

Gratitude for Great Deliverances

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"For He has looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from Heaven did the LORD behold the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death; to declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem; when the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD." [Psalm 102:19-22](#).

I SUPPOSE the first sense of this passage would be just this. Israel had been carried away captive and only the poorest of the people had been left in the land. Jerusalem was a heap. Zion had been plowed with the plow of desolation. The whole country was, compared with its former state, like a desert. But in due time, God, who had peculiar favor towards His people, though He had sorely smitten them, would look down upon them. From the height of His sanctuary in Heaven, He would look down upon the ruins of His sanctuary on earth. From His heavenly city above, He would look down upon His earthly city below. And as He looked and listened, He would be attracted by the moans of His people, and especially of some who were appointed to death, or, as the margin renders it, "the children of death." Upon these He would look with tender pity and, in due time He would so come to the deliverance of His scattered people, Israel, and bring them back to their own land and work for them such wonderful mercy that, ever afterwards that deliverance would be spoken of with praise and thanksgiving! Even in the last days when all nations shall serve the Lord, the memory of this deliverance shall not be forgotten! Still shall it be the theme of joyous song and the subject of holy contemplation, just as when Israel was in Egypt, the Lord heard their groaning and with a high hand and a stretched-out arm brought them up out of the land of bondage—and ever afterwards among the sweetest patriotic songs of the nation was the one which Moses and Miriam sang on the further shore of the Red Sea—"Sing you to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea." And all along Jewish history, whatever of her songs there may have been, that one has never gone into oblivion. And even in Heaven, itself, "they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." So that the deliverance promised here to Israel was to be as noteworthy as that which was given at the Red Sea and it was to be forever kept in memory by the Lord's chosen people!

Now I am going to leave the more immediate sense of our text, yet still give you its meaning. It has been said that if a great crystal is broken into the smallest fragments, each piece will still be crystallized in the same form and, in like manner, the dealings of God with

His Church, as a whole, will be found to be of the same kind as His dealings with the various parts of His Church and also with individuals. And in dealing with individuals, each separate act of God will have about it the same attributes and be of the same character as His dealings on a large scale with the whole of His people. So, if we break down the great Truth of the text, which is like a mass of bread, into small crumbs so that each one of the Lord's children may have a portion, it will still be bread! The Truth of God will be the same as we try to bring it home to individual experience—and that we shall now try to do. May the eternal Spirit, the Comforter, help us in the doing of it!

I. And first, dear Friends, our text speaks of MISERY AT ITS EXTREME.

You observe that it speaks of prisoners who are groaning and of those who are appointed unto death—who are evidently in chains because they are spoken of as being loosed. It has been well said that one half of the people in the world do not know how the other half lives, and it is certainly true that there are sorrows in this world of which some of us have no conception or imagination! Complaint was made, some time ago, by a hearer in a certain place of worship, that most of the sermons that he heard there were composed upon the principle that everybody was happy—and it did

not appear to him that the preacher had much, if any sympathy with those who were of a sorrowful spirit, like Hannah,

[See Sermon #1515, Volume 26—A WOMAN OF A SORROWFUL SPIRIT] or those who were in an afflicted and depressed condition who could not rejoice as he could. I do not think that charge could be truthfully brought against me. If it could, I would be sorry, for where the Spirit of God rests upon any man at all after the manner in which it rested upon Christ, that man will repeat, in his measure, what his Lord could say in the fullest

possible sense, "He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, [See Sermon #1604, Volume 27—HEART DISEASE CURABLE] to preach deliverance to the captives, [See Sermon #2371, Volume 40—FREEDOM AT ONCE AND FOREVER] and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at

liberty they who are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." The ministry that God sends, though it will be a ministry of warning and threats to the ungodly, will be a ministry of consolation to those who are sorrowing over their sins and seeking Divine deliverance from them! So you who are the sons and daughters of joy will pardon me if there should seem to be less than usual for you in my present discourse. When someone is sick, nobody blames the physician for giving his main attention to the invalid of the house, nor finds fault with the nurse for her assiduous attentions to the poor suffering one. There are many sorrows, Brothers and Sisters, in this world, and there are many sorrows even in the Church of God! And yet, for my part, I see much for which I can thank God, especially when I look upon the people of God. Then I say, with Moses, "Happy are you, O Israel: who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord?" Yet there are still many sons and daughters

of affliction and there are many trials and tribulations for each of us to pass through before we reach that land where sorrow is unknown.

