who might be called Paul the Ready. The Lord Jesus no sooner called to him out of Heaven, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" than he answered, "Who are You, Lord?" Almost directly after, his question was, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" He was no sooner converted than he was ready for holy service and, "straightway, he preached Christ" in the synagogues at Damascus. All through his life, whatever happened to him, he was always ready. If he had to speak to crowds in the street, he had the fitting word, or if to the elite upon Mars' Hill, he was ready for the philosophers. If he talked to the Pharisees, he knew how to address them and when he was brought before the Sanhedrim, and perceived the Pharisaic and Sadducean elements in it, he knew how to avail himself of their mutual jealousies to help his own escape.

Watch him before Felix, before Festus, before Agrippa—he is always ready—and when he came to stand before Nero, God was with him and delivered him out of the mouth of the lion. If you find him on board ship, he is ready to comfort men in the storm, and when he gets on shore, a shipwrecked prisoner, he is ready to gather sticks to help to make the fires. At all points he is an all-round man and an all-ready man—always ready to go wherever his Master sends him, and to do whatever his Lord appoints him.

In talking at this time about Paul's readiness, I shall, first, dwell for a little while upon the state of Paul's mind, as indicated by his declaration, "I am ready." Secondly, I shall show that this state of mind arose from excellent principles. And, thirdly, I shall point out that this readiness produces admirable results wherever it is to be found.

I. First, let us consider THE STATE OF PAUL'S MIND which enables him to say, "I am ready."

I shall refer you to four passages where he expresses his readiness. The first is our text. Here we have Paul's readiness to work. "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome, also." He had preached the Gospel throughout a great part of Asia. He had crossed over into Europe, he had proclaimed the Word through Greece—and if ever an opportunity should occur for him to get to the capital of the world, whatever might be the danger to which he would be exposed—he was prepared to go. He was ready to go anywhere for Jesus, anywhere to preach the Gospel, anywhere to win a soul, anywhere to

comfort the people of God! "I am ready." There is no place to which Paul was not ready to go. He was ready to make a journey into Spain and if he did not come to this island of ours, which is a matter of question, undoubtedly he was ready to have gone to the utmost isles of the sea, and to lands and rivers unknown, to carry his Master's mighty Word! Are we as ready as Paul was to go anywhere for Jesus, or do we feel that we could only work for Christ at home? Dare we go to the United States, or to Australia, or into some heathen land? Oh, may God keep us always on tiptoe, ready to move if the cloud moves, and equally ready to stay where we are if the cloud moves not!

If Paul went to Rome, he would be going into the lion's mouth, but he was ready for that, for lions had no kind of terror for him. He had fought with beasts at Ephesus. In spirit he had died in the mouth of the lion many a time, counting not his life dear to him. I wish we were ready for all danger, all slander, all contumely, all poverty, all of anything that it might cost us to preach Christ where He is not known. The Apostle was ready to go anywhere with the Gospel, but he was not ready to preach another gospel—no one could make him ready to do that! He was not ready to hide the

Gospel, he was not ready to tone it down, he was not ready to abridge it or to extend it. He said, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the

Greek."

As to the matter of preaching the Gospel, Paul was always ready for that! He kept not back any one of its Truths, nor any part of its teaching. Even if it should bring ridicule and contempt upon him, though it should be to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness, Paul would say, "As much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel" to them all. He did not always feel fit for the work—he did not always find the same openings, or the same freedom in speech—but he was always ready to preach wherever the Lord gave him the opportunity.

If you will kindly turn to [Acts 21:13](#), you will read, in the second place, of Paul's readiness to suffer. He says, "I am ready not to be bound, only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." This is, perhaps, a greater thing than the former one—to be ready to suffer is more than to be ready to serve. To some of us it has become a habit to be ready to preach the Gospel, but here was a man who was ready to suffer for the name of the Lord Jesus—so ready that he could not be dissuaded from it. He might preach the Gospel, but why must he go to Jerusalem? All the world was before him—why must he go to that persecuting city? Everybody told him that he would have bonds and imprisonment and, perhaps, death—but he cared nothing about all that! He said, "I am ready, I am ready."

Beloved Friends, are we ready to be scoffed at, to be thought idiots, to be put down among old-fashioned fossils? Perhaps so. Are we ready, if we should be required to do so, to lose friends for Christ's sake, to have the cold shoulder for Christ's sake? Perhaps so. Are

we also ready, if it is the Lord's will, to go home, to be carried upstairs and to lie there for the next three months? Are we as ready as that poor woman who said, "The Lord said to me, 'Betty, mind the house, look after the children,' and I did it. By-and-by, He said, 'Betty, go upstairs, and cough 12 months.' Shall I not do that, also, and not complain, for it is all that I can do?" "I am ready." Do you remember what is on the seal of the American Baptist Missionary Society?—An ox with a plow on one side and a halter on the other, ready for either—ready to serve, or ready to suffer. You have not come to the highest style of readiness till you are ready for whatever the will of God may appoint for you! Unreadiness from this point of view is very common, but it shows unsubdued human nature. It is a relic of rebellion, for when we are fully sanctified—when every thought is brought into subjection to the mind of God—then the cry is not, "As I will," but, "As You will!"

Ah, dear Friends, while I am talking very feebly to you, I should not wonder but what you are saying to yourselves, "This is above us as yet—we shall need much more teaching of the Holy Spirit before we are ready for unknown sufferings, for lonely sufferings, for suffering that seems to have no good in it, useless suffering, for being put on the shelf, for being laid aside from the holy services of God's House, and from the little works that once we were able to do for Christ. Are you ready? Can you answer, "Ready, yes, ready"? So it should be with you if you belong to Christ. And so it was with Paul.

The third passage I must now quote is not exactly the same in words, but it means the same as the others. It tells us of Paul's readiness to do unpleasant work. I am afraid many of God's servants fall short here. The passage is in [2 Corinthians 10:6](#)—"And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." The Church at Corinth had sunk into a very sad condition. It was a Church that did not have any minister. It had an open ministry and nobody knows what mischief comes of that kind of thing. Paul recommended them to try what a minister could do for them, for he said, "I beseech you, brethren, (you know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first-fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints), that you submit yourselves unto such." They were too gifted for that and everybody wanted to speak. When a Church is all mouth, what becomes of the body? If it were all mouth, it would simply become a vacuum—nothing more—and the Church in Corinth became very much that. It was nobody's business to administer discipline, for it was everybody's business, and what is everybody's business is nobody's business, as we well know! So no discipline was administered and the Church became what we call, "all sixes and sevens." It stands in the Scriptures forever as a warning against that method of Church government, or, rather, of no Church government at all.

Paul, when he went among these people, determined to administer discipline, and to try to put things right. He was not going to Corinth with a sword, or with any carnal weapon,

or with anything of unkindness or hasty temper. But he was going with the Word of God. He wrote, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to

the pulling down of strongholds." And he meant to go among the Corinthian professors and pull down the stronghold of heathen vice that had entered the Church to such an extent that even at the Lord's Table some of them were drunk! Paul meant to deal honestly with all who were dishonoring the name of Christ.

Now, dear Friends, I speak especially to Brothers whom God has put into the ministry, or put into office in the Church—are you ready for this unpleasant duty? Oh, it costs some of us a great deal to say a strong thing! Perhaps we cannot say it at all without getting into a temper—and then we had better not say it at all! It is not easy to have firmness in the language combined with sweetness in the manner of uttering it. It is easy to congratulate friends. It is not difficult to condemn them in the gross—but it is another thing to speak personally and faithfully to each erring one, and to be assured in our own souls that, as far as we have any responsibility in the matter, we will not tolerate an Achan in the camp, and will not have evil done knowingly in the House of God. It should be our endeavor, as God has made us overseers, not to overlook things that are evil, but really to oversee everything that is committed to our charge, and to try to set right whatever is wrong.

Is it not the case with you who are private members of Churches—do you not, sometimes, find it difficult to rebuke sin? Even profane swearing will come under the notice of many Christian people without a word of rebuke from them. They say they thought it best to hold their tongue—you mean you thought it easiest for yourselves! Sometimes known wickedness comes before the eyes of Christians and they excuse themselves, and say, "We did not like to interfere." "Perhaps they were too gentle," you say. I suggest that they were too lazy, too much inclined to save their own precious skins, too anxious to have the soft side of this life and not willing to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ! Are you ready, as Paul was, to exhibit a holy indignation against sin, and lovingly and tenderly, yet firmly, in the name of the Lord, to see that evil does not go unrebuked? If any man has come to this, I will not say that I envy him, but that I desire to be found in that position, so that, when the Lord comes, none of the evil of this generation may be at my door. When He shall come, and find His Church lukewarm, faithless, adulterated by worldliness and all manner of heresies, I pray that He may not have to point His finger at unfaithful pastors and say of any of us, "You are the man who is responsible for this sad state of affairs." Oh, may God make us ready for whatever is laid upon us, however unpleasant and contrary to our mind and feeling the task may be, may we be ready to do the Lord's work, faithful even to the end!