There are some sad souls who are comparable to prisoners, prisoners that groan most mournfully. And there are some who are convinced of sin, but who have not yet found the Savior—and some who, having found that Savior, have fallen into doubts and fears, or who have backslidden from Him and so lost their comforting assurances. And they are now crying, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" There are also some who have experienced heavy losses and are bearing heavy crosses—some who have seen the desire of their eyes taken away with a stroke, some to whom the shafts of death have flown once, twice, thrice—each time smiting down a beloved one. There are some very dear children of God who do not always see the light of His Countenance—precious sons of God who are like fruit brought forth by the moon—those who are the bruised spices of the sanctuary all the sweeter for being bruised and just now is the time of their sorrow, when they are prisoners that cry and sigh and groan by reason of their hard bondage.

A prisoner is often a solitary man. Yet much of the sorrow of imprisonment lies in separation from friends and in utter loneliness. Perhaps I am addressing some whose condition is that of extreme solitude. You are alone in the streets of this great wilderness of a city and there is no such loneliness as that! Or you live in a house where you wish that you could be alone in one sense, for you are sadly alone in another sense, for nobody seems to understand your case, or to enter into your experience. You wear a fetter which never fretted human wrists before—at least so you think. You are in solitary confinement and in that confinement you are in the dark. The light in which you once rejoiced has gone from you. The joyous flow of spirits and the cheery countenance which you used to possess have departed from you. Your heart is troubled and you are vexed with inward doubts and fears. It is a sorrowful case when a man is in that condition and is alone in it.

It may be, also, that you feel as if you were jailed. The power to act, which you once had, has gone from you. Your former energy has departed. You are like a man spellbound. Just as sometimes, in troubled dreams, a man tries to run but cannot even lift a foot, or seeks to grasp something, but his hands seems turned to stone, so is it with you—or so, at any rate, has it been with some of us! We were chained and in the dark, and solitary. And we have tried hard to convince ourselves of the truth of what people said to us—that it was only a matter of nerves and that we must be energetic and make up our minds to get out of that state—which is what only fools say, for wise men know that such talk as this is like pouring vinegar into open wounds, making them smart still more and never producing any healing effects! You have, perhaps, been like a prisoner who has well-near escaped, but who has been detected by the ever-watchful guards and so had to go back to his cell and to wear double chains for trying to escape! And, possibly, your imprisonment has lasted long. Some of you young people may feel frightened when you hear me talk like this. Do not be alarmed,

yet lay up in your memories what I am saying, because if these dark days never come to you, you will be all the more thankful that they do not! But if they do, you will remember that I told you about them. You will then say, "This is no strange thing that

has happened to us, for the preacher said it might be so, and the preacher was a man of a cheery spirits yet he said it might be so with us. As it now is so, we need not be surprised and we may know that we may be the children of God and that God may be looking down from Heaven in pity upon us—and resolving to set us free—and yet for the present we are fettered and unable to escape from our prison."

Now observe that according to the text, there are some who are in a worse plight even than prisoners, for they are "appointed to death"—some who feel in their bodies that they will soon die, but who have not yet learned to exult in that fact. They have not looked at the heavenward side of it and said, "Ah, we shall soon be where we shall shake off every infirmity and sickness, and see our Savior face to face and praise Him without sinning forever!" But they have said, "We are appointed to death. We have sharp pains to undergo and the dying strife to endure when the clammy sweat will thicken upon our brow." And as yet, that is all that they have thought of, or, at least they think most of that. If there are any such people here, I pray God to now give them the comfort which they so sorely need—that they may even rejoice in the prospect of departing to be with that dear Lord whom they have so long loved and served! And, alas, there are some who are "appointed to death" in a far worse sense than that for "to die is gain" to us who are believers in Christ, but the ungodly feel that they are "appointed to death" in a much more terrible meaning of the word, "death!"

Their sins are standing out before them and crying out against them! They feel like a murderer who is standing under the gallows—they are afraid that the floor will fall from beneath their feet and that they will sink down to destruction! They have not yet learned the power of the precious blood of Jesus and they have not yet heard the voice of God saying to them, "Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you for Christ's sake." They are under conviction of sin and under that conviction they feel that they are "appointed to death" eternal—their own conscience affirms that the Divine sentence is a just one and they dare not argue with it. Such is their own sense of their condition in the sight of God that if they had to judge themselves, they would have to condemn themselves! And, perhaps, meanwhile, Satan is reminding them of the wrath to come and making them feel how certain it is that it will be their portion. They also believe themselves to be "appointed to death" because even their fellows seem to shun them. Christian people appear to have given them up as hopeless. Their old companions look upon them as though they were too far gone for the mercy of God to reach them. If there should be one such sinner in this building, I am right glad of it, for it is to him and to those like he that this text is especially sent! The Lord is, at this moment, looking down from Heaven with those piercing eyes of His which can discern the exact

condition of all hearts here—and those eyes of His are gazing with Infinite pity upon the groaning prisoners who are "appointed to death."