Now, once more, will you kindly turn to [2 Timothy 4:6](#), where you have a verse well known to you all, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." Paul was ready to die. He was ready to loose his cable from earth and to sail away to the haven of the blessed! And well he might be, for he could add, "I have fought a good fight,

I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: therefore, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." Beloved Friends, we cannot be ready to die unless we have been taught how to live! We who are active, and have talents to use, and health and strength with which to use those talents, must go on with "the greatest fight in the world" till we can say, "I have fought a good fight." We must go on running the Christian race till we can say, "I have finished my course." We must go on guarding the Word of God and holding fast the Truth of God, till we can say, "I have kept the faith." It will be hard work to lie dying if we have been unfaithful. God's infinite mercy may come in and forgive and help us, and we may be "saved, yet so as by fire," but if we would look forward to death with perfect readiness, having no dread or fear about it—but being as ready to die as we are to go to our beds tonight—then we must be kept faithful to God by His Almighty Grace. The faith must keep us, and we must keep the faith.

Thus, you see, Paul was ready for service, ready for suffering, ready for unpleasant duty and ready to die. If I were to go round this Tabernacle and ask of everyone, "My Friend, are you ready in these four ways?" how many of you would be able to answer, "We are ready"? I am afraid many would have to shake their heads and say, "I do not know what to say. I am doing my best in some style, but I cannot say that I have the readiness which the Apostle claimed."

II. Let me show you now that PAUL'S READINESS AROSE FROM EXCELLENT PRINCIPLES. That is our second point.

As for Paul's readiness to preach, I should trace that to his solemn conviction of the Truth of the Gospel. If a man only thinks it is true, he will not care whether he preaches it, or does not preach it. But if he knows it is true, then he must preach it! I do not think we need find much fault with people, nowadays, for being too positive and dogmatic about the Truth of God. The present current runs in quite another direction. A feeble faith which might almost be mistaken for

unbelief, is the common thing, and, therefore, there is no great readiness to speak. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "As it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak." If I get a grip of a thing and know it is true, then I must tell it to others. The backbone of the preaching of Christ is a conviction of the Truth of Christ.

Paul also had a dauntless courage in this matter. He said, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel!" Whatever happened to him if he did preach it, he had counted the cost, and he was quite ready for all the consequences of his action. He had a holy self-denial so that he put himself out of the question. "I am ready for anything; I am ready to preach this Gospel if I am stoned, if I am thrown out of the city as dead, if I am imprisoned, if I am sent into the den of Caesar at

Rome."

Paul was ready because his courage had been given him of God. Paul was ready to preach the Gospel at Rome because he had freed himself from all entanglement. You know how he put it, in writing to his son Timothy, "No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier." There are some of us who get so tied up and entangled, that we are not ready to do God's service because we are all in knots through too much worldly business. Try, dear Friends, you who are the servants of Christ, to keep yourselves as clear as you can of all entanglements. You have your living to earn, but serve God while you are earning it. If you see an opportunity of getting rich, but in order to do so you will have to deny yourself from Christ's work—you will have to give up week-night services, and so on—do not thus entangle yourself! Keep yourself as clear as you can.

Her Majesty does not expect one of her soldiers to take to farming and then to send word that he cannot go to battle because he has to get in his hay, or he has his wheat to cut. He must come whenever he is called! And blessed is that good soldier of Jesus Christ who can come when he is wanted by his King and Captain. Sir Cohn Campbell, when told that he was needed to go to India, was asked, "How long will you take to get ready, Sir Cohn?" He replied, "Twenty-four hours." And in 24 hours he was ready to go. A Moravian was about to be sent by Zinzendorf to preach in Greenland. He had never heard of it, before, but his leader called him, and said, "Brother, will you go to Greenland?" He answered, "Yes, Sir." "When will you go?" "When my boots come home from the cobbler." And he did go as soon as his boots came home. He needed nothing else but just that pair of boots, and he was ready to go! Paul, not even waiting for his boots to come home from the cobbler, says, "I am ready." Oh, it is grand to find a man so little entangled that he can go where God would have him go, and can go at once!

Paul had, besides, such love for men, whether they were Jews, or Romans, or any other people, that he was ready to go anywhere to save them. He also had such zeal for God that it was a happiness for him to think of going to the furthest region if he might but preach Christ where He was not known—not building on another man's foundation, but laying the first stone of the edifice himself. This, then, accounted for his readiness to preach—a holy conviction of the truth of what he had to preach and of the need of preaching it.

But what helped Paul to be ready to suffer? Some here will have to suffer for Jesus Christ's sake, though they may never be called to preach. Well, I should say, dear Friends, first, that Paul was completely consecrated to the Lord. He was not his own—he was bought with a price—and that led him to feel that his Master might do whatever He liked with him. He belonged to Christ, he was Jesus Christ's branded slave and he was absolutely at Christ's disposal. Moreover, he had such trust in his Lord that he felt, "whatever He does with me, it will be good and kind and, therefore, I will make no conditions, I will have no reserve from Him. It is the Lord, let Him do what seems good to Him." He had resolved to serve

his Lord and, therefore, if he had to be bound, or to die, he would not shrink back. He could have sung, as we sometimes sing, but he could carry it out better than we do—

"Through floods and flames, if Jesus leads, I'll follow where He goes."

A whole-hearted consecration, a child-like confidence, a deep-toned submission—these will make us ready for suffering, whatever it may be.

But how did Paul prepare himself to be ready to exercise discipline? That is, to me, the ugliest point of all. How could he bring himself to be able to do that? I think it was because he had not received his Gospel from men, nor by men, and he had learned not to depend upon men, nor to look for their approval as the support of his life. He was able to lean on the Savior and to walk alone with his Lord. So long as he had Christ with him, he needed nobody else. Paul had learned the

fear of God which casts out the fear of man! "Who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forget the Lord, your Maker?" Remembering man leads to the forgetting of God! If we learn to speak very plainly, yet very lovingly, habitually cultivating frankness towards all Christian people, and even towards the ungodly, and do not know what it is to ask of any man leave to speak the truth, how much better it will be all round! May the Holy Spirit deepen in us the fear of God and so take away from us the fear of man! Then, with Paul, each of us will be ready to say, even concerning the most unpleasant duty, "I am ready."

But how came he to be able to say that he was ready to die? I will not dwell upon that. I have already told you that he felt ready to die because he could say that, as far as he had gone, he had finished the work God gave him to do and he had kept the faith. Ah, dear Friends, it is nothing but keeping faithful to God that will enable you to treat death as a friend! One dereliction of duty will be sufficient to rob you of comfort. When a traveler is walking, a very small stone in his shoe will lame him—and a very small offense against the integrity that God requires of His servants may do us great mischief. Did you ever notice, in Gideon's life, that he had 70 sons, his own legitimate sons, and that he had one son who was the child of a harlot, and that one, Abimelech, killed 69 of his father's 70 sons? So it may be that a good man has 70 virtues, but if he tolerates one wrong thing, it will be enough to rob him of the comfort of all the good things of this life, so that, when he comes to die, he may go limping and lame! Yes, and all his life long he may go, like David did, halting even to the grave. May the Lord in mercy and love keep us right! If He teaches us how to live, we shall know how to die.

It is not dying that is the great difficulty—it is living. If we are but helped to fight the good fight of faith, to finish our course, and to keep the faith, we shall die right enough. As Mr. Wesley said when the good woman asked him, "Do you not sometimes feel an awe at the thought of dying?" "No," he replied, "If I knew for certain that I was going to die tomorrow night, I should do just exactly what I am going to do. I am going to preach (I think it was)

at Gloucester this afternoon and this evening. And I shall go to lodge with friend So-and-So. I shall stay up with him till ten o'clock and then I shall go to bed. And I shall be up at five and ride over to Tewkesbury and I shall preach there, and shall go to friend So-and-So's for the night. And I shall go to bed at ten o'clock and whether I live or not, it does not matter at all to me, for if I die, I shall wake up in Glory. That is what I am going to do, whether I live or die."

It was said of Mr. Whitefield, that he never went to bed at night leaving even a pair of gloves out of its place. He used to say that he would like to have everything ready in case he might be taken away. I think I see that good man standing with a bedroom candle in his hand, at the top of the staircase, preaching Christ the last night of his life to the people sitting on the stairs—and then going inside the room and commending himself to God and going straight away to Heaven! That is the way to die! But if you do not live like Wesley and Whitefield lived, you cannot die like Wesley and Whitefield died. May God grant us Grace that we may be perfectly ready to die when the time for our departure is at hand!