Now, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, there are some of us who are neither prisoners nor "appointed to death." Let us bless the Lord who has set us free and given us eternal life in His Son, Jesus Christ! But let us not forget what we used to be, nor forget those who are still in bonds and under sentence of death. Let us pray the Lord to bless them and to bring them out into liberty and joy this very hour! Whenever I meet with a poor enslaved, sin-sick soul, I say, "Ah, my Friend! I can pity you. I still have the scars upon my soul where the iron fetters used to hold me fast—and the bitterness of heart that I then experienced makes me always feel a tender, loving sympathy with the weak ones among God's people and the tried ones among His saints." Those who are pushed about by many as though they were not fit to live are the very ones for whom I would gladly make a way and bring them to the softest place and say, "Be of good comfort, for it is for you and such as you that God has sent His Son and His Spirit into the world."

II. Now, secondly, in our text we notice MISERY OBSERVED.

I want you carefully to note these words, "For the Lord has looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from Heaven did the Lord behold the earth to hear the groaning of the prisoner." This expression is, of course, not strictly applicable to God, for He sees all things. But, speaking after the manner of men, it describes Him as going up to the highest part of Heaven, as a watchman goes up to the top of the tower, where the widest range of vision can be obtained and looks over sea and land with keen and searching eyes. The original appears to mean, "The Lord leans from the height of His sanctuary," as if He bent down over the battlements of Heaven in order to get nearer to the object of His search and to gaze the more intently at it. And as He looks and listens, His eyes and ears are riveted upon a prison through whose dreary, grated window He sees what others cannot—a pining prisoner—and He hears a moan which others cannot bear to hear. And far off, yonder, in the place of shame and death, He sees poor wretches taken out to die. And all His heart goes out in pity towards them. We naturally look for some pleasing sight—we like to let our eyes rest upon that beautiful lake in the distance, or that forest browning with the tints of autumn, or that green hill, or that sky checkered with a thousand hues as the sun is setting. But here is the great God looking out for miserable objects, keenly observing those who are the most miserable of men and women! We like to have our ears charmed by the sweet sounds of melody and harmony, but God opens His ears to catch the sound of a moan or a groan, and turns His eyes, not to search for a diamond, but to look for a tear! O wondrous mercy of God! How strange that the King of kings should go to the top of His castle to look for a poor wretched soul!

And yet, dear Friends, after this manner do the benevolent of the earth, who are most like their God, act. See the man whose duty it is to watch the coast—observe him going up

and down the seashore and the cliffs, walking to and fro with his telescope under his arm. There is a pleasure yacht yonder, but he does not especially notice that. There is a steamer plowing the deep, but he does not notice that. Here are little rowing or sailing boats flitting about, but he does not notice them. Now it is night and presently a rocket flies up into the air. Ah, he is all attention now! There is another rocket. He calls his fellows and soon they will be off with the lifeboat in answer to the signals of distress at sea! Just so is it with God—He is looking for signals of distress. Some of you are bent on pleasure, but He does not take special note of you. Some of you are full of pride, you are rich and increased in goods, you have all your canvas spread and all your flags flying—but the Lord does not notice you except in sorrow and anger! But if there is a signal of distress anywhere about, or a poor anxious soul is crying, "O God, have mercy upon me," or one that cannot get as far as that, but whose moan is too suffocating to become an articulate prayer, (for that is what is implied in the word, groaning, here), God is sure to notice that, to hear the groaning and mark the falling tear of the penitent!

To my mind it is very wonderful that while God is Omniscient and so sees everything, there should be some special objects of His Omniscient regard. Think for a moment what concentrated Omniscience must be—each individual as closely looked upon by God as if there were not another person for Him to look upon—as if he were as much the sole object of the thought of the Most High as if He had forgotten the whole universe besides! That is really the purport of what we are here taught. God is reading you through and through, poor Soul—watching you as if He had nobody else to watch, understanding you as fully as if there were nobody else to be understood—leaning over you that He may get the better view of you, bringing all His Infinite faculties to bear upon your case, searching it from top to bottom—the origin of your sorrow, the ramifications of your grief, planning the outcome of the whole matter, what balms and what catholicons you need to heal your wounds and charm away your distresses! Why, it is really worthwhile to be a prisoner to have God looking upon one like this! It is worthwhile to feel the sentence of death in one's soul in order to know, by the testimony of Inspiration, that God is looking upon one out of Heaven in this special and peculiar sense! He can never forget His children anywhere, but if there is one place where He remembers them more specially than anywhere else, it is in the place of their sorrow!

I wonder whether you, good mother, have been especially thinking of anyone at home while I have been preaching? I should not wonder if it is so and I can guess which member of your family you have thought of more than of all the rest! Of course you have been thinking of the little one whom you left so ill. You were scarcely sure whether you might venture to steal out this evening, but you said, "I think I must go and bow before the Lord in His House." And while you have been here, you have been wondering whether the nurse has been properly caring for your sick child. Why have you not been concerned about your

big boy, John, who is away at school, or about your daughter, Mary, who is well and strong? Ah, no, you have been able to keep your thoughts away from them, but you could not keep your thoughts away from the little sick one. Now, like as a father and a mother of a family pity their children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him— and He especially pities His poor tried and troubled ones.

III. Thirdly, keeping to the same strain, we see MISERY RELIEVED.

God looks down from Heaven to hear the groaning of the prisoner and to loose those that are appointed to death. God's thoughts do not end in thoughts, nor do His words end in words. David wrote truly, "How precious also are Your thoughts unto me, O God!" So they are, but how precious also must His actions be! Our text is one of many proofs that God does really hear prayer. My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I would be greatly grieved if any of you were moved in the slightest degree by the assertion that is made, in these evil days, that our prayers are really not heard by God. The persons who make that assertion do not know anything at all about the matter, for they do not themselves pray to God, so what can they know about it? If I were to contradict one of these philosophers concerning certain natural phenomena

which I have never observed, he would at once say that I was out of court! If I said that I did not believe in the result which he said he had attained, he would say, "But I have proved it and, therefore, I am able to speak positively concerning it." If I were to say, "I have not tried it and so do not believe it," he would say to me, "Negative evidence is of no use in such a case as this." I cannot help using this simple illustration, which I have used before, concerning a man who was charged with theft. They brought five persons to prove that he stole the goods, and they all saw him do it, "but," he said, "that is nothing! I can bring 50 people who did not see me steal the goods." Just so. But the magistrate knew that there was not anything in the evidence of the 50 people who did not see the theft—the evidence of the five people who did see it was much stronger! So if there is but a very small number of us who have really proved the power of prayer and who know that we have obtained answers to our petitions, the evidence of the small number who have tested the matter is worth far more than the evidence of any number who have not tried it and who, therefore, cannot say anything about it! Some of us have been to God about great things and little things, temporal things and spiritual things—we are in the habit of going to Him all day long! There is scarcely an hour in the day in which we do not ask Him for something or other—and for us to receive answers to our prayers is as common a thing for us as breathing the air, or seeking the sunshine by day or the stars by night! It has become such an ordinary, common occurrence with us that we cannot doubt it.

Our text also reminds us that God hears the very poorest prayers, those which are the poorest in the judgment of men—the groaning of the prisoners. I do not think them the poorest prayers—I consider that they are really the most powerful prayers. The prayers of

the heart are often the most prevalent with God when they cannot be expressed in words, for the weight of meaning would break the backs of the words and human language would stagger beneath the crushing load. Then it is that we often pray best of all. If a man gets up from his knees and groans, and says, "I cannot pray," he need not fret about not finding suitable words, for he has prayed! But our wordy prayers, whether in our private devotions or in public Prayer Meetings, are often so much chaff and nothing more. God does not need our words, yet we sometimes string them together as if we were displaying our oratory before the Eternal. This must not be! God loves the heart of the suppliant to be poured out before Him. The best prayer is when a man can take his heart and turn it bottom upwards and let all that is in it run out! That is the style of praying that has most influence with God.

He does "hear the groaning of the prisoner" and with God, to hear means to answer. We need not say, as many do, that "He is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God," for prayer-hearing involves prayer-answering! O mourners, still mourn before your God, but mourn with this mixture of hope—that God will not suffer the groaning that arises from your heart, in the name of Jesus, to be like the mere whisperings of the wind! He will hear them before long.