III. Now I finish by saying that THIS READINESS PRODUCES ADMIRABLE RESULTS.

First, it prevents surprise. It is always bad to be taken by surprise. He who lives unto the Lord shall not fear evil tidings, for his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. If you are perfectly submissive to God's will and, as you crossed your threshold tonight, you heard that your child was dead, or that your dearest friend was smitten with sore sickness, you would say, "Well, I stoop to the surrender. When I had my children I did not think they were immortal. I knew they would die and I have stood ready for anything that might happen to them." Oh, Brothers and Sisters, it is because we are not submissive, not sanctified, not fully resigned to God's will, that we get tripped up, every now and then, and do not quite know where we are! May the Lord give us the Grace to be prepared for every emergency.

Again, when a man is ready, it prevents loss of time and opportunity. Many a sportsman has lost his bird because he was not ready to take aim. Many a fisherman has lost his fish because he has not been ready to grasp his rod and put the line into the stream. Many a preacher has, no doubt, missed the mark because when he might have said a word for Christ, he was not ready to say it. Have you not often gone home and said to yourself, "Now I remember what I ought to have said! That man made an observation and I could not tell, at the moment, what to reply to it. I now know what I should have said"? It is a fine thing to be wise when it is too late, but it would be much better if we waited upon God and asked Him to make us ready—always ready—to speak for Him in every place, at any time and whenever an opportunity occurs.

Readiness also helps us to make good use of every occasion. He who is ready as each occasion comes, not only snatches the first part of it, but all the rest of it. He is prepared to deal with the whole thing as it proceeds. He who is always do-

ing his Master's work learns how to do it well—but he who only does it occasionally is like a bad workman who half forgets his craft because he is so much engaged in doing something else. God keep us all ready! May you be ready, tonight, to say a good word to somebody on your way home and to serve God in your family when you get home!

To be ready puts a bloom on obedience, and presents it to God at its best. Some Sunday school children were once asked what was the meaning of doing the will of God on earth as it is done in Heaven, and they gave some very pretty answers. One said, "In Heaven they always do God's will." Another said, "They do God's will cheerfully." But one said, "Please, Sir, they do God's will at once." That is the thing—that is how it is done in Heaven—at once. May we be in such a state of heart that we are ready to do the Lord's will at once!

In this readiness, our obedience is multiplied. I mean that any one act is multiplied, for the man who is ready to do the right thing has already done it in the sight of God. The Lord accepts it as done and then, if the man still remains ready, he does, as it were, the thing, again—and when it is actually done—he is still ready to do it again! If the act is only one, yet to God's eye it has a teeming multitude of obedient actions swarming around it!

To be ready, especially to be ready to die, removes all fear of death. I wish we could all sing as she did, who died in her sleep, and left this verse written on a piece of paper by her bedside—

"Since Jesus is mine, I'll not fear undressing, But gladly put off these garments of clay. To die in the Lord is a Covenant blessing, Since Jesus to Glory through death led the way." If we are ready as Paul was, all fear of death will be gone from us.

And I think it takes away a thousand ills if we are ready for service, ready for suffering, ready to die. I will tell you one thing, dear Sister over yonder, you would not be so ready to stay as you are if you were ready for the Lord's work and the Lord's will. And you who are ready to perish would get out of that sad kind of readiness if you came and trusted Christ and became ready to suffer, or to do the Master's will. The Lord is ready to pardon! May we be ready to believe. May we come at once to Him, accept salvation through Jesus Christ, and then all through the rest of our lives say to the great Captain of our salvation what good sailors reply to their captain's call, "Ready, yes ready! Ready for storms and ready for calms; ready for whatever You command. Ready for whatever You ordain!" The Lord bless you, dear Friends, and give all of you this readiness, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON ISAIAH63.

Some of you will remember that chapter 62 ends with the announcement of the Savior's coming—"Say you to the daughter of Zion, behold, your Salvation comes; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him," The present chapter describes His coming.

Verse 1. Who is this that comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? Who can HE be, this mysterious Person, this Friend of God's people, this destroyer of their enemies? Who can HE be?—

"Who is this that comes from Edom, All His raiment stained with blood; To the slave proclaiming freedom; Bringing and bestowing good: Glorious in the garb He wears, Glorious in the spoils He bears?" 1. This that is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. He that has come to save us is majestic in His Person, but He is also mighty in His power to save! When we ask, "Who is this?" the answer comes to us, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." Listen to this, you who feel that you are great sinners, you who know that you need a mighty Savior! Here is One able to do for you all that you need! He comes from the field of battle, from the place of conquest, where He has fought the fight on your behalf, and won for you the victory over sin, and death, and Hell. Who is He?—

"'Tis the Savior, now victorious. Traveling onward in His might; 'Tis the Savior, oh, how glorious To His people is the sight! Jesus now is strong to save; Mighty to redeem the slave."