It is also said, in our text, that the Lord will "loose those that are appointed to death." Is it not wonderful that God should deliver men just when it seems as if all is over with them? I remember lying in the condemned cell—I mean spiritually. I thought I heard the bell tolling out my doom and I expected to soon be taken away to execution! But it was just then that God came and loosed my bonds. I had tugged hard at them, trying to untie the knots that Moses had tied and seeing if I could break the iron fetters of conviction and condemnation which were riveted upon me, but I could not. But the sight of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and the Omnipotent might of His atoning Sacrifice broke every bond from off my soul in a single moment and I leaped into ecstatic liberty! And this is how God will deal with every soul that will but turn to Jesus on the Cross and leave itself in the hands of Infinite Love! Sinner, even if you are on the very verge of Hell, if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, He will loose your bonds and set you at liberty! Even though your death warrant seems to be signed and sealed, the prey shall be taken from the mighty and the lawful captive shall be delivered, for the Lord, your Redeemer, is almighty and none can withstand Him when He resolves to bring up His children even from their prisons! Only trust in Jesus! Rest your soul upon Him and God will yet come to your deliverance!

IV. The last thing in our text is ELOQUENT GRATITUDE. "To declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem; when the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord."

One of the most powerful preachers who ever lived was the Prophet Jonah. And I believe that Jonah learned to preach by going, in the whale's belly, to the bottom of the Mediterranean. That voyage was better than a university education for him and he became a good

sound Calvinist before he was cast up again upon the land. He said, "Salvation is of the Lord," before the Lord told the fish to give him up and I have no doubt that he often preached that doctrine afterwards! And if some preachers whom I know, instead of having lessons in elocution, were sent for a little while down into the depths of soul-despair. If they were tried, plagued, vexed and chastened every morning, they would learn a way of speaking which would reach the people's hearts far better than any that can be learned by human teaching!

We need, dear Brothers, if we are to speak aright for God, to know something of our soul's need, the depths of it, and then something of the Grace of God and the height of it in bringing us out of our distresses! Hence, according to our text, those who are set free declare or publish the name of the Lord. You cannot keep a man quiet if he has been, spiritually, in prison and has been brought out by God! If he has been condemned to die and has had his sentence canceled at the last moment, you cannot make him hold his tongue! You may tell him that he must keep his religion to himself, but it is impossible. He is so overjoyed about it—it has so charmed him that he must begin to tell somebody about it! You know that John Bunyan said that he wanted to tell the crows on the plowed land all about his conversion. It seems quite natural that he should feel like that and he did tell a great many besides the crows about it! There is something in a man who gets joy and peace in believing that will not be quiet. Perhaps some of you have been very ill and a certain medicine has been recommended to you and it has restored you. Now, do you not always feel, when you meet anybody who is ill as you were, that you must tell him about the remedy that cured you? You say, "You should try so-and-so! Look what it has done for me." Why do you need to tell him? You do not know why! You do not claim any very great measure of benevolence for doing it, for you cannot help communicating the good news to others. So is it with the man who is really saved by the Grace of God! He needs to communicate it and he is the fit man to communicate it because he who speaks from the heart speaks to the heart and he who speaks experimentally is the man by whom the Holy Spirit is most likely to speak to those who are in a similar experience. Perhaps, my dear Friends, some of you are now suffering on purpose that God may afterwards fit you the better to speak to others in a similar case—I believe it is often so and trust that it may turn out to be so in your case.

These people declared the goodness of God among the saints. So ought we to do. Some Christians cannot tell their experience very readily, but I think they should try to do so. Tell your Brothers and Sisters in Christ what the Lord has done for you. If there were more commerce among Christians with their experience, they would be mutually the more enriched. But these people also declared the name of the Lord among the nations when they were gathered together. And Soul, if God has allowed you to go down into the deeps of the prison and to lie in the condemned cell—and has brought you out to life and liberty—you will surely not blush to tell all what great things God has done for you! I think you must sometimes feel in your heart as if you wished you had a whole universe for an audience—the

devils in Hell and the angels in Heaven, the saints above and the saints below—and the sinners, too, and you would like to say to them, "I sought the Lord and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears. This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles." You cannot have quite so large an audience as that just yet, so, meanwhile, make use of the audience you can have and—

"Tell to sinners round

What a dear Savior you have found!"