2, 3. Why are You red in your apparel, and Your garments like he that treads in the wine vat? I have trod the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with Me. In all Christ's redeeming work He was alone. None could help Him to redeem His people. He must, alone, pay the ransom price. None could help Him in His last great battle, when He stood forth as the sole Champion of all whom His Father had given to Him—

"Death and Hell will He dethrone, By His single arm alone."

3, 4. For I will tread them in My anger, and trample them in My fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon My garments, and I will stain all My raiment. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed is come. It was the day of vengeance on the enemies of God, vengeance on sin and death, and Hell. And it was the year of redemption for the great host of Believers in Christ, for whom His garments were dyed in His own most precious blood. Notice how the great Redeemer speaks of His chosen people—"My redeemed."

5, 6. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore My own arm brought salvation unto Me; and My fury, it upheld Me. And I will tread down the people in My anger, and make them drunk in My fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth. Dear Friends, I will not go into a full explanation of these verses just now. I have often explained them to you, but this is the one lesson that they teach—there is a Savior "mighty to save." Nothing can destroy those who put their trust in Him. He will overthrow every enemy of our souls if we take Him to be our Savior. Now the Prophet speaks again.

7. I will mention the loving kindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His loving kindnesses. It is well to talk of God's love and God's mercy, for, if

we afterwards speak of our own sin and unfaithfulness, it tends to set our sin in a clearer light, and we are the more ready to confess it, and to mourn over it. God has dealt well with us and, therefore, that we have dealt ill with Him is the more shameful. See what He did for His ancient people and behold, in His actions, a picture of what He has done for His spiritual Israel.

8. For He said, Surely they are My people, children that will not lie: so He was their Savior. He thought well of them. He said, "They will be true to Me." He loved them. He chose them. He put them in a place of trust and honor. He entered into fellowship and sympathy with them.

9. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them, and carried them all the days of old. This is what He did for them in Egypt, what He did for them in the desert. He was very near them, one with them, very tender to them.

10. But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit; therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them. Hear this, you people of God! This is what God will do to you if you rebel against Him and vex His Holy Spirit. He will turn to be your enemy and will fight against you! If God's people will not yield to His love and His pity, they must suffer from His hand and His rod!

11. He remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is He that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock? Where is He that put His holy Spirit within them? God begins to think of the past, and of what He did for His people in the days of old.

12-14. That led them by the right hand of Moses with His glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make Himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goes down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD causes him to rest: so did You lead Your people, to make Yourself a glorious name. See what God did for His people in His tenderness and loving kindness? Is it not strange that, after that, they rebelled against Him?

15. Look down from Heaven, and behold from the habitation of Your holiness and of Your glory: where is Your zeal and Your strength, the sounding of Your heart and of Your mercies toward me? Are they restrained? If you are in trouble. tonight, if you have lost the light of God's Countenance, here are words for you to use in prayer to God.

16. Doubtless You are our Father, though Abraham is ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: You, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer; Your name is from everlasting. Get a hold of this great Truth of God, Believer! Say, "God is my Father. He is still my Father and, though He smites me, though He frowns upon me, I will not let Him go. I will still plead His dear Son's name and wait for His mercy, trusting in His Grace."

17-19. O LORD, why have You made us to err from Your ways, and hardened our heart from Your fear? Return for Your servants' sake, the tribes of Your inheritance. The people of Your holiness have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trod down Your sanctuary. We are Yours: You never bore rule over them; they were not called by Your name. I pointed out to you, at the beginning of our reading, that this chapter appropriately follows the preceding one. It is, itself, most suitably followed by chapter sixty-four. Indeed, the first verse of that chapter belongs to this one and should not have been separated from it. God's people, in their low estate, recognized that deliverance must come from the Lord alone, so they prayed, "Oh that You would rend the heavens, that You would come down, that the mountains might flow down at Your Presence, as when the melting fire burns, the fire causes the waters to boil, to make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your Presence!"

God bless the reading of His Word and give us His Presence during the whole of the service, for Christ's sake. Amen!