It is in part for this purpose that this great blessing has been given to you that you might tell all you can about it to others. I pray you not to rob God of the revenue of Glory which His Grace deserves at your hands!

Brothers and Sisters, the gist of what I have said to you is just this—Are we rejoicing in the Lord? Then let us turn our joy into praise of Him! Are we very much cast down? Then let us look up to Him who looks down upon us and let us rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, for He will yet bring us out of our prison! Are we as yet unsaved? Then let us catch at those words in the text that tell us that God looks down from Heaven "to hear the groaning of the prisoner." Will you not groan, poor prisoner? The devil tempted you never to do so any more. You yourself said, "It is no use. I have been to the Tabernacle so long and I have been to other places of worship, but I cannot get any comfort. I will give up trying." Oh, do not do so, I pray you!

Have you come to the end of yourself? Well, then, now you have come to the beginning of God! It is when the last penny of creature merit is gone that God comes to us with the boundless treasures of His Grace! If you have one moldy crust of your own homemade bread left, you shall not have the Bread of Heaven! But when you are starved. When you have no goodness in you—nor any hope of goodness, no merit, nor hope of merit, no reliance, nor shadow of reliance upon anything that you are, or ever can be—then is the time to cast yourself upon the all-sufficient mercy of God in Christ Jesus! Everything that you can spin, God will unravel! Everything that you can do for yourself, He will throw

down! Your spider webs He will break! You think to spin them into silken robes, but He will strip you and He will slay you, for it is written, "I wound and I heal. I kill and I make alive." Blessed is the man who is wounded by God, for He will afterwards heal him! Blessed is the man who is slain by God in this sense, for He will make him alive! Blessed is the man who is empty, for God will fill him! That was the theme of the Virgin's song and let it be ours as I close my discourse—"He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent away empty. He has put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree." So may He do now, for His dear Son's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALM 102.

Verses 1, 2. Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto You. Hide not Your face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline Your ear unto me: in the day when I

call, answer me speedily. Sincere suppliants are not content with praying for praying's sake. They desire to really reach the ear and heart of Jehovah. "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto You." When prayer is intensified into a cry, then the heart is even more urgent to have audience of the Lord.

3-7. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning, my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert I watch and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop. The Psalmist gives us here a very graphic description of his sorrowful condition at that time. He was moved to grief by a view of the national calamities of the chosen people and these so worked upon his patriotic soul that he was wasted with anxiety, his spirits were dried up and his very life was ready to expire.

8. My enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me. Their rage was unrelenting and unceasing and vented itself in taunts and insults. With his inward sorrows and outward persecutions, the Psalmist was in as ill a plight as may well be conceived!

9-11. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping because of Your indignation and Your wrath: for You have lifted me up, and cast me down. My days are like a shadow that declines; and I am withered like grass. This is a telling description of all-saturating, all-embittering sadness. And that was the portion of one of the best of men, and that for no fault of his own, but because of his love to the Lord's people.

12. But You, O LORD, shall endure forever; and Your remembrance unto all generations. All other things are vanishing like smoke and withering like grass. But, overall, the one eternal, Immutable Light shines on, and will shine on when all these shadows have declined into nothingness.

13,14. You shall arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favor her, yes, the set time is come. For Your

servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof [See Sermon #2576, Volume 44—ZION'S PROSPERITY] They delight in her so greatly that even her rubbish is dear to them. It was a good omen for Jerusalem when the captives began to feel a homesickness and began to sigh after her.

15-17. So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth Your Glory. When the LORD shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His Glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer

[See Sermon #1141, Volume 19—GOOD NEWS FOR THE DESTITUTE] He will not treat their pleas with contempt. He will incline His ears to hear, His heart to consider and His hands to help.

18. This shall be written for the generation to come; and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD. A note shall be made of it, for there will be destitute ones in future generations—"the poor shall never cease out of the land"—and it will make glad their eyes to read the story of the Lord's mercy to the needy in former times.

19-23. For He has looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from Heaven did the LORD behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death; to declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem; when the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD. He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days. Here the Psalmist comes down again to the mournful string and pours forth his personal complaint.

24-27. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: Your years are throughout all generations. Of old have You laid the foundations of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They shall perish, but You shall endure: yes, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shall You change them, and they shall be changed: but You are the same, and Your years shall have no end. God always lives on. No decay can happen to Him, nor destruction overtake Him. O my Soul, rejoice you in the Lord always, since He is always the same!

28. The children of Your servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before You